PAST MASTERS 178

Miles J. Breuer
Richard Connell
Rudyard Kipling
Damon Runyon
E. Phillips Oppenheim
Willa Cather
O. Henry
M. R. James

and more

PAST MASTERS 178

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

28 September 2024

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1: The Old Portrait

Hume Nisbet

1849-1921

The Penny Illustrated Paper, 22 Feb 1896

OLD-FASHIONED frames are a hobby of mine. I am always on the prowl amongst the framers and dealers in curiosities for something quaint and unique in picture frames. I don't care much for what is inside them, for being a painter it is my fancy to get the frames first and then paint a picture which I think suits their probable history and design. In this way I get some curious and I think also some original ideas.

One day in December, about a week before Christmas, I picked up a fine but dilapidated specimen of wood-carving in a shop near Soho. The gilding had been worn nearly away, and three of the corners broken off; yet as there was one of the corners still left, I hoped to be able to repair the others from it. As for the canvas inside this frame, it was so smothered with dirt and time stains that I could only distinguish it had been a very badly painted likeness of some sort, of some commonplace person, daubed in by a poor pot-boiling painter to fill the second-hand frame which his patron may have picked up cheaply as I had done after him; but as the frame was all right I took the spoiled canvas along with it, thinking it might come in handy.

For the next few days my hands were full of work of one kind and another, so that it was only on Christmas Eve that I found myself at liberty to examine my purchase which had been lying with its face to the wall since I had brought it to my studio.

Having nothing to do on this night, and not in the mood to go out, I got my picture and frame from the corner, and laying them upon the table, with a sponge, basin of water, and some soap, I began to wash so that I might see them the better. They were in a terrible mess, and I think I used the best part of a packet of soap-powder and had to change the water about a dozen times before the pattern began to show up on the frame, and the portrait within it asserted its awful crudeness, vile drawing, and intense vulgarity. It was the bloated, piggish visage of a publican clearly, with a plentiful supply of jewellery displayed, as is usual with such masterpieces, where the features are not considered of so much importance as a strict fidelity in the depicting of such articles as watch-guard and seals, finger rings, and breast pins; these were all there, as natural and hard as reality.

The frame delighted me, and the picture satisfied me that I had not cheated the dealer with my price, and I was looking at the monstrosity as the gaslight beat full upon it, and wondering how the owner could be pleased with

himself as thus depicted, when something about the background attracted my attention – a slight marking underneath the thin coating as if the portrait had been painted over some other subject.

It was not much certainly, yet enough to make me rush over to my cupboard, where I kept my spirits of wine and turpentine, with which, and a plentiful supply of rags, I began to demolish the publican ruthlessly in the vague hope that I might find something worth looking at underneath.

A slow process that was, as well as a delicate one, so that it was close upon midnight before the gold cable rings and vermilion visage disappeared and another picture loomed up before me; then giving it the final wash over, I wiped it dry, and set it in a good light on my easel, while I filled and lit my pipe, and then sat down to look at it.

What had I liberated from that vile prison of crude paint? For I did not require to set it up to know that this bungler of the brush had covered and defiled a work as far beyond his comprehension as the clouds are from the caterpillar. The bust and head of a young woman of uncertain age, merged within a gloom of rich accessories painted as only a master hand can paint, who is above asserting his knowledge, and who has learnt to cover his technique. It was as perfect and natural in its sombre yet quiet dignity as if it had come from the brush of Moroni.

A face and neck perfectly colourless in their pallid whiteness, with the shadows so artfully managed that they could not be seen, and for this quality would have delighted the strong-minded Queen Bess.

At first as I looked I saw in the centre of a vague darkness a dim patch of grey gloom that drifted into the shadow. Then the greyness appeared to grow lighter as I sat from it, and leaned back in my chair until the features stole out softly, and became clear and definite, while the figure stood out from the background as if tangible, although, having washed it, I knew that it had been smoothly painted.

An intent face, with delicate nose, well-shaped, although bloodless, lips, and eyes like dark caverns without a spark of light in them. The hair loosely about the head and oval cheeks, massive, silky-textured, jet black, and lustreless, which hid the upper portion of her brow, with the ears, and fell in straight indefinite waves over the left breast, leaving the right portion of the transparent neck exposed.

The dress and background were symphonies of ebony, yet full of subtle colouring and masterly feeling; a dress of rich brocaded velvet with a background that represented vast receding space, wondrously suggestive and awe-inspiring.

I noticed that the pallid lips were parted slightly, and showed a glimpse of the upper front teeth, which added to the intent expression of the face. A short upper tip, which, curled upward, with the underlip full and sensuous, or rather, if colour had been in it, would have been so.

It was an eerie looking face that I had resurrected on this midnight hour of Christmas Eve; in its passive pallidity it looked as if the blood had been drained from the body, and that I was gazing upon an open-eyed corpse.

The frame, also, I noticed for the first time, in its details appeared to have been designed with the intention of carrying out the idea of life in death; what had before looked like scroll-work of flowers and fruit were loathsome snake-like worms twined amongst charnel-house bones which they half covered in a decorative fashion; a hideous design in spite of its exquisite workmanship, that made me shudder and wish that I had left the cleaning to be done by daylight.

I am not at all of a nervous temperament, and would have laughed had anyone told me that I was afraid, and yet, as I sat here alone, with that portrait opposite to me in this solitary studio, away from all human contact; for none of the other studios were tenanted on this night, and the janitor had gone on his holiday; I wished that I had spent my evening in a more congenial manner, for in spite of a good fire in the stove and the brilliant gas, that intent face and those haunting eyes were exercising a strange influence upon me.

I heard the clocks from the different steeples chime out the last hour of the day, one after the other, like echoes taking up the refrain and dying away in the distance, and still I sat spellbound, looking at that weird picture, with my neglected pipe in my hand, and a strange lassitude creeping over me.

It was the eyes which fixed me now with the unfathomable depths and absorbing intensity. They gave out no light, but seemed to draw my soul into them, and with it my life and strength as I lay inert before them, until overpowered I lost consciousness and dreamt.

I thought that the frame was still on the easel with the canvas, but the woman had stepped from them and was approaching me with a floating motion, leaving behind her a vault filled with coffins, some of them shut down whilst others lay or stood upright and open, showing the grizzly contents in their decaying and stained cerements.

I could only see her head and shoulders with the sombre drapery of the upper portion and the inky wealth of hair hanging round.

She was with me now, that pallid face touching my face and those cold bloodless lips glued to mine with a close lingering kiss, while the soft black hair covered me like a cloud and thrilled me through and through with a delicious thrill that, whilst it made me grow faint, intoxicated me with delight.

As I breathed she seemed to absorb it quickly into herself, giving me back nothing, getting stronger as I was becoming weaker, while the warmth of my contact passed into her and made her palpitate with vitality.

And all at once the horror of approaching death seized upon me, and with a frantic effort I flung her from me and started up from my chair dazed for a moment and uncertain where I was, then consciousness returned and I looked round wildly.

The gas was still blazing brightly, while the fire burned ruddy in the stove. By the timepiece on the mantel I could see that it was half-past twelve.

The picture and frame were still on the easel, only as I looked at them the portrait had changed, a hectic flush was on the cheeks while the eyes glittered with life and the sensuous lips were red and ripe-looking with a drop of blood still upon the nether one. In a frenzy of horror I seized my scraping knife and slashed out the vampire picture, then tearing the mutilated fragments out I crammed them into my stove and watched them frizzle with savage delight.

I have that frame still, but I have not yet had courage to paint a suitable subject for it.

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2: The Fable of Ambrose

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

The Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 12 Feb 1937

Broadway columnist, movie producer, and prolific writer of short-short stories.

THAT genial producer Mr. Ambrose Dingleberry tossed restlessly in his bed. Try as he might, sleep would not come. He tried counting sheep. No use. He tried counting the women who had been untrue to him. When that failed to work, he realised it would be futile to count further. So he sat up and snapped on the light.

Ambrose knew exactly what the trouble was. He was worried about theatrical conditions. He had lost much of his money in the last three years. Another unsuccessful production would just about ruin him. He sighed heavily. If only something would happen. If some author would only step into his office and toss an "Abie's Irish Rose" or a "Rose Marie" into his lap. If the public ! would only realise that he was badly in need of its money. If Wall Street would only return to 1928.

If. If. If.

Came a squeaky voice from a corner of the room.

"I wouldn't be too certain about that," it said.

The producer's eyes almost popped from their sockets. Was one of those chorines hiding in his room again? He had been lying there for hours, but he hadn't heard a sound. He strained his eyes.

"Who's there?" he cried. "Is it Mabel? Gloria? Marjorie? Joan? Florence? Evelyn?"

The voice came closer. It seemed to be right beside the producer's bed now.

"It's none of those," said the voice. "Here I am. Can't you see me?"

Mr. Dingleberry stiffened perceptibly. A very thin man was standing right beside him. He wasn't more than a foot tall. And on his face there was an elfish grin.

"Holy Whosis!" gasped the producer. "What are you— a Depression midget?"

The visitor shook his head. "No, my friend," he replied. "I am a gnome."

"A gnome" repeated Mr. Dingleberry vaguely.

"Exactly," said the intruder. "I'm first cousin to an elf, a goblin, or a fairy. Surely you've heard of my cousins?"

The producer nodded. "I've heard of one of them. But let's get back to you. What makes you so small?"

"Because gnome wasn't built in a day," was the prompt retort.

Ambrose blinked. He decided to put that gag into his next attraction. It was just bad enough.

"I don't get all this," he said somewhat peevishly. "Just how did you get in here and what do you want? I'm a tired man and I'm worried. What do you want of me?"

The dwarf placed a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles on his nose and climbed upon the producer's bed.

"Mr. Ambrose Dingleberry," he announced, "we have been looking over your record as a producer on Broadway, and we have come to the conclusion that you are one of the nicest men in town. Aside from the fact that you have gypped the speculators right and left— and that, of course, doesn't count— you have but two black marks upon your record.

"If you can explain those black marks, we are going to help you by granting you any one wish that you may desire. Heed me carefully now, because it will mean everything to you.

"First, you are charged with the murder of your first wife. Why did you do it?"

Ambrose's fists clenched. "We had a little poker club consisting of six men," he snapped, "and whenever we met in my home, she insisted on playing with us."

The gnome extended his hand. "I congratulate you," he cried. "That's the perfect explanation. And now for the second and last black mark. There have been reports that, before you turned producer, you were once a dramatic critic. Is that true?"

Mr. Dingleberry bit his lip. He shivered. Anger blazed in his eyes. He pointed to the door.

"Go!" he commanded. "That's the deadliest insult of all. I don't care if you are able to bring me all the gold in the world. I will not stand for any such terrible abuse. Get out of here."

His mood changed. The tears came. He shook with emotion.

"Oh, God," he moaned, "what have I ever done that I should have such a thing said about me? Oh, my God!"

The little man leaned forward and patted the producer's hand. "There, there," he sympathised. "I'm sorry. I know now that it's all a lie. I'm sorry I ever mentioned it. Look!"

Mr. Dingleberry looked up. From beneath his blouse, the gnome produced a tiny lamp. He caressed it tenderly.

"This," he announced softly, "is the magic lamp. You are now to make the one wish for something that you want more than anything in the world. One, and only one— and it will be granted on the instant. Come; what is it?"

The producer gazed off into space. "I have always wanted to peer into the future," he answered dreamily. "I want to know how conditions will be and what I will be doing in future years. Yes, that's it. Here is my one wish. Get me a copy of the *New York Times* five years from today."

The gnome clapped his hands and gazed at the lamp. "Abadaba," he chanted. "Toodle-oodles. Easy, baby. Look at me. Hot-Cha!"

And before he knew what had happened, Mr. Dingleberry 's arms were loaded with a copy of the *New York Times*. It was the copy for which he had wished; the copy that was dated five years ahead. Feverishly he turned to the dramatic pages. For the moment his visitor was forgotten. He quivered nervously as he looked at the list of shows that were then being presented on Broadway. What was all this?

"Ambrose Dingleberry presents?"

"Ambrose Dingleberry presents?"

"Ambrose Dingleberry presents?"

He swallowed hard. Of the fifty shows on the list he was the producer of fully forty of them. He would be the most successful producer of all time. His eyes found a news note on the same page.

"At the Belasco Theatre tonight," it read, "Mr. Ambrose Dingleberry will present his forty-second production of the season. It is estimated that this great manager's plays thus far this year have earned him at least $10,000,000."

The producer threw out his chest. He had known all the time that he was the greatest of them all. He closed the dramatic section and turned to the front page. Suddenly his expression changed. The smile of contentment faded from his face.

His eyes had fallen upon another piece of news. He had died the same morning!

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3: "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi"

Rudyard Kipling

1865-1936

St. Nicholas, Nov 1893

In: The Jungle Book, 1894

I haven't read anything by Kipling except "The Jungle Books", which were in the house when I was a child. This is the only story I can remember much of, so it must have impessed me when I was about 8 years old.

At the hole where he went in
Red-Eye called to Wrinkle-Skin.
Hear what little Red-Eye saith:
"Nag, come up and dance with death!"
Eye to eye and head to head,
(Keep the measure, Nag.)
This shall end when one is dead;
(At thy pleasure, Nag.)
Turn for turn and twist for twist—
(Run and hide thee, Nag.)
Hah! The hooded Death has missed!
(Woe betide thee, Nag!)

THIS IS THE STORY of the great war that Rikki-tikki-tavi fought single-handed, through the bath-rooms of the big bungalow in Segowlee cantonment. Darzee, the Tailorbird, helped him, and Chuchundra, the musk-rat, who never comes out into the middle of the floor, but always creeps round by the wall, gave him advice, but Rikki-tikki did the real fighting.

He was a mongoose, rather like a little cat in his fur and his tail, but quite like a weasel in his head and his habits. His eyes and the end of his restless nose were pink. He could scratch himself anywhere he pleased with any leg, front or back, that he chose to use. He could fluff up his tail till it looked like a bottle brush, and his war cry as he scuttled through the long grass was: "Rikk-tikk-tikki-tikki-tchk!"

One day, a high summer flood washed him out of the burrow where he lived with his father and mother, and carried him, kicking and clucking, down a roadside ditch. He found a little wisp of grass floating there, and clung to it till he lost his senses. When he revived, he was lying in the hot sun on the middle of a garden path, very draggled indeed, and a small boy was saying, "Here's a dead mongoose. Let's have a funeral."

"No," said his mother, "let's take him in and dry him. Perhaps he isn't really dead."

They took him into the house, and a big man picked him up between his finger and thumb and said he was not dead but half choked. So they wrapped him in cotton wool, and warmed him over a little fire, and he opened his eyes and sneezed.

"Now," said the big man (he was an Englishman who had just moved into the bungalow), "don't frighten him, and we'll see what he'll do."

It is the hardest thing in the world to frighten a mongoose, because he is eaten up from nose to tail with curiosity. The motto of all the mongoose family is "Run and find out," and Rikki-tikki was a true mongoose. He looked at the cotton wool, decided that it was not good to eat, ran all round the table, sat up and put his fur in order, scratched himself, and jumped on the small boy's shoulder.

"Don't be frightened, Teddy," said his father. "That's his way of making friends."

"Ouch! He's tickling under my chin," said Teddy.

Rikki-tikki looked down between the boy's collar and neck, snuffed at his ear, and climbed down to the floor, where he sat rubbing his nose.

"Good gracious," said Teddy's mother, "and that's a wild creature! I suppose he's so tame because we've been kind to him."

"All mongooses are like that," said her husband. "If Teddy doesn't pick him up by the tail, or try to put him in a cage, he'll run in and out of the house all day long. Let's give him something to eat."

They gave him a little piece of raw meat. Rikki-tikki liked it immensely, and when it was finished he went out into the veranda and sat in the sunshine and fluffed up his fur to make it dry to the roots. Then he felt better.

"There are more things to find out about in this house," he said to himself, "than all my family could find out in all their lives. I shall certainly stay and find out."

He spent all that day roaming over the house. He nearly drowned himself in the bath-tubs, put his nose into the ink on a writing table, and burned it on the end of the big man's cigar, for he climbed up in the big man's lap to see how writing was done. At nightfall he ran into Teddy's nursery to watch how kerosene lamps were lighted, and when Teddy went to bed Rikki-tikki climbed up too. But he was a restless companion, because he had to get up and attend to every noise all through the night, and find out what made it. Teddy's mother and father came in, the last thing, to look at their boy, and Rikki-tikki was awake on the pillow.

"I don't like that," said Teddy's mother. "He may bite the child."

"He'll do no such thing," said the father. "Teddy's safer with that little beast than if he had a bloodhound to watch him. If a snake came into the nursery now— "

But Teddy's mother wouldn't think of anything so awful.

Early in the morning Rikki-tikki came to early breakfast in the veranda riding on Teddy's shoulder, and they gave him banana and some boiled egg. He sat on all their laps one after the other, because every well-brought-up mongoose always hopes to be a house mongoose some day and have rooms to run about in; and Rikki-tikki's mother (she used to live in the general's house at Segowlee) had carefully told Rikki what to do if ever he came across white men.

Then Rikki-tikki went out into the garden to see what was to be seen. It was a large garden, only half cultivated, with bushes, as big as summer-houses, of Marshal Niel roses, lime and orange trees, clumps of bamboos, and thickets of high grass. Rikki-tikki licked his lips. "This is a splendid hunting-ground," he said, and his tail grew bottle-brushy at the thought of it, and he scuttled up and down the garden, snuffing here and there till he heard very sorrowful voices in a thorn-bush.

It was Darzee, the Tailorbird, and his wife. They had made a beautiful nest by pulling two big leaves together and stitching them up the edges with fibers, and had filled the hollow with cotton and downy fluff. The nest swayed to and fro, as they sat on the rim and cried.

"What is the matter?" asked Rikki-tikki.

"We are very miserable," said Darzee. "One of our babies fell out of the nest yesterday and Nag ate him."

"H'm!" said Rikki-tikki, "that is very sad— but I am a stranger here. Who is Nag?"

Darzee and his wife only cowered down in the nest without answering, for from the thick grass at the foot of the bush there came a low hiss— a horrid cold sound that made Rikki-tikki jump back two clear feet. Then inch by inch out of the grass rose up the head and spread hood of Nag, the big black cobra, and he was five feet long from tongue to tail. When he had lifted one-third of himself clear of the ground, he stayed balancing to and fro exactly as a dandelion tuft balances in the wind, and he looked at Rikki-tikki with the wicked snake's eyes that never change their expression, whatever the snake may be thinking of.

"Who is Nag?" said he. "I am Nag. The great God Brahm put his mark upon all our people, when the first cobra spread his hood to keep the sun off Brahm as he slept. Look, and be afraid!"

He spread out his hood more than ever, and Rikki-tikki saw the spectacle-mark on the back of it that looks exactly like the eye part of a hook-and-eye fastening. He was afraid for the minute, but it is impossible for a mongoose to stay frightened for any length of time, and though Rikki-tikki had never met a live cobra before, his mother had fed him on dead ones, and he knew that all a grown mongoose's business in life was to fight and eat snakes. Nag knew that too and, at the bottom of his cold heart, he was afraid.

"Well," said Rikki-tikki, and his tail began to fluff up again, "marks or no marks, do you think it is right for you to eat fledglings out of a nest?"

Nag was thinking to himself, and watching the least little movement in the grass behind Rikki-tikki. He knew that mongooses in the garden meant death sooner or later for him and his family, but he wanted to get Rikki-tikki off his guard. So he dropped his head a little, and put it on one side.

"Let us talk," he said. "You eat eggs. Why should not I eat birds?"

"Behind you! Look behind you!" sang Darzee.

Rikki-tikki knew better than to waste time in staring. He jumped up in the air as high as he could go, and just under him whizzed by the head of Nagaina, Nag's wicked wife. She had crept up behind him as he was talking, to make an end of him. He heard her savage hiss as the stroke missed. He came down almost across her back, and if he had been an old mongoose he would have known that then was the time to break her back with one bite; but he was afraid of the terrible lashing return stroke of the cobra. He bit, indeed, but did not bite long enough, and he jumped clear of the whisking tail, leaving Nagaina torn and angry.

"Wicked, wicked Darzee!" said Nag, lashing up as high as he could reach toward the nest in the thorn-bush. But Darzee had built it out of reach of snakes, and it only swayed to and fro.

Rikki-tikki felt his eyes growing red and hot (when a mongoose's eyes grow red, he is angry), and he sat back on his tail and hind legs like a little kangaroo, and looked all round him, and chattered with rage. But Nag and Nagaina had disappeared into the grass. When a snake misses its stroke, it never says anything or gives any sign of what it means to do next. Rikki-tikki did not care to follow them, for he did not feel sure that he could manage two snakes at once. So he trotted off to the gravel path near the house, and sat down to think. It was a serious matter for him.

If you read the old books of natural history, you will find they say that when the mongoose fights the snake and happens to get bitten, he runs off and eats some herb that cures him. That is not true. The victory is only a matter of quickness of eye and quickness of foot— snake's blow against mongoose's jump— and as no eye can follow the motion of a snake's head

when it strikes, this makes things much more wonderful than any magic herb. Rikki-tikki knew he was a young mongoose, and it made him all the more pleased to think that he had managed to escape a blow from behind. It gave him confidence in himself, and when Teddy came running down the path, Rikki-tikki was ready to be petted.

But just as Teddy was stooping, something wriggled a little in the dust, and a tiny voice said: "Be careful. I am Death!" It was Karait, the dusty brown snakeling that lies for choice on the dusty earth; and his bite is as dangerous as the cobra's. But he is so small that nobody thinks of him, and so he does the more harm to people.

Rikki-tikki's eyes grew red again, and he danced up to Karait with the peculiar rocking, swaying motion that he had inherited from his family. It looks very funny, but it is so perfectly balanced a gait that you can fly off from it at any angle you please, and in dealing with snakes this is an advantage. If Rikki-tikki had only known, he was doing a much more dangerous thing than fighting Nag, for Karait is so small, and can turn so quickly, that unless Rikki bit him close to the back of the head, he would get the return stroke in his eye or his lip. But Rikki did not know. His eyes were all red, and he rocked back and forth, looking for a good place to hold. Karait struck out. Rikki jumped sideways and tried to run in, but the wicked little dusty gray head lashed within a fraction of his shoulder, and he had to jump over the body, and the head followed his heels close.

Teddy shouted to the house: "Oh, look here! Our mongoose is killing a snake." And Rikki-tikki heard a scream from Teddy's mother. His father ran out with a stick, but by the time he came up, Karait had lunged out once too far, and Rikki-tikki had sprung, jumped on the snake's back, dropped his head far between his forelegs, bitten as high up the back as he could get hold, and rolled away. That bite paralyzed Karait, and Rikki-tikki was just going to eat him up from the tail, after the custom of his family at dinner, when he remembered that a full meal makes a slow mongoose, and if he wanted all his strength and quickness ready, he must keep himself thin.

He went away for a dust bath under the castor-oil bushes, while Teddy's father beat the dead Karait. "What is the use of that?" thought Rikki-tikki. "I have settled it all;" and then Teddy's mother picked him up from the dust and hugged him, crying that he had saved Teddy from death, and Teddy's father said that he was a providence, and Teddy looked on with big scared eyes. Rikki-tikki was rather amused at all the fuss, which, of course, he did not understand. Teddy's mother might just as well have petted Teddy for playing in the dust. Rikki was thoroughly enjoying himself.

That night at dinner, walking to and fro among the wine-glasses on the table, he might have stuffed himself three times over with nice things. But he remembered Nag and Nagaina, and though it was very pleasant to be patted and petted by Teddy's mother, and to sit on Teddy's shoulder, his eyes would get red from time to time, and he would go off into his long war cry of "Rikk-tikk-tikki-tikki-tchk!"

Teddy carried him off to bed, and insisted on Rikki-tikki sleeping under his chin. Rikki-tikki was too well bred to bite or scratch, but as soon as Teddy was asleep he went off for his nightly walk round the house, and in the dark he ran up against Chuchundra, the musk-rat, creeping around by the wall. Chuchundra is a broken-hearted little beast. He whimpers and cheeps all the night, trying to make up his mind to run into the middle of the room. But he never gets there.

"Don't kill me," said Chuchundra, almost weeping. "Rikki-tikki, don't kill me!"

"Do you think a snake-killer kills muskrats?" said Rikki-tikki scornfully.

"Those who kill snakes get killed by snakes," said Chuchundra, more sorrowfully than ever. "And how am I to be sure that Nag won't mistake me for you some dark night?"

"There's not the least danger," said Rikki-tikki. "But Nag is in the garden, and I know you don't go there."

"My cousin Chua, the rat, told me— " said Chuchundra, and then he stopped.

"Told you what?"

"H'sh! Nag is everywhere, Rikki-tikki. You should have talked to Chua in the garden."

"I didn't— so you must tell me. Quick, Chuchundra, or I'll bite you!"

Chuchundra sat down and cried till the tears rolled off his whiskers. "I am a very poor man," he sobbed. "I never had spirit enough to run out into the middle of the room. H'sh! I mustn't tell you anything. Can't you hear, Rikki-tikki?"

Rikki-tikki listened. The house was as still as still, but he thought he could just catch the faintest scratch-scratch in the world— a noise as faint as that of a wasp walking on a window-pane— the dry scratch of a snake's scales on brick-work.

"That's Nag or Nagaina," he said to himself, "and he is crawling into the bath-room sluice. You're right, Chuchundra; I should have talked to Chua."

He stole off to Teddy's bath-room, but there was nothing there, and then to Teddy's mother's bathroom. At the bottom of the smooth plaster wall there was a brick pulled out to make a sluice for the bath water, and as Rikki-tikki

stole in by the masonry curb where the bath is put, he heard Nag and Nagaina whispering together outside in the moonlight.

"When the house is emptied of people," said Nagaina to her husband, "he will have to go away, and then the garden will be our own again. Go in quietly, and remember that the big man who killed Karait is the first one to bite. Then come out and tell me, and we will hunt for Rikki-tikki together."

"But are you sure that there is anything to be gained by killing the people?" said Nag.

"Everything. When there were no people in the bungalow, did we have any mongoose in the garden? So long as the bungalow is empty, we are king and queen of the garden; and remember that as soon as our eggs in the melon bed hatch (as they may tomorrow), our children will need room and quiet."

"I had not thought of that," said Nag. "I will go, but there is no need that we should hunt for Rikki-tikki afterward. I will kill the big man and his wife, and the child if I can, and come away quietly. Then the bungalow will be empty, and Rikki-tikki will go."

Rikki-tikki tingled all over with rage and hatred at this, and then Nag's head came through the sluice, and his five feet of cold body followed it. Angry as he was, Rikki-tikki was very frightened as he saw the size of the big cobra. Nag coiled himself up, raised his head, and looked into the bathroom in the dark, and Rikki could see his eyes glitter.

"Now, if I kill him here, Nagaina will know; and if I fight him on the open floor, the odds are in his favor. What am I to do?" said Rikki-tikki-tavi.

Nag waved to and fro, and then Rikki-tikki heard him drinking from the biggest water-jar that was used to fill the bath. "That is good," said the snake. "Now, when Karait was killed, the big man had a stick. He may have that stick still, but when he comes in to bathe in the morning he will not have a stick. I shall wait here till he comes. Nagaina— do you hear me?— I shall wait here in the cool till daytime."

There was no answer from outside, so Rikki-tikki knew Nagaina had gone away. Nag coiled himself down, coil by coil, round the bulge at the bottom of the water jar, and Rikki-tikki stayed still as death. After an hour he began to move, muscle by muscle, toward the jar. Nag was asleep, and Rikki-tikki looked at his big back, wondering which would be the best place for a good hold. "If I don't break his back at the first jump," said Rikki, "he can still fight. And if he fights— O Rikki!" He looked at the thickness of the neck below the hood, but that was too much for him; and a bite near the tail would only make Nag savage.

"It must be the head"' he said at last; "the head above the hood. And, when I am once there, I must not let go."

Then he jumped. The head was lying a little clear of the water jar, under the curve of it; and, as his teeth met, Rikki braced his back against the bulge of the red earthenware to hold down the head. This gave him just one second's purchase, and he made the most of it. Then he was battered to and fro as a rat is shaken by a dog— to and fro on the floor, up and down, and around in great circles, but his eyes were red and he held on as the body cart-whipped over the floor, upsetting the tin dipper and the soap dish and the flesh brush, and banged against the tin side of the bath. As he held he closed his jaws tighter and tighter, for he made sure he would be banged to death, and, for the honor of his family, he preferred to be found with his teeth locked. He was dizzy, aching, and felt shaken to pieces when something went off like a thunderclap just behind him. A hot wind knocked him senseless and red fire singed his fur. The big man had been wakened by the noise, and had fired both barrels of a shotgun into Nag just behind the hood.

Rikki-tikki held on with his eyes shut, for now he was quite sure he was dead. But the head did not move, and the big man picked him up and said, "It's the mongoose again, Alice. The little chap has saved our lives now."

Then Teddy's mother came in with a very white face, and saw what was left of Nag, and Rikki-tikki dragged himself to Teddy's bedroom and spent half the rest of the night shaking himself tenderly to find out whether he really was broken into forty pieces, as he fancied.

When morning came he was very stiff, but well pleased with his doings. "Now I have Nagaina to settle with, and she will be worse than five Nags, and there's no knowing when the eggs she spoke of will hatch. Goodness! I must go and see Darzee," he said.

Without waiting for breakfast, Rikki-tikki ran to the thornbush where Darzee was singing a song of triumph at the top of his voice. The news of Nag's death was all over the garden, for the sweeper had thrown the body on the rubbish-heap.

"Oh, you stupid tuft of feathers!" said Rikki-tikki angrily. "Is this the time to sing?"

"Nag is dead— is dead— is dead!" sang Darzee. "The valiant Rikki-tikki caught him by the head and held fast. The big man brought the bang-stick, and Nag fell in two pieces! He will never eat my babies again."

"All that's true enough. But where's Nagaina?" said Rikki-tikki, looking carefully round him.

"Nagaina came to the bathroom sluice and called for Nag," Darzee went on, "and Nag came out on the end of a stick— the sweeper picked him up on the end of a stick and threw him upon the rubbish heap. Let us sing about the great, the red-eyed Rikki-tikki!" And Darzee filled his throat and sang.

"If I could get up to your nest, I'd roll your babies out!" said Rikki-tikki. "You don't know when to do the right thing at the right time. You're safe enough in your nest there, but it's war for me down here. Stop singing a minute, Darzee."

"For the great, the beautiful Rikki-tikki's sake I will stop," said Darzee. "What is it, O Killer of the terrible Nag?"

"Where is Nagaina, for the third time?"

"On the rubbish heap by the stables, mourning for Nag. Great is Rikki-tikki with the white teeth."

"Bother my white teeth! Have you ever heard where she keeps her eggs?"

"In the melon bed, on the end nearest the wall, where the sun strikes nearly all day. She hid them there weeks ago."

"And you never thought it worth while to tell me? The end nearest the wall, you said?"

"Rikki-tikki, you are not going to eat her eggs?"

"Not eat exactly; no. Darzee, if you have a grain of sense you will fly off to the stables and pretend that your wing is broken, and let Nagaina chase you away to this bush. I must get to the melon-bed, and if I went there now she'd see me."

Darzee was a feather-brained little fellow who could never hold more than one idea at a time in his head. And just because he knew that Nagaina's children were born in eggs like his own, he didn't think at first that it was fair to kill them. But his wife was a sensible bird, and she knew that cobra's eggs meant young cobras later on. So she flew off from the nest, and left Darzee to keep the babies warm, and continue his song about the death of Nag. Darzee was very like a man in some ways.

She fluttered in front of Nagaina by the rubbish heap and cried out, "Oh, my wing is broken! The boy in the house threw a stone at me and broke it." Then she fluttered more desperately than ever.

Nagaina lifted up her head and hissed, "You warned Rikki-tikki when I would have killed him. Indeed and truly, you've chosen a bad place to be lame in." And she moved toward Darzee's wife, slipping along over the dust.

"The boy broke it with a stone!" shrieked Darzee's wife.

"Well! It may be some consolation to you when you're dead to know that I shall settle accounts with the boy. My husband lies on the rubbish heap this morning, but before night the boy in the house will lie very still. What is the use of running away? I am sure to catch you. Little fool, look at me!"

Darzee's wife knew better than to do that, for a bird who looks at a snake's eyes gets so frightened that she cannot move. Darzee's wife fluttered on, piping sorrowfully, and never leaving the ground, and Nagaina quickened her pace.

Rikki-tikki heard them going up the path from the stables, and he raced for the end of the melon patch near the wall. There, in the warm litter above the melons, very cunningly hidden, he found twenty-five eggs, about the size of a bantam's eggs, but with whitish skin instead of shell.

"I was not a day too soon," he said, for he could see the baby cobras curled up inside the skin, and he knew that the minute they were hatched they could each kill a man or a mongoose. He bit off the tops of the eggs as fast as he could, taking care to crush the young cobras, and turned over the litter from time to time to see whether he had missed any. At last there were only three eggs left, and Rikki-tikki began to chuckle to himself, when he heard Darzee's wife screaming:

"Rikki-tikki, I led Nagaina toward the house, and she has gone into the veranda, and— oh, come quickly— she means killing!"

Rikki-tikki smashed two eggs, and tumbled backward down the melon-bed with the third egg in his mouth, and scuttled to the veranda as hard as he could put foot to the ground. Teddy and his mother and father were there at early breakfast, but Rikki-tikki saw that they were not eating anything. They sat stone-still, and their faces were white. Nagaina was coiled up on the matting by Teddy's chair, within easy striking distance of Teddy's bare leg, and she was swaying to and fro, singing a song of triumph.

"Son of the big man that killed Nag," she hissed, "stay still. I am not ready yet. Wait a little. Keep very still, all you three! If you move I strike, and if you do not move I strike. Oh, foolish people, who killed my Nag!"

Teddy's eyes were fixed on his father, and all his father could do was to whisper, "Sit still, Teddy. You mustn't move. Teddy, keep still."

Then Rikki-tikki came up and cried, "Turn round, Nagaina. Turn and fight!"

"All in good time," said she, without moving her eyes. "I will settle my account with you presently. Look at your friends, Rikki-tikki. They are still and white. They are afraid. They dare not move, and if you come a step nearer I strike."

"Look at your eggs," said Rikki-tikki, "in the melon bed near the wall. Go and look, Nagaina!"

The big snake turned half around, and saw the egg on the veranda. "Ah-h! Give it to me," she said.

Rikki-tikki put his paws one on each side of the egg, and his eyes were blood-red. "What price for a snake's egg? For a young cobra? For a young king cobra? For the last— the very last of the brood? The ants are eating all the others down by the melon bed."

Nagaina spun clear round, forgetting everything for the sake of the one egg. Rikki-tikki saw Teddy's father shoot out a big hand, catch Teddy by the

shoulder, and drag him across the little table with the tea-cups, safe and out of reach of Nagaina.

"Tricked! Tricked! Tricked! Rikk-tck-tck!" chuckled Rikki-tikki. "The boy is safe, and it was I— I— I that caught Nag by the hood last night in the bathroom." Then he began to jump up and down, all four feet together, his head close to the floor. "He threw me to and fro, but he could not shake me off. He was dead before the big man blew him in two. I did it! Rikki-tikki-tck-tck! Come then, Nagaina. Come and fight with me. You shall not be a widow long."

Nagaina saw that she had lost her chance of killing Teddy, and the egg lay between Rikki-tikki's paws. "Give me the egg, Rikki-tikki. Give me the last of my eggs, and I will go away and never come back," she said, lowering her hood.

"Yes, you will go away, and you will never come back. For you will go to the rubbish heap with Nag. Fight, widow! The big man has gone for his gun! Fight!"

Rikki-tikki was bounding all round Nagaina, keeping just out of reach of her stroke, his little eyes like hot coals. Nagaina gathered herself together and flung out at him. Rikki-tikki jumped up and backward. Again and again and again she struck, and each time her head came with a whack on the matting of the veranda and she gathered herself together like a watch spring. Then Rikki-tikki danced in a circle to get behind her, and Nagaina spun round to keep her head to his head, so that the rustle of her tail on the matting sounded like dry leaves blown along by the wind.

He had forgotten the egg. It still lay on the veranda, and Nagaina came nearer and nearer to it, till at last, while Rikki-tikki was drawing breath, she caught it in her mouth, turned to the veranda steps, and flew like an arrow down the path, with Rikki-tikki behind her. When the cobra runs for her life, she goes like a whip-lash flicked across a horse's neck.

Rikki-tikki knew that he must catch her, or all the trouble would begin again. She headed straight for the long grass by the thorn-bush, and as he was running Rikki-tikki heard Darzee still singing his foolish little song of triumph. But Darzee's wife was wiser. She flew off her nest as Nagaina came along, and flapped her wings about Nagaina's head. If Darzee had helped they might have turned her, but Nagaina only lowered her hood and went on. Still, the instant's delay brought Rikki-tikki up to her, and as she plunged into the rat-hole where she and Nag used to live, his little white teeth were clenched on her tail, and he went down with her— and very few mongooses, however wise and old they may be, care to follow a cobra into its hole. It was dark in the hole; and Rikki-tikki never knew when it might open out and give Nagaina room to turn and strike at him. He held on savagely, and stuck out his feet to act as brakes on the dark slope of the hot, moist earth.

Then the grass by the mouth of the hole stopped waving, and Darzee said, "It is all over with Rikki-tikki! We must sing his death song. Valiant Rikki-tikki is dead! For Nagaina will surely kill him underground."

So he sang a very mournful song that he made up on the spur of the minute, and just as he got to the most touching part, the grass quivered again, and Rikki-tikki, covered with dirt, dragged himself out of the hole leg by leg, licking his whiskers. Darzee stopped with a little shout. Rikki-tikki shook some of the dust out of his fur and sneezed. "It is all over," he said. "The widow will never come out again." And the red ants that live between the grass stems heard him, and began to troop down one after another to see if he had spoken the truth.

Rikki-tikki curled himself up in the grass and slept where he was— slept and slept till it was late in the afternoon, for he had done a hard day's work.

"Now," he said, when he awoke, "I will go back to the house. Tell the Coppersmith, Darzee, and he will tell the garden that Nagaina is dead."

The Coppersmith is a bird who makes a noise exactly like the beating of a little hammer on a copper pot; and the reason he is always making it is because he is the town crier to every Indian garden, and tells all the news to everybody who cares to listen. As Rikki-tikki went up the path, he heard his "attention" notes like a tiny dinner gong, and then the steady "Ding-dong-tock! Nag is dead— dong! Nagaina is dead! Ding-dong-tock!" That set all the birds in the garden singing, and the frogs croaking, for Nag and Nagaina used to eat frogs as well as little birds.

When Rikki got to the house, Teddy and Teddy's mother (she looked very white still, for she had been fainting) and Teddy's father came out and almost cried over him; and that night he ate all that was given him till he could eat no more, and went to bed on Teddy's shoulder, where Teddy's mother saw him when she came to look late at night.

"He saved our lives and Teddy's life," she said to her husband. "Just think, he saved all our lives."

Rikki-tikki woke up with a jump, for the mongooses are light sleepers.

"Oh, it's you," said he. "What are you bothering for? All the cobras are dead. And if they weren't, I'm here."

Rikki-tikki had a right to be proud of himself. But he did not grow too proud, and he kept that garden as a mongoose should keep it, with tooth and jump and spring and bite, till never a cobra dared show its head inside the walls.

Darzee's Chant
(Sung in honor of Rikki-tikki-tavi)

Singer and tailor am I—
Doubled the joys that I know—
Proud of my lilt to the sky,
Proud of the house that I sew—
Over and under, so weave I my music—
so weave I the house that I sew.

Sing to your fledglings again,
Mother, oh lift up your head!
Evil that plagued us is slain,
Death in the garden lies dead.
Terror that hid in the roses is impotent— flung on the dung-hill and dead!

Who has delivered us, who?
Tell me his nest and his name.
Rikki, the valiant, the true,
Tikki, with eyeballs of flame,
Rikk-tikki-tikki, the ivory-fanged, the hunter with eyeballs of flame!

Give him the Thanks of the Birds,
Bowing with tail feathers spread!
Praise him with nightingale words—
Nay, I will praise him instead.
Hear! I will sing you the praise of the bottle-tailed Rikki, with eyeballs of red!

(Here Rikki-tikki interrupted, and the rest of the song is lost.)

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4: Bridgeen and the Leprechaun

Herminie Templeton Kavanagh

1861-1933

Ladies' Home Journal Sep 1920

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"OUTSIDE of France, the month of May is not the month of May," Victor Hugo says. Surely, surely the great poet never saw the break of May in Ireland. If on the May day we are talking about, he had walked down the winding road from Ballinderg by little Bridgeen Daley's side, and with her had kept his eyes and ears awake, looking in the ditches and under the hedges for the Leprechaun, the little fairy cobbler, he would have changed that saying entirely, I'm thinking.

On either side of the narrow lane pressed the bursting hedges, dazzling pink and white, while beyond, in the fields over every hillock and upland, surged riotous crowds of laughing, yellow buttercups and golden-hearted daisies. And the violets— every green leaf hid a purple cluster! And the perfume— but sure, one can't talk about the perfume of the Irish violets, because it gives one such a lonesome, longing heartsickness to think about them there! The linnets and the blackbirds contended desperately with one another as to who should give the heartiest, merriest welcome to the spring. And above all hovered the kindly sky, as grave, as blue, and as tender as Bridgeen's own eyes.

But back in the village of Ballinderg, it was little about blackbirds and linnets the people were thinking. Little Mickey Driscoll, who never before in all the troubled days of his short life had resented any honestly earned cuff on the ear, today leaned disconsolately against the shady side of the thatched cottage, weeping torrents of indignant tears into the short skirt of his brown linsey frock.

A few feet away, on an upturned tub beside the open door, sat his subdued and commiserating father, too wise for any open expression of sympathy or comfort, but nodding and winking covert assurances and beckoning to the lad with coaxing, compassionate fingers.

"Come over here, Mickey avick," he whispered. "Don't cry, ahager. Where did she slap ye? Oh my, oh my, on the two little red legs of ye! What did ye do, alannah?"

"Naw-nawthin', Da-daddy; I— I— only dhrew wan finger down, that a-way, on sisther Eileen's white dhress to see if it would make a mark," sobbed the heartbroken child.

"Oh, isn't that the turrible thing," soothed his hypocritical parent, "to larrup ye loike that just for wan weeney bit of a sthreek. Oh, husheen, husheen. No

wondher yer heart's in tatthers!" He drew the little lad between his knees and smoothed his tumbled, yellow curls.

Daniel Driscoll and his weeping son Mickey were not the only victims of feminine oppression in Ballinderg that Saturday afternoon; they but typified the general state of affairs, for in every cottage, an anxious, flustered woman was bustling back and forth from dresser to clothespress and from bedroom back to kitchen, and woe betide any unfortunate man or child or four-footed beast that got in the way of her flying feet!

On each side of the winding village street, the male portion of the community, apprehensive, subdued, and biddable, sat smoking their pipes under the projecting thatch of the cottages. The air was tense with expectation. Today no child loitered on an errand. At the first word of command, there was a flash of bare legs, a swish of red petticoat, and he was shot across the street from threshold to threshold with the speed and precision of field-gun practice.

And who could blame the busy mothers for their feverish perturbation! Wasn't the archbishop himself— not the bishop, mind you, but the archbishop— coming down on the morrow to the humble village chapel to give Confirmation to the children. Don't be talkin'! Wasn't Father Cassidy the clever man entirely to get such an honor for Ballinderg?

But, oh dear, the bother of it! What with the grandeur of white veils and wreaths for the girls and brand-new suits for the boys— shoes for a good many of them, too— the parish was fairly turned upside down and made bankrupt, so it was.

Late in the afternoon, Father Cassidy, tired and happy, having put the last touch to the decorations in the chapel and the last bunch of wildflowers in the altar vases, went cantering home along the gravel country lane on his black hunter, Terror.

He passed through the village and had almost reached the Ballymore crossroads when he spied, just ahead of him, a slim, barefooted little girl, trudging wearily along and carrying in her clasped arms a pair of brogues almost as heavy as herself.

"It's Bridgeen Daley," he muttered. "The kind Lord look down on that houseful of motherless children."

Father Cassidy reined in his horse beside her. "Is that you, Bridgeen?" he called. "Come here, asthore. Oh, I see ye've been to Neddy Hagan's to get yer father's brogues mended. I'm greatly afraid all this grandeur will be the ruination of us at last."

The little girl bobbed a curtsey and raised a pair of timid blue eyes to the priest's face.

"I hear everyone saying, alannah, what a grand little mother you are to the brothers and sisters since— your poor mother was taken away from you; and it's pleased I am and proud of you."

The ghost of a smile flickered a moment over the child's sensitive lips. Wasn't it the grand thing entirely to be praised like that by such a great man as Father Cassidy! But it's little he knew the trouble Bridgeen had with those same brothers and sisters; indeed, she was strongly tempted to tell him of the goings on of Jamesy. Musha, why shouldn't she tell him? When Daniel Casey, the tailor, went wrong with the drink, didn't his wife, Julia, call in Father Cassidy to put corrections on Daniel? And didn't it work wonders?

As if reading her thought, the priest bent low and looked almost deferentially into the innocent, blushing face. "I suppose it's great trials entirely you have with them, acushla?"

Thus encouraged, the colleen broke forth: "Jamesy's the worst, sir," she cried. "Even Paudeen, the baby, is more biddable— and Jamesy four years old yisterday and ought to have more sinse. But nothin' plazes him, yer riverence, but pokin' at the fire. Whin I go home now, I'll warrant it's hunkerin' in the ashes I'll find him. If yer honor's riverence'd only stop in and give him a spakin' to"— there was a little catch in Bridgeen's voice as she realized her boldness— "I'd— I'd take it kind."

Father Cassidy shook his head in sorrowful surprise. "Dear, dear, will you look at that now! I wouldn't have believed it of Jamesy, and him four years old, too. Wait till I lay me eyes on him! However, 'tis of yourself I'd like to be asking. Are you all ready for the Confirmation tomorrow? Have you yer white wreath and veil?"

Bridgeen's eyes dropped instantly, and she fell to digging in the turf with a bare toe. "No," she half-whispered, and her head dropped lower and lower.

Wasn't it a terrible thing to be the only girl in the chapel before the archbishop without a white wreath and veil! But, ochone mavrone, the pennies which her mother and she had so carefully hoarded for them had gone a fortnight ago to buy the makings of a sober, brown shroud with which to cover a quiet breast.

"Never mind, mavourneen," said Father Cassidy. "I've a plan. On your way home, do you be looking carefully under the hedge as you go along, and who knows but what you may meet up with the Leprechaun. Do you know what the Leprechaun is, Bridgeen?"

"Yis, sir— I mane, yer riverence— he's the sly, wee, fairy cobbler that sits undher a twig makin' shoes for the Little People; and if ye can only find him and kape yer eye on him the while, it's three grand wishes he'll give ye to buy his freedom."

"True for you, Bridgeen, but remember what a cunning trickster the lad is; if he can beguile you to take your eyes from him for a second, he's gone forever; don't forget that. I'm on now. Take the lane and hurry home, asthore, and I'll take the road and keep an eye out for him meself, an' whichever of us finds the Leprechaun first will go and tell the other." There was a laugh in Father Cassidy's eyes as he nodded good-day. Then something tinkled on the road at Bridgeen's feet. She stopped to pick it up. Wonders! It was a bright silver shilling.

"Thank you kindly, yer riverence," she gasped, but Father Cassidy was already galloping away, down the road, laughing softly to himself.

Look at that now, Father Cassidy himself to be talking of the Leprechaun. Why, then, in spite of what the schoolmaster said, there was truly such a little fairy man, dressed in a green cloak and red cap. It was no lie at all Tim O'Brien was telling. Dear, dear, wouldn't it be the grandest luck in the world if one could only—

"But sure, what good if I did meet up with him?" thought Bridgeen. "Isn't it too frightened to spake to him I'd be, let alone clever enough to make the like of him a prisoner? But the wishes! Oh, if I only could."

Bridgeen had heard a hundred times how years and years ago, it was a fairy thrush that had coaxed Tim O'Brien out of this same lane— in troth, almost from this same spot— across the fields to the fairy rath, where, Tim declared, he saw the Leprechaun. Now a thrush which had followed Bridgeen from the village, whirring in short flights along the top of the hedge, stopped on a branch just above her head and began singing fit to burst his swelling throat. And indeed 'twas he that had the fine, friendly song with him!

At first, it's little heed the child gave to the bird, for the priest's last words had raised a solemn wonder in her mind; for now, after what Father Cassidy had said, there could be no danger in asking from the fairy cobbler the favor of three wishes. Neither could it be wrong for one to search for the little fairy; didn't the priest himself bid her look carefully under the hedges, and didn't he promise to do that same? Well, wasn't it a queer world entirely!

By this time, she had reached the stile into Hagan's meadow, so she seated herself on the lowest step to think up the three best wishes and to rest her arms from the heavy brogues.

Wouldn't it be the grand fortune entirely to meet the Leprechaun? She turned a dozen wishes over and over in her mind. There was the wreath and veil for herself, of course, but then, on the other hand, there were potatoes and meal for next week, and barely enough turnips for the cow, and the turf down to the last row, and oh, so many needed things; but, above and beyond them all, one impossible, shining wish.

However, Father Cassidy had bidden her to hurry home, so, putting aside the pleasant wishes, Bridgeen slowly picked up the brogues from the grass where she had laid them and arose to go. As she did so, she cast anxious eyes at the big, red sun which was already sending slow-creeping shadows across the fields. And lo! as she looked, there arose sharp and clear before her the great dead tree off at the foot of the blue hills, the tree that marked the fairy rath where Tim O'Brien once had seen the Leprechaun.

"Why couldn't I go there looking for him?" The colleen trembled with excitement. "But it would be dark before I could go to the fairy fort and back again," she thought, shrinkingly.

And the distant tree towered so gloomily, so lonesomely, so silently, that Bridgeen hesitated, with her foot on the stile. But only an instant did she pause, for the friendly thrush which had followed her down the lane from the village rose out of the hedge nearby and, with a coaxing, beguiling trill, darted away across the meadow toward the fairy sentinel tree.

"I do believe he's calling me," she whispered.

The cheery note of the thrush took much of the lonesomeness out of the gathering shadows, and Bridgeen, with an answering cry in her throat, quickly hid her father's brogues under the stile and, without so much as a glance behind, followed the bird's flight.

Eager and brave enough she ran across the fields after the twinkling brown speck which, with many excited calls and soft, coaxing trills, lured her straight as a sunbeam through the cool, damp grass. Out of the meadow over the upland Bridgeen sped down from the upland into the moor she flew. An astonished curlew sent up a reproachful cry, and the moor hens, indignant at this untimely intrusion, fluttered angrily out of the bog.

The wind beating against the girl's face as she ran blurred the sight of her wide, blue eyes; and by and by, because of a throbbing in her temples, the line between earth and sky began to waver unsteadily up and down. Then, too, a mysterious, shadowy form, invisible, but nevertheless strongly palpable to her excited imagination, peeped out of the ditch after she had passed, and she knew that another strange shape crouched hidden in the rushes.

But, in spite of all her fears, a new, wild hope lent fluttering courage to her heart and gave such strength of speed to her bare, brown feet that before Bridgeen realized how far she had traveled, the gray, withered sentinel tree flashed up from the ground in her path and stood towering high above her head.

With a quick clasp of her hands and a frightened little gasp, Bridgeen stopped short and looked timidly around. Well might she hesitate! Just a few yards beyond the tree, shadowy, dark, and dumb, crouched the low green

mound which was famed through all the countryside as the Leprechaun's fairy fort.

There was not a man in the barony, let alone a child, foolhardy enough to venture to this spot after dark; and, yet here was Bridgeen standing alone in that very place, with the sun fast disappearing behind the mountains.

To gain a moment's courage, she turned and looked in the direction of the village. It seemed miles and miles away, and a soft, white mist was creeping low along the meadows, cutting her off from the world of living things. There was not a cricket's chirp to break the throbbing silence. Even a curlew's cry would have brought some comfort with it. As she listened, a chilling sense of utter loneliness fell upon her, and a nameless dread reached out and touched her like a ghostly hand.

Overcome by a shapeless fear, she turned to fly from the awesome spot, when, clear and cheery from a leafless bough above her head, the same thrush began to call. Bridgeen paused, wonderstruck, for the bird was now chirping as plainly almost as spoken words: "The Leprechaun! The Leprechaun!"

'Twas like a friend's voice in her ear and brought with it the recollection of the importance of her mission. She hesitated no longer. Stealthily and still half-afraid, she tiptoed her way over to the shallow ditch which ran about the enchanted place and, with many a shuddering glance, stepped slowly down. There was nothing there save mayflowers, ivy, and daisies.

It was in this very ditch that Tim O'Brien had seen the Leprechaun; Bridgeen remembered that well. Her heart beating like that of a captured bird, the child stood, with parted lips and panting breast, wondering whether she should go to the right or to the left, when the twigs stirred on the bank above her head, and glancing quickly up, she saw through the fringe of leaves two round, golden eyes peering down upon her.

For one horrified instant, Bridgeen stared fascinated at the eyes, and the eyes, fixed and unwinking, glared back at her. All power of motion deserted the child. Then a smothered cry broke from her lips. At the sound of her voice, a pair of slim ears popped straight up above the eyes, and a great brown rabbit sat up on his haunches and listened for a moment, greatly surprised. Then, as though reassured, he coolly turned and, with a saucy whisk of his fluffy tail, scampered out of sight.

With a quick laugh of relief, the nervous colleen wiped her lips with her apron and crept on her way round the fairy rath. She looked eagerly under every bush, and behind every clump of rushes, but found no sign of the Leprechaun. After making the circle, so tired was Bridgeen and so disheartened that she sat herself down to think. But lo and behold you, she had hardly time

to settle herself comfortably, when from somewhere behind her came the tack, tack, tack of a little hammer!

She listened, every sense alert. There could be no mistake. From behind a sloe bush not five feet away, the sound came tinkling clear as a bell: tack-tack-tack-tack.

"Surely," said Bridgeen to herself, and she trembled at the thought, "it must be the Leprechaun!"

Then quietly, oh, so quietly, she stole over to the sloe bush and peeped cautiously behind it. There, in truth, was a sight of wonder. Seated on a flat stone and partly hidden by the grass, worked a frowning little bald-headed cobbler, not the height of Bridgeen's knee, hammering and stitching with all his might on a dainty wee slipper, the size of your thumb.

While Bridgeen stared, the fairy, frowning deeper still, began singing in a high, querulous voice:

Tick, tack, tickety, tack!
I've not a breath to lose;
Bad manners to their dancing,
But they're cruel on their shoes!
The quane plays on her silver pipes,
The king lolls on his throne.
But underneath the hawthorn three
I mend and moil alone.

He stopped singing. "All the rest of the world spendin' their lives in fun and jollity!" he muttered. "Wirra, wirra, I'm fair kilt with work, so I am." With a vicious bang of the little hammer he started again:

They trail their robes of shiny silk
Wear many a jeweled ring;
I'd make them careful of their brogues,
If I could be the king.
They ride the wind from cloud to cloud
'Mid wonder and delight,
But I must stitch the satin shoes
The quane will wear tonight.
The mist is on the spangled fields;
I'm perished with the frost!
If a mortal's eyes falls on me,
Tare an' ages, sure I'm lost!

He may ask for love and beauty;
Sure they always ask for wealth;
Much good in love or beauty Huh!
I'd rather have me health.

Tick, tack, tickety, tack— Suddenly, as if stuck by a pin, he sprang to his feet and turned, shaking his tiny hammer at Bridgeen. "What's the worruld comin' to," he shouted fiercely, "whin one of your age comes gallopin' and cavortin' over the fields to torture out of a poor ould man the favor of three wishes, you young r-r-rob-ber?"

"No, no, Misther Leprechaun, not that at all," Bridgeen hurried to say. "I don't want to force yer honor to do anything. I came only to beg from you one little wish. See, I will take my eyes from you, so that you may go away if you like; but, oh, it would be kind of you, indeed, indeed it would, to hear the wish before you go."

"Do! Take yer eyes from me! I dare ye!" snapped the little man.

And indeed, turn away her head she did; but when she looked back to the rock again, there still sat the little cobbler much as before, only now there was a friendlier light shining through his big spectacles.

"That was the daycintest thrick," vowed he, thumping the rock with his fist, "that I've seen a human crachure do in foive hundhred years. I mane whin ye turned yer head, mavourneen. By rayson, I've a gr-reat curiosity to know what this one grand thing is that ye'd be after wishin' for. It's a crock o'goold, no doubt," he said, peering.

Bridgeen shook her head sadly and threw him a wistful look.

The Leprechaun dropped his chin into his hand and stared quizzically. "It's a coach an' four thin, I'm thinkin'," he ventured.

The sad, wistful look deepened on Bridgeen's face.

The Leprechaun puzzled a moment in silence and then spoke up quickly: "A-ha! I have it now! If it isn't a purty red dhress wid green ribbons, an' a hat wid a feather as long as yer arrum, thin I'm fair bate out!" exulted he, clasping his knee in his hands and leaning back.

The little girl still hesitated.

"Millia murdher! Isn't it that ayther? Out with it! Spake up!" he encouraged.

Bridgeen nervously plaited the corner of her apron in her fingers and answered, "It isn't any of thim things I want at all, at all," she hesitated. Then, boldly, "Of course, I need a white veil and wreath and dress for my Confirmation tomorrow."

"Oh my! Oh my!" broke in the Leprechaun. "The wreath, and the veil and the purty white dhress! Oh dear! Oh dear!"

"Still," Bridgeen continued, "It isn't for thim I came to ask you."

"Tare an' ages, what is it, thin? Ye're makin' me narvous! I niver saw such a quare little colleen."

"A fortnight ago last Monday"— and Bridgeen bit her lips to hide the tremble—"my mother died; and oh, how can I live longer without her!"

The Leprechaun slowly wagged his head and clucked his tongue sympathetically.

Bridgeen faltered. "I know she's in Heaven, as Father Cassidy says, and that it's cruel and wicked to wish her back to life again; but I know, too, that even if she is happy with the angels, she still must miss little Paudeen, the baby, sometimes— and, Misther Leprechaun, the one wish I have is that you'll let me see my mother for a minute, just for a minute, won't you?" Without realizing the boldness of it, she stretched her hands out to him, all the pleading of the world in her eager eyes.

The little cobbler shook his head sadly. "What good'd that do?" he sighed.

"If you only knew how my heart aches and aches for a sight of her when I go home and find her not there! You don't know what a terrible thing it is to be without your mother, Leprechaun, do you?"

"I don't," he answered, wiping his eyes with the corner of his apron. "I never had a mother, but I can aymagine. I wish I could bring her to ye, acushla, but it's beyant me power, I'm sorry to say. Ye see, she's a blessed sperrit up in Heaven, and we Fairies are only onblessed sperrits down here, ye undherstand; an' it's little the likes of her'd have to do with the likes of us. But maybe the talk I'm talkin' is too deep for ye, colleen. It's tayology," he said with a grand sweep of his hand.

The last hope was gone. Her head sank forward in a despair too deep for tears. "Never again! O Mother! Mother!"

The Leprechaun had pushed his spectacles high on his forehead and was vigorously wiping his eyes with his sleeve. "Stop, mavourneen," he said gruffly, ashamed of his weakness. "Now maybe it isn't so bad as all that. Whist now!" He paused a moment in deep thought, and a grim, determined look stole over his odd little face.

"I'm goin', Bridgeen Daley," he said, getting up and tightening the strings on his leather apron. "Sthop yer cryin', an' dhry yer eyes. I'm off. I may get insulted an' I may be malthrated, and at the very laste, I'm sure to have an ackerymoneous argymint. Howandever, what I can do, I will do, an' what I can't do, I won't do, but I'll sthrive my best endayvors; so do you go and sit again undher that withered three, and we'll see what'll happen. Don't be afeared, for

if a thousand fairies were there ferninst ye, they'd not harm a hair of yer purty head. But whatever ye do, stir not a stir, and spake not a worrud till the shadow of this three raiches yondher hazel bush. Goodbye. I'm off!" And flash! he was gone.

Bridgeen went and sat under the tree as she was told. Presently she noticed how the stealthy shadow of the tree crept nearer and nearer the hazel bush. At last, the quivering tracings of the topmost branch, reaching out eager fingers, touched the bush.

Bridgeen caught her breath and glanced around for some sign, but for the moment, there was none. The only moving things she saw were two belated bees, which, rising heavily laden from the sweetbriar bush at her side, buzzing and tumbling, started for home; and in the grass at her feet, a busy little brown spider was measuring off the outlines of a net and stopped now and then to listen, one slender arm lifted. The colleen looked reproachfully toward the white stone upon which had perched the Leprechaun. There it still shone dimly amongst the swaying rushes.

"The time is past, and she isn't here. Oh, I wonder if she'll come," grieved Bridgeen.

As if in answer to the thought, the rushes bowed low to the ground, and over their heads swept a cool wind that lifted the curls on the child's brow. Or was it the wind? Was it not rather soft, caressing fingers that were smoothing the brown hair back from her forehead?

Bridgeen started to her knees with a sobbing, laughing cry of "Mother! Mother! My own mother!"

For there, bending over her, was the white, gentle face she loved best in all the world. Never before had the child seen so much tenderness and peaceful happiness shining in the dear, patient eyes. Crying and laughing, Bridgeen flung herself into the arms outstretched for her.

"Bridgeen asthore, acushla, machree!" Though the voice was as soft as the voice of the wind, it still held the same lingering tenderness that had soothed and comforted a thousand griefs and sorrows. And wonder of wonders, slowly about her shoulders closed the remembered pressure of her mother's arms.

And now, with her head once more in its old place upon her mother's breast, all the cares, all the heartaches were forgotten.

"Your lonesome cry brings me thus visible to you, alannah!"

"O Mother, I've wanted you so much!" murmured Bridgeen with a sigh of measureless joy and relief.

"But don't you know I am never away from you, asthore? I've felt every tear that you have shed, and every grief of your heart has been a pain to me."

"Oh, if I had only known that, Mother, I wouldn't have grieved. I thought you were away from us entirely," cried the child.

"Listen, Bridgeen, and mark my words," the mother warned, "for the time is short and I've many things to tell you."

And then, with faces close, the two talked earnestly about many important things: how willingly Bridgeen must obey her father; how careful she must be to keep the stirabout from burning in the morning; but, above all, how watchful she must be to keep her brother Jamesy away from the fire. The colleen promised faithfully not to forget. And so they talked on lovingly, happily together.

At last the mother said, "It is the children's bedtime, and you must be my own brave daughter and go to them. Keep well in your mind what I have said; be cheerful and contented, for we are not separated. And listen, mavourneen!

"Tomorrow— the morning we had so long hoped for and planned for together, the day of your Confirmation— though you will not see me there, still I'll be kneeling happy at your side."

"Mother, I'll be contened and happy always now. Indeed, indeed, I will."

"Now hurry home, mavourneen," the mother whispered. "Run straight on without looking back. Have no fear, and remember!" Bridgeen felt a kiss on her forehead, and she knew that her mother was gone.

So, her happy heart filled with satisfied longings, without once turning her head, she ran out into the fields, her spirit growing lighter and lighter at every step.

On and on Bridgeen hurried, picking up her father's brogues as she passed the stile; and she never tarried till she came to her own door.

There she found waiting for her, all bristling with excitement, Kathleen, Norah, Jamesy and Paudeen, and they were carefully guarding a long, white, pasteboard box, held jealously between them.

"Oh, Bridgeen, Father Cassidy was just here, an' he said he met the Leprechaun, an' he left this box an' said he'd skiver Jamesy for pokin' at the fire, an' for us all not to so much as lay a finger on the knot of the cord till you came home." It was Kathleen who spoke.

With shaking fingers and amid eager proffers of help from Kathleen, Norah, Jamesy, and even little Paudeen, the string was untied and the lid lifted. And what do you think was in that same box?

Why, nothing else but the prettiest white dress and veil and wreath ever worn in the parish of Ballinderg.

The next morning, the good old archbishop leaned over Bridgeen Daley where she knelt.

He thought that in all the years of his life, he had never seen so happy a face.

And do you wonder that to this day, Bridgeen will listen to no doubting or unkind word spoken of the Leprechaun?

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5: The Case of the Scientific Murderer

Jacques Futrelle

1875-1912

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CERTAINLY no problem that ever came to the attention of The Thinking Machine required in a greater degree subtlety of mind, exquisite analytical sense, and precise knowledge of the marvels of science than did that singular series of events which began with the death of the Honorable Violet Danbury, only daughter and sole heir of the late Sir Duval Danbury, of Leamington, England. In this case The Thinking Machine— more properly, Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, Ph. D., M. D., F. R. S., et cetera, et cetera— brought to bear upon an extraordinary mystery of crime that intangible genius of logic which had made him the court of last appeal in his profession. “Logic is inexorable,” he has said; and no greater proof of his assertion was possible than in this instance where literally he seemed to pluck a solution of the riddle from the void.

Shortly after eleven o’clock on the morning of Thursday, May 4, Miss Danbury was found dead, sitting in the drawing-room of apartments she was temporarily occupying in a big family hotel on Beacon Street. She was richly gowned, just as she had come from the opera the night before; her marble-white bosom and arms aglitter with jewels. On her face, dark in death as are the faces of those who die of strangulation, was an expression of unspeakable terror. Her parted lips were slightly bruised, as if from a light blow; in her left cheek was an insignificant, bloodless wound. On the floor at her feet was a shattered goblet. There was nothing else unusual, no disorder, no sign of a struggle. Obviously she had been dead for several hours.

All these things considered, the snap judgement of the police— specifically, the snap judgement of Detective Mallory, of the bureau of criminal investigation— was suicide by poison. Miss Danbury had poured some deadly drug into a goblet, sat down, drained it off, and died. Simple and obvious enough. But the darkness in her face? Oh, that! Probably some effect of a poison he didn’t happen to be acquainted with. But it looked as if she might have been strangled! Pooh! Pooh! There were no marks on her neck, of fingers or anything else. Suicide, that’s what it was— the autopsy would disclose the nature of the poison.

Cursory questions of the usual nature were asked and answered. Had Miss Danbury lived alone? No; she had a companion upon whom, too, devolved the duties of chaperon— a Mrs. Cecelia Montgomery. Where was she? She’d left the city the day before to visit friends in Concord; the manager of the hotel

had telegraphed the facts to her. No servants? No. She had availed herself of the service in the hotel. Who had last seem Miss Danbury alive? The elevator attendant the night before, when she had returned form the opera, about half past eleven o'clock. Had she gone alone? No. She had been accompanied by Professor Charles Meredith, of the university. He had returned with her, and left her at the elevator.

"How did she come to know Professor Meredith?" Mallory inquired. "Friend, relative—"

"I don't know," said the hotel manager. "She knew a great many people here. She'd only been in the city two months this time, but once, three years ago, she spent six months here."

"Any particular reason for her coming over? Business, for instance, or merely a visit?"

"Merely a visit, I imagine."

The front door swung open, and there entered at the moment a middle-aged man, sharp-featured, rather spare, brisk in his movements, and distinctly well groomed. He went straight to the inquiry desk.

"Will you please phone to Miss Danbury, and ask her if she will join Mr. Herbert Willing for luncheon at the country club?" he requested. "Tell her I am below with my motor."

At mention of Miss Danbury's name both Mallory and the house manager turned. The boy behind the inquiry desk glanced at the detective blankly. Mr. Willing rapped upon the desk sharply.

"Well, well?" he demanded impatiently. "Are you asleep?"

"Good morning, Mr. Willing," Mallory greeted him.

"Hello, Mallory," and Mr. Willing turned to face him. "What are you doing here?"

"You don't know that Miss Danbury is"— the detective paused a little— "is dead?"

"Dead!" Mr. Willing gasped. "Dead!" he repeated incredulously. "What are you talking about?" He seized Mallory by the arm, and shook him. "Miss Danbury is—"

"Dead," the detective assured him again. "She probably committed suicide. She was found in her apartments two hours ago."

For half a minute Mr. Willing continued to stare at him as if without comprehension, then he dropped weakly into a chair, with his head in his hands. When he glanced up again there was deep grief in his keen face.

"It's my fault," he said simply. "I feel like a murderer. I gave her some bad news yesterday, but I didn't dream she would— — " He stopped.

"Bad news?" Mallory urged.

"I've been doing some legal work for her," Mr. Willing explained. "She's been trying to sell a huge estate in England, and just at the moment the deal seemed assured it fell through. I— I suppose it was a mistake to tell her. This morning I received another offer from an unexpected quarter, and I came by to inform her of it." He stared tensely into Mallory's face for a moment without speaking. "I feel like her murderer!" he said again.

"But I don't understand why the failure of the deal—" the detective began; then: "She was rich, wasn't she? What did it matter particularly if the deal did fail?"

"Rich, yes; but land poor," the lawyer elucidated. "The estates to which she held title were frightfully involved. She had jewels and all those things, but see how simply she lived. She was actually in need of money. It would take me an hour to make you understand. How did she die? When? What was the manner of her death?"

Detective Mallory placed before him those facts he had, and finally went away with him in his motor car to see Professor Meredith at the university. Nothing bearing on the case developed as the result of that interview. Mr. Meredith seemed greatly shocked, and explained that his acquaintance with Miss Danbury dated some weeks back, and friendship had grown out of it through a mutual love of music. He had accompanied her to the opera half a dozen times.

"Suicide!" the detective declared, as he came away. "Obviously suicide by poison."

On the following day he discovered for the first time that the obvious is not necessarily true. The autopsy revealed absolutely no trace of poison, either in the body or clinging to the shattered goblet, carefully gathered up and examined. The heart was normal, showing neither constriction nor dilation, as would have been the case had poison been swallowed, or even inhaled.

"It's the small wound in her cheek, then," Mallory asserted. "Maybe she *didn't* swallow or inhale poison— she injected it directly into her blood through that wound."

"No," one of the examining physicians pointed out. "Even that way the heart would have shown constriction or dilation."

"Oh, maybe not," Mallory argued hopefully.

"Besides," the physician went on, "that wound was made after death. That is proven by the fact that it did not bleed." His brow clouded in perplexity. "There doesn't seem to be the slightest reason for that wound, anyway. It's really a hole, you know. It goes straight through her cheek. It looks as if it might have been made with a large hatpin."

The detective was staring at him. If that wound had been made after death, certainly Miss Danbury didn't make it— she had been murdered! And not murdered for robbery, since her jewels had been undisturbed.

"Straight through her cheek!" he repeated blankly. "By George! Say, if it wasn't poison, what killed her?"

The three examining physicians exchanged glances.

"I don't know that I can make you understand," said one. "She died of absence of air in her lungs, if you follow me."

"Absence of air— well, that's illuminating!" the detective sneered heavily. "You mean she was strangled, or choked to death?"

"I mean precisely what I say," was the reply. "She was not strangled— there is no mark on her throat; or choked— there is no obstruction in her throat. Literally she died of absence of air in her lungs."

Mallory stood silently glowering at them. A fine lot of physicians, these!

"Let's understand one another," he said at last. "Miss Danbury did not die a natural death?"

"No!" emphatically.

"She wasn't poisoned? Or strangled? Or shot? Or stabbed? Or run over by a truck? Or blown up by dynamite? Or kicked by a mule? Nor," he concluded, "did she fall from an aeroplane?"

"No."

"In other words, she just quit living?"

"Something like that," the physician admitted. He seemed to be seeking a means of making himself more explicit. "You know the old nursery theory that a cat will suck a sleeping baby's breath?" he asked. "Well, the death of Miss Danbury was like that, if you understand. It is as if some great animal or— or thing had—" He stopped.

Detective Mallory was an able man, the ablest, perhaps, in the bureau of criminal investigation, but a yellow primrose by the river's brim was to him a yellow primrose, nothing more. He lacked imagination, a common fault of that type of sleuth who combines, more or less happily, a number eleven shoe and a number six hat. The only vital thing he had to go on was the fact that Miss Danbury was dead— murdered, in some mysterious, uncanny way. Vampires were something like that, weren't they? He shuddered a little.

"Regular vampire sort of thing," the youngest of the three physicians remarked, echoing the thought in the detective's mind. "They're supposed to make a slight wound, and—"

Detective Mallory didn't hear the remainder of it. He turned abruptly, and left the room.

On the following Monday morning, one Henry Sumner, a longshoreman in Atlantic Avenue, was found dead sitting in his squalid room. On his face, dark in death, as are the faces of those who die of strangulation, was an expression of unspeakable terror. His parted lips were slightly bruised, as if from a light blow; in his left cheek was an insignificant, bloodless wound. On the floor at his feet was a shattered drinking glass!

'Twas Hutchinson Hatch, newspaper reporter, long, lean, and rather prepossessing in appearance, who brought this double mystery to the attention of The Thinking Machine. Martha, the eminent scientist's one servant, admitted the newspaper man, and he went straight to the laboratory. As he opened the door The Thinking Machine turned testily from his worktable.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Hatch. Glad to see you. Sit down. What is it?" That was his idea of extreme cordiality.

"If you can spare me five minutes?" the reporter began apologetically.

"What is it?" repeated The Thinking Machine, without raising his eyes.

"I wish I knew," the reporter said ruefully. "Two persons are dead— two persons as widely apart as the poles, at least in social position, have been murdered in precisely the same manner, and it seems impossible that— — "

"Nothing is impossible," The Thinking Machine interrupted, in the tone of perpetual irritation which seemed to be a part of him. "You annoy me when you say it."

"It seems highly improbable," Hatch corrected himself, "that there can be the remotest connection between the crimes, yet—"

"You're wasting words," the crabbed little scientist declared impatiently. "Begin at the beginning. Who was murdered? When? How? Why? What was the manner of death?"

"Taking the last question first," the reporter explained, "we have the most singular part of the problem. No one can say the manner of death, not even the physicians."

"Oh!" For the first time The Thinking Machine lifted his petulant, squinting, narrowed eyes, and stared into the face of the newspaper man. "Oh!" he said again. "Go on."

As Hatch talked, the lure of a material problem laid hold of the master mind, and after a little The Thinking Machine dropped into a chair. With his great, grotesque head tilted back, his eyes turned steadily upward, and slender fingers placed precisely tip to tip, he listened in silence to the end.

"We come now," said the newspaper man, "to the inexplicable after developments. We have proven that Mrs. Cecelia Montgomery, Miss Danbury's companion, did *not* go to Concord to visit friends; as a matter of

fact, she is missing. The police have been able to find no trace of her, and to-day are sending out a general alarm. Naturally, her absence at this particular moment is suspicious. It is possible to conjecture her connection with the death of Miss Danbury, but what about—"

"Never mind conjecture," the scientist broke in curtly. "Facts, facts!"

"Further," and Hatch's bewilderment was evident on his face, "mysterious things have been happening in the rooms where Miss Danbury and this man Henry Sumner were found dead. Miss Danbury was found dead last Thursday. Immediately after the body was removed, Detective Mallory ordered her room locked, his idea being that nothing should be disturbed at least for the present, because of the strange circumstances surrounding her death. When the nature of the Henry Sumner affair became known, and the similarity of the cases recognized, he gave the same order regarding Sumner's room."

Hatch stopped, and stared vainly into the pallid, wizened face of the scientist. A curious little chill ran down his spinal column.

"Some time Tuesday night," he continued, after a moment, "Miss Danbury's room was entered and ransacked; and some time that same night Henry Sumner's room was entered and ransacked. This morning, Wednesday, a clearly defined hand print in blood was found in Miss Danbury's room. It was on the wooden top of a dressing table. It seemed to be a woman's hand. Also, an indistinguishable smudge of blood, which may have been a hand print, was found in Sumner's room!" He paused; The Thinking Machine's countenance was inscrutable. "What possible connection can there be between this young woman of the aristocracy, and this— this longshoreman? Why should— — "

"What chair," questioned The Thinking Machine, "does Professor Meredith hold in the university?"

"Greek," was the reply.

"Who is Mr. Willing?"

"One of the leading lawyers of the city."

"Did you see Miss Danbury's body?"

"Yes."

"Did she have a large mouth, or a small mouth?"

The irrelevancy of the questions, to say nothing of their disjointedness, brought a look of astonishment to Hatch's face; and he was a young man who was rarely astonished by the curious methods of The Thinking Machine. Always he had found that the scientist approached a problem from a new angle.

"I should say a small mouth," he ventured. "Her lips were bruised as if— as if something round, say the size of a twenty-five-cent piece, had been crushed against them. There was a queer, drawn, caved-in look to her mouth and cheeks."

“Naturally,” commented The Thinking Machine enigmatically. “And Sumner’s was the same?”

“Precisely. You say ‘naturally.’ Do you mean—” There was eagerness in the reporter’s question.

It passed unanswered. For half a minute The Thinking Machine continued to stare into nothingness. Finally:

“I dare say Sumner was of the English type? His name is English?”

“Yes; a splendid physical man, a hard drinker, I hear, as well as a hard worker.”

Again a pause.

“You don’t happen to know if Professor Meredith is now or ever has been particularly interested in physics— that is, in natural philosophy?”

“I do not.”

“Please find out immediately,” the scientist directed tersely. “Willing has handled some legal business for Miss Danbury. Learn what you can from him to the general end of establishing some connection, a relationship possibly, between Henry Sumner and the Honorable Violet Danbury. That, at the moment, is the most important thing to do. Neither of them may have been aware of the relationship, if relationship it was, yet it may have existed. If it doesn’t exist, there’s only one answer to the problem.”

“And that is?” Hatch asked.

“The murders are the work of a madman,” was the tart rejoinder. “There’s no mystery, of course, in the manner of the deaths of these two.”

“No mystery?” the reporter echoed blankly. “Do you mean you know how they—”

“Certainly I know, and you know. The examining physicians know, only they don’t know that they know.” Suddenly his tone became didactic. “Knowledge that can’t be applied is utterly useless,” he said. “The real difference between a great mind and a mediocre mind is only that the great mind applies its knowledge.” He was silent a moment. “The only problem remaining here is to find the person who was aware of the many advantages of this method of murder.”

“Advantages?” Hatch was puzzled.

“From the viewpoint of the murderer there is always a good way and a bad way to kill a person,” the scientist told him. “This particular murderer chose a way that was swift, silent, simple, and sure as the march of time. There was no scream, no struggle, no pistol shot, no poison to be traced, nothing to be seen except—”

“The hole in the left cheek, perhaps?”

"Quite right, and that leaves no clew. As a matter of fact, the only clew we have at all is the certainty that the murderer, man or woman, is well acquainted with physics, or natural philosophy."

"Then you think," the newspaper man's eyes were about to start from his head, "that Professor Meredith—"

"I think nothing," The Thinking Machine declared briefly. "I want to know what he knows of physics, as I said; also I want to know if there is any connection between Miss Danbury and the longshoreman. If you'll attend to—"

Abruptly the laboratory door opened and Martha entered, pallid, frightened, her hands shaking.

"Something most peculiar, sir," she stammered in her excitement.

"Well?" the little scientist questioned.

"I do believe," said Martha, "that I'm a-going to faint!"

And as an evidence of good faith she did, crumpling up in a little heap before their astonished eyes.

"Dear me! Dear me!" exclaimed The Thinking Machine petulantly. "Of all the inconsiderate things! Why couldn't she have told us before she did that?"

It was a labor of fifteen minutes to bring Martha around, and then weakly she explained what had happened. She had answered a ring of the telephone, and some one had asked for Professor Van Dusen. She inquired the name of the person talking.

"Never mind that," came the reply. "Is he there? Can I see him?"

"You'll have to explain what you want, sir," Martha had told him. "He always has to know."

"Tell him I know who murdered Miss Danbury and Henry Sumner," came over the wire. "If he'll receive me I'll be right up."

"And then, sir," Martha explained to The Thinking Machine, "something must have happened at the other end, sir. I heard another man's voice, then a sort of a choking sound, sir, and then they cursed me, sir. I didn't hear any more. They hung up the receiver or something, sir." She paused indignantly. "Think of him, sir, a-swearing at *me!*"

For a moment the eyes of the two men met; the same thought had come to them both. The Thinking Machine voiced it.

"Another one!" he said. "The third!"

With no other word he turned and went out; Martha followed him grumblingly. Hatch shuddered a little. The hand of the clock went on to half past seven, to eight. At twenty minutes past eight the scientist re-entered the laboratory.

"That fifteen minutes Martha was unconscious probably cost a man's life, and certainly lost to us an immediate solution of the riddle," he declared peevishly. "If she had told us before she fainted there is a chance that the operator would have remembered the number. As it is, there have been fifty calls since, and there's no record." He spread his slender hands helplessly. "The manager is trying to find the calling number. Anyway, we'll know to-morrow. Meanwhile, try to see Mr. Willing to-night, and find out about what relationship, if any, exists between Miss Danbury and Sumner; also, see Professor Meredith."

The newspaper man telephoned to Mr. Willing's home in Melrose to see if he was in; he was not. On a chance he telephoned to his office. He hardly expected an answer, and he got none. So it was not until four o'clock in the morning that the third tragedy in the series came to light.

The scrubwomen employed in the great building where Mr. Willing had his law offices entered the suite to clean up. They found Mr. Willing there, gagged, bound hand and foot, and securely lashed to a chair. He was alive, but apparently unconscious from exhaustion. Directly facing him his secretary, Maxwell Pittman, sat dead in his chair. On his face, dark in death, as are the faces of those who die of strangulation, was an expression of unspeakable terror. His parted lips were slightly bruised, as if from a light blow; in his left cheek was an insignificant, bloodless wound!

Within an hour Detective Mallory was on the scene. By that time Mr. Willing, under the influence of stimulants, was able to talk.

"I have no idea what happened," he explained. "It was after six o'clock, and my secretary and I were alone in the offices, finishing up some work. He had stepped into another room for a moment, and I was at my desk. Some one crept up behind me, and held a drugged cloth to my nostrils. I tried to shout, and struggled, but everything grew black, and that's all I know. When I came to myself poor Pittman was there, just as you see him."

Snooping about the offices, Mallory came upon a small lace handkerchief. He seized upon it tensely, and as he raised it to examine it he became conscious of a strong odor of drugs. In one corner of the handkerchief there was a monogram.

" 'C. M.,' " he read; his eyes blazed. "Cecelia Montgomery!"

In the grip of an uncontrollable excitement Hutchinson Hatch bulged in upon The Thinking Machine in his laboratory.

"There *was* another," he announced.

"I know it," said The Thinking Machine, still bent over his worktable. "Who was it?"

"Maxwell Pittman," and Hatch related the story.

“There may be two more,” the scientist remarked. “Be good enough to call a cab.”

“Two more?” Hatch gasped in horror. “Already dead?”

“There may be, I said. One, Cecelia Montgomery, the other the unknown who called on the telephone last night.” He started away, then returned to his worktable. “Here’s rather an interesting experiment,” he said. “See this tube,” and he held aloft a heavy glass vessel, closed at one end, and with a stopcock at the other. “Observe. I’ll place this heavy piece of rubber over the mouth of the tube, and then turn the stopcock.” He suited the action to the word. “Now take it off.”

The reporter tugged at it until the blood rushed to his face, but was unable to move it. He glanced up at the scientist in perplexity.

“What hold it there?”

“Vacuum,” was the reply. “You may tear it to pieces, but no human power can pull it away whole.” He picked up a steel bodkin, and thrust it through the rubber into the mouth of the tube. As he withdrew it, came a sharp, prolonged, hissing sound. Half a minute later the rubber fell off. “The vacuum is practically perfect— something like one-millionth of an atmosphere. The pin hole permits the air to fill the tube, the tremendous pressure against the rubber is removed, and—” He waved his slender hands.

In that instant a germ of comprehension was born in Hatch’s brain; he was remembering some college experiments.

“If I should place that tube to your lips,” The Thinking Machine resumed, “and turn the stopcock, you would never speak again, never scream, never struggle. It would jerk every particle of air out of your body, paralyze you; within two minutes you would be dead. To remove the tube I should thrust the bodkin through your cheek, say your left, and withdraw it— — ”

Hatch gasped as the full horror of the thing burst upon him. “Absence of air in the lungs,” the examining physicians had said.

“You see, there was no mystery in the manner of the deaths of these three,” The Thinking Machine pointed out. “You knew what I have shown you, the physicians knew it, but neither of you knew you knew it. Genius is the ability to apply the knowledge you may have, not the ability to acquire it.” His manner changed abruptly. “Please call a cab,” he said again.

Together they were driven straight to the university, and shown into Professor Meredith’s study. Professor Meredith showed his astonishment plainly at the visit, and astonishment became indignant amazement at the first question.

“Mr. Meredith, can you account for every moment of your time from mid-afternoon yesterday until four o’clock this morning?” The Thinking Machine

queried flatly. “Don’t misunderstand me— I mean every moment covering the time in which it is possible that Maxwell Pittman was murdered?”

“Why, it’s a most outrageous—” Professor Meredith exploded.

“I’m trying to save you from arrest,” the scientist explained curtly. “If you can account for all that time, and prove your statement, believe me, you had better prepare to do so. Now, if you could give me any information as to—”

“Who the devil are you?” demanded Professor Meredith belligerently. “What do you mean by daring to suggest—”

“My name is Van Dusen,” said The Thinking Machine, “Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen. Long before your time I held the chair of philosophy in this university. I vacated it by request. Later the university honored me with a degree of LL. D.”

The result of the self-introduction was astonishing. Professor Meredith, in the presence of the master mind in the sciences, was a different man.

“I beg you pardon,” he began.

“I’m curious to know if you are at all acquainted with Miss Danbury’s family history,” the scientist went on. “Meanwhile, Mr. Hatch, take the cab, and go straight and measure the precise width of the bruise on Pittman’s lips; also, see Mr. Willing, if he is able to receive you, and ask him what he can give you as to Miss Danbury’s history— I mean her family, her property, her connections, all about everything. Meet me at my house in a couple of hours.”

Hatch went out, leaving them together. When he reached the scientist’s home The Thinking Machine was just coming out.

“I’m on my way to see Mr. George Parsons, the so-called copper king,” he volunteered. “Come along.”

From that moment came several developments so curious, and bizarre, and so widely disassociated that Hatch could make nothing of them at all. Nothing seemed to fit into anything else. For instance, The Thinking Machine’s visit to Mr. Parsons’ office.

“Please ask Mr. Parsons if he will see Mr. Van Dusen?” he requested of an attendant.

“What about?” the query came from Mr. Parsons.

“It is a matter of life and death,” the answer went back.

“Whose?” Mr. Parsons wanted to know.

“His!” The scientist’s answer was equally short.

Immediately afterward The Thinking Machine disappeared inside. Ten minutes later he came out, and he and Hatch went off together, stopping at a toy shop to buy a small, high-grade, hard-rubber ball; and later at a department store to purchase a vicious-looking hatpin.

“You failed to inform me, Mr. Hatch, of the measurement of the bruise?”

“Precisely one and a quarter inches.”

"Thanks! And what did Mr. Willing say?"

"I didn't see him as yet. I have an appointment to see him in an hour from now."

"Very well," and The Thinking Machine nodded his satisfaction. "When you see him, will you be good enough to tell him, please, that I know— *I know*, do you understand?— who killed Miss Danbury, and Sumner, and Pittman. You can't make it too strong. *I know*— do you understand?"

"*Do* you know?" Hatch demanded quickly.

"No," frankly. "But convince him that I do, and add that to-morrow at noon I shall place the extraordinary facts I have gathered in possession of the police. At noon, understand; and I*know!*" He was thoughtful a moment. "You might add that I have informed you that the guilty person is a person of high position, whose name has been in no way connected with the crimes— that is, unpleasantly. You don't know that name; no one knows it except myself. I shall give it to the police at noon to-morrow."

"Anything else?"

"Drop in on me early to-morrow morning, and bring Mr. Mallory."

Events were cyclonic on that last morning. Mallory and Hatch had hardly arrived when there came a telephone message for the detective from police headquarters. Mrs. Cecelia Montgomery was there. She had come in voluntarily, and asked for Mr. Mallory.

"Don't rush off now," requested The Thinking Machine, who was pottering around among the retorts, and microscopes and what not on his worktable. "Ask them to detain her until you get there. Also, ask her just what relationship existed between Miss Danbury and Henry Sumner." The detective went out; the scientist turned to Hatch. "Here is a hatpin," he said. "Some time this morning we shall have another caller. If, during the presence of that person in this room, I voluntarily put anything to my lips, a bottle, say, or anything is forced upon me, and I do not remove it in just thirty seconds, you will thrust this hatpin through my cheek. Don't hesitate."

"Thrust it through?" the reporter repeated. An uncanny chill ran over him as he realized the scientist's meaning. "Is it absolutely necessary to take such a chance to—"

"I say if *I* don't remove it!" The Thinking Machine interrupted shortly. "You and Mallory will be watching from another room; I shall demonstrate the exact manner of the murders." There was a troubled look in the reporter's face. "I shall be in no danger," the scientist said simply. "The hatpin is merely a precaution if anything should go wrong."

After a little Mallory entered, with clouded countenance.

"She denies the murders," he announced, "but admits that the hand prints in blood are hers. According to her yarn, she searched Miss Danbury's room and Sumner's room after the murders to find some family papers which were necessary to establish claims to some estate— I don't quite understand. She hurt her hand in Miss Danbury's room, and it bled a lot, hence the hand print. From there she went straight to Sumner's room, and presumably left the smudge there. It seems that Sumner was a distant cousin of Miss Danbury's— the only son of a younger brother who ran away years ago after some wild escapade, and came to this country. George Parsons, the copper king, is the only other relative in this country. She advises us to warn him to be on his guard— seems to think he will be the next victim."

"He's already warned," said The Thinking Machine, "and he has gone West on important business."

Mallory stared.

"You seem to know more about this case than I do," he sneered.

"I do," asserted the scientist, "quite a lot more."

"I think the third degree will change Mrs. Montgomery's story some," the detective declared. "Perhaps she will remember better—"

"She is telling the truth."

"Then why did she run away? How was it we found her handkerchief in Mr. Willing's office after the Pittman affair? How was it—"

The Thinking Machine shrugged his shoulders, and was silent. A moment later the door opened, and Martha appeared, her eyes blazing with indignation.

"That man who swore at me over the telephone," she announced distinctly, "wants to see you, sir."

Mallory's keen eyes swept the faces of the scientist and the reporter, trying to fathom the strange change that came over them.

"You are sure, Martha?" asked The Thinking Machine.

"Indeed I am, sir." She was positive about it. "I'd never forget his voice, sir."

For an instant her master merely stared at her, then dismissed her with a curt, "Show him in," after which he turned to the detective and Hatch.

"You will wait in the next room," he said tersely. "If anything happens, Mr. Hatch, remember."

The Thinking Machine was sitting when the visitor entered— a middle-aged man, sharp-featured, rather spare, brisk in his movements, and distinctly well groomed. It was Herbert Willing, attorney. In one hand he carried a small bag. He paused an instant, and gazed at the diminutive scientist curiously.

"Come in, Mr. Willing," The Thinking Machine greeted. "You want to see me about—" He paused questioningly.

"I understand," said the lawyer suavely, "that you have interested yourself in these recent— er— remarkable murders, and there are some points I should like to discuss with you. I have some papers in my bag here, which"— he opened it— "may be of interest. Some er— newspaper man informed me that you have certain information indicating the person—"

"I know the name of the murderer," said The Thinking Machine.

"Indeed! May I ask who it is?"

"You may. His name is Herbert Willing."

Watching tensely Hatch saw The Thinking Machine pass his hand slowly across his mouth as if to stifle a yawn; saw Willing leap forward suddenly with what seemed to be a bottle in his hand; saw him force the scientist back into his chair, and thrust the bottle against his lips. Instantly came a sharp click, and some hideous change came over the scientist's wizened face. His eyes opened wide in terror, his cheeks seemed to collapse. Instinctively he grasped the bottle with both hands.

For a scant second Willing stared at him, his countenance grown demoniacal; then he swiftly took something else from the small bag, and smashed it on the floor. It was a drinking glass!

After which the scientist calmly removed the bottle from his lips.

"The broken drinking glass," he said quietly, "completes the evidence."

Hutchinson Hatch was lean and wiry, and hard as nails; Detective Mallory's bulk concealed muscles of steel, but it took both of them to overpower the attorney. Heedless of the struggling trio The Thinking Machine was curiously scrutinizing the black bottle. The mouth was blocked by a small rubber ball, which he had thrust against it with his tongue a fraction of an instant before the dreaded power the bottle held had been released by pressure upon a cunningly concealed spring. When he raised his squinting eyes at last, Willing, manacled, was glaring at him in impotent rage. Fifteen minute later the four were at police headquarters; Mrs. Montgomery was awaiting them.

"Mrs. Montgomery, why,"— and the petulant pale-blue eyes of The Thinking Machine were fixed upon her face— "why didn't you go to Concord, as you had said?"

"I did go there," she replied. "It was simply that when news came of Miss Danbury's terrible death I was frightened, I lost my head; I pleaded with my friends not to let it be known that I was there, and they agreed. If any one had searched their house I would have been found; no one did. At last I could stand it no longer. I came to the city, and straight here to explain everything I knew in connection with the affair."

"And the search you made of Miss Danbury's room? And of Sumner's room?"

"I've explained that," she said. "I knew of the relationship between poor Harry Sumner and Violet Danbury, and I knew each of them had certain papers which were of value as establishing their claims to a great estate in England now in litigation. I was sure those papers would be valuable to the only other claimant, who was—"

"Mr. George Parsons, the copper king," interposed the scientist. "You didn't find the papers you sought because Willing had taken them. That estate was the thing he wanted, and I dare say by some legal jugglery he would have gotten it." Again he turned to face Mrs. Montgomery. "Living with Miss Danbury, as you did, you probably held a key to her apartment? Yes. You had only the difficulty then, of entering the hotel late at night, unseen, and that seemed to be simple. Willing did it the night he killed Miss Danbury, and left it unseen, as you did. Now, how did you enter Sumner's room?"

"It was a terrible place," and she shuddered slightly. "I went in alone, and entered his room through a window from a fire escape. The newspapers, you will remember, described its location precisely, and—"

"I see," The Thinking Machine interrupted. He was silent a moment. "You're a shrewd man, Willing, and your knowledge of natural philosophy is exact if not extensive. Of course, I knew if you thought I knew too much about the murders you would come to me. You did. It was a trap, if that's any consolation to you. You fell into it. And, curiously enough, I wasn't afraid of a knife or a shot; I knew the instrument of death you had been using was too satisfactory and silent for you to change. However, I was prepared for it, and—I think that's all." He arose.

"All?" Hatch and Mallory echoed the word. "We don't understand—"

"Oh!" and The Thinking Machine sat down again. "It's logic. Miss Danbury was dead— neither shot, stabbed, poisoned, nor choked; 'absence of air in her lungs,' the physicians said. Instantly the vacuum bottle suggested itself. That murder, as was the murder of Sumner, was planned to counterfeit suicide, hence the broken goblet on the floor. Incidentally the murder of Sumner informed me that the crimes were the work of a madman, else there was an underlying purpose which might have arisen through a relationship. Ultimately I established that relationship through Professor Meredith, in whom Miss Danbury had confided to a certain extent; at the same time he convinced me of his innocence in the affair.

"Now," he continued, after a moment, "we come to the murder of Pittman. Pittman learned, and tried to phone me, who the murderer was. Willing heard that message. He killed Pittman, then bound and gagged himself, and waited. It was a clever ruse. His story of being overpowered and drugged is absurd on the face of it, yet he asked us to believe that by leaving a handkerchief of Mrs.

Montgomery's on the floor. That was reeking with drugs. Mr. Hatch can give you more of these details." He glanced at his watch. "I'm due at a luncheon, where I am to make an address to the Society of Psychical Research. If you'll excuse me—"

He went out; the others sat staring after him.

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6: In Hell's Cañon

H. D. Umbstaetter (*as by Harold Kinsabby*)
1851-1913
The Black Cat, June 1900

ADVENTUROUS prospectors who have followed the perilous trails over the Cabinet Mountains have, as a matter of course, heard of the Lost Lead, but only he who is a total stranger to fear has penetrated the chaotic wilderness of Hell's Cañon, and thus come suddenly upon the Grave of Gold. Four rude granite posts, connected by heavy log chains, enclose the spot. On the face of the giant bowlder that stands guard over the few square feet of sacred earth is carved :

THE LOST LEAD
LOUIS GILBERT
1860-1891

This inscription marks the loneliest, yet richest, grave in the world.

Late in the spring of 1889, Louis Gilbert left Ms home in Kentucky for a visit to his uncle's mine in the North-west. He had lung trouble, and the doctor had ordered an outdoor life. While his health improved, he became infected with another ailment, perhaps the only one to be caught at that altitude— the gold fever. Miners were his only associates, the talk was all of lodes, leads and drifts, and the only communication with the outside world was by the train of pack mules that carried the heavy ore sacks down the winding trail. So it was not surprising that his walks took the character of prospecting tours, and carried him farther and farther from camp. Late in October, when his visit was nearlv over, he started with three days' food for a last trip, into new territory. From a conical mountain top about ten miles west of the mine, he had looked over a lower range of summits to a great expanse of wild and broken country that he had never explored.

The weather was like summer when he started, but thirty-six hours later, on the evening of the second day, a fierce snowstorm set in. By midnight, the first blizzard of the season was raging through the mountains. On the third day the storm still howled furiously, but searching parties were sent out with a faint hope of finding the young prospector before the trails became entirely impassable. In the dim twilight of the afternoon they returned one by one, almost worn out, convinced that the body of the missing man would not be found till the warm winds of spring should melt away the drifts. Yet, as a humane precaution, lights were kept burning all night in cabin windows, and, guided by one of them, Louis Gilbert staggered into camp and fell like a dead

man before the mess-room door. He was taken from the snow, wrapped in blankets and laid before a blazing fire. When he showed signs of life he was given hot drinks and put to bed. His prospector's belt dropped to the floor like lead, and when opened was found to be stuffed with nuggets of virgin gold.

In the fever that followed, Gilbert talked deliriously of his long struggle through the blinding drifts, hungry, cold and aching for the sleep which would mean death, yet forcing himself onward with the blizzard at his back as his only guide. The amazing richness of his find had given him the strength that saved his life.

Finally he opened his eyes with the old look and told in detail the story of his wonderful discovery. On the east side of a stream, in a cañon so terribly wild and broken that it was almost impassable, he had found the gold on the very surface of a ledge.

Filling his belt, he had started to blaze his way back, when the storm came down with frightful violence. The rest of the journey was simply a horrible nightmare.

As nothing could be done while the snow lasted, Gilbert returned to Kentucky for the winter, yet could think of nothing but his discovery. He had found a fortune, had even put his hands upon it, and knew it was his whenever he could stake off his claim and take possession. He spent his time in making a chart of the stream he had followed on which he set down every detail he could recall of the eastern bank, along which he had travelled.

Early the following spring he was back at his uncle's mine, waiting impatiently for the snow to melt and be carried away by the swollen streams. Finally, after a tedious delay, he set out with a small party of miners all eager to have a hand in locating the rich prospect.

"Hell's Cañon! " exclaimed the foreman, as, skirting Cone Top Mountain, Gilbert pointed out the way. One of the men, a Mexican, declined to go any farther with the party, and the foreman explained to the wondering Gilbert:

"The Mexicans give Hell's Cañon a wide berth. They say that one of them found a big treasure there, and then lost it and his life in some uncanny way. They found his bones though, next summer. Knew 'em by his divining rod, that he clung to even in death."

On the second day Gilbert and his companions found the stream, which fought its way among the upturned rocks, cavernous gorges and fallen logs. At the sight of it Gilbert eagerly led the search along the east bank, and every spot was carefully searched. But the bowlder, the two dead trees— every other characteristic landmark on Gilbert's chart— could not be found. All search was vain. The map was not that of the locality they were in— as Gilbert himself was obliged to admit.

During that summer Gilbert led out four other searching parties, but never got any nearer the lost lead. Then he again went South for the winter. When he next returned it was with a flushed cheek that contrasted horribly with his pale, pinched look and steadily failing strength. In spite of all disappointments, he was still hopeful, and to humor him his uncle's miners occasionally made excursions into the maze of peaks and gulches.

One morning, late in the season, Gilbert asked for one more chance to solve the mystery of Hell's Cañon. He had had a dream, he said enthusiastically, that this time he would be successful. The miners did not put much faith in dreams, but, for his uncle's sake, and because it was recalled that this was the second anniversary of the great discovery, they made up a party and started out in the usual direction. Although they moved slowly, the young man's feebleness increased until it became necessary to carry him on a litter made of boughs. This delayed them even more, and it was late on the third day before they reached the stream. At the sight of the dashing water, Gilbert's strength appeared to rally, and, sitting up, he directed them to cross to the west bank. At this strange order the bearers exchanged significant glances and called the rest of the party. They all believed that with a brief return of physical strength the young man's mind had broken down. The one point on which he had always been most positive— that the vein was on the eastern bank of the stream— he had now abandoned. It was evident to them that the lost lead would never be found.

But it was time to camp for the night, and the west bank was much more sheltered. With much difficulty, bracing themselves against the stones, they carried the litter across the swift current. Selecting a site sheltered by a huge bowlder, the men sent in advance to pitch camp began with picks to clear a spot for the tent. With a ring that could not be mistaken the steel struck the rock. The men gave a great cheer. Grilbert raised himself on his litter when it was brought up, and gazed excitedly at the great boulder and its surroundings, which had come to him so vivdly in that prophetic death-dream— his last on earth.

"The Lost Lead!" he cried in a triumphant tone, and then adding in a weak voice, "Bury me here, boys," he sank back— dead.

Spring freshets had changed the torrent's course, and the east bank had become the west!

They buried Louis Gilbert with the treasure he had never possessed, and while the rich mine became known in financial circles as "The Lost Lead," yet old miners themselves speak of it only as "The Grave of Gold."

7: Neap-Tide Madness

E. Phillips Oppenheim

1866-1946

Collier's Weekly, 24 Aug 1929,
(as "The Siren of the Marsh")

One of 10 short stories featuring Sir Jasper Slane, an aristocratic detective

SLANE saw tragedy coming to him through the bank of white mist which had fallen suddenly over the marshes. A breath of wind unscreened those ghostly arms; he saw the dim figure of a man, saw the blinding flash of a gun, heard the shrill whistle of a bullet. Once more the wall of floating vapours closed up, and there was silence.

"What the hell do you mean by that?" Slane shouted.

His voice seemed the most ineffectual thing in this wilderness of silence. There was no reply. High overhead, a flight of geese went honking along the shore. From the side of the road came the sibilant, soft suction of the tidal waters, but of human sound there was none.

Slane, who had courage enough, felt only one sensation— anger. He plunged forward blindly, left the road, made breathless passage over the mossy, sea-riven land, only to put his foot deep into a morass, and fall headlong before he had gone a dozen paces. He picked himself up, and listened. Again there was that queer, brooding silence, which at this hour of the evening seemed always to come down from the skies. The cold water chilled him. He stumbled on his way— an undignified object, his clothes soaking, his anger finding no form of expression.

The mist was denser now—so dense that as he struggled toward the rough lane he walked into a startled pony, which galloped off at his touch. With a sense of bewilderment, he strode on until he reached the first gate, grasped the white timber bars and raised his voice again— in vain.

A dog was barking somewhere in the far distance. There was the eternal swish and suction of the waters, the breathing of a cow close at hand—so close that as he pushed the gate open he set the beast stampeding into the mist. The furtive lights of the Dormy House shone dimly now through the hanging gloom. He unlatched the gate and stepped, dripping, into the hall. Harrison, the butler, hastened forward to meet him.

"Harrison," he demanded, "who the hell wanders over these marshes in the mists with a gun, trying to commit murder?"

"A gun, Sir Jasper? One of the duck shooters lost his way, I expect. You don't mean to say he came nigh hitting you?"

"Blast him, he tried to murder me!" Slane cried, the fury still hot in his veins. "It was no shotgun. It was an automatic, or a rifle. Fired a bullet at me through the mist. He couldn't have missed me by more than a yard. What maniacs are there loose in the neighbourhood?" Harrison's expression was a little grave as he took Slane's wringing wet coat.

"If you'll come straight upstairs, sir," he proposed, "I'll get you a bath quick. As to whom you might come across on them marshes, God only knows, but there be queer tales at times."

"I'll have the queer tales out of someone," Slane muttered. "I'm no more careful of my life than most men, but I've no fancy to be a target for a lunatic."

"There's a few of the gentlemen, sir," Harrison ventured, "who stay out quite late."

"And why not?" Slane demanded. "I had a late tea, and whisky in the bar, and a chat with Tom Ryder afterward in his workshop. Then I saw the mists come down, and I made for home. Why shouldn't I stay as long as I want to? I'll get to the bottom of this, Harrison."

They had reached the bathroom. The man turned on the tap, and the room was soon full of hissing steam.

"If you'll take your bath, Sir Jasper," he suggested, "you'll find your clothes all laid out for you. I'll bring you a cocktail up, if I may, to keep the cold out, and what there may be to tell I'll just tell you, if the other gentlemen don't, sir."

The evening meal in the long, low dining-room of the Dormy House was always a simple but pleasant function. It was served by Harrison, a maid and a rather clumsy boy, and consisted usually of soup, fish and a joint. Whisky and soda, followed by a bottle of port, was the staple drink, and golf the invariable subject of conversation. Tonight, however, Slane introduced what was evidently a disturbing note. He turned to Major Lyall, the secretary, who sat at the head of the table, and asked him a portentous question. "Why do you allow madmen to go about on the links, Lyall?"

"Can't help it so long as they're not certified, and have paid their subscriptions," was the cheerful reply. "Someone has to lose. Was it the old colonel you were thinking of? I saw him break two clubs this afternoon."

"I am not referring to the usual type of golfing lunatic," Slane continued. "Do you know, I was shot at, at point-blank range, coming back tonight by some beast of a fellow with a gun?" There was a moment's silence, and the secretary— a broad-shouldered man of fine physique, with healthily tanned cheeks, loud voice and breezy manner— seemed unaccountably embarrassed. The other three men showed their interest in various ways. Ferguson, a barrister, clean shaven, a little worn and grizzled, was clearly taken by surprise.

The other two men— Paul Fenton, a stockbroker, and Walter Seymour, a lawyer who came from somewhere in the Midlands— seemed to share the secretary's discomfiture.

"What made you come home by the marsh road?" Major Lyall asked, rather with the air of an unsympathetic magistrate cross-examining a witness.

"Well, I suppose I can if I want to, can't I?" was the impatient rejoinder. "As a matter of fact I lost my way. There was one of those beastly sea fogs about, and I didn't realize that I had missed the turning until I was halfway here."

The secretary sipped his wine.

"You haven't been down for a month or so, Slane," he said. "Otherwise, you'd know that that road isn't safe now for anyone staying at the Dormy House."

"Why on earth not?"

Lyall shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I should have thought you'd have found out," he vouchsafed dryly.

Slane was puzzled, and a little indignant. "Do you know who the fellow was?" he asked.

"I can guess," Lyall acknowledged. "It was Mark Rennett."

"Then I shall take a policeman and have a talk with Mr. Mark Rennett in the morning," Slane declared. "He'd better choose some other form of amusement than mistaking human beings for ducks."

The secretary moved uneasily in his chair.

"THE fellow's a damned nuisance, of course," he admitted, "but he doesn't seem to do any mischief unless some one goes near his cottage. I should leave him alone, I think."

"Why should I?" Slane demanded. "The fellow fired at me deliberately. I'm not going to give him the chance of doing it a second time."

"You'll be all right," Major Lyall assured him, "so long as you stick to the main road. The fellow's a difficult proposition. He built that cottage of old timbers and beach stones on a piece of reclaimed land twenty years ago, and I don't think anyone could turn him out. He's made a living somehow or other. He's got a boat on one of the reaches, and he can bring fish out of the water and duck from the skies like no ordinary man. He was a civil enough chap, too, until a year ago— used to caddy sometimes when the weather was bad, and knew the game as well as any of us."

"What's happened to him since a year ago?" Slane asked bluntly.

There was a moment's silence. Seymour seemed about to speak, but thought better of it. Lyall stretched out his hand for the decanter, and filled his glass.

"The fact is," he confided, "that Rennett, although he's a man past middle age, has a wife who in her way is really beautiful. I won't even qualify it. She is an amazingly beautiful human being. One or two of the visitors down here used to go out of their way to stroll home by Rennett's cottage: one especially— a man you know, I think, Slane. If ever he comes back— which he hasn't done for the last eight months— I think Rennett will shoot him. Not that he's really to blame. I don't believe anyone who's stayed here has ever spoken more than a dozen words to the woman. As a matter of fact, Rennett himself— a sour, sullen dog he is— has never made any serious complaint, and I shouldn't imagine he's had any cause to. The trouble is, the man's half a gypsy, and at times he's mad. He's sworn to shoot a n y o n e from the Dormy House who goes near the cottage, and there you are."

"And you put up with it?" Slane asked in amazement.

The secretary laughed a little apologetically.

"I suppose, upon the face of it," he said, "it does seem rather ridiculous, but what are we to do? The man's his own landlord. He can't be turned out, even if one wanted to do it. The grievance against us may have some foundation, or it may not— no one really knows— but so long as he's left alone, he does no harm. He's never raised his gun that I've heard of, or attempted any form of violence against anyone, except— except against one man. Supposing you take your story to the police. He'll just say that he was duck shooting, and didn't notice anyone coming, and all the police can do is to warn him to be more careful in the future."

"They can take his gun license away," Slane pointed out.

"I doubt whether they could. In this part of the world it's like drawing a man's teeth."

Slane abandoned the subject. It seemed to him a curious thing that the fact of his doing so was a matter for obvious relief to everyone.

"Playing with us today, Slane?" Penton asked at breakfast-time the next morning. Slane looked over his shoulder from the sideboard from which he was helping himself.

"After lunch," he assented. "This morning I am going to pay a call upon Mr. Mark Rennett."

There was a brief silence. Major Lyall looked up from behind the local paper.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you, Slane," he advised.

"I'd let the fellow alone," Seymour echoed.

Slane looked at them both curiously.

"Well," he seated himself. "I have my own ideas of what to do when a fellow takes a pot shot at you from twenty yards away, because you happen to

be passing near his cottage. If I didn't go to see him, I should go to the police. Perhaps that would be better any. way."

"It wouldn't do any good," Seymour confided. "I know the sergeant here, and I know the policeman. I bet you a fiver that neither of them would go near."

"Well, let's hope it won't be necessary," Slane remarked, settling down to his breakfast. "I shall try the effect of a little gentle persuasion first."

MARK RENNETT'S abode was easily to be seen— a strange, rough-looking structure, standing absolutely by itself near one of the arms of the sea— a muddy ditch now, but transformed into a glittering waterway with the turn of the tide. There was no sign of human life about the place as Slane approached, and he had time to take note of his surroundings. There were several things that surprised him. In the first place, everything was spotlessly neat. In one of the front windows was a great bowl of wild lavender; in another a pot of primroses. A long fishing net, reeking with doors of the sea, was laid out to dry. There had been no attempt to enclose any space for a garden— the door opened on to the soft, spongy turf— but in a sheltered corner, where one might catch the sunlight, there was a wicker chair upon which were some articles of woman's clothing. Slane was in the act of tapping at the door with his stick when it suddenly opened, and he received a shock which bereft him, for a moment, of speech.

Mark Rennett's wife stood upon the threshold looking out at him. Afterward, for his own pleasure, he tried to collect those first impressions of her, and though he never failed to weave them into a wonderful picture, he always felt that in certain mysterious ways memory failed him. To his first surprised fancy she resembled nothing so much as Fra Lippo Lippi's Florentine Madonna. She stood with one hand upon her hip, leaning a little forward, and as she looked at Slane that first gentle smile of inquiry seemed to become to him something subtly different, something which stirred him as he had seldom before been stirred in his life. "What might you be wanting?" she asked.

Her voice was soft enough, but it had more than a touch of the East Anglian accent.

"I wanted a word with Mark Rennett," he announced.

"My husband," the woman said, a little uneasily. "He is out along the dyke side. There was a call of snipe this morning— or maybe he fancied it. What do you want with him, may I ask, sir?"

She crossed the threshold toward him, and shaded her eyes with her hand, looking down the curving waterway. Slane was speechless. In a dim sort of

way, he understood the reticence of the men at the Dormy House. No words could deal adequately with the subject of this woman.

"He's not partial to strangers, Mark isn't," she confided, turning toward him, with a faint deprecatory gesture. "I don't know that I'd stay, if I were you, unless the business is serious. He be a violent man, and suspicious beyond all things." Her delicate mouth— heavens, to find such a mouth in such a place!— broke into a smile, her eyes seemed to be asking him for understanding.

"Well, the fact of it is," Slane told her, pulling himself together, "I came to complain. I lost my way and passed along the path there last night, and he shot at me— missed me by no more than a foot or two."

She seemed to treat the incident lightly.

"Mark's peculiar," she admitted. "He has strange ideas in his head— mostly about me. I'd let it be, sir. I wouldn't wait for him now. Don't come this way again by night, if Mark's about."

"That's all very well," Slane protested, with an effort at good-humour, "but one doesn't expect to be shot at just because a madman doesn't like you near his cottage. I very nearly went to the police instead of coming here."

She laughed gaily. "And what did you think they'd do?" she mocked him. "There's old Sergeant Pardowe. He'd tighten his belt, and cough and wheeze, but he'd never step this far across the marshes. He'd wait until he found Mark in a public house, and then have a solemn word with him. Young Clooney would come fast enough if he'd send him, but young Clooney is afraid of Mark. They mostly are," she went on, looking at him with wistful, wide-open eyes, seeking for sympathy. "Mark's so queer about me. The sight of a man near the cottage drives him crazy. Some day there will be trouble."

"It must make life lonely for you," he ventured. Again she laughed, and Slane fought against the stealthy conviction of what that call in her eyes might mean. "There come times," she confided, and there was a magic in her tone which seemed to be telling him that it was for him alone she spoke, "when the wind sets fair, and the boats go out, and Mark must fish. That's in "the full springtime too. He's away for weeks— the springtime when the nights here are soft and velvety, and the stars shine, and one can see the sea and the lights of the boats without moving from my window. I am thankful for those fishing days and nights sometimes, for Mark's a gloomy man."

In the distance they heard the report of a gun. Once more she leaned forward and gazed down the waterway. "He's coming back," she whispered. "If I were you, mister, I wouldn't wait. I shan't tell him you've been."

"If you don't mind," Slane insisted, "I should like to stay and see him. I do not wish my visit to be a secret. I came here to warn him."

"He'll take no notice," she assured him. "He's a fearsomely determined man. Do you come from the Dormy House, by chance, mister?"

"I do," Slane admitted. "I'm staying there."

"Then he'll hate you just like the rest of them," she predicted. "He can't abide the sight of a gentleman. I'd rather you went," she begged, moving back a little. "If he sees me here talking to you, there may be trouble, mister. He can't help it. He's like that."

"I'll take my chance," Slane decided. "Or— wait! It's safe going by the side of your creek, I suppose? I can reach the links that way. I'll go and meet him, and then there's no chance of getting you into trouble." She looked upward, her eyes searching for a lark, singing unusually high. At that moment her face was like the face of an angel. She was listening too; her eyes were seeking for something beautiful.

"Go and meet him then," she sighed, "if you must. For myself, I should rather everyone left him alone. There's the spring fishing, and the winter fishing, and when he's away I can breathe. When he's here there's always terror in the air."

"I think," Slane remonstrated, "that you get a little over-nervous living here alone and without neighbours. I'll have my talk with him anyway."

He lifted his hat. She had drawn back into the shelter of the cottage, out of sight of the distant but approaching figure. She made no reply to his farewell, but with her hand straying back once more to her hip, she stood looking at him, and there was something in the flicker of her eyelids, the promise of her eyes, the faint curve of her lips which an even less experienced man than Slane might have recognized as something akin to the witchery which has set men's hearts trembling and crumbled to dust their wills since the days of Delilah. Slane went tramping across the marshes, with a singing in his ears, but without a backward glance....

MARK RENNETT, at close quarters, had at least personality. In costume and appearance he seemed to be a composite picture of the gypsy and the fisherman. His complexion was swarthy and his hair black. He had a distinctly hooked nose, and a harsh, angry mouth. He wore a fisherman's jersey, sea boots over his trousers, and a red handkerchief around his neck. He was a fine, upstanding figure of a man, with a slight stoop of the neck. His pockets were bulging with the snipe he had shot, and as Slane approached, he brought another one down from the skies, picked up the fluttering little mass of feathers, chucked it into his pocket, and reloaded his gun. Then he changed his course so as to meet Slane.

"What does you want with me, mister?" he inquired truculently. "I don't allow visitors at my cottage."

"You'll have visitors you won't want if you're not careful, my man," Slane replied. "You'll have the police. I nearly went for them this morning."

"Fat lot of good that would do you," the man snarled. "Say your business with me, and be off."

"I shall be off when I choose," was the calm rejoinder. "The marshes don't belong to you, my man, and you'll quit them for prison if you go about letting off firearms as you did last night." Mark Rennett laughed unpleasantly.

"So the marshes are yours and the sea and the air as well, I reckon, mister," he jeered. "Will you fight me for them?"

"We can neither of us fight for what does not belong to either of us," Slane replied. "They are free for me as they are for you, so long as you behave yourself. You fired off a gun last night in the fog which barely missed me."

"Well, if there was a fog, mister, how could I see?" the man demanded insolently.

"You saw me right enough."

"Then what were you doing nigh to my cottage?"

"You don't deserve a civil answer," Slane said, "but you shall have one. I missed my way walking from the golf club house to the Dormy House."

"I guessed you was one of those lazy, ball-playing pigs," Mark Rennett gibed. "Nothing to do but eat and drink and knock a little ball about, and skulk after other men's belongings. Sorry I missed you the other night, guv'nor. I could always have said I thought I 'eered duck. You listen to me," he went on, coming half a yard nearer. "It isn't often I get a chance to talk to one of you blokes, except Major Lyall. He's the only gentleman of the lot of you. Minds his own business, he does. Now I've got you here I'm going to tell you summat. You can bawl about the police until your throat aches. I don't care. The police won't touch me. They dursn't. But as for you chaps up at the Dormy House there, I hate the lot of you. D'you hear that? You're a lot of mucking, idling hogs. I beat up one on 'em, come a year ago, and I did my two months for it. I'll swing maybe for the next. So now you know. Get on your ways, mister. You're the first one I've seen as can look a man in the eyes anyway. Keep t'other side of Rennett's dyke, and you'll keep out of mischief."

The man strode away.

Jasper Slane filled his pipe and turned toward the golf house. Somehow or other he was not utterly convinced that he had had the best of the interview. The memory of that singing bullet still filled him with a curious sort of irritation when he thought of it. He sat on the beach, deliberating what to do, and then fate solved the problem for him. A boy from the Dormy House arrived on a

bicycle with a telegram. He was wanted in town, and wanted urgently. He caught the three o'clock train, and for the time being his acutely vivid impressions of the last few hours passed into the background of his mind.

IT WAS May before Slane found himself able to take another few days' holiday. He packed his golf clubs and fishing rods, wrote for his usual room, and travelled down to Norfolk. In the hall of the Dormy House, Lyall met him.

"Come down alone?" the latter asked eagerly, as they shook hands.

"Didn't seem to be anyone at the junction for here," Slane replied. "I kept the car waiting five minutes or so in case anyone turned up."

Lyall drew a little breath of relief.

Slane looked at him curiously. "You don't look very fit, old chap," he remarked.

The secretary took his arm, and led him to the little smoking-room. He made signs to the steward, and they were served with whiskies and sodas. Slane glanced at the man again. There were deeper lines in his long, narrow face.

"I want a change," he confessed. "The solitude and quietness of this place through the winter get on one's nerves. One magnifies little things, and one can't sleep."

"Is that murderous fellow Rennett still tramping the marshes with his gun?" Slane asked.

Lyall's face was like a mask. "That fellow, Slane," he confessed, "is the curse of my life. He'll do someone a mischief some day or other. By the bye, I think you know Ebben— Julius Ebben?"

"Very slightly. I'm really not sure that I have ever met him. He's a banker, isn't he— one of the famous Jew family— A tidy golfer, I believe."

"Yes, he's a scratch player. To tell you the truth, he's one of my troubles just now. He wanted to come down here. I wired that every room was full, and that it was quite impossible. I'm afraid, all the same, he'll turn up. He's one of these persistent devils. You never can get a millionaire to understand that there are things he can't buy. If I had my way," Lyall continued, filling a pipe, "I'd blow the roof off this place before he slept under it."

"What's the trouble?" Lyall smoked gloomily. "Nothing that men of common sense— healthy men like you and me— could understand. It is these romanticists— Jews, artists, chaps of that sort— get the poison into their veins sometimes. Don't let's talk about it. Ebben mayn't come, and," he added, looking out of the window at the storm which had suddenly blown up, "the fishing boats mayn't go out."

"So that's it," Slane murmured softly.

A car drove up to the front door, and a soberly dressed manservant descended from the box. A tall man in a huge ulster climbed out and entered the hall.

"It's Ebben!" Lyall exclaimed. The door of the smoking-room was thrown open. Julius Ebben entered— a tall, good-looking man, slim and athletic, with bright, dark eyes, just then filled with laughter.

"It's no good, Lyall, old man," he said. "You can't rob a man of his week's golf like that. Any old crib will do for me."

"I wired you we hadn't a room, Ebben," Lyall protested. "There isn't a hole or corner for you. You had better have a drink and go on to Hunstanton."

Ebben smiled. "Now, Lyall," he begged, "don't be unreasonable. This is Slane, isn't it?" he added, turning to the latter. "Glad to see you. Lyall, you've plenty of rooms, and you know you have, and you can't keep me out of the place. Why, damn it all, I'm a director! Don't be stupid. We'll have a drink together, and you shall tell my servant where to put my things. I warn you though, arguments are no use with me. I shall open the door of every bedroom in the place and select the first empty one I come to."

"There are a lot of fellows coming tomorrow," Lyall muttered ungraciously.

"Then perhaps there may be one of them," Ebben declared, "for whom there won't be a room, but first come, first served, you know."

Lyall was beaten, and he knew it. He left the room to give some orders. Ebben watched his great, shambling figure with a smile of amusement.

"Poor old Lyall," he murmured. "He takes everything so damned seriously. Looks upon us all when we come here as being under his parental eye, or something of the sort— as though we couldn't take care of ourselves."

Four times that evening, between the service of dinner and bedtime, Lyall, on some excuse or another, walked out into the night and stood on the wall, his hands outstretched, his head thrown back, scenting for the wind. The last time he came back, Ebben looked up from the bridge table.

"What about the weather, Lyall?"

"The wind has gone down," was the grumpy reply. "You'll get your golf tomorrow."

But both men knew that it wasn't the golf Lyall was thinking about. They knew it then, and they knew it when, from the ninth green on the following morning, they turned to see the little procession of boats coming down from the harbor along the widening estuary. Along a narrow creek, running at right angles, a single sail was visible, gliding between the two banks of marshy land, down to join the others.

The little company of golfers stood and watched it. Not one of them spoke a word. They stood there gazing until the small boat reached the broader

waters. After they had driven from the tenth tee, they turned round again. The sail of the little dinghy had been furled. Its solitary occupant had clambered into one of the larger boats. The smaller one was made fast behind. Lyall watched it curiously.

"I wonder," Julius Ebben murmured, "why our friend Rennett is taking his dinghy?"

No one answered, but three other men wondered. The cottage on the marshes seemed dead and lifeless. Not even a wisp of smoke came from the chimney.

THAT evening, the wind had dropped, and the lights of the fishing fleet were dimly visible on the horizon. At night they had disappeared. At the Dormy House, the time passed apparently in the usual fashion. There were some new arrivals, and three tables of bridge.

When Slane retired to bed, Julius Ebben was still playing. Lyall, in a distant corner, was seated with his arms folded, and the air of a watchdog.

Slane awoke the next morning to find the room full of sunlight and Lyall's tall form bending over him. Some instinct of apprehension caused him to become suddenly alert. He swung himself out of bed.

"What's wrong, Lyall?" he asked.

"The inevitable," Lyall groaned. "I thought you'd better see the body before it was moved. These local police are no use, although of course I've sent for them, and a doctor. Come along, man! Into some clothes, quick!" All the usual matutinal instincts were forgotten. In a pair of trousers, a shirt and a pull-over, Slane was prepared in a matter of seconds.

"Tell me about it!" he begged, as the two men left the room.

"Everyone went to bed last night at midnight," Lyall recounted. "I locked up myself. This morning Ebben wasn't in his room. They came and told me. I got up. I knew where to go. He's outside the door of the cottage, dead; Mark Rennett sitting a few yards away, smoking and looking at him."

"And the woman?"

"I haven't seen her."

It was a few minutes before seven o'clock when they reached the hall.

Lyall hesitated. "I wonder whether you'd better take a gun?" he said.

There were four or five in a corner. Slane handled them thoughtfully.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea," he agreed. "What about this one?"

"Take the next one," Lyall suggested hastily. "Here are some cartridges."

"And you?"

"Oh, he wouldn't touch me, even if he were crazy." They crossed the lawn, stepped out on to the marsh, turned a little to the right, and walked in single

file along the top of the dyke. Slane saw with a shudder that the dinghy was back, moored in its place. In the distance, they could see Mark Rennett seated apparently on a kitchen chair outside, and something a few feet away from him lying stretched upon the ground.

"Where is the woman, I wonder?" Slane muttered.

"Inside, I suppose," Lyall answered. "I can't think why the sergeant hasn't come by this time," he added uneasily.

They were about fifty yards off now, and he paused. "I don't know why the mischief I should drag you into this, Slane," he continued. "There's nothing to be done, nothing can be done. Ebben's dead. A whole shell of number four shot plugged into his heart at not more than a dozen paces away, I should say."

"What about Rennett? Did he speak to you?"

"Not a word."

"We might have waited for the police and the doctor," Slane meditated, "but now we are here we'd better go on. He might try to get away." They stepped across the last little creek, and drew near to the cottage. Ebben lay, as Lyall had left him, with the latter's coat over his face, one leg doubled up. He seemed to have changed since evening into a suit of rough golfing clothes, with rubber shoes. Opposite to him, Rennett remained seated in his hard-backed chair. He glowered at the two arrivals, but made no movement. Slane bent for a moment over Ebben's prostrate body, raised the coat reverently and replaced it. Lyall was all the time gazing at the cottage. Every one of the windows was framed with coquettish-looking dimity curtains, but there was no sign of life behind. Slane crossed the few yards of turf to where Rennett was seated and, stooping down, picked up his gun, and looked at it.

"Where's your wife, Rennett?" he asked. The man, although his eyes had been wide open, started as though he had been awakened from sleep.

"I were watching he," he said. "He's dead."

"I can see that he is," Slane assented gravely. "Where's your wife, Rennett?"

The man glanced toward the sun, and back to the windows of the cottage. "She do sleep steady," he replied, "but it's past seven o'clock in the morning. Give her a call, mister."

Slane knocked on the door. When he tried to call out, he was surprised to find his voice tremulous.

"Mrs. Rennett— Mrs. Rennett!"

There was no reply. The man on the chair moved nervously.

"She do be a sound sleeper at times," he repeated.

This time, Slane thundered upon the door. His first blow had scarcely fallen when the door was thrown open. The woman stood for a moment framed

upon the threshold. She was wrapped in a strangely fashioned dressing-gown which she clutched tightly around her slim body. Her feet were bare. A breath of wind disclosed her throat. Her hair, unbraided and loose, was in wild disorder. The sun touched it, bringing out red glints of fire. Her large eyes seemed weary with sleep.

"Why, what's amiss?" she asked, in her soft, disturbing voice. "Mark, thou'rt back? I dreamed I heard the dinghy in the creek."

No one spoke for a moment. Her eyes lit as they looked into Slane's. Then, behind him, she saw the body, stretched upon the ground, and shrank a little backward.

"Up to thy killing games, Mark?" she cried. "They'll bring thee to the gallows. Who lies there?"

Still, no one spoke for a moment. Then Lyall stepped forward. He had seen over his shoulder the approach of the little company of men from the village.

"You'd better go inside, Mrs. Rennett," he advised.

She stepped out, and walked swiftly across to the prostrate body. She had the wanton's gift. There was no one there who did not realize that save for that flimsy dressing-gown she was naked. She stooped down, and before Lyall could stop her, raised the coat, and glanced underneath, at Ebben's face. Then she turned around, and looked at them all one after the other. There was no problem picture of modern days, or ancient history, which failed to answer its own riddle so completely as did her expression. For a moment it seemed almost triumphant. Certainly there was in it nothing of pity— very little of horror. Her bare feet flashed over the turf as she turned back toward the door. From there she faced them all. She looked first at her husband, still sitting in his chair.

"Thee had better have stayed with the fleet and caught thy fish, Mark Rennett," she said. "Is this for what you came stealing home on the tide? It sings in your blood, too, though to a different tune, the neap-tide madness?"

Her eyes travelled round the little group once more, but met Slane's fairly, with the witch's challenge flashing from their depths. She closed the door with something almost like a laugh.

A few yards away, now, a scattered crowd of the villagers were approaching. A doctor sunk on his knees by the side of Julius Ebben's body, and opened his case which a rough-looking youth had been carrying. A police sergeant whispered on one side with Lyall. The village constable sidled up to Rennett, and possessed himself of his gun, a feat of which he bragged many a time afterward. The sergeant turned away, and approached the man who was still seated.

"Mark Rennett," he said, "I've a few questions to ask you. You needn't answer them unless you choose— may be used in evidence against you afterward."

Rennett threw back his head, and laughed. "What's all the palavering about, sergeant?" he asked. "There lies one of them Dormy House muck rats, dead, and in hell by this time, and there's my cottage ten yards away."

"Hold out your hands, Rennett," the sergeant ordered.

The man obeyed. The sergeant fastened the handcuffs with a click. It was perhaps the proudest moment of his life.

"You're a wise man, Rennett, to keep a still tongue in your head, and to give no trouble," he said. "There's a trap on the road. We'll be making for the station."

Rennett had suddenly the appearance of a man who is waking up. He looked at the sergeant with a dazed light in his eyes.

"You be taking me for killing he?" he demanded.

"A still tongue in your head is the greatest wisdom," the sergeant reiterated. "There's many a man has hanged himself with his own lips. We'll be making a move, Bob," he went on, turning to his subordinate, "you stay here, and see that nothing's touched until I return. These gentlemen will walk along with me."

Slane brought up the rear of the little procession. Twice, he deliberately turned and looked at those empty windows. There was no sign of life from behind them, nothing to tell him whether the woman was combing her hair, or sobbing her heart out oh the bed, or shaking with terror in her chair.

The garden at the Dormy House was fragrant with spring flowers as Slane and Lyall pushed open the gate. Down the lane they could hear the sergeant's mare trotting off toward the police station. Some of the curious had wandered back on to the marshes. The whole of the little place was in a fever. It seemed to Slane that his companion too had something of the dazed expression of the handcuffed man as he had been driven off to the police station. Slane passed his arm through his as they entered the passage, and stopped to whisper a word or two to Harrison, the steward.

"Just one minute, Lyall," Slane begged. "Come in here."

They entered the bar. The Dormy House was a very well-ordered establishment, and all signs of the last night's festivities had disappeared. The tables were bright and shining. There were no glasses anywhere about. The window was open, letting in the fresh, hyacinth-scented air.

"Lyall," Slane asked, "what are you going to do about this?"

His companion looked at him with burning eyes.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

Slane hesitated. "You shot Julius Ebben," he said. "Mark Rennett came back when it was all over."

Lyall sank into a chair. His little groan was horrible in a way, and yet Slane fancied that there was a note almost of relief in it.

"It must come out," Slane continued. "When you asked me to take a gun, I felt yours. The muzzle was warm. One cartridge was still in it. Your shoes, reeking wet, were just by the side. I told Harrison not to move them for a moment. Rennett's gun, on the other hand, was fully loaded, and as cold as ice. I heard you leave the house last night, Lyall. It's no business of mine, but I heard you. I am sorry. I can't say more. Rennett would have done it right enough if he'd been there. I wish he had."

Lyall rose to his feet. For a moment he leaned out of the window, and half closed his eyes. The breeze was becoming a little stronger, and its fragrance seemed to fill the room. His lips twitched once or twice. Then he moved back to the bar, stretched across the counter, took a bottle of brandy, half filled a tumbler, and drank it as though it were water.

"We always blame the woman, Slane," he said, "but if ever one was born without soul or heart, and with a call to evil singing in her blood and out of her eyes, and quivering of her limbs— well, let it go! I suppose it was the solitude here, and it's a strange, lone place through the gray months. You'll give me five minutes upstairs, Slane? I'll leave everything straight. It's the best way."

"I'm damned sorry, old chap," Slane sighed, as he held out his hand. Lyall left the room and in less than five minutes Slane, who had walked out into the garden, heard the sound for which he had been listening. A man stepped through the French windows of the dining-room, his napkin in his hand.

"Did you hear that shot?" he asked.

Harrison, too, was standing in an attitude of startled attention, and, looking into the man's pale face, Slane realized that he, too, knew.

"It seemed to me to come from the major's room," Slane said. "You'd better step up there, Harrison."

8: Police Protection

Anonymous

Sunshine Advocate (Victoria) 17 Aug 1934

ROY Stanton, Britain's premier racing motorist, had lost his nerve at last. He was mounting the steps of Scotland Yard to seek police protection. The man who had annihilated space at 250 miles an hour without turning a hair was now so jumpy that he was afraid to trust himself with the steering wheel in his hand. It had begun a year ago, all but three days, a week before he married Hermione Danvers.

He had been showing his car, the Scarlet Rocket, at a charity fete, bored with answering mostly footling questions, when Hermione had glanced up at him under shy eyelashes. Two days later she had accepted his proposal, and had taken him to interview her guardian, Mr Skinner. From him Roy learnt that Hermione's father had died young, that her mother had married again and was living in America, and that he was her guardian under her father's will.

"Yours is a risky occupation," Mr Skinner had said, after giving his consent to the match. "But I suppose you're well covered with life insurance."

Roy, having no one dependent upon him, was not insured, but he willingly took out: a policy of £10,000 for one year, and at Skinner's suggestion made it over ;irrevocably to Hermione, so that she should not want if he were killed.

"One's got to face these things, Skinner had said. "Perhaps you'll be in a position to take out a permanent insurance in a year's time. Meanwhile a year's policy will satisfy me for Hermione— and it's a lower premium."

It had all seemed reasonable enough at the time and nothing had occurred for three months to suggest there was anything wrong. But during, the last nine months determined efforts had been made on his life. The first proof that he had an enemy came at the Le Mans race, before he had gone a quarter of a mile from the starting post, when his back axle had snapped. On being examined it was found to have been filed or sawn almost right through.

The perpetrator was never discovered and Roy put it down to a rival driver; not, he decided with murderous intent. He was too happy with Hermione, then, to worry over-much; she usually went with him everywhere.

Luckily, however, he thought at the time, she had gone to see her guardian, who was ill, and thus escaped sharing the dangers of the second attempt on his life. After a race meting in the Midlands he had found a venomous: snake in his bed. If he had not happened to pull back the covers before getting in he would have been fatally bitten.

Then, two months later returning: from Scotland in a sleeper, an attempt had been made to chloroform him. He had informed the police, but they had been unable to get on to a single clue.

Weeks went by without any further attempt being made but Roy found himself unconsciously keyed up to a state of expectancy. It was with a sigh of relief that he boarded the Cunarder with Hermione, *en route* for Florida, to make a new attempt to beat his own record on the famous sands. He felt that he would be safe for a month at least.

Everything went well on the voyage, and they reached Miami without incident. The trial, runs were very satisfactory, and, full of confidence; he sent his car hurtling towards the measured five miles. The engine's song of power was even and flawless. He flashed past the start and roared between the guide posts, leapt past the finishing post, and slowed down, unaware that as his car crossed the wire that signalled the time at the end of the course, an explosive bomb had blown a great hole in the course. His speed had saved him from death.

There was a great to-do in the newspapers, but the criminal escaped detection, The police, were baffled by the utter lack of motive. Hermione was temporarily prostrated, despite the great news that Roy had beaten the previous best time; and on the homeward trip they discussed endlessly, but fruitlessly, the mystery of these determined attempts to kill him.

On his return to England, Roy was occupied at the London works of the firm which financed him in designing a super racing car; and for weeks he was left unmolested. He found himself, however, always on the watch, nervy and strained, and utterly mystified as to why anyone should want to kill him.

Then, with shattering suddenness, came the explanation. He returned to the flat one evening, when Hermione was out, and took in a telegram addressed "Stanton."

He opened it and saw it was addressed inside to his wife:

The policy expires in a fortnight you must take a hand yourself. Skinner

He stared at the message, aghast at its import. So, Hermione was an accomplice of the criminals who had, made such determined efforts to remove him: off the face of the earth. She had decoyed him into a marriage, arranged the yearly insurance, with the deliberate intention of killing him and drawing the ten thousand pounds.

His impulse was to go to the police, but he realised after consideration that he had no real evidence. One thing he must do: get out of Hermione's

company until the policy expired, after which the motive for his murder would be gone.

He scribbled a note, explaining that he had to go urgently to the firm's works at Coventry; sealed the telegram envelope, which had fortunately opened without tearing, and left the flat with a hurriedly packed suitcase.

Three days after reaching Coventry, duped by a bogus summons to a directors' conference, he was found chloroformed on the railway lines by a platelayer. Even then he decided to say nothing to the police. He wanted just to disappear for the remaining ten days of the policy's term; a hideaway where no one could find him. A pound note to the platelayer kept his rescuer quiet. He had managed to each London safely, and for a week had stayed in a room in Brixton.

On the eighth day he ventured out for a walk, but before he had gone a quarter of a mile, a motorcycle almost knocked him down as he crossed a street. For a full minute after it had flashed past he stood trembling, unable to move. Pulling himself together he turned and hurried back to his temporary lodging.

He was within ten yards of the door when the roar of a motor cycle made him jump. Turning he saw the same rider, with the machine apparently out of control, mounting the pavement and charging straight at him. Roy flung himself like a diver into the road. The motor cycle missed him by inches and roared away. Roy got up and staggered into the house in which he lodged, and poured himself out a stiff peg of whisky, shaking in every limb.

He sent the landlady's boy for a taxi, and drove to Scotland Yard to demand police protection for the three days that must pass before the policy expired.

His interview with the police officers was over, and Roy stood on the top of the steps frowning. They hadn't taken him seriously, inferring that he was suffering from nerves and imagining things. They would instruct the local police to keep an eye on the house in which he was lodging.

Roy's frown deepened as he realised that he was afraid to leave the sanctuary of Scotland Yard for the peril of the streets. The constable at the door looked at him curiously, then asked him if there was anything he wanted.

In that instant, the way to secure proper police protection flashed into Roy's mind. With a cheerful grin chasing away his frown, he answered the constable by punching him hard on the nose, and giving him a neat one in the solar plexus. Blood pouring from his nose, the policeman closed with his assailant, who made no resistance whatever, but allowed himself to be led off with happy smile on his face.

"HE HAS dished us, after all," said Hermione's chagrined guardian, as they read the sensational account of the inexplicable attack upon an innocent police constable by Britain's premier racing motorist.

"That policy expires the day after tomorrow; and he has got himself jugged for fourteen days. I sure hand it to him."

9: The Rathskeller and the Rose

O. Henry

William Sydney Porter, 1862-1910

The (New York) *Sunday World* 9 Oct 1904

One of his less well-known stories; O. Henry was the master of the snappy short story with a kick in the tail.

MISS POSIE CARRINGTON had earned her success. She began life handicapped by the family name of "Boggs," in the small town known as Cranberry Corners. At the age of eighteen she had acquired the name of "Carrington" and a position in the chorus of a metropolitan burlesque company. Thence upward she had ascended by the legitimate and delectable steps of "broiler," member of the famous "Dickey-bird" octette, in the successful musical comedy, "Fudge and Fellows," leader of the potato-bug dance in "Fol-de-Rol," and at length to the part of the maid "'Toinette" in "The King's Bath-Robe," which captured the critics and gave her her chance. And when we come to consider Miss Carrington she is in the heydey of flattery, fame and fizz; and that astute manager, Herr Timothy Goldstein, has her signature to iron-clad papers that she will star the coming season in Dyde Rich's new play, "Paresis by Gaslight."

Promptly there came to Herr Timothy a capable twentieth-century young character actor by the name of Highsmith, who besought engagement as "Sol Haytosser," the comic and chief male character part in "Paresis by Gaslight."

"My boy," said Goldstein, "take the part if you can get it. Miss Carrington won't listen to any of my suggestions. She has turned down half a dozen of the best imitators of the rural dub in the city. She declares she won't set a foot on the stage unless 'Haytosser' is the best that can be raked up. She was raised in a village, you know, and when a Broadway orchid sticks a straw in his hair and tries to call himself a clover blossom she's on, all right. I asked her, in a sarcastic vein, if she thought Denman Thompson would make any kind of a show in the part. 'Oh, no,' says she. 'I don't want him or John Drew or Jim Corbett or any of these swell actors that don't know a turnip from a turnstile. I want the real article.' So, my boy, if you want to play 'Sol Haytosser' you will have to convince Miss Carrington. Luck be with you."

Highsmith took the train the next day for Cranberry Corners. He remained in that forsaken and inanimate village three days. He found the Boggs family and corkscrewed their history unto the third and fourth generation. He amassed the facts and the local color of Cranberry Corners. The village had not grown as rapidly as had Miss Carrington. The actor estimated that it had suffered as few actual changes since the departure of its solitary follower of Thespis as had a stage upon which "four years is supposed to have elapsed."

He absorbed Cranberry Corners and returned to the city of chameleon changes.

It was in the rathskeller that Highsmith made the hit of his histrionic career. There is no need to name the place; there is but one rathskeller where you could hope to find Miss Posie Carrington after a performance of "The King's Bath-Robe."

There was a jolly small party at one of the tables that drew many eyes. Miss Carrington, petite, marvellous, bubbling, electric, fame-drunken, shall be named first. Herr Goldstein follows, sonorous, curly-haired, heavy, a trifle anxious, as some bear that had caught, somehow, a butterfly in his claws. Next, a man condemned to a newspaper, sad, courted, armed, analyzing for press agent's dross every sentence that was poured over him, eating his *à la* Newburg in the silence of greatness. To conclude, a youth with parted hair, a name that is ochre to red journals and gold on the back of a supper check. These sat at a table while the musicians played, while waiters moved in the mazy performance of their duties with their backs toward all who desired their service, and all was bizarre and merry because it was nine feet below the level of the sidewalk.

At 11.45 a being entered the rathskeller. The first violin perceptibly flatted a C that should have been natural; the clarionet blew a bubble instead of a grace note; Miss Carrington giggled and the youth with parted hair swallowed an olive seed.

Exquisitely and irreproachably rural was the new entry. A lank, disconcerted, hesitating young man it was, flaxen-haired, gaping of mouth, awkward, stricken to misery by the lights and company. His clothing was butternut, with bright blue tie, showing four inches of bony wrist and white-socked ankle. He upset a chair, sat in another one, curled a foot around a table leg and cringed at the approach of a waiter.

"You may fetch me a glass of lager beer," he said, in response to the discreet questioning of the servitor.

The eyes of the rathskeller were upon him. He was as fresh as a collard and as ingenuous as a hay rake. He let his eye rove about the place as one who regards, big-eyed, hogs in the potato patch. His gaze rested at length upon Miss Carrington. He rose and went to her table with a lateral, shining smile and a blush of pleased trepidation.

"How're ye, Miss Posie?" he said in accents not to be doubted. "Don't ye remember me— Bill Summers— the Summerses that lived back of the blacksmith shop? I reckon I've growed up some since ye left Cranberry Corners.

" 'Liza Perry 'lowed I might see ye in the city while I was here. You know 'Liza married Benny Stanfield, and she says—"

"Ah, say!" interrupted Miss Carrington, brightly, "Lize Perry is never married— what! Oh, the freckles of her!"

"Married in June," grinned the gossip, "and livin' in the old Tatum Place. Ham Riley perfessed religion; old Mrs. Blithers sold her place to Cap'n Spooner; the youngest Waters girl run away with a music teacher; the court-house burned up last March; your uncle Wiley was elected constable; Matilda Hoskins died from runnin' a needle in her hand, and Tom Beedle is courtin' Sallie Lathrop— they say he don't miss a night but what he's settin' on their porch."

"The wall-eyed thing!" exclaimed Miss Carrington, with asperity. "Why, Tom Beedle once— say, you folks, excuse me a while— this is an old friend of mine— Mr.— what was it? Yes, Mr. Summers— Mr. Goldstein, Mr. Ricketts, Mr.— Oh, what's yours? Johnny'll do— come on over here and tell me some more."

She swept him to an isolated table in a corner. Herr Goldstein shrugged his fat shoulders and beckoned to the waiter. The newspaper man brightened a little and mentioned absinthe. The youth with parted hair was plunged into melancholy. The guests of the rathskeller laughed, clinked glasses and enjoyed the comedy that Posie Carrington was treating them to after her regular performance. A few cynical ones whispered "press agent"' and smiled wisely.

Posie Carrington laid her dimpled and desirable chin upon her hands, and forgot her audience— a faculty that had won her laurels for her.

"I don't seem to recollect any Bill Summers," she said, thoughtfully gazing straight into the innocent blue eyes of the rustic young man. "But I know the Summerses, all right. I guess there ain't many changes in the old town. You see any of my folks lately?"

And then Highsmith played his trump. The part of "Sol Haytosser" called for pathos as well as comedy. Miss Carrington should see that he could do that as well.

"Miss Posie," said "Bill Summers," "I was up to your folkeses house jist two or three days ago. No, there ain't many changes to speak of. The lilac bush by the kitchen window is over a foot higher, and the elm in the front yard died and had to be cut down. And yet it don't seem the same place that it used to be."

"How's ma?" asked Miss Carrington.

"She was settin' by the front door, crocheting a lamp-mat when I saw her last," said "Bill." "She's older'n she was, Miss Posie. But everything in the house looked jest the same. Your ma asked me to set down. 'Don't touch that willow rocker, William,' says she. 'It ain't been moved since Posie left; and that's the apron she was hemmin', layin' over the arm of it, jist as she flung it. I'm in hopes,' she goes on, 'that Posie'll finish runnin' out that hem some day.'"

Miss Carrington beckoned peremptorily to a waiter.

"A pint of extra dry," she ordered, briefly; "and give the check to Goldstein."

"The sun was shinin' in the door," went on the chronicler from Cranberry, "and your ma was settin' right in it. I asked her if she hadn't better move back a little. 'William,' says she, 'when I get sot down and lookin' down the road, I can't bear to move. Never a day,' says she, 'but what I set here every minute that I can spare and watch over them palin's for Posie. She went away down that road in the night, for we seen her little shoe tracks in the dust, and somethin' tells me she'll come back that way ag'in when she's weary of the world and begins to think about her old mother.'

"When I was comin' away," concluded "Bill," "I pulled this off'n the bush by the front steps. I thought maybe I might see you in the city, and I knowed you'd like somethin' from the old home."

He took from his coat pocket a rose— a drooping, yellow, velvet, odorous rose, that hung its head in the foul atmosphere of that tainted rathskeller like a virgin bowing before the hot breath of the lions in a Roman arena.

Miss Carrington's penetrating but musical laugh rose above the orchestra's rendering of "Bluebells."

"Oh, say!" she cried, with glee, "ain't those poky places the limit? I just know that two hours at Cranberry Corners would give me the horrors now. Well, I'm awful glad to have seen you, Mr. Summers. Guess I'll bustle around to the hotel now and get my beauty sleep."

She thrust the yellow rose into the bosom of her wonderful, dainty, silken garments, stood up and nodded imperiously at Herr Goldstein.

Her three companions and "Bill Summers" attended her to her cab. When her flounces and streamers were all safely tucked inside she dazzled them with au revoirs from her shining eyes and teeth.

"Come around to the hotel and see me, Bill, before you leave the city," she called as the glittering cab rolled away.

Highsmith, still in his make-up, went with Herr Goldstein to a café booth.

"Bright idea, eh?" asked the smiling actor. "Ought to land 'Sol Haytosser' for me, don't you think? The little lady never once tumbled."

"I didn't hear your conversation," said Goldstein, "but your make-up and acting was O.K. Here's to your success. You'd better call on Miss Carrington early to-morrow and strike her for the part. I don't see how she can keep from being satisfied with your exhibition of ability."

AT 11.45 a. m. on the next day Highsmith, handsome, dressed in the latest mode, confident, with a fuchsia in his button-hole, sent up his card to Miss Carrington in her select apartment hotel.

He was shown up and received by the actress's French maid.

"I am sorree," said Mlle. Hortense, "but I am to say this to all. It is with great regret, Mees Carrington have cancelled all engagements on the stage and have returned to live in that— how you call that town? Cranberry Cornaire!"

10: John Granger

A Ghost Story

M. E. Braddon

1835-1915

The Belgravia Annual, 1870

Mary Elizabeth Braddon was a best selling Victorian author of at least 60 novels, the first in 1860, the most famous being "Lady Audley's Secret", 1862; she founded Belgravia *magazine in 1866. Her last novel appeared in 1910.*

"THEN there is no hope for me, Susy?" The speaker was a stalwart young fellow of the yeoman class, with a grave earnest face and a frank fearless manner. He was standing by the open window of a pleasant farmhouse parlour, by the side of a bright-eyed pretty-looking girl, who was leaning with folded arms upon the broad window-sill, looking shyly downwards as he talked to her.

"Is there no chance, Susy— none? Is it all over between us?"

"If you mean, that I shall ever cease to think of you as one of the best friends I have in this world, John, no," she answered; "or that I shall ever cease to look up to you as the noblest and truest of men, no, John— a hundred times, no."

"But I mean something more than that, Susy, and you know it as well as I do, I want you to be my wife by and by. I'm not in a hurry, you know, my dear. I can bide my time. You're very young yet, and maybe you scarce know your own mind. I can wait, Susy. My love will stand wear and tear. Let me have the hope of winning you by and by. I'm not a poor man at this present time, you know, Susy, There's three thousand pounds ready cash standing to my name in Hillborough Bank; but with the chance of you for my wife, a few years would make me a rich man."

"That can never be, John. I know how proud I ought to be that you should think of me like this. I'm not worthy of so much love. It isn't that I don't appreciate your merits, John; but—"

"There's some one else, eh, Susy?"

"Yes, John,"she faltered in a very low voice, and with a vivid blush on her drooping face.

"Some one who has asked you to be his wife?"

"No, John; but I think he likes me a little, and—"

John Granger gave a long heavy sigh, and stood for some minutes looking at the ground in dead silence.

"I think I can guess who it is," he said at last; "Robert Ashley— eh, Susy?"

The blush grew deeper, and the girl's silence was a sufficient answer.

"Well, he's a fine handsome young fellow, and more likely to take a girl's fancy than such a blunt plain-spoken chap as I am; and he's a good fellow enough, as far as I know; I've nothing to say against him, Susy. But there's one man in the world I should have liked to warn you against, Susan, if I'd thought there was a shadow of a chance you'd ever listen to any lovemaking of his."

"Who is that, John?"

"Your cousin, Stephen Price."

"You needn't fear that I should ever listen to him, John. There's little love lost between Stephen and me."

"Isn't there? I've heard him swear that he'd have you for his wife some day, Susan. I don't like him, my dear, and I don't trust him either. It isn't only that he bears a bad character up-town, as a dissipated, pleasure-loving spendthrift; there's something more than that; something below the surface, that I can't find words for. I know that he's very clever. Folks say that Mr. Vollair the lawyer looks over all his faults on account of his cleverness, and that he never had a clerk to serve him so well as Stephen does. But cleverness and honesty don't always go together, Susy, and I fear that cousin of yours will come to a bad end."

Susan Lorton did not attempt to dispute the justice of this opinion. Stephen Price was no favourite of hers, in spite of those good looks and that showy cleverness which had won him a certain amount of popularity elsewhere.

John Granger lingered at the sunny window, where the scent of a thousand roses came floating in upon the warm summer air. He lingered as if loath to go and make an end of that interview, though the end must come, and the last words must needs be spoken very soon.

"Well, Well, Susy,' he said presently, "a man must teach himself to bear these things, even when they seem to break his life up somehow, and make an end of every hope and dream he ever had. I can't tell you how I've loved you, my dear— how I shall love you to the end of my days. Bob Ashley is a good fellow, and God grant he may make you a good husband! But I don't believe it's in him to love you as I do, Susan. He takes life pleasantly, and has his mind full of getting on in the world, you see, and he has his mother and sisters to care for. I've got no one but you to love, Susan. I've stood quite alone in the world ever since I was a boy, and you've been all the world to me. It's bitter to bear, my dear; but it can't be helped. Don't cry, Susy darling. I'm a selfish brute to talk like this, and bring the tears into those pretty eyes. It can't be helped, my dear. Providence orders these things, you see, and we must bear them quietly. Good-bye, dear."

He gave the girl his big honest hand. She took it in both her own, bent over it, and kissed it tearfully.

"You'll never know how truly I respect you, John," she said. "But don't say good-bye like that. We are to be friends always, aren't we?"

"Friends always? Yes, my dear; but friends at a distance. There's some things I couldn't bear to see. I can wish for your happiness, and pray for it honestly; but I couldn't stop at Friarsgate to see you Robert Ashley's wife. My lease of the old farm is out. I'm to call on Mr. Vollair this afternoon to talk about renewing it. I fancied you'd be mistress of the dear old place, Susy. That's been my dream for the last three years. I couldn't bear the look of the empty rooms now that dream's broken. I shall surender the farm at once, and go to America. I've got a capital that'll start me anywhere, and I'm not afraid of work. I've old friends out there too: my first cousin, Jim Lomax, and his wife, that went out five years ago, and have been doing wonders with a farm in New England. I sha'n't feel quite strange there."

"Go to America, John, and never come back!" said Susan despondently.

She had a sincere regard for this honest yeoman, and was grieved to the heart at the thought of the sorrow that had come to him through his unfortunate disposition to be something more to her than a friend.

"Never's a long word, Susy," he answered in his grave straightforward way. "Perhaps when a good many years have gone over all our heads, and when your children are beginning to grow up, I may come back and take my seat beside your hearth, and smoke my pipe with your husband. Not that I should ever cease to love you, my dear; but time would take the sting out of the old pain, and it would be only a kind of gentle sorrowful feeling, like the thought of one that's long been dead. Yes, I shall come back to England after ten or fifteen years, if I live, if it's only for the sake of seeing your children— and I 'll wager there'll be one amongst them that'll take to me almost as if it was mine, and will come to be like a child to me in my old age. I 've seen such things. And now I must say good-bye, Susy; for I've got to be up-town at three o'clock to see Mr. Vollair, and I've a deal of work to do before I leave."

"Shall you go soon, John?"

"As soon as ever I can get things settled— the farm off my hands, and so on. But I shall come to say goodbye to you and your father before I go—"

"Of course you will, John. It would be unfriendly to go without seeing father. Good-bye!'

They shook hands once more; and the yeoman went away along the little garden path, and across a patch of furze-grown common-land, on the other side of which there was a straggling wood of some extent, broken up here and there by disused gravel-pits and pools of stagnant water— a wild kind of place to pass at night, yet considered safe enough by the country people about Hillborough, as there was scarcely any part of it that was not within earshot of

the high road. The narrow footpath across this wood was a short-cut between Matthew Lorton's farm and Hillborough, and John Granger took it.

He walked with a firm step and an upright bearing, though his heart was heavy enough as he went townwards that afternoon. He was a man to bear his trouble in a manly spirit, whatever it might be, and there were no traces of his disappointment in his looks or manner when he presented himself at the lawyer's house.

Mr. Vollair had a client with him; so John Granger was ushered into the clerks' office, where he found Stephen Price hard at work at a desk, in company with a smaller and younger clerk.

"Good afternoon, Granger," he said, in a cool patronising manner that John Granger hated; "come about your lease, of course?"

"There is nothing else for me to come about."

"Ah, you see, you're one of those lucky fellows who never want the help of the law to get you out of a scrape. And you're a devilish lucky fellow too, in the matter of this lease, if you can get Friarsgate farm for a new term at the rent you've been paying hitherto, as I daresay you will, if you play your cards cleverly with our governor presently."

"I am not going to ask for a new lease," answered John Granger; "I am going to leave Friarsgate."

"Going to leave Friarsgate! You astound me. Have you got a better farm in your eye?"

"I am going to America."

Stephen Price gave a long whistle, and twisted himself round upon his stool, the better to regard Mr. Granger.

"Why, Granger, how is this?" he asked. "A fellow like you, with plenty of money, going off to America! I thought that was the refuge for the destitute."

"I'm tired of England, and I've a fancy for a change. I hear that a man may do very well in America, with a good knowledge of farming and a tidy bit of capital."

"Ah, and you've got that," said Stephen Price, with an envious sigh. "And so you're thinking of going to America? That's very strange. I used to fancy you were sweet upon a certain pretty cousin of mine. I 've seen you hanging about old Lorton's place a good deal of late years."

John Granger did not reply to this remark. Mr. Vollair's client departed a few minutes later, and Mr. Granger was asked to step into the lawyer's office. He found his business very easy to arrange in the manner he wished. Mr. Vollair had received more than one offer for Friarsgate farm, and there was an applicant who would be glad to get the place as soon as John Granger could relinquish it, without waiting for the expiration of his lease. This incoming

tenant would no doubt be willing to take his furniture and live and dead stock at a valuation, Mr. Vollair told John; who left the office in tolerable spirits, pleased to find there were no obstacles to his speedy departure from a home that had once been dear to him.

ii

JOHN GRANGER'S preparations and arrangements, the disposal of his property, and the getting together of his simple outfit, occupied little more than three weeks; and it was still bright midsummer weather when he took his last walk round the pastures of Friarsgate, and for the first time since he had resolved to leave those familiar scenes realised how great a hold they had upon his heart.

"It'll be dreary work in a strange country," he thought, as he leaned upon a gate, looking at the lazy cattle which were no longer his, and wondering whether they would miss him when he was gone; "and what pleasure can I ever take in trying to get rich— I who have no one to work for, no one to take pride in my success? Perhaps it would have been better to stay here, even though I had to hear her wedding-bells and see her leaning on Robert Ashley's arm, and looking up in his face as I used to fancy she would look up to me in all the years to come. O God, how I wish I was dead! What an easy end that would make of everything!"

He thought of the men and women who had died of a fever last autumn round about Hillborough— people who had wished to live, for whom life was full of duties and household joys; whose loss left wide gaps among their kindred, not to be filled again upon this earth. If death would come to him, what a glad release! It was not that he suffered from any keen or violent agony; it was the dull blankness of his existence which he felt— an utter emptiness and hopelessness; nothing to live for in the present, nothing to look forward to in the future.

This was the last day. His three great chests of clothes, and other property which he could not bring himself to part with, had gone on to London by that morning's luggage-train. He had arranged to follow himself by the night-mail, which left Hillborough station at half-past nine, and would be in London at six o'clock next morning. At the last, he had been seized with a fancy for prolonging his time to the uttermost, and it was for this reason he had chosen the latest train by which he could leave Hillborough. He had a good many people to take leave of, and it was rather trying work. He had always been liked and respected, and on this last day it surprised him to find how fond the people were of him, and how general was the regret caused by his departure.

Little children hung about his knees, matronly eyes were wiped by convenient aprons, pretty girls offered blushingly to kiss him at parting; stalwart young fellows, his companions of old, declared they would never have a friend they could trust and honour as they had trusted and honoured him. It touched the poor fellow to the heart to find himself so much beloved. And he was going to sacrifice all this, because he could not endure to live in the old home now his dream was broken.

He had put off his visit to Matthew Lorton's house to the very last. His latest moments at Hillborough should be given to Susan. He would drain to the last drop the cup of that sweet sad parting. His last memory of English soil should be her bright tender face looking at him compassionately, as she had looked the day she broke his heart.

It was half-past seven when he went in at the little garden-gate. A warm summer evening, the rustic garden steeped in the low western sunshine; the birds singing loud in hawthorn and sycamore; a peaceful vesper calm upon all things. John Granger had been expected. He could see that at a glance. The best tea-things were set out in the best parlour, and Mr. Lorton and his daughter were waiting tea for him. There was a great bunch of roses on the table, and Susan was dressed in light-blue muslin, with a rose in her bosom. He thought how often in the dreary time to come she would arise before him like a picture, with the sunshine flickering about her bright hair and the red rose at her breast. She was very sweet to him that evening, tender and gentle and clinging, as she might have been with a fondly-loved brother who was leaving her for ever. The farmer asked him about his plans, and gave his approval of them heartily. It was well for a sturdy fellow with a bit of money to push his way in a new country, where he might make cent for cent upon his capital, instead of dawdling on in England, where it was quite as much as a man could do to make both ends meet at the close of a year's hard work.

"My little Susy is going to be married to young Bob Ashley," Mr. Lorton said by and by. "He asked her last Tuesday was a week; but they've been courting in a kind of way this last twelve-month. I couldn't well say no, for Bob's father and I have been friends for many a year, and the young man's a decent chap enough. He's going to rent that little dairy-farm of Sir Marmaduke Halliday's on the other side of Hillborough-road. Old Ashley has promised to stock it for him, and he hopes to do well. It isn't much of a match for my girl, you know, John; but the young people are set upon it, so it's no use setting my face against it."

They had been sitting at the tea-table nearly half an hour, when the sunny window was suddenly darkened by the apparition of Mr. Stephen Price, looking in upon them in an easy familiar manner, with his folded arms upon the sill.

"Good-evening, uncle Lorton," he said. "Good evening, Susy. How do, Granger? I didn't know there was going to be a tea-party, or I shouldn't have come."

"It isn't a tea-party," answered Susan; "it is only John Granger, who has come to bid us good-bye, and we are very, very sorry he is going away."

"O, we are, are we?" said the lawyer's clerk, with a sneer; "what would Bob Ashley say to that, I wonder?"

"Come in, Steph, and don't be a fool," growled the old man.

Mr. Price came in, and took his seat at the tea-table. He was flashily dressed, wore his hair long, and had a good deal of whisker, which he was perpetually caressing with a hand of doubtful cleanliness, whereon inky evidence of his day's work was very visible.

He did not care much for such womanish refreshment as tea, which he denounced in a sweeping manner as "cat-lap", but he took a cup from his cousin nevertheless, and joined freely in the conversation while he drank it. He asked John Granger a good many questions about his plans— whether he meant to buy land, and when, and where, and a great deal more in the same way— to all of which John replied as shortly as was consistent with the coldest civility.

"You take all your capital with you, of course!" asked Stephen Price.

"No; I take none of my capital with me."

"Why, hang it all, man, you must take some money!"

"I take the money I received for my furniture and stock."

"Ah, to be sure; you came to the office yesterday afternoon to receive it. Over six hundred pounds, wasn't it? I drew up the agreement between you and the new man; so I ought to know."

"It was over six hundred pounds."

"And you take that with you? Quite enough to start with, of course. And the rest of your money is safe enough in old Lawler's bank. No fear of any smash there. I wish I was going with you, Granger; I'm heartily sick of Hillborough. I shall cut old Vollair's office before very long, come what may. I can't stand it much longer. I've got a friend on the look-out for a berth for me up in London, and directly I hear of anything I shall turn my back upon this slow old hole."

"You'll have to pay your debts before you do that, I should think, Steph," the farmer remarked bluntly.

Stephen Price shrugged his shoulders, and pushed his teacup away with a listless air. He got up presently and lounged out of the house, after a brief good-evening to all. He made no attempt to take leave of John Granger, and seemed in his careless way to have forgotten that he was parting with him for

the last time. No one tried to detain him; they seemed to breathe more freely when he was gone.

John and Susan wandered out into the garden after tea, while the farmer smoked his pipe by the open window. The sun was very low by this time, and the western sky flooded with rosy light. The garden was all abloom with roses and honeysuckle. John Granger fancied he should never look upon such flowers or such a garden again.

They walked up and down the little path once or twice almost in silence, and then Susan began to tell him how much she regretted his departure.

"I don't know how it is, John," she said, "but I feel to-night as if I would give all the world to keep you here. I cannot tell you how sorry I am you are going. O, John, I wish with all my heart I could have been what you asked me to be. I wish I could have put aside all thoughts of Robert."

"Could you have done that, Susan?' he cried, with sudden energy.

His fate trembled upon a breath in that moment. A word from Susan, and he would have stayed; a word from her, and he would never have taken the path across the common and through the wood to Hillborough on that bright summer evening. He was her valued friend of many years; dearer to her than she had known until that moment. It seemed to her all at once that she had thrown away the gold, and had chosen— not dross, but something less precious than that unalloyed gold. It was far too late now for any change.

"I have promised Robert to be his wife," she said; "but O, John, I wish you were not going away."

"My dear love, I could not trust myself to stay here; I love you too much for that. But I will come back when I am a sober elderly man, and ask for a corner beside your hearth."

"Promise me that. And you will write to me from America, won't you, John? I shall be so anxious, and father too, to know that you are safe and well."

"Yes, my dear, I will write."

"What is the name of the steamer you are to go in?"

"The *Washington*, and bound for New York."

"I shall not forget that— the *Washington*."

John Granger looked at his watch. The sun had gone down, and there was a long line of crimson yonder in the west above the edge of the brown furze-grown common. Beyond it, the wood dipped down, and the tops of the trees made a black line against that red light. Above, the sky was of one pale tender green, with stars faintly shining here and there.

"What a lovely night!" said Susan. John Granger sighed as he looked at that peaceful landscape. "I did not know how much I loved it," he said. "Good-night,Susy; goodnight, and good-bye."

"Won't you kiss me the last time, John?' she said shyly.

She scarcely knew what she had asked. He took her up in his arms, strained her to his breast, and pressed one passionate despairing kiss upon her brow. It was the first and last in his life.

"Time's up, Susy," he said, gently releasing her.

He went to the window, shook hands with the farmer, and took leave of him in that quiet undemonstrative way which means a good deal with some people. A minute more, and he was gone.

Susan stood at the garden-gate, watching the tall dark figure crossing the common. Twice he turned and waved his hand to her— the last time upon the edge of the wood. That still twilight hour seldom came after that night without bringing the thought of him to Susan Lorton.

It seemed to grow dark all at once when he was gone, and the house had a dreary look to Susan when she went back to it. What was it that made her shiver as she crossed the threshold? Something— some nameless, shapeless fancy shook her with a sudden fear. Her father had strolled out to the garden through the wide open back-door. The house seemed quite empty, and the faint sound of the summer wind sighing in the parlour chimney was like the lamentation of a human creature in pain.

iii

THE SUMMER passed, and in the late autumn came Susan's wedding-day. She was very fond of her good-looking generous-hearted young suitor, and yet even on the eve of her marriage her heart had turned a little regretfully towards absent John Granger. She was not a coquette, to glory in the mischief her beauty bad done. It seemed to her a terrible thing that a good man should have been driven from his home for love of her.

She had thought of him a great deal since that summer night upon which he had looked back at her on the verge of Hawley W ood-all the more because no letter had come from him yet, and she was beginning to be a little anxious about his safety. She thought of him still more by and by, as the winter months passed without bringing the promised letter. Her husband made light of her fears, telling her that John Granger would find plenty to do in a new country, without wasting his time in scribbling letters to old friends. But this did not convince Susan.

"He promised to write, Robert," she said; "and John Granger is not the man to break his promise."

Susan was very happy in her new home, and Robert Ashley declared he had the handiest, brightest, and most industrious wife in all Northlandshire, to say

nothing of her being the prettiest. She had been used to keeping her father's house since her early girlhood, and her matronly duties came very easy to her. The snug little farmhouse, with its neat furniture and fresh dimity draperies, was the prettiest thing possible in the way of rustic interiors— the Dutch-tiled dairy was like a temple dedicated to some pastoral divinity—and Susan took a natural womanly pride in this bright home. She had come from as good a house; but then this was quite her own, and young Robert Ashley was a more romantic figure in the foreground of the picture than her good humdrum old father.

Stephen Price had not stayed at Hillborough long enough to see his cousin's wedding. He had left Mr. Vollair's employment about three weeks after John Granger's departure, and had left without giving his employer any notice of his intention.

He had gone away from Hillborough as deeply in debt as it was practicable for a young man in his position to be, and the tradesmen to whom he owed money were loud in their complaints about him.

He was known to have gone to London, and there was some attempt made to discover his whereabouts. But in that vast area it was no easy thing to find an obscure lawyer's clerk, and nothing resulted from the endeavours of his angry creditors. No one, except those to whom he owed money, cared what had become of him. He had been considered pleasant company in a tavern parlour, and his manners and dress had been copied by aspiring clerks and apprentices in Hillborough; but he had never been known to do any one a kindness, and his disappearance left no empty place in any heart.

The new year came, and still there was no letter from John Granger. But early in January Robert Ashley came home from Hillborough market one afternoon, and told his wife she needn't worry herself about her old friend any longer.

"John Granger's safe enough, my lass," he said. "I was talking to Simmons, the cashier at Lawler's bank, this morning, and he told me that Granger wrote to them for a thousand pounds last November from New York, and he has written for five hundred more since. He is buying land somewhere— I forget the name of the place— and he's well and hearty, Simmons tells me."

Susan clapped her hands joyfully.

"O, Robert, how glad I am !" she cried. "It isn't kind of John to have forgotten his promise; but I don't care about that as long as he's safe."

"I don't know why you should ever take it into your head that there was anything amiss with him," said Robert Ashley, who did not regard John Granger's exile from a sentimental point of view.

"Well, I'm afraid I'm rather fanciful, Bob; but I could never explain to you what a strange feeling came over me the night John Granger went away from Hillborough. It was after I had said good-bye to him, and had gone back into the house, where all was dark and quiet. I sat in the parlour thinking of him, and it seemed as if a voice was saying in my ear, that neither I, nor any one that cared for him, would ever see John Granger again. There wasn't any such voice, of course, you know, Robert, but it seemed like that in my mind; and whenever I've thought of poor John Granger since that time, it has seemed to me like thinking of the dead. Often and often I've said to myself, 'Why, Susan, you foolish thing, you ought to know that he's safe enough out in America. Ill news travels fast; and if there'd been anything wrong, we should have heard of it somehow.' But, reason with myself as I would, I have never been able to feel confortable about him; and thank God for your good news, Robert, and thank you for bringing it to me."

She raised herself on tiptoe to kiss her husband, who looked down at her in a fond protecting way from the height of his own wisdom.

"Why, Susy, what a timid nervous little puss you are!" he said; "I should have been getting jealous of John Granger by this time, if I'd known you thought so much of him."

The winter days lengthened, and melted into early spring. It was bright March weather, and Susan had an hour of daylight after tea for her needlework, while Robert attended to his evening duties out of doors. They had fires still, though the days were very mild; and Susan used to sit at the open window, with a jug of primroses on the wide wooden ledge before her, executing some dainty little repairs upon her husband's shirts.

One evening Robert Ashley was out later than usual, and when it had grown too dark for her to work any longer, Susan sat with her hands lying idle in her lap, thinking— thinking of her wedded life, and the years that had gone before it— years that she could never recall without the image of John Granger, who had been in a manner mixed up with all her girlish days. It had been very unkind of him not to write. It seemed as if his love for her could not have been very much after all, or he would have been pleased to comply with her request. She could not quite forgive him for his neglect, glad as she was to know that he was safe.

The room was rather a large one; an old-fashioned room, with a low ceiling crossed by heavy beams; half parlour, half kitchen, with a wide open fireplace at one end, on which the logs had burnt to a dullish red just now, only brightening up with a faint flash of light now and then. The old chintz-covered arm-chair, in which Robert Ashley was wont to smoke his evening pipe, stood by the hearth ready for him.

Susan had been sitting with her face towards the open window, looking absently out at the garden, where daffodils and early primroses glimmered through the dusk. It was only the striking of the eight-day clock in the corner that roused her from her reverie. She stooped to pick up her work, which had fallen to the ground. She was standing folding this in a leisurely way, when she looked towards the fireplace, and gave a little start at seeing that her husband's arm-chair was no longer empty.

"Why, Robert," she cried, "how quietly you must have come into the place! I never heard you."

There was no answer, and her voice sounded strange to her in the empty room.

"Robert!" she repeated a little louder; but the figure in the chair neither answered nor stirred. Then a sudden fright seized her, and she knew that it was not her husband. The room was almost dark; it was quite impossible that she could see the face of that dark figure seated in the arm-chair, with the shoulders bent a little over the fire. Yet she knew as well as ever she had known anything in her life, that it was not Robert Ashley.

She went slowly over towards the fireplace, and stood within a few paces of that strange figure. A little flash of light shot up from the smouldering logs, and shone for an instant on the face.

It was John Granger!

Susan Ashley tried to speak to him; but the words would not come. And yet it was hardly so appalling a thing to see him there, that she need have felt what she did. England is not so far from America, that a man may not cross the sea and drop in upon his friends unexpectedly.

The logs fell together with a crashing noise, and broke into a ruddy flame, lighting up the whole room. The chair was empty.

Susan uttered a loud cry, and almost at the same moment Robert Ashley came in at the door.

"Why, Susy!' he exclaimed, "what's amiss, lass?"

She ran over to him, and took shelter in his arms, and then told him how she had seen John Granger's ghost. Robert laughed her to scorn.

"Why, my pet, what fancies will you be having next? Granger is safe enough over in Yankee land. It was some shadow that took the shape of your old friend, to your fancy. It's easy enough to fancy such a thing when your mind's full of any one."

"There's no use in saying that, Robert,' Susan answered resolutely. ' It was no fancy; John Granger is dead, and I have seen his ghost.'

"He wasn't dead on the tenth of last December, anyhow. They had a letter from him at Lawler's bank, dated that day. Simmons told me so."

Susan shook her head mournfully. "I've a feeling that he never got to America alive, Robert," she said. "I can't explain how it is, but I've a feeling that it was so.'

"Dead men don't write letters, Susy, or send for their money out of the bank."

"Some one else might write the letters."

"Nonsense, lass; they know John Granger's handwriting and signature well enough at the bank, depend upon it. It would be no easy matter to deceive them. But I'll look in upon Simmons to-morrow. He and I are uncommonly friendly, you know, and there's nothing he wouldn't do to oblige me in a reasonable way. I'll ask him if there have been any more letters from Granger, and get him to give me the address."

Susan did not say much more about that awful figure in the armchair. It was no use trying to convince her husband that the thing which she had seen was anything more than a creation of her own brain. She was very quiet all the rest of the evening, though she tried her uttermost to appear as if nothing had happened.

Robert Ashley saw Mr. Simmons the cashier next day, and came back to his wife elated by the result of his inquiries. John Granger had written for another five hundred pounds by the very last post from America, and reported himself well and thriving. He was still in New York, and Mr. Simmons had given Robert Ashley his address in that city.

Susan wrote to her old friend that very afternoon, telling him what she had seen, and begging him to write and set her mind at ease. After all it was very consoling to hear what she had heard from her husband, and she tried to convince herself that the thing she had seen was only a trick of her imagination.

Another month went by, and again in the twilight the same figure appeared to her. It was standing this time, with one arm leaning on the high mantelpiece; standing facing her as she came back to the room, after having quitted it for a few minutes for some slight household duty.

There was a better fire and more light in the room than there had been before. The logs were burning with a steady blaze that lit up the well-known figure and unforgotten face. John Granger was looking at her with an expression that seemed half reproachful, half beseeching. He was very pale, much paler than she had ever seen him in life; and as he looked, she standing just within the threshold of the door, she saw him lift his hand slowly and point to his forehead. The firelight showed her a dark stain of blood upon the left temple, like the mark of a contused wound.

She covered her face with her hands, shuddering and uttering a little cry of terror, and then dropped half fainting upon a chair. When she uncovered her face the room was empty, the firelight shining cheerily upon the walls, no trace of that ghostly visitant. Again when her husband came in she told him of what she had seen, and of that mark upon the temple which she had seen for the first time that night. He heard her very gravely. This repetition of the business made it serious. If it were, as Robert Ashley fully believed it was, a delusion of his wife's, it was a dangerous delusion, and he knew not how to charm it away from her mind. She had conjured up a new fancy now, this notion of a blood-stained temple; a ghastly evidence of some foul play that had been done to John Granger.

And the man was alive and well in America all the time; but how convince a woman of that fact when she preferred to trust her own sick fancies?

This time Susan Ashley brooded over the thoughts of the thing she had seen, firmly believing that she had looked upon the shadow of the dead, and that there was some purpose to be fulfilled by that awful vision. In the day, however busy she might be with her daily work, the thought of this was almost always in her mind; in the dead silence of the night, when her husband was sleeping by her side, she would often lie awake for hours thinking of John Granger.

No answer had come to her letter, though there had been more than time for her to receive one.

"Robert," she said to her husband one day, "I do not believe that John Granger ever went to America."

"O, Susy, Susy, I wish you could get John Granger out of your head. Who is it that writes for his money, if it isn't him?'

"Anybody might know of the money— people know everything about their neighbours' affairs in Hillborough— and anybody that knew John Granger's hand might be able to forge a letter. I don't believe he ever went to America, Robert. I believe some accident— some fatal accident— happened to him on the night he was to leave Hillborough.'

"Why, Susy, what should happen to him, and we not hear of it?"

"He might have been waylaid and murdered. He had a good deal of money about him, I know, that night; he was to sail from London by the Washington, and his luggage was all sent to an inn near the Docks. I wish you'd write to the people, Robert, and ask if he arrived there at the time he was expected; and I wish you'd find out at the station whether any one saw him go away by the train that night."

"It's easy enough to do as much as that to please you, Susy. But I wish you wouldn't dwell upon these fancies about Granger; it's all nonsense, as you'll find out sooner or later."

He wrote the letter which his wife wanted written, asking the landlord of the Victoria Hotel, London Docks, whether a certain Mr. John Granger, whose travelling chests had been forwarded from Hillborough, had arrived at his house on the 24th of July last, and when and how he had quitted it. He also took the trouble to go to the Hillborough station, in order to question the station-master and his subordinates about John Granger's departure.

Neither the station-master nor the porters were able to give Robert Ashley any satisfactory information on this point. One or two of the men were not quite clear that they knew John Granger by sight; another knew him very well indeed, hut could not swear to having seen him that night. The station-master was quite clear that he had not seen him.

"I'm generally pretty busy with the mail-bags at that time," he said, "and a passenger might very well escape my notice. But it would only have been civil in Granger to bid me good-bye; I've known him ever since he was a lad."

This was not a satisfactory account to carry back to Susan; nor was the letter that came from London in a day or two much more satisfactory. The landlord of the Victoria Hotel begged to inform Mr. Ashley, that the owner of the trunks from Hillborough had not arrived at his house until the middle of August. He was not quite sure about the date; but he knew the luggage had been lying in his place for something over three weeks, and he was thinking of advertising it, when the owner appeared. Three weeks ! and John Granger had left Susan Lorton that July night, intending to go straight to London. Where could he have been? What could he have been doing in the interval?

Robert Ashley tried to make light of the matter. Granger might have changed his mind at the last moment— at the railway station, perhaps— and might have gone off to visit friends in some other part of the country. But Susan told her husband that John Granger had no friends except at Hillborough, and that he was not given to changing his mind upon any occasion. She had now a settled conviction that some untimely fate had befallen her old friend, and that the letters from America were forgeries. Ashley told his friend Simmons the story of the ghost rather reluctantly, but it was necessary to tell it in explaining how the letter to the London hotel-keeper came to be written. Of course Mr. Simmons was quite ready to agree with him that the ghostly part of the business was no more than a delusion of Susan's; but he was a good deal puzzled, not to say disturbed, by the hotel-keeper's letter. He had talked over John Granger's plans with him on that last day, and he remembered that John had been perfectly decided in his intention of going

straight to London. The three weeks' interval between his departure from Hillborough and his arrival in that city was a mystery not easily to be explained.

Mr. Simmons referred to the letters from New York, and compared the signatures of them with previous signatures of John Granger's. If they were forgeries, they were very clever forgeries; but it was a plain commercial hand by no means difficult to imitate. There was one thing noticeable in the signatures to the American letters— they were all exactly alike, line for line and curve for curve. This rather discomposed Mr. Simmons; for it is a notorious fact, that a man rarely signs his name twice in exactly the same manner. There is almost always some infinitesimal difference. "I'm going up to London in a month," said the cashier; "I'll call at the Victoria Hotel when I'm there, and make a few inquiries about John Granger. We can make some excuse for keeping back the money in the mean time, if there should be any more written for."

Before the month was out, John Granger's ghost appeared for the third time to Susan Ashley. She had been to Hillborough alone to make some little purchases in the way of linen-drapery, and came home through Hawley Wood in the tender May twilight. She was thinking of her old friend as she walked along the shadowy winding footpath. It was just such a still, peaceful evening as that upon which he had stood on the edge of the wood, looking back at her, and waving his hand, upon that last well-remembered night.

He was so much in her thoughts, and the conviction that he had come from among the dead to visit her was so rooted in her mind, that she was scarcely surprised when she looked up presently, and saw a tall familiar figure moving slowly among the trees a little way before her. There seemed to be an awful stillness in the wood all at once, but there was nothing awful in that well-known figure.

She tried to overtake it; but it kept always in advance of her, and at a sudden turn in the path she lost it altogether. The trees grew thicker, and there was a solemn darkness at the spot where the path took this sharp turn, and on one side of the narrow footpath there was a steep declivity and a great hollow, made by a disused gravel-pit.

She went home quietly enough, with a subdued sadness upon her, and told her husband what had happened to her. Nor did she rest until there had been a search made in Hawley Wood for the body of John Granger.

They searched, and found him lying at the bottom of the gravel-pit, half-buried in loose sand and gravel, and quite hidden by a mass of furze and bramble that grew over the spot. There was an inquest, of course. The tailor who had made the clothes found upon the body identified them, and swore to them as those he had made for John Granger. The pockets were all empty.

There could be little doubt, that John Granger had been waylaid and murdered for the sake of the money he carried upon him that night. His skull had been shattered by a blow from a jagged stick on the left temple. The stick was found lying at the bottom of the pit a little way from the body, with human hair and stains of blood upon it.

John Granger had never left Hillborough; and the person who had contrived to procure so much of his money, by forged letters from America, was, in all probability, his murderer. There was a large reward offered for the discovery of the guilty party; the police were hard at work; and the inquest was adjourned several times, in the hope that new facts might be elicited.

Susan Ashley and her father were examined closely as to the events of that fatal evening of July the 24th. Susan told everything: her cousin Stephen Price dropping in while they were at tea, the questions and answers about the money John Granger carried upon him— all to the most minute particular. "Then Stephen Price knew of the money John Granger had about him?" suggested the coroner.

"He did, sir."

"Did he leave your father's house after Granger, or before him?"

"Before him, sir: I should think nearly an hour before him."

The inquest was again adjourned; and within a week of this examination Matthew Lorton received an application from the police, asking for a photograph of his nephew Stephen Price if he happened to possess such a thing.

He did possess one, and sent it to London by return of post.

The landlord of the Victoria Hotel identified the original of this portrait as the person who had represented himself to be John Granger, and had carried away John Granger's luggage.

After this the work was easy. Little links in the chain were picked up one by one. A labouring man turned up who had seen Stephen Price sitting on a stile hard by Hawley Wood, hacking at a thick jaggedlooking stake with his clasp-knife on the night of the 24th of July. The woman at whose house Price lodged gave evidence that he broke an appointment to play billiards with a friend of his on that night; the friend had called at his lodgings for him twice, and had been angry about the breaking of the appointment; and that Stephen Price came in about half-past ten o'clock, looking very white and strange, and saying that he had eaten something for his dinner which had made him ill. The lad who was his fellow-clerk was ready to swear to his having been disturbed and strange in his manner during the two or three weeks before he left Hillborough; but the boy had thought very little of this, he said, knowing how deeply Stephen was in debt.

The final examination resulted in a verdict of wilful murder; and a police-officer started for New York by the next steamer, carrying a warrant for the apprehension of Stephen Price.

He was not found very easily, but was ultimately apprehended, with some of John Granger's property still in his possession. He was brought home, tried, found guilty, and hung, much to the satisfaction of Hillborough. Shortly afterwards, Mr. Vollair produced a will, which John Granger had executed a few days before his intended departure, bequeathing all he possessed to Susan Lorton— the interest for her sole use and benefit, the principal to revert to her eldest son after her death, the son to take the name of John. The bank had to make good the money drawn from them by Stephen Price. The boy came in due course, and was christened after the dead man, above whose remains a fair white monument has been erected in the rustic churchyard near Hawley Wood, at the expense of Robert and Susan Ashley; a handsomer tomb than is usually given to a man of John Granger's class, but it was the only thing Susan could do to show how much she had valued him who had loved her so dearly.

She often sits beside that quiet resting-place in the spring twilight, with her children busy making daisy-chains at her knee; but she has never seen John Granger's ghost since that evening in the wood, and she knows that she will never see it again

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11: The Doctor's Invention

Val Jameson

fl 1901-1921

Western Mail (Perth) 20 July 1907

PLATTERSBY, the doctor's attendant and general camp-sergeant, had three patients of a decidedly impatient temperament to subdue while awaiting the doctor's return.

Bill Fraser had brought a wounded arm to dress. Old Croaker nursed a bronchial cold that rapped the atmosphere intermittently with a complaining cough. Smithers had brought instructions from his wife to capture the man of physic and convey him to their camp, as she "didn't like the look of baby."

"Out in the bush somewheres attendin' a severious case," explained Plattersby to each arrival. "Be here in a minute or two."

The "minute or two" multiplied a full hour, but the missing doctor failed to appear. Heavy feet shuffled discontentedly beneath the waiting-room chairs.

"What sorter game is this?" growled Fraser. Old Croaker coughed lugubriously. The anxious father relieved his feelings in a burst of profanity.

The red soil, shaken loose by dryblowers, was caught by the wind and swept over the residence areas and whitewashed humpies, along the main street and into the doctor's camp whenever Plattersby opened the door to make observations.

"D— the dust!" he remarked, to suit the prevailing mood indoors, and really felt he had eased the meeting by the objurgation. The meeting chiefly eased itself by competitive streams of saliva aimed at a conti al depot.

The assistant, whose lanky form seemed stiffened at the joints, proceeded to scour the surgery floor and rearrange the numerous bottles on shelves. He varied his duties by frequent attempts to pacify the increasing wrath of the patients in the adjoining room. The arrival of Sam Dixon, the post-boy, brought the situation to a crisis. Thrusting his round, cheeky face in at the surgery door, he exclaimed, "Hi say, Platts! Better shut up shop. The ole doc's struck on the lead!"

"What's that?" yelled the infuriated patients. Plattersby booted the miscreant out-of-doors, but the news had inflamed Fraser, Smithers, and Croaker to the verge of desperation.

"We'll give ye ten minutes to fetch that d— docther!" said Smithers, "dead or aloive, begorra Oi mane it!"

"Go on!" urged Fraser, with a persuasive thump of his sound arm on Plattensby's client.

"Go on!" wheezed Croaker, with menacing gestures. "Never mind yer duds, we've stood enough foolin'!"

Hustled out, bald-headed and coatless, the distracted Plattersby commandeered a vehicle whose owner was making purchases within the local store, and drove frantically toward the famous Half-mile Lead.

On one of the deserted dumps sat the absentee, clad in dungarees and grey flannel shirt, belted at the waist. A miner's flap-leafed hat protected his venerable head. He was absorbed in fascinating diagnosis of a fragment of puggy clay.

"Tons of it below!" he soliloquized, "and absolutely valueless for want of proper treatment. Can't crush it nor melt it, nor separate the gold by any method up-to-date! You've beat the brains of the district, old pug, but you won't beat me! I've got a scheme that will tease the gold from your clutches—"

These cogitations were rudely interrupted by an act of habeas corpus performed by Plattersby.

"Let go, you confounded idiot, let go, I say!"

But Plattersby possessed the dual advantage of superior size and strength. The refractory medico was deposited haphazard in the ricketty shay. One leg wagged wildly over the washboard. His head was imprisoned beneath Plattersby's arm, while the wily abducter lashed the horse to a gallop. After considerable effort the doctor liberated his head and pomelled his captor victoriously.

"For two pins I'd chuck you out, you interferin' jackanapes! I'll teach you to remember you're man not master'"

"Summun's got to be master this trio," growled the mutineer, "they're raisin 'ell in the surgery!"

"My valuable invention delayed by your chuckle-headed namby-pamby concern for my patients," stormed the doctor. "Fraser's arm can do very well till evening! Croaker's bronchitis is on the mend. Smither's baby will thrive alright without its parents. Well, well, well! dammit! What a world it is!"

When the fussy little doctor bustled into his waiting-room and turned his keen eyes on the desperados, not a murmur escaped them. The lions that thrust Plattersby forth crouched like lambs at the doctor's feet. His infatuation for mining was well-known, and his contempt of professional apparel contributed to his popularity amongst the miners.

When the patients and their troubles were dismissed the doctor's solitary lunch was prepared by Plattersby. During this meal the fragment of pug was laid on the table beside his plate, and the fascinating problem again occupied his thoughts. Once he addressed the waiter. "Isn't it marvellous, Plattersby, marvellous?"

Plattersby was discreetly silent, as he could not conscientiously agree with this description of a "lump of mullock" but in the remote silence of the skillion he relieved his mind in one impressive word, "Rats!"

THE DROWSY residents of Nuggetville were stirred to unusual excitement when the goods train from Kalgoorlie dumped a huge mass of intricate mechanism on their insignificant siding. It resembled a steam-boiler, dryblower and donkey-engine intermixed. After a prolongued guessing competition the curious group that surrounded the new arrival were enlightened by the approach of Dr. Patchem and Plattersby in command of a waggon and four-horse team. There had been preliminary rumours of the doctor's invention, and curiosity gave place to admiring awe.

The doctor viewed his prize with the proud air of a mother contemplating her first-born infant. He flicked the spotless gear with his handkerchief, and resting his fingers upon it as lightly as though it were an invalid's pulse. Willing hands assisted the cumbrous apparatus into the waggon. The men shouted "Hurrah!" and "Success to the doctor's invention!" The proud inventor, seated on the floor of the waggon, dangled his legs below, rested one arm lovingly on the machine, and waved his hat while Plattersby took command oí tho horses.

Some of the prospectors and townsmen formed a procession in the rear, naturally anxious to find the pug conundrum solved. The doctor's invention, if successful, would not only enrich the inventor, but it would create a new dawn of prosperity for the district. Deserted claims would be re-pegged, and the silent Lead would chime again to the ring of the pick and creaking windlass.

Little satisfaction was given to the general public that night. The doctor announced his intention of giving the new arrival "a trial run" in the morning. It was merely a ruse to disperse the excited, expectant crowd, who straggled away in reluctant groups. When alone with his faithful attendant the doctor peeled off his coat, rolled his shirt-sleeves to the shoulder, and touched a spring that controlled the activity of his creation. Simultaneously he found himself in company with Platbersby seated ignominiously on the ground, with a sensation of a biff in the chest. The Frankenstein grinned, creaked, and groaned dismally.

Plattersby, keeping a watchful eye on the monster, made a galloping all-fours retreat. The gallant doctor scrambled to his feet.

"It's all right Plattersby. We must allow elbow-room. These automatic arms—"

"The devil," exploded Plattersby, examining his wounded chest. "I'll stand up to any man for stoush, but that licks prize-fightin'!"

"This is the feeder," explained the doctor, thrusting some of the puggy clay into a funnel-shaped mouth at the side. "Come here, you old fool, it won't eat you; I want you to understand it, as you'll be manager in my absence."

Flattered by this arrangement, Plattersby mastered his timidity.

"This is the feeder," repeated the doctor.

"Klug-klug-klug!" gurgled the monster in apparent effort to digest the pug. At each throb it made a threatening bow towards Plattersby, who swiftly backed to a safe distance.

"Something stuck," remarked the doctor, examining the throttle as if expecting to find diphtheric symptoms.

"It's goin' ter bust!" warned the scared attendant.

"Bust yer boots!" retorted the aggrieved inventor. "I see I shall require a manager with brains, and commonsense. Your qualifications won't suit."

Stung to the heart hy this scornful taunt, Plattersby pulled himself together heroically.

"I'll be alright once she gits goin' without wobblin', an' chokin' an' snortin' like a bloomin' volcano! Seems like she's goin' ter spit an' dunno where to spit, like a seasick passenger a-cryin' out 'stew'—"

Plattersby's fears were verified by catastrophe. The internal troubles of the miraculous invention caused it to sway violently, and at the point mentioned above it turned a complete somersault. The attendant grabbed his master in the nick of time and escaped so narrowly that the heel was torn from one boot.

"You can git another manager!" he said, "an' welcome. I'll stick to the surgery, my qualifica—"

"Shut up!" snapped the discomfited inventor, too disgusted at the conduct of his masterpiece to be grateful for his rescue. "The stupid fools have misplaced some of the fixings. I'll have to wire them to send a man up!"

"Thank heavens," said Plattersby devoutly, when he found himself secure within the familiar surgery walls.

ALTHOUGH the doctor never again requested the services of his assistant at the claim, he passed most of his time with the unruly child of his inventive genius. Experts advised, suggested, altered, and presented exorbitant accounts, but with all the attention and expense lavished upon it the obstinate pug was discharged like juvenile stick-jaw indented by teeth. Anxiety crept into the doctor's cheery face. His shoulders told of the long night hours bent in planning improvements. His clothes could not disguise the hollows deepening beneath.

''It's that cursed sausage-machine," moaned Plattersby. "He's that 'fatuated 'e can't see it's sappin' the blood an' forchoon out o' him like a hoktapus!"

"Let's sink it in the dam," suggested a confidential chum.

"Hoosh!" warned Plattersby, then whispered, "I was thinkin' o that very same; it's the on'y way to save 'im. We'll do it. 'E'll raise 'ell, no doubt, but 'e'll soon, git over it, an' water tells no tales. I'll take a pleasure in drownin' the brute!"

The two conspirators, with another pair sworn to secrecy, conveyed the detested monster at dead of night to the local dam, a mile beyond the lead, and the ceremony of "drownin' the brute" was soon completed. With almost a human gurgle of despair the duffer invention settled down in its watery bier, "unsorrowed and unsung," while the guilty plotters crept back to their bunks, relieved, but apprehensive.

The wild excitement of the following day, when the doctor discovered the abduction, was unparalleled in the records of Nuggetville. Black trackers were not available, and the numerous wheeltracks of vehicles journeying daily to the dam averted discovery in that direction. A notice offering £50 reward was posted on the outer wall of the Warden's Court, for the luckless doctor had not discovered that his expensive toy had drained his bank account to a tenth of that sum.

Fortunately, no one came forward to claim the reward, and after a month's fuming and fretting, the doctor seemed reconciled to his loss, and Plattersby secretly rejoiced to see the old characteristic buoyancy of health and good spirits return.

WHEN the bright winter days were advancing a surprise came to Nuggetville.

"Good news, Plattersby, good news!" A simultaneous slap on the attendant's shoulder sent a precious phial to destruction.

"What's good news to the price o' that?" he grumbled, but a furtive fear gleamed in his averted eyes. Had the dam yielded up its secret?

"Never mind the phial, old man," laughed the doctor. "We're independent. Look at that! We're off to England next month!"

The document wildly flourished during this speech announced the fact of a brother's death and consequent next-of-kinship in the disposal of a substantial fortune.

"When we get to London, Plattersby, I'll patent my invention!"

"Eh?" gasped the attendant, " 'tis gone, ain't it?"

"How can it be gone, idiot! I've got it in my head!"

Plattersby's jaw dropped. "Go on, you stupid old remnant. I can see you're dying to inform the town, so git!"

The attendant groped for his cap, placed it reversely on his head, and obediently quitted the camp.

Colliding unexpectedly with Sam Trevor, one of the conspirators who shared the secret of the dam, he stared confusedly at him.

"How's things?" demanded Sam brilliantly.

Plattersby shook his head and groaned, "Some's in the dam an' some's got stuck in 'is 'ed!"

Without another word of explanation the attendant pursued his erratic course.

The puzzled look on his friend's face changed to a smile of comprehension. "Got 'em again—" he muttered. "Rats!"

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12: Matthewson's Invisible Pig

Ernest Favenc

1845-1908

Evening News (Sydney) 13 August 1898

Explorer, historian, journalist and prolific short story writer, this English born Australian writer (the surname is of Heugenot origin) wrote a good many humorous stories featuring Jim Parkes and his encounters with strange ghosts and other oddities. Such as an invisible pig...

'DID I ever tell about Matthewson's invisible pig? asked Jim of me one day.

'No, is it worth hearing or not?'

'Well, that depends on whether you choose to believe it to be a true story or only a yarn. I assure you that it's as true as gospel; but there have been some people who have had the cheek to say it's not true, Sammy Greenup amongst them—'

NOT the Greenup who sold his farm because he believed the world was coming to an end. But a brother of his, and the very biggest-sized liar in the district; got a yarn he tells about a knock-kneed duck, and swears that it's a fact. I'd be ashamed to tell such a thing.

Matthewson had a prize sow, which he was very proud of, and some say that he thought more of her than he did of his wife and family. Anyway, he made an awful fuss about her. Well, she had a fine litter of young pigs, and Matthewson went about as proud as a dog with a new gilt tail, calculating what he'd make by these pigs, and boring the soul out of everybody to come and look at them.

I went, and a fine lot of young suckers they were, but Matthewson needn't have made such a song about it; other people had pigs as well as he. Well, we were looking at the piggies, and Matthewson had just gone into a calculation as to what money he would make out of them when I heard a little squeak behind me.

I looked round, couldn't see anything, and thought I must have made a mistake, and went on listening to Matthewson, who was just buying a new farm with the pig money, when I heard a squeak again.

I turned round sharp once more— nothing there.

'I wish you'd listen to me, Jim, instead of turning round and starting in that loony kind of way,' says Matthewson. Just then there was a little, grunt right at my heels, and it felt like something sniffing at them. I turned round like a shot. Nothing there again.

'At it again,' he says. 'You've been drinking, Jim Parkes, and got the jumps.'

'You're an everlasting teetotaller,' I said. 'But there's something grunting and squeaking about my heels; can't you hear it?'

'No, I can't,' he said; 'and you put me out in my calculations.'

I tried to listen steadily, but that grunting and squeaking kept on, and I had to back kick once or twice.

'Jim,' he said, 'you tire me with your goings on. I've got a nip or two inside; come in and get one if you want to steady your nerves, but own up like a man.'

'Matthewson,' I replied, 'I won't refuse your offer, for there's something going on I don't understand; but you know well enough I'm not a bcozer.'

'No, Jim, and I'll admit it; but you're very jumpy for all that.'

We went inside, and I had some whisky, and sat down and listened quietly to Matthewson developing into a millionaire, but all the time I was turning the occurrence over in my mind.

When we went outside again we had another look at the pigs, and I listened, and presently heard a grunt and a squeal where there was no pig at all to be seen. Then the truth flashed on me.

'Matthewson,' I said, 'that old sow's a ventriloquist.'

'Jim Parkes,' he exclaimed, 'I won't allow anyone, not even you, to call my prize sow names. She's no more a ventriloquist than you are.'

'I didn't miscall your sow at all, but she's a ventriloquist for all that. Ever since I've been here I've been hearing grunts and squeals where it isn't natural for them to come from, so if she isn't a ventriloquist, and doing it for a lark, what's up?'

'Your nervous system is all upset, Jim. That's what's up.'

'My nerves are as good as ever, but you're as deaf as a post, or you'd have heard the noises.'

Then Matthewson got downright mad, for he really was a little deaf, but would never admit it, and didn't like it mentioned. We got to words, and I went away.

Matthewson went about teiling everybody how I was jealous of his sow, and said she was a ventriloquist, out of pure spite and envy. And the neighbors sympathised with him, and he got worse than ever about his sow and her litter. By and bye, a nephew of Matthewson's came up to recruit. He'd been an a bad spree, and his people sent him up to his uncle's to get round.

Well, he used to go down and look at the pigs and compare himself to the prodigal son, for he was in the repentant stage and very shaky, and one day he heard the grunting at his heels and couldn't see anything. So he ran, hard as he could lick, up to the house, and had a fit.

Even this did not satisfy Matthewson that there was something queer about his sow; but he packed the nephew hdme, and said he wouldn't take

charge of lunatics any more. However, the yarn got about, and people began to poke fun at his old sow, and he laid it all down to me. Said that everyone knew I was always blowing about what I knew about ghosts, and if there was anything wrong about the sow I must have bewitched her, and he'd have the law of me and get keavy damages.

Seeing how things stood, I was rather surprised to see him coming up to my place one day.

'Jim Parkes,' he said, 'you're not the one to bear malice; and for what I may have said about you I ask your pardon. There is something queer about those young pigs. It's not the sow; she's as good as gold, and her character hasn't a stain upon it; it's one of the young ones that's wrong.'

'What's up?' I asked.

'You thought the mother was a ventriloquist,' he went on, 'and I admit now you had some cause for your belief; but it wasn't her. Now come over and find out with me what it is, and beg her pardon.'

Of course I went back with Matthewson to investigate. We had a bit of a job. They were all comfortably asleep, but we roused them up, and chivied them round a bit, for by this time they were pretty strong, on their legs, and after a while I says to Matthewson, 'How many grunters have you?'

'Eight, by rights.'

'There's nine; but one of 'em's invisible.'

Matthewson stared at me for a long time betore he could take it in, but when something ran between his legs with a squeal, and he couldn't see it, he was satisfied.

'What shall I do?' says he. 'I've never done nothing to deserve this.'

'Why, you everlasting fool,' I said, 'it's a rare piece of luck. Why, an invisible pig's a rarity.'

'I suppose it is,' he replied, after thinking a bit. 'Anyhow, I never heard of the breed before. What's it called?'

'You jolterhead! It's never been heard of before. You can take the pig to any country in Europe, and get thousands for it. People will pay to see him.'

'They will, will they, Jim? Pay to see an invisible pig that nobody can see. How do you make that out?'

'Well, it was just a figure of speech. The pig's worth more than all the others put together and the sow thrown in.'

'Perhaps she may have an invisible litter next time, and that would mean something big. But I'd nave to keep the breed to myself, or they'd get too common.'

Matthewson was always thinking of money— nothing else seemed to interest him much.

'How am I to secure them?' he says. 'I can't ear-mark or brand them. And everybody will claim them.'

He was getting quite silly over it, so I amused myself with hunting the invisible animal about to make sure of his presence. It was not long before the yarn was all over the place, and people came from all parts to hear the pig grunt. This worried the old sow considerably, but she had to put up with it, and Matthewson got that conceited he could scarcely put his hat on. He had a photograph taken of himself with the invisible pig on his lap.

Of course, he hadn't any pig on his lap in reality, and nobody never caught that pig, but it pleased people to think so, and the photograph sold. Clergymen came, heaps of 'em. They all said it was a wonderful manifestation of Divine Providence and a testimony of the truth of the doctrines of their particular church, and asked Matthewson for a subscription. But he never gave them anything. Said they must excuse him because the responsibility of the thing was wearing him to the grave, and he didn't think he'd have enough money left to pay for his funeral.

As that pig grew up he was a very devil for mischief. Mrs. Matthewson and the girls said that life wasn't worth living. It was nothing but shrieking and equalling all over the house, with the invisible pig rooting unexpectedly round their ankles. They couldn't keep him out anyhow, for when they'd shut all the doors and congratulate themselves on being safe for a bit, they'd find they'd shut the invisible pig in with them, instead of outside.

Several learned and scientific men came down to inquire into the matter, and whenever they met they came to high words. Most of them refused to believe it, and said it was a clever piece of jugglery and ventriloquism; but some wrote long articles on it, and explained it to their satisfaction. A lady medium said that it was a spirit called Major Mompus, whom she knew well, and she would make him materialise himself for £50.

But Matthewson wouldn't allow it— said that it wouldn't pay; the pig would only be an ordinary pig then. Other mediums came, and they all said: it was a spirit of their acquaintance, and wanted to know how Matthewson did it so well. But he wouldn't tell them, for a very good reason, because he had nothing to tell.

I puzzled my brains about it a good bit. I thought at times that it must be some kind of ghost trick or other, and presently I noticed that the pig always kept very quiet when I was up at Matthewson's. I put this down to fancy, and got Mrs. Matthewson to take notice for me whether he was more frisky when other, people were about than when I was, and she did, and confirmed my views on the subject.

It's some sprightly old ghost, I thought, having a game. And when I saw that the old sow never noticed the invisible pig's presence or absence I was sure that I was right.

I mentioned this fact to Matthewson, but he got quite cross about it; and when I hinted that I'd undertake to expose the old fraud of a ghost he burst out: 'Now look here, Jim Parkes, I'll have none of your interfering. Who asked you to shove your oar in? Is it your invisible pig or mine? Answer me that, now.'

I got riled, and replied, 'As for that! that invisible pig don't belong to anybody. If he's yours, catch him.'

'I could catch him quick enough if I wanted to, and I'll trouble you to let my property alone.'

'I don't know if it as your property. Anyway, that old sow's not its mother.'

'Taking that old sow's character away again. I might have known what you were after. I'll bet you the next litter she has are all invisible. Come now.'

I laughed at him, but he annoyed me, all the same, and I determined to have a try, in spite of Matthewson. But the pig stuck close to the place, and I could never get a chance at him. I saw that I'd been a fool to quarrel with Matthewson, so I determined to make it up with him.

You may eay that I had no business to interfere in the matter. If Matthewson chose to have an invisible pig about his place, surely it was his business. But you know how it is with me when there's anything ghostly about— I must have my finger in the pie.

So I laid my plans.

First I went to Matthewson and apologised for being so hot the other day, and that I'd changed my opinion on the subject. I remanded him that I first found out that he had an invisible pig. I said I had thought of a way by which I pould prove that it was the old sow's pig, and not a common ghost; and that if I could do that, why, his fortune was made.

Matthewson was touched at this, and we shook hands. We went up to the pig-yard and leaned on the logs, looking at them.

'What's that strange grunter you have?' I said suddenly.

'There's no stranger there,' says Matthewson.

'Yes there is,' said I; 'a razor-backed, long-legged brute's got in from somewhere.'

Matthewson looked, but couldn't see anything strange, and he began to grow uneasy.

'You're kidding me,' said he; 'you're gammoning. I've no long-legged, razor-backed animal.'

'By Jupiter, then, I can see the invisible pig at last— and a mangy, brute it is!'

As I said this there was a squeal from the little pigs, and I knew I was right, and that it was some old screw of a ghost up to his larks.

Matthewson looked very downcast.

'If you can see him really, and he's such a mongrel, why, he can't be the old sow's,' he said, dejectedly.

Matthewson wouldn't go back on his prize sow.

I put my leg over the logs, and went into the yard, pretending I could see the pig all the time. Just then something ran between my legs, and down I went in the dirty litter.

'What did you do that for?' said Matthewson.

'That darned pig disappeared again, and ran between my legs,' I said, getting up, sulkily. But I wasn't sulky in reality, for I felt that that pig knew who I was, and meant what he did.

Matthewson laughed like anything.

That settled it. A man who could laugh at his friend being capsized in a pigyard was not deserving of consideration. Matthewson might want to keep that invisible pig going, but henceforth it was war to the knife between the pig and I. Still the pig had the best of it, for I could only get near him with the assistance of Matthewson, and he did not altogether trust me.

'This makes things doubtful,' I said to him when I was once more outside the pig-pen. 'We must keep quiet about it. If the pig is really such a brute as the thing I saw, he couldn't be the offspring of your well-bred sow, could he?'

'Seems not,' he said, 'but you won't say a word to anybody.'

'Not a word. But if I were you, I'd sell that sow. You'd get a big price for her, as the mother of invisible pigs.'

'I might, certainly; but, strictly speaking, I don't see much market value in invisible pigs. You can't kill and eat them, and what else are pigs good for?'

'That's the bow you and your brother had the dispute over.'

'Yes. Poor Harry he used to have queer notions. Would have it that sow was his, because he lent me the money to buy her, and I didn't paid it back Before he died. Some people have queer ideas about money matters.'

'They have,' I said.

Now not far from me was a lazy galoot of a fellow who had a wife and a large family all lazier than himself. He kept pigs, mostly in the house. They were bred like racers, and lived principally on empty jam tins and broken crockery. I went down to him and borrowed a young pig. Before daylight I had him in Matthewson's pen.

Matthewson overslept himself that morning. He had been dreaming of pig all night, when the redheaded man, who was knockabout, rushed in and said that he had seen the invisible pig, Mattheweon was up like a shot, and ran to the pen.

There sure enough was the steeplechaser I'd put in there. I managed to be about pretty early that morning, and Matthewson seeing me in the paddock, cooee'd to me to come up. Up I went end found Matthewson and his red-headed man gazing, struck dumb, at the pig.

'He's a beauty!' I said.

Just as I spoke there was a row in the pen. The real invisible pig seized the invisible impostor, and a curious fight ensued.

The visible pig could feel the other, but he couldn't see him, and though he fought and squealed and did his best, he got spots knocked off him. The invisible pig had him by the ear, and was dragging him round the yard, the others all singing out pen and ink. It was the most curious sight you ever saw to see that pig hauled along by nothing, protesting all the time.

There was a lump of a sapling lying by the fence, and picking it up and judging just where the invisible pig must be, I landed him one on the back that must have astonished him. He let go with a loud squeal, and the other pig jumped the logs, capsized the red-beaded man, who was standing with his mouth open, and fled home.

'You've killed my pig, and by Jingo you'll pay for him.'

'Where's his dead body, anyhow?' I asked.

There were high words, and Matthewson and I quarrelled again over the blessed pig.

That night I was woke up by a noise in 'my' room, grunting and squealing, and enough row for forty pigs. I guessed it was the invisible pig, and sang out to it.

'Who are you?'

'I'm Matthewson's brother,' came back a human voice.

'What's the matter with you?'

'I was just paying off that brother of mine for cheating me out of that sow, and what you wanted to interfere for I don't know.'

'What did you upset me for?'

'You began It. You think too much of yourself, Jim Parkes. Who are you after all?'

'I'm not invisible, at any rate.'

'Well, I am. I thought it would scare that brother of mine off the place, and, Instead of that, the old fool's as proud as anything about it. How can I get even with him?'

I thought a bit. I knew there had been sharp practice between the brothers over that sow, but there seemed no sense in the ghost of Harry playing the fool.

'What do you want to do?'

'I want him to sell that sow. It makes me rank sick to watch him coddlimg her, and talking about her, add carrying on so. I can't get my proper wast.'

'How did you suppose you could do it by coming back as an invisible pig? Why did you not come in your own shape, and scare the soul out of him till he sold the sow, and gave the money away in charity?'

'I must give up this pig racket, I see.'

'Not yet; come and see me to-morrow night; I might think of something.'

I went to sleep again, and the next day went over to Matthewson's.

'Pig come back?' I asked.

'Yes, but you've injured him severely, I can tell it by his squeal. Sounds all out of tone. What sort of a game was it to belt an invisible pig with a sapling?'

'Well, the beggar capsized me, didn't be?'

'Served you right for calling him names. But just listen to that squeal—haan't got half the music in it that it had.'

I couldn't tell any difference in it; tout Matthewson thought he could. However, it gave me an idea.

That night I told the ghost of Harry Matthewson what to do, and he gave me a sample of his powers

A day or two afterwards, Matthewson came down to me, and said he, 'That there invisible pig's mighty queer. He's making the most outrageous noises possible; and I can't see him or catch him to find out what's the matter with him.'

I went back with Matthewson; and of all the rows you ever heard that pig was making the most diabolical. It was like a mad foghorn phasing a railway whistle. You couldn't get away from it if you stuffed your ears full, and put your head in a bucket of water.

'He's got some sort of a fit now,' said Matthfwson, in a hollow tone of voice. 'Times he's not so bad; times he's worse.'

Well, this went on till Matthewson got thin and haggard. He couldn't sleep for listening to the. moaning of the pig.

'I wouldn't mind if I could see him, and doctor him, but to hear that animal suffering tortures, and not be able to physic him. It's killing me, Jim.'

'Do you think me and the girls' like it any better than you do?' put in Mrs. Matthewson, and I couid see that Matthewson was suffering.

'Better get rid of the sow; then the pig will go with her,' I suggested.

He shook his head dismally, and I saw that if Harry kept it up properly, he'd. Give in. Harry did keep it up. His groans and cries were the terror of the neighborhood, and Matthewson used to walk about bewailing the fact of not being able to doctor the pig.

At last his wife would stand it no longer, and he tried to sell the sow. But no one would buy her along with that horrible fog-horn. At last a dealer came along, and as the ghost had the sense to keep quiet, he managed to get rid of her for about half her value. But it broke his heart, fairly broke his heart. And when the dealer came by again, and said he'd had no trouble with any noise, it was the last straw. He took to his bed.

But he never knew that it was the ghost of his dead brother that drove him to an early grave. All through liking to get the best of everybody, too. It's a bad failing for a man to have, though permissible in horse-dealing.

13: A House in the Country

Richard Connell

1893-1949

The Saturday Evening Post, 24 March 1923

I MET him again in this way: The revolving door of the excessively fashionable St. Erdman Hotel was spinning around furiously— and yet no one came forth. My eye spied this phenomenon; and, ever curious, I paused on Fifth Avenue and watched. Round and round sped the door like the Ferris Wheel in a squirrel cage propelled by an athletic squirrel gone mad. So fast did the door revolve that with difficulty I made out a small figure in a brown suit in one of the compartments. It was he who was making a whirligig of the door. Then I saw another figure, very bulky and cholerically red in the face and wearing the purple-and-gold livery of the hotel, stop the buzzing door and with outraged thumb and forefinger pick up the little man in brown by the collar, pop him out of the door like a tiddleywink and send him bouncing across the sidewalk in my direction. The little man picked himself up, apparently not in the least angry, cast not a single malediction at the broad purple back of the doorman, but began to brush himself off thoughtfully. Then I saw that he was Hosmer Appleby, with whom I had had a casual acquaintance in college some five years before.

"Why hello, Appleby," I greeted him. "Are you hurt?"

"I shall not have one," was his reply. "I do not like them."

I stared at Appleby, uncertain whether he was dazed by his recent experience, or was perhaps psychopathic, or had been drinking.

"You do not like what?" I queried.

"Revolving doors," he said. "I've tried them in seven buildings now, and I don't like any of them. No; I shan't have one. That's settled."

He addressed me as if I were trying to compel him to have a revolving door, willy-nilly.

"There, there," I said soothingly, convinced now that his mind was affected. "You need not have revolving doors if you don't want them."

"But what kind shall I have?" he demanded, looking at me anxiously. "What kind would you have?"

"Have? For what?"

"Why, for your house, of course," he said.

"But I have no house, Appleby."

I fancied that he looked at me pityingly.

"Neither have I," he said; "but I am going to have one."

"Are you? Where?"

"In the country."

"Whereabouts in the country?"

"I don't know yet." Then, in a tone that was rapt, if not actually reverent, he said, "Yes, some day I'll have a house in the country."

"When?"

"I wish I knew," Appleby said. "As soon as I save enough to build the house and to provide a small income for myself."

"You're married then?"

"Oh, no; no, indeed. Nothing like that," he assured me hastily.

"Then what the dickens do you want with a house in the country?"

"I'll tell you," said Appleby. "Where can we go and talk?"

I suggested a certain coffee house, hidden away in a side street.

"The coffee," I said, as we started there, "is the best Java in New York. It is raised for the exclusive use of a royal family in Europe; but now and then the royal steward sells a bag to this coffee house. It has to be smuggled in, bean by bean; the man said so."

"Smuggled in, bean by bean," repeated Appleby. "Do you think I could get a bag?"

"A whole bag? What for?"

"For my house, of course," he said. "I could serve it at the housewarming."

"Well," I said, "it strikes me that a fellow who plans what sort of coffee he'll serve at the housewarming of a house that isn't even started yet must like to peer into the future."

"I do," said Appleby seriously.

As we neared the coffee house he suddenly darted from my side. With some apprehension I saw him, by a somewhat hazardous display of gymnastic ability, mount a window ledge that he might examine closely one of the old ship lanterns that served to light the sign of the coffee house.

He climbed down, shaking his head.

"It won't do," he said.

"It won't do what?" I asked.

"It won't do for my house," he replied.

As we entered the vestibule he dropped to his knees and ran an appraising hand over the doormat.

"Too prickly," he announced. "For me, at any rate."

We took a table in the little back room, and while Appleby inquisitively fingered the curtain material and searched the bottom of the sugar bowl for the maker's mark, I examined him. Save for the addition of a blond snippet of mustache, he was much the same as he had been in college. He wore the same sort of assiduously brushed brown suit, the same careful necktie, the same intent, intense air.

"Did you see the Yale game this year?" I asked.

"No; but let me tell you about my house," he answered. "Just now it's to be a rather simple affair of, say, ten rooms; a low, rambling house of the English type, with plaster walls showing the trowel marks; or I may have it of field stone, with a beamed ceiling in the living room and—"

"But why are you going to build it, Appleby?"

He looked solemn.

"Because of my philosophy of life," he said.

"I don't see—"

"This is what I mean," he explained: "I came out of college about as well prepared for life as a snake is prepared to ride a bicycle. I'd no idea what I wanted to do. First, I thought I'd like to be a painter; I lived on art and sausages for five months; then I ran out of paint and sausages. So I went to work in an advertising agency. I'm not just sure now why I did. I think I ran into some fellow who said advertising was a young giant still in its infancy and advised me to get in on the ground floor; I remember the metaphor, if not the fellow. I did get in on the ground floor and I stayed there for four months. Then I lost interest in the superlative merits of the hair restorer my company advertised, and left the young giant still in its infancy."

The coffee came; he absent-mindedly, drank some.

"I entered finance," he went on. "That is to say, I trekked all over town trying to find someone feeble-minded enough to buy a bond from me. Not finding anyone, I entered foreign trade; meaning, I sat at a desk and tried to sell dolls in gross lots to Peruvian importers. I did this for some endless months. One day I found myself looking out of my ninth-story window and wondering why I didn't jump. 'Why,' I found myself asking myself, 'do I continue to live? Do I care a snap about dolls in gross lots? I do not! Do I like Peruvians? Not at all! In fact, they both bore me. Life,' I said to myself, 'is as empty as a used cantaloupe.' What had I to live for?"

Appleby sipped his coffee, and I said I didn't know.

"Nothing," he said; "nothing. What was my life? Same routine. Get up in the morning; miserable business, getting up. Shave myself; always painful; tender skin, you know. Breakfast; same old coffee, same old cereal, same old eggs. Jostle down to the office. Same dolls; same Peruvians. Lunch with earnest young exporters; same oatmeal crackers and milk; same talk about profits and markets. Back to the office; 'Miss Gurry, take a letter: "Yours of the fourteenth received, and in reply would say in re shipment of 325 gross of best India-rubber dolls, style 7BB— squeaking— am shipping same f.o.b., Wappingers Falls, N. Y., at once." ' Oh, you know the line. Home to my apartment, the size of a police patrol. Read the papers. Same old bunk. 'Strike Situation Serious.'

'International Situation Serious.' 'Pugilistic Situation Serious.' Everything serious, everybody serious. Dinner; that's serious too. Same old question: What shall I do to kill the evening? Read a book? The usual bunk; either romance about people who are too happy, or realism about people who are not happy enough. Go to a show? The old plots, the old lines, the old girls. Same banalities; same strutting hams spouting moss-covered buckets of bunk. Call on a girl? Ghastly bore. Same old 'Have you seen this or have you read that? Isn't it shocking about the Warps getting a divorce, or nice about the Woofs getting married? Do you believe a man and a girl can really be friends in the strictest sense of the word, and how is your golf game getting on?' Home to bed, wind the alarm clock; same old dreams, and then— br-r-ring— 7:30 same thing all over again. I was slaving at work I hated, and what was I getting out of it? What was it all leading to?"

Again he sipped coffee; again I said I didn't know; again he launched himself.

"Nothing," he said; "nothing. There I was at twenty-four doing work I loathed in order to lead a life that bored me. The whole business seemed as pointless as an aquarium without fish. What could I do to make life worth living?"

"Well, what did you do?" I asked.

"First, I analyzed the situation. I always was analytic, you know. Then I decided what I must do. I must have some definite object to work for. I must set some goal for myself."

He tossed off his coffee with a triumphant air; his eyes sparkled. I signaled for more coffee and looked at him interrogatorily.

"And the goal?" I questioned.

His voice was alive with excitement as he said, "To have a house in the country; to retire and live there and raise roses."

"You're pretty young to retire," I remarked.

"Oh, I won't be able to do that for years and years," Appleby said. "I'll not only have to earn enough for a house but enough to bring me in a modest income."

"Well, you have your definite object."

"I have," said Appleby. "And you've no idea how it has bucked me up. I've gained ten pounds since I thought of it. And my whole outlook has changed; I'm as happy as a cat in a fish store these days. You see, I'm going to build a perfect house. I take all the building magazines. Every Sunday I go walking in the country looking for sites. And as for my job—"

"You like it now?"

"I do not. I'm still distinctly bored by dolls in gross lots, and Peruvians; but I take them seriously now. They're pawns in my game, you see. Now, every time I sell a gross of dolls I say to myself, 'Ah, 144 dolls means a commission to me of $4.77, or enough to pay for one electric outlet in my house.' Or, if I sell ten gross I say to myself, 'Good work, old boy! The commission will buy andirons, or bricks for the chimney, or so many gallons of paint.' I'm three times as good a business man as I was. Indeed, I should be at my office this minute, but I got thinking about revolving doors and could not be easy in my mind till I tried some. I don't think they'd be appropriate for a country house, do you?"

"Decidedly not."

He looked relieved.

"Good! Glad you agree. I'll cross them off."

He took out a fat memorandum book and crossed words off a list.

"When do you expect to make this dream a reality?" I asked.

A wistful look came to his face.

"If I do it by the time I'm fifty I'll be lucky," he said. "There isn't much money in dolls. It will take years. But"— and he brightened— "I have already set aside enough money to pay for one window with leaded glass, one foot scraper, three electric outlets and part of the coal bin. Have you any ideas about coal bins?"

Before I could give him the benefit of my thought on this subject he vanished from my sight. I perceived that he had dived under the table and was subjecting the floor to a microscopic scrutiny. Presently he looked up.

"Wanted to be sure whether the floor is painted or stained," he explained. "I think I'll have my floors painted." There was pride in his voice as he accented the word "my." He got to his feet.

"Well, I must rush along. Hope I can sell a few gross of dolls before the market closes. Glad I ran into you. By the way, if you hear of anybody who wants to buy dolls—"

He did not finish his sentence, for his attention was caught by the door-knob of the front door and he bent over to see how it worked.

Then he went out. I did not see Hosmer Appleby again for six years.

NEW YORK eats men. It ate Appleby. At least I did not encounter him. He may have ridden in the same cars or lived in the same block; but our paths did not cross until one afternoon at the art museum. It was, as I recall it, just six years after we drank coffee together and he told me about his aim in life. I was in one gallery of the museum looking at a new exhibition of etchings, when I heard a commotion in the next gallery. A bass voice was in somewhat violent controversy with a tenor voice.

"But you can't lie in that there bed," the bass voice protested loudly.

"Why can't I?"

"That there bed," declared the bass voice, "was slep' in by Napoleon. It's worth twenty thousand dollars. We can't have people layin' in it, now can we?"

"But I'm only trying it."

"It's against the rules of the museum," stated the bass voice.

I entered the gallery at this moment and saw a fat and agitated museum attendant, owner of the bass voice, expostulating with a small man in a brown suit, the tenor, who was reclining on an enormous gilt, canopied, four-poster bed of florid design.

"Oh, very well," said the man on the bed. "I don't think much of it as a bed, anyhow. I wouldn't have it in my house."

Saying this, he rose from the bed and I saw that he was Hosmer Appleby.

"Oh, you wouldn't, wouldn't you?" said the attendant, loyal to his charge. "Well, it was good enough for Napoleon, that there bed was."

"Steel beds are more sanitary," said Appleby. Then turning to me, "Don't you think so?"

He spoke as if I'd been with him all the time. He had the same absorbed expression, the same intent, intense look.

"How's the house?" I asked. "Are you enjoying living in it?"

"Living in it? Why, I haven't started to build it yet!" he told me as we strolled through the collection of Sheraton furniture, which he now and then stopped to poke.

"No," he continued, "I haven't found a site. Haven't the money, anyhow. But I'm looking. I suppose I've looked at five hundred sites since I saw you, and have got forty earaches listening to real-estate agents. I'm in no great hurry. The perfect house on the perfect site— that's my plan."

He said it as if he were annunciating a religious principle.

"And the dolls?" I asked.

He made a wry face.

"Oh, I still sell the little beasts," he replied. "I'm assistant sales manager now, you know."

"Good work!"

"Beastly grind," he said. "I detest dolls. But they're going to build me a house in the country."

"A doll house?" I suggested.

He did not smile; his look said that his house was too sacred a matter for facetiousness.

"How are you, anyhow? Married, or anything like that?" I inquired.

"The living room is going to be thirty-five by twenty," he said.

I stopped to admire a Fuller landscape.

"Aren't those shadows lovely?" I said.

"My living room is going to be very bright," said Hosmer Appleby. "Splotches of brilliant color everywhere. Old Spanish." He said this in a confidential whisper, as if he were imparting a secret. "And, do you know," he concluded, "I've earned almost enough to furnish the living room."

I congratulated him. He shook a rather woeful head.

"It's fearfully slow work," he said. "Sometimes I think I'll never make it. Sometimes I fear that the house is a mirage that can never be reached. But I conquer these fits of despair; I put on full steam and sell dolls like a fiend incarnate." He made a face. "Little bores," he added. We had reached the front door of the museum.

"Well, good-by," Appleby said. "Glad I saw you. Let's have lunch sometime. Have to go back downtown and cable Peru. Just dropped in here to try that Napoleonic bed. Now I can cross canopied beds off my list." He did so.

Then I saw him make a hasty exit, and I saw his brown-suited back disappear in pursuit of a bus.

We never did have that lunch; he disappeared from my life and it was some years before I saw him again. It was at an auction. I heard an excited tenor voice bidding on a dragon-sprinkled Chinese rug.

Appleby shook hands with me vigorously, without taking his eyes off the auctioneer. He seemed in excellent health and spirits; he had color in his cheeks and a spark in his eyes. He bought the rug.

"This makes the seventh rug I've bought," he whispered to me breathlessly.

"How's the house?" I asked.

"Still in the blue-print stage," he said, a little sadly. "But I've earned nearly enough to pay for the first floor. And I've got my eye on a wonderful site in Connecticut. You should see the hanging lamp I picked up at a sale last week! Very French and cubistic." His eyes glowed.

"For your old-Spanish room?" I asked with a smile.

"Oh, now it's going to be a modern French room," he said.

"Still selling dolls, Appleby?"

"Yes, worse luck. I mean I still get no thrill out of the work. But I'm to be made sales manager the first of the year. That means more money, and every dollar I make brings me nearer my house in the country, and freedom."

I left him bidding feverishly on a plum-colored Cabistan.

I HAD ALMOST forgotten Hosmer Appleby and his house. A good many years had passed since our last meeting— seventeen years, I think; or maybe eighteen. Then one day last spring I received a note inviting me to the

housewarming of Briar Farm, near Noroton, Connecticut; it was a very cordial little note, and it was signed "Hosmer Appleby." Then I knew that he had attained his goal at last.

I went out to Briar Farm to the housewarming. The site was, indeed, perfect; five acres or so of rolling land, with a view across Long Island Sound; and the house itself was a gem. Hosmer Appleby, white-haired now, but as bright-eyed and interested as ever, greeted me warmly. He skipped from guest to guest, rubbing his hands, bowing acknowledgments of the compliments they offered him on the perfection of his house. Now and then he pointed out some perfections that might have escaped our attention— that chair was from a sixteenth-century monastery near Seville; that fireplace was his own design; the beams in that ceiling he had discovered in an old manor house in Somersetshire; he invented that especially efficient shower bath; and didn't we think that Matisse in his library rather good?

He took me to the library window, showed me gleefully how the patent casement windows worked, and said: "You see that garden out there? It's to be a rose garden. There I'm going to spend the rest of my days; at night I'll read in this room. It's been a long pull, I can tell you; but here I am."

"You've deserted the dolls?" I asked.

He made the face of one who has just taken unpleasant medicine.

"Don't remind me of them," he said. "I hope I'll never see one of the little brutes again. When I think of the years I spent worrying and sweating over them— still they helped me attain my objective. I was president of the company, you know, when I resigned."

When I was leaving his house he said to me, "You must come up when the roses are blooming. They ought to be beauties; I've been studying books on rose growing for the last ten years."

Three months later I was driving near Briar Farm, and I stopped in to see Appleby and his house and the roses. I saw a figure in old clothes pottering about in the garden. It seemed to me as I watched him that his walk sagged. He would pick a rose bug from a leaf, look at it for a whole minute or more, put it into a can, and then pick off another rose bug. He saw me standing there and came slowly toward me. I thought he seemed pale. He shook hands with me limply.

"How well the roses are getting on!" I said.

"Do you think so?" he said without enthusiasm.

We went into his living room— he had done it in old-Spanish style, after all. I admired a venerable refectory table. Appleby shrugged his shoulders. There were long silences in the course of our conversation, during which Appleby

would sit with head on chest, staring at a rug; and yet I felt somehow that he did not see the rug.

"What a stunning lamp!" I said.

"Oh, it'll do," said Appleby; his tone seemed dull.

"Don't you feel well, Appleby?" I asked.

"Not particularly," he said in that same blunted voice.

A week later I heard through a mutual friend that Hosmer Appleby had taken to his bed, and that his doctors were shaking their heads and looking grave. I had it in mind to go out to see him, but business called me suddenly to England for a flying trip. I was gone a month. I came back to New York on the newest and largest of liners, the Steamship Gigantic. We tied up at a New York pier, and while waiting for the customs inspectors to delve into our baggage I decided to take a last stroll about the vast ship.

I had penetrated into its depths and had come to the place where one could peer down and see the mighty engines, great polished and black giants crouching in their cave. As I stood there I became aware that a man, at no small peril to his safety, was hanging out over the rail and studying the engines with fascinated eyes. He was shaking his head and muttering to himself as if he were in the midst of calculation or inner debate. He heard my step and swung around. It was Appleby. He bounded toward me and shook hands with me with a hearty violence. His face was full of color, and I have never seen brighter eyes.

"Well, well, well!" he cried. "How are you?"

"Fine, thanks. And you?"

"Bully!" he said. "Bully!"

"But what are you doing here, Appleby?"

"I got a pass and came aboard just as soon as the boat docked," he explained. His manner was alert, almost jaunty, one would say. "You see, I know the president of the line. I use his boats to export some of my dolls."

"Your dolls?" I exclaimed.

"Certainly. I'm back in the doll business. And I'll bet you a good cigar we'll sell half a million dollars' worth of dolls this year."

His voice was brisk, his air determined.

"But your house in the country, Appleby."

"Oh, I sold that. Tell me, how did these new oil-burning engines work on the trip coming over? You see, I'm going to build myself a yacht. I'm working like a beaver to earn the money. It's going to be the finest yacht that was ever built— the newest oil-burning engine, mahogany decks, cabins for twenty or more, elevators—"

14: Alexander and the Lady

Edgar Wallace

1875-1932

Short Stories, Oct 1918

In: *The Adventures of Heine*, 1919

The first of a series of short humorous tales of Heine, the pusillanimous and snobbish head of Germany's secret service agents in Britain in World War 1, later collected into an episodic novel.

SECRET SERVICE work is a joke in peace time and it is paid on joke rates. People talk of the fabulous sums of money which our Government spend on this kind of work, and I have no doubt a very large sum was spent every year, but it had to go a long way. Even Herr Kressler, of the Bremen-America Line, who gave me my monthly cheque, used to nod and wink when he handed over my two hundred marks.

"Ah, my good Heine," he would say, stroking his stubbly beard, "they make a fool of me, the Government, but I suppose I mustn't ask who is your other paymaster?"

"Herr Kessler," said I earnestly, "I assure you that this is the whole sum I receive from the Government."

"So!" he would say and shake his head: "Ah, you are close fellows, and I mustn't ask questions!"

There was little to do save now and again to keep track of some of the bad men, the extreme Socialists, and the fellows who ran away from Germany to avoid military service. I often wished there were more, because it would have been possible to have made a little on one's expenses. Fortunately, two or three of the very big men in New York and Chicago knew the work I was doing, and credited me with a much larger income than I possessed. The reputation of being well off is a very useful one, and in my case brought me all sorts of commissions and little tips which I could profitably exploit on Wall Street, and in one way or another I lived comfortably, had a nice apartment on Riverside Drive, backed horses, and enjoyed an occasional trip to Washington, at my Governments expense.

I first knew that war was likely to break out in July. I think we Germans understood the European situation much better than the English and certainly much better than the Americans, and we knew that the event at Sarajevo— by the way, poor Klein of our service and an old colleague of mine, was killed by the bomb which was intended for the Archduke, though nobody seems to have noticed the fact— would produce the war which Austria had been expecting or seeking an excuse to wage for two years.

If I remember aright, the assassination was committed on the Sunday morning. The New York papers published the story on that day, and on the Monday afternoon I was summoned to Washington, and saw the Secretary, who was in charge of our Department on the Tuesday evening after dinner.

The Secretary was very grave and told me that war was almost certain, and that Austria was determined to settle with Serbia for good, but that it was feared that Russia would come in and that the war could not be localised because, if Russia made war, Germany and France would also be involved.

Personally, I have never liked the French, and my French is not particularly good. I was hoping that he was going to tell us that England was concerned and I asked him if this was not the case. To my disappointment, he told me that England would certainly not fight, that she would remain neutral, and that strict orders had been issued that nothing was to be done which would in any way annoy the English.

"Their army," he said, "is beneath contempt, but their navy is the most powerful in the world and its employment might have very serious consequences."

It seemed very early to talk about war with the newspapers still full of long descriptions of the Sarajevo murder and the removal of the Archduke's body and I remembered after with what astounding assurance our Secretary had spoken.

I must confess I was disappointed, because I had spent a very long time in England Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, establishing touch with good friends who, I felt, would work with advantage for me in the event of war. I had prepared my way by founding The Chinese News Bureau, a little concern that had an office in Fleet Street and was ostensibly engaged in collecting items of news concerning China and distributing them to the London and provincial press, and in forwarding a London letter to certain journals in Pekin, Tientsien and Shanghai.

Of course, the money was found by the Department, and it was not a financial success, but it was a good start in case one ever had to operate in London, since I was registered as a naturalised Chilean and it was extremely unlikely that Chile would be at war with any European Power.

On the 3rd August, 1914, I received a message from Washington in the Departmental code, telling me that war with England was inevitable and that I was to sail on the first boat and take up my duties in London in full control of the British Department.

I was overjoyed with the news and I know that men like Stohwasser, Wesser, and other men of my Department, looked at me with envy. They did not think they had an easy task because the American Secret Service is a very

competent one; but they thought I was a lucky pig— as indeed I was— to be operating in a country containing a population of forty millions, most of whom, as one of their writers said, were fools.

I landed at Liverpool on August 11th. My passport was in order and I immediately went forward to London. There was no trace of any excitement. I saw a lot of soldiers on their way to their depots; and arriving in London, I immediately received the reports of our innumerable agents.

With what pride did I contemplate the splendid smoothness of our system! When the Emperor pressed the button marked "Mobilise," he called, in addition to his soldiers, a thousand gallant hearts and brilliant minds in a score of countries all eager and happy to work for the aggrandisement of our beloved Fatherland.

Six of us met at a fashionable restaurant near Trafalgar Square. There were Emil Stein who called himself Robinson, Karl Besser— I need not give all their aliases— Heine von Wetzl, Fritz von Kahn and Alexander Koos.

Stein had arrived from Holland the night before and Fritz von Kahn had come down from Glasgow where he had been acting as a hotel porter. These men were, as I say, known to me, and to one another, but there were thousands of unknowns who had their secret instructions, which were only to be opened in case of war and with whom we had to get in touch.

I briefly explained the procedure and the method by which our agents would be identified. Every German agent would prove his bona fides by producing three used postage stamps of Nicaragua. It is a simple method of identification, for there is nothing treasonable or suspicious in a man carrying about in his pocket-book, a ten, twenty or a fifty centime stamp of a neutral country.

I sent Emil Stein away to Portsmouth and instructed him to make contact with sailors of the Fleet especially with officers. Besser was dispatched to a West Coast shipping centre to report on all the boats which left and entered. I sent Kahn and his family on a motor-car tour to the East Coast with instructions to find out what new coast defences were being instituted.

"You must exercise the greatest care," I said; "even though these English are very stupid, they may easily blunder into a discovery. Make the briefest notes on all you see and hear and only use the Number 3 code in case of urgent necessity." We finished our dinner and we drank to "The Day" and sang under our breath "*Deutschland über Alles*" and separated, Koos coming with me.

Koos was a staff officer of the Imperial Service, and though he was not noble he was held in the greatest respect. He was a fine, handsome fellow, very popular with the girls, and typically British in appearance. His English was

as good as mine, and that is saying a great deal. I sent him to Woolwich because in his character as an American inventor— he had spent four years in the States— he was admirably fitted to pick up such facts as were of the greatest interest to the Government.

I did not see Koos for a few days and in the meantime I was very busy arranging with my couriers who were to carry the result of our discoveries through a neutral country to Germany. The system I adopted was a very simple one. My notes, written in Indian ink, were separately photographed by means of a camera. When I had finished the twelve exposures, I opened the camera in a dark room, carefully re-rolled the spool and sealed it, so that it had the appearance of being an unexposed pellicle. I argued that whilst the English military authorities would confiscate photographs which had obviously been taken, they might pass films which were apparently unused.

I had arranged to meet Koos on the night of August 17th, and made my way to the rendezvous, engaging a table for two. I had hardly seated myself when, to my surprise, Koos came in accompanied by a very pretty English girl. He walked past me, merely giving me the slightest side-glance, and, seated himself at the next table. I was amused. I knew the weakness of our good Koos for the ladies, but I knew also that he was an excellent investigator and that he was probably combining business with pleasure In this I was right. The meal finished— and the innocent laughter of the girl made me smile again— and Koos walked out with the girl on his arm.

As he passed my table he dropped a slip of paper which I covered with my table-napkin. When I was sure I was not observed, I read the note.

"Making excellent progress. Meet me at a quarter to eleven outside Piccadilly Tube."

I met him at the appointed time and we strolled into Jermyn Street.

"What do you think of her?" was Koos' first question.

"Very pretty, my friend," said I. "You have excellent taste."

He chuckled.

"I have also excellent luck, my dear Heine. That lady is the daughter of one of the chief gun-constructors at Woolwich."

He looked at me to note the effect of his words, and I must confess I was startled.

"Splendid, my dear fellow!" said I, warmly. "How did you come to meet her?"

"A little act of gallantry," he said airily; "a lady walking on Blackheath twists her ankle, what more natural than that I should offer her assistance to the nearest seat? Quite a babbling little person— typically English. She is a mine of information. An only daughter and a little spoilt, I am afraid, she knows no

doubt secrets of construction of which the technical experts of the Government are ignorant. Can you imagine a German talking over military affairs with his daughter?"

"What have you learnt from her?" I asked.

Koos did not reply for a moment, then he said: "So far, very little. I am naturally anxious not to alarm her or arouse her suspicions. She is willing to talk and she has access to her father's study and, from what I gather, she practically keeps all the keys of the house. At present I am educating her to the necessity of preserving secrecy about our friendship and to do her justice, she is just as anxious that our clandestine meetings should not come to the ears of her father as I am."

We walked along in silence.

"This may be a very big thing," I said.

"Bigger than you imagine," replied Alexander; "there is certain to be an exchange of confidential views about artillery between the Allies, and though we have nothing to learn from the English it is possible that the French may send orders to Woolwich for armament. In that case our little friend may be a mine of information. I am working with my eyes a few months ahead," he said, "and for that reason I am allowing our friendship to develop slowly."

I did not see Koos again for a week, except that I caught a glimpse of him in the Cafe Riche with his fair companion. He did not see me, however, and as it was desirable that I should not intrude, I made no attempt to make my presence apparent.

At the end of the week we met by appointment, which we arranged through the agony column of a certain London newspaper. I was feeling very cheerful, for Stein, Besser, and Kahn had sent in most excellent reports, and it only needed Alexander's encouraging news to complete my sum of happiness.

"You remember the gun-lathe I spoke to you about," he said. "My friend—you may regard the blue prints as in your hands."

"How has this come about?"

"I just casually mentioned to my little girl that I was interested in inventions and that I had just put a new lathe upon the market in America and she was quite excited about it lt. She asked me if I heard about the lathe at Woolwich, and I said that l had heard rumours that there was such a lathe. She was quite overjoyed at the opportunity of giving me information and asked me whether in the event of her showing me the prints I would keep the fact a great secret because," he laughed softly, "she did not think her father would like the print to leave his office!"

"You must be careful of this girl," I said, "she may be detected."

"There is no danger, my dear fellow," said Alexander. "She is the shrewdest little woman in the world. I am getting quite to like her if one can like these abominable people— she is such a child!"

I told him to keep in communication with me and sent him off feeling what the English call in "good form." I dispatched a courier by the morning train to the Continent, giving details of the British Expeditionary Force. Only two brigades were in France— and that after three weeks of preparation! In Germany every man was mobilized and at his corps or army headquarters weeks ago— every regiment had moved up to its order of battle position. Two brigades! It would be amusing if it were not pathetic!

Besser came to me soon after lunch in a very excited state.

"The whole of the British Expeditionary Force of three Divisions is in France," he said, "and, what is more, it is in line."

I smiled at him.

"My poor dear fellow, who has been pulling your foot?" I asked.

"It is confidentially communicated to the Press, and will he public to-morrow," he said.

"Lies," said I calmly, "you are too credulous. The English are the most stupid liars in the world."

I was not so calm that night when I ran down in my car to Gorselton, where our very good friend, the Baron von Hertz-Missenger, had a nice little estate.

"Heine," he said, after he had taken me to his study and shut the door. "I have received a radio through my wireless from *Kreigsministerium* [*The Prussian Ministry of War*] to the effect that the whole of the British Expeditionary Force has landed and is in line."

"Impossible, Herr Baron," I said, but he shook his head.

"It is true— our Intelligence in Belgium is infallible. Now, I do not want to interfere with you, for I am but a humble volunteer in this great work, but I advise you to give a little more attention to the army. We may have underrated the military assistance which Britain can offer."

"The English Army, Herr Baron," said I firmly, "is almost as insignificant a factor as— as well— the American army, which only exists on paper! Nevertheless, I will take your advice."

I went back to town and dispatched another courier, for as yet the Torpington Varnish Factory (about which I will tell you later) had not been equipped with radio.

That night I again saw Alexander. It was at supper at the Fritz, and he looked a fine figure of a man. I felt proud of the country which could produce such a type. Where, I ask you, amongst the paunchy English and the scraggy Scotch, with their hairy knees and their sheep-shank legs, could you find a

counterpart of that *beau sabreur*? Cower treacherous Albion, shiver in your kilt, hateful Scotch (it is not generally known that the Royal and High-Born Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria is rightful King of Scotland.), tremble, wild Wales , and unreliable Ireland, when you come in arms against a land which can produce such men as Alexander Koos!

I never saw a girl look more radiantly happy than did the young woman who was sitting *vis-à-vis* my friend. There was a light in her eye and a colour in her cheeks which were eloquent of her joy.

I saw Alexander afterwards. He came secretly to my room.

"Have you brought the blue print?" I asked. He shook his head smilingly. "Tomorrow, my friend, not only the blue print of the lathe, not only the new gun-mounting model, but the lady herself will come to me. I want your permission to leave the day after to-morrow for home. I cannot afford to wait for what the future may bring."

"Can you smuggle the plans past the English police?" I asked, a little relieved that he had volunteered to act as courier on so dangerous a mission.

"Nothing easier."

"And the girl— have you her passport?"

He nodded.

"How far shall you take her?"

"To Rotterdam," he said promptly.

In a way I was sorry. Yes, I am sentimental, I fear, and "sentiment does not live in an agent's pocket" as the saying goes. I wish it could have been done without. I shrugged my shoulders and steeled my soul with the thought that she was English and that it was all for the Fatherland.

"You must come to the Café Riche tonight and witness our going," said Alexander; "you will observe that she will carry a leather case such as schoolgirls use for their books and exercises. In that, case, my friend, will be enough material to keep our friends in Berlin busy for a month."

I took leave of him giving him certain instructions as to the course he was to take after reporting at Headquarters, and spent the rest of the night coding a message for our Alexander to carry with him. The hour at which Alexander was to meet the girl was eight o'clock in the evening.

His table (already booked) was No. 47, which is near the window facing Piccadilly. I telephoned through to the cafe and booked No. 46, for I was anxious to witness the comedy.

All was now moving like clockwork— and let me say that the smoothness of the arrangements was due largely to the very thorough and painstaking organisation-work which I had carried out in the piping days of peace. We Germans have a passion for detail and for thoroughness and for this reason

(apart from the inherent qualities of simplicity and honesty, apart from the superiority of our *kultur* and our lofty idealism) we have been unconquerable throughout the ages.

You must remember that I was in London as the representative of a Chinese News Bureau. I was also an agent for a firm of importers in Shanghai. It was therefore only natural that I should be called up all hours of the day and night with offers of goods.

"I can let you have a hundred and twenty bales of Manchester goods at 125."

Now 120 and 125 added together make 245, and turning to my "simple code", to paragraph 245, I find the following:

"2nd Battalion of the Graniteshire Regiment entrained to-day for embarkation."

The minor agents carried this code (containing 1,400 simple sentences to covet all naval or military movements) in a small volume. The code is printed on one side of very thin paper leaves, and the leaves are as porous and absorbent as blotting paper.

One blot of ink dropped upon a sheet will obliterate a dozen— a fact which our careless agents have discovered. Clipped in the centre of the book (as a pencil is clipped in an ordinary book) is a tiny tube of the thinnest glass containing a quantity of black dye-stuff. The agent fearing detection has only to press the cover of the book sharply and the contents of the book are reduced to black sodden pulp. Need I say that this ingenious invention was German in its origin.*

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*[*As a matter of fact, it was invented by the American Secret Service— E.W.]*

My days were therefore very full. There came reports from all quarters and some the most unlikely. How, you may ask, did our agents make these discoveries?

There are many ways by which information is conveyed. The relations of soldiers are always willing to talk about their men and will tell you, if they know, when they are leaving the ships they are leaving by, and will sometimes give you other important facts, but particularly about ports and dates of embarkations are they useful.

Also officers will occasionally talk at lunch and dinner and will tell their women folk military secrets which a waiter can mentally note and convey to the proper quarters. Our best agents, however, were barbers, tailors, chiropodists, and dentists. English people will always discuss matters with a barber or with the man who is fitting them with their clothes, and as almost

every tailor was making military uniforms and a very large number of the tailors in London were either German or Austrian, I had quite a wealth of news.

Tailors are useful because they work to time. Clothes have to be delivered by a certain date and generally the man who has the suit made will tell the fitter the date he expects to leave England. Other useful investigators are Turkish-bath attendants and dentists. A man in a dentist's chair is always nervous and will try to make friends with the surgeon who is operating on him.

Of all agencies the waiter is in reality the least useful, because writers have been pointing out for so many years the fact that most waiters were German. But the truth is that most restaurant waiters are Italian, and it is amongst the bedroom waiters that you can find a preponderance of my fellow countrymen.

Prompt at eight o'clock, I took my place at the table and ordered an excellent dinner (my waiter was naturally a good German) and a bottle of Rhenish wine. A few minutes after I had given my order Alexander and the girl arrived. She was dressed in a long travelling coat of tussore silk, and carried— as I was careful to note— a shiny brown leather portfolio. This she placed carefully on be lap when she sat down and raised her veil.

She looked a little pale, but smiled readily enough at Alexander's jests. I watched her as she slowly peeled off her gloves and unbuttoned her coat. Her eyes were fixed on vacancy. Doubtless her conscience was pricking her.

Is it the thought of thy home, little maid from whence thou hast fled never to return? Is it the anguished picture of thy broken-hearted and ruined father bemoaning his daughter and his honour? Have no fear, little one, thy treason shall enrich the chosen of the German God, those World Encirclers, Foreordained and Destined to Imperial Grandeur!

So I thought, watching her and listening.

"Are you sure that everything will be all right?" she asked anxiously.

"Please trust me," smiled Alexander. (Oh, the deceiving rogue— how I admired his sang-froid!)

"You are ready to go— you have packed?" she asked.

"As ready as you, my dear Elsie. Come— let me question you," he bantered; "have you all those wonderful plans which are going to make our fortunes after we are married?

So he had promised that— what would the gracious Frau Koos-Mettleheim have said to this perfidy on the part of her husband?

"I have all the plans," she began, but he hushed her with a warning glance.

I watched the dinner proceed but heard very little more. All the time she seemed to be plying him with anxious questions to which he returned reassuring answers. They had reached the sweets when she began to fumble at

her pocket. I guessed (rightly) that she was seeking a handkerchief and (wrongly) that she was crying.

Her search was fruitless and she beckoned the waiter.

"I left a little bag in the ladies' room— it has my handkerchief; will you ask the attendant to send the bag?"

The waiter departed and presently returned with two men in the livery of the hotel. I was sitting side by side and could see the faces both of the girl and Alexander and I noticed the amusement in his face that two attendants must come to carry one small bag.

Then I heard the girl speak.

"Put your hands, palms upward, on the table," she said. I was still looking at Alexander's face. First amazement and then anger showed— then I saw his face go grey and into is eyes crept the fear of death. The girl was holding an automatic pistol and the barrel was pointing at Alexander's breast. She half turned her head to the attendants.

"Here is your man, sergeant she said briskly. "Alexander Roos, alias Ralph Burton-Smith. I charge him with espionage."

They snapped the steel handcuffs upon Alexander's wrists and led him out, the girl following. I rose unsteadily and followed. In the vestibule was quite a small crowd which had gathered at the first rumour of so remarkable a sensation. Here, for the first time, Alexander spoke, and it was curious bow in his agitation his perfect English became broken and hoarse.

"Who are you? You have a mistake maken, my frient."

"I am an officer of the British Intelligence Department," said the girl.

"*Himmel*! Secret Service!" gasped Alexander, "I thought it was not!"

I saw them take him away and stole home.

They had trapped him. The girl with the sprained ankle had been waiting for him that day on Blackheath. She led him on by talking of the plans she could get until he had told her of the rough plans he already had. Whilst (as he thought) he was tightening the net about her, she was drawing the meshes tighter about him... Phew! It makes me hot to think of it!

Was there a secret service in England after all? For myself, my tracks were too well covered; for Alexander I could do nothing. He would not betray me. I was sure of that. Yet to be perfectly certain I left the next night for Dundee, and I was in Dundee when the news came that Alexander had been shot in the Tower of London.

15: The Yokel and the Grand Duke

Georges Surdez

1900-1949

Cosmopolitan, Oct 1946

Swiss-born American short story writer Surdez wrote mostly stories of the French Foreign Legion. He is credited with inventing the expression "Russian roulette" (in the story of the same name in Collier's Magazine*, 30 January 1937).*

I AM an old man, Monsieur, a very old man. The odds against my living another year are long. But my old stomach tolerates liquor, if the liquor is good, and food, if it is decently cooked. Certain dishes are not at all bad here, if one is known to the cook, as I am. I shall order for us both, and you will not regret it. And from this table, we can see the other patrons, especially the pretty girls.

Of course I am French! And I hope that in some way I shall get back to die in France. Just why I should wish to die in France does seem foolish, just about as foolish as being proud that I was born there. Fate decides such things... No, I do not think I should find the country or its people changed greatly. I have been away seven years this time, and there has been a war. Another war, for it was the third I remember. Yes, such as you see me, at the age of twelve, I saw the Prussians march into Paris, with their flat little drums pounding away and brass spikes on their helmets.

The next war, in 1914, I was considered too old. I was living in Russia when it started, a guest of the Grand Duke Vladimir. We were inseparable; we had met in France, or rather at Monte Carlo, and when the roulette had cleaned me out, I became his permanent guest. You see, I was vaguely married to one of his vague cousins. It was after the Revolution that we went back to France together, after many adventures. My life, Monsieur, would make quite a film for the cinema. And I would like to go home and contemplate it quietly, for a few months, before the end. I no longer have any property, but I have old friends who would help me out.

No, I repeat, there would be no change, if one lived in the country. Of course, the franc is but a small fraction of what it was; there are radios, cars, perhaps even refrigerators. Or there will be again. But the farmers, the peasants, won't have changed. I am telling you, Monsieur, nothing changes the French peasant. The Boches undoubtedly killed many peasants— they can be killed, but they cannot be changed. Events pass over them like a steam roller; then those that are living get up, dust themselves and resume as before. There is a matter-of-fact streak in our country breed that refuses to be amazed at anything.

The Grand Duke Vladimir doubted me for a long time when I insisted that for phlegmatic acceptance of fate the ordinary French countryman could give lessons to the proverbially cool Englishman. Then there was one evening, at the Casino of Monte Carlo, when an incident proved me right. Listen to me carefully, Monsieur, and you will understand the French better, even if you think you already know them well. I mean the French of the soil, the stratum that forms the foundation. We others are silt, froth bubbles in plain sight.

THAT EVENING, I had accompanied the Grand Duke to the Casino, as usual, and had drawn my usual minimum for gambling. It would have been cruel to tend to my other needs and not to that one. We were in a.rather small salon, almost a private room, around a roulette table. I say we, for we all knew each other by sight and by name. There was, for instance, a French marquis who had a ranch in the American West, a Greek who had made millions in a speculation around a certain canal, a woman who was wrecking her third titled husband, a musicalcomedy star who was to become mistress of a king.

The gambling went on calmly, almost drearily, for it takes a couple of hours for the players to grow excited and nervous. Until the stakes got large, there was little excitement, for the players, with the exception. of myself, were not persons to whom ten or fifteen thousand francs made a great deal of difference.

Vladimir played carelessly and lost enormously. He could afford it; his revenues were immense, fabulous. You must have seen pictures of him— a big man, six foot four or five, broad as a door, wearing a full blond beard not yet streaked with gray. He wore evening dress, decorations. An imposing figure. His hands were long and slender, well muscled, and it was a pleasure to see his fingers move carelessly in the gold and bills before him— those were the days before markers were in general use.

As I told you, it was comparatively early, not long after ten o'clock, and most of us were chatting casually, relaxed. Later, eyes would get hard, smiles grow bitter. Even the croupier was taking it easy, waiting for us to warm up.

We were startled by an unusual voice. An unusual voice in that place, a slow, rather coarse peasant voice: "We'll be bothering these rich people."

"Oh, no, Henri, it's open to the public."

Every one at the table looked up, and all smiled. A young couple, sight-seers, had strayed into our room. This seldom happened, as the attendants ordinarily steered such people away, kept them in the main rooms.

IT WAS was easy to see that they were newlyweds, on their honeymoon, and that they were from the country. I judged from somewhere in the east,

Department of Ain or Jura, from their speech. The man was perhaps twentysix, rather short, stocky, with closely cropped chestnut hair, small gray eyes and a face that appeared carved from brick. He was mottled with freckles, and his ears stuck out like the handles on a jug. He wore ready-made garments of some stiff, dark cloth, an incredible yellow and green tie. If one had ordered a personification of the yokel, one could not have had better. He was sweating with constraint and embarrassment.

Yet his bride, as countrified, as awkward, as ill-got-up in her finery, was attractive, delightful. She was almost a child and still retained the naive charm and self-confidence of childhood. She looked like a Dresden-china shepherdess in cheap modern clothes. Small tilted a superb complexion that owed nothing to art. Try and think, at that moment, that inside a very few years she would be a shrewish farmer's wife! And her eyes were dancing with excitement and pleasure— Monte Carlo, the Azure Coast, her wedding trip! Evidently, she even liked her husband, the ugly but necessary accessory.

"Come, we 're disturbing the ladies and gentlemen," he said.

We at the table resumed play, politely, and I believe some of us even sought to behave as she expected gamblers to behave. She radiated something that gave anyone near by an irresistible urge to please her. We avoided looking at her too hard, afraid that a smile might be misunderstood as mockery. I realize now that we need not have bothered. She was not in the least conscious that she was out of place.

"I'd like to play, Henri," she said.

"All right. This is twenty-francs minimum; well go and try the five-franc table."

"Please, darling, just once."

"Not twenty francs. Are you crazy?"

The roulette had spun, the ball had settled into number four. Currency was raked in and out. Bills rustled crisply, gold tinkled. I don't know how the others felt, but I felt we were on parade. That those beautiful eyes would always retain this vision of wealth and recklessness.

"Just once, Henri; we have it—"

"Come, let's go.'

It was then that Grand Duke Vladimir rose from his chair, bowed to the pair.

"If you would be so kind as to permit me, Monsieur," he addressed Henri, over whom he towered almost a foot, "I should beg Madame to occupy my chair for an instant. A gambler's notion, you understand, that such grace and youth would bring. me great luck?"

"Well, I don't know, Monsieur, if—" the husband began.

But his bride had already thanked the Grand Duke and settled in the chair.

"What do I do, please?" she asked.

"Put some money on the number you fancy," Vladimir replied. She diffidently picked up a gold Louis, twenty francs.

"Oh, I say, there!" Henri protested.

"The loss shall be mine, don't worry," the Grand Duke cut him short. To the girl, he said, "Play your age, Madame."

Mlavame placed the coin on seventeen. It was not the night to play seventeen— it had not come out all evening. The wheel whirred, and the ball was in seventeen! The croupier slid seven hundred francs, in gold, onto the number.

"You have won, Madame," the Grand Duke announced.

"Can I play again, Monsieur?"

"Oh, certainly, Madame, but I'd advise you to take in your winnings."

"Oh, no, please, Monsieur. I feel—"

"Now, do be sensible and let us go," Henri protested. His tone was so harsh, his eagerness to be off with the money so obvious, that Vladimir bristled a bit.

"Madame has the true gambler's hunch," he said. "And it is all for amusement." He added, "I am responsible for any loss."

I can tell you we were no longer indifferent. Not that the sum was important— to anyone except Henri— but we so wanted her to win again. Dimly, we thought it would be justice from above if this little girl could make herself a small fortune— and prove her cautious lout of a mate wrong.

Seventeen came out again!

I know I felt like applauding, and even the attendants were grinning. This time, the croupier shoved out little bundles of bills along with the gold coins. The little bride pushed them on seventeen again. This time, there was a delay, while she argued with Henri in loud tones.

"It's mine, and if I lose, it's my loss," she snapped.

Henri quieted and looked at the Grand Duke hopefully. But Vladimir did not react.

A great many thousand francs were involved, the equivalent of one thousand pounds sterling, or some five thousand dollars. He would never have noticed the loss of it, but he probably had had time to think that according to French law her winnings would belong to the husband. I know that when that thought did occur to me, it rather spoiled my fun.

The croupier questioned the girl with a glance. She nodded: Yes, she was leaving the lot. And on seventeen, It was insane. Yet seventeen came out again!

This time, the croupier did not push out money, he beckoned to an attendant. Henri was standing very still, his freckles almost black on his paling face.

"That's enough," he said at last, very roughly. "Come on, let's collect what's due and go." When she protested, Henri resumed loudly, "We've got a train to make, at eleven forty-five. Our excursion ticket from Nice is for that train. You've seen the Casino, you've gambled— what more do you want?"

"I want to play just once more, please, darling."

"Nonsense. You'd only lose from now on. I don't want to act mean in front of all these folks, but I'm telling you to leave."

"Monsieur," the Grand Duke felt impelled to protest, "in all decency, I must ask you to moderate your—"

"Im talking to my wife," Henri reminded him stiffly. "And even if you have a beard and a monocle, that doesn't give you the right to butt in—"

Vladimir had fought duels with swords and pistols, had campaigned in Asia and the Balkans, It is unlikely that he was impressed even by the remarkably developed fists that the yokel held up. But he was technically in the wrong. In any case, several husky attendants had materialized from nowhere. They always handled such things well at the Casino.

"If Monsieur will be so kind as to follw us. "

"Where's my money?"

"That man over there is taking care of some. The balance will be paid to you by the cashier. My dear sir, it is a matter of close to nine hundred thousand francs! The table is dry."

"All right," said Henri. He grumbled at his young wife who had earned him more than he could have made in several lifetimes at his ordinary tasks, "Go on, now, before I lose my temper!"

HE STARTED after her, then seemed to change his mind. He crossed toward the man who carried some of the winnings in a little basket, reached into it, and touched the shoulder of the Grand Duke, already settled in his chair.

"What now?" Vladimir snapped, turning. "My patience—"

Henri held out his hand calmy but with such urgency that the Grand Duke held out his hand without thinking. And the peasant quietly laid on that aristocratic palm a glittering Louis d'or, a twenty-franc coin.

"I don't like to owe anything to anybody," he said. "Here's your money!"

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16: A Neighbour's Landmark

M. R. James

1862-1936

The Eton Chronicle 17 March 1924

In: *The Collected Ghost Stories of M. R. James*, (New York) 1931

THOSE WHO SPEND the greater part of their time in reading or writing books are, of course, apt to take rather particular notice of accumulations of books when they come across them. They will not pass a stall, a shop, or even a bedroom-shelf without reading some title, and if they find themselves in an unfamiliar library, no host need trouble himself further about their entertainment. The putting of dispersed sets of volumes together, or the turning right way up on those which the dusting housemaid has left in an apoplectic condition, appeals to them as one of the lesser Works of Mercy. Happy in these employments, and in occasionally opening an eighteenth-century octavo, to see "what it is all about," and to conclude after five minutes that it deserves the seclusion it now enjoys, I had reached the middle of a wet August afternoon at Betton Court—

"You begin in a deeply Victorian manner," I said; "is this to continue?"

"Remember, if you please," said my friend, looking at me over his spectacles, "that I am a Victorian by birth and education, and that the Victorian tree may not unreasonably be expected to bear Victorian fruit. Further, remember that an immense quantity of clever and thoughtful Rubbish is now being written about the Victorian age. Now," he went on, laying his papers on his knee, "that article, 'The Stricken Years,' in *The Times* Literary Supplement the other day— Able? of course it is able; but, oh! my soul and body, do just hand it over here, will you? it's on the table by you."

"I thought you were to read me something you had written," I said, without moving, "but, of course—"

"Yes, I know," he said. "Very well, then, I'll do that first. But I *should* like to show you afterwards what I mean. However—" And he lifted the sheets of paper and adjusted his spectacles

—AT BETTON COURT, where, generations back, two country-house libraries had been fused together, and no descendant of either stock had ever faced the task of picking them over or getting rid of duplicates. Now I am not setting out to tell of rarities I may have discovered, of Shakespeare quartos bound up in volumes of political tracts, or anything of that kind, but of an experience which befell me in the course of my search— an experience which I cannot either explain away or fit into the scheme of my ordinary life.

It was, I said, a wet August afternoon, rather windy, rather warm. Outside the window great trees were stirring and weeping. Between them were stretches of green and yellow country (for the Court stands high on a hill-side), and blue hills far off, veiled with rain. Up above was a very restless and hopeless movement of low clouds travelling north-west. I had suspended my work— if you call it work— for some minutes to stand at the window and look at these things, and at the greenhouse roof on the right with the water sliding off it, and the Church tower that rose behind that. It was all in favour of my going steadily on; no likelihood of a clearing up for hours to come. I, therefore, returned to the shelves, lifted out a set of eight or nine volumes, lettered "Tracts," and conveyed them to the table for closer examination.

They were for the most part of the reign of Anne. There was a good deal of *The Late Peace, The Late War, The Conduct of the Allies*: there were also *Letters to a Convocation Man*; *Sermons preached at St. Michael's, Queenhithe*; *Enquiries into a late Charge of the Rt. Rev. the Lord Bishop of Winchester* (or more probably Winton) *to his Clergy*: things all very lively once, and indeed still keeping so much of their old sting that I was tempted to betake myself into an arm-chair in the window, and give them more time than I had intended. Besides, I was somewhat tired by the day. The Church clock struck four, and it really was four, for in 1889 there was no saving of daylight.

So I settled myself. And first I glanced over some of the War pamphlets, and pleased myself by trying to pick out Swift by his style from among the undistinguished. But the War pamphlets needed more knowledge of the geography of the Low Countries than I had. I turned to the Church, and read several pages of what the Dean of Canterbury said to the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge on the occasion of their anniversary meeting in 1711. When I turned over to a Letter from a Beneficed Clergyman in the Country to the Bishop of C....r, I was becoming languid, and I gazed for some moments at the following sentence without surprise:

"This Abuse (for I think myself justified in calling it by that name) is one which I am persuaded Your Lordship would (if 'twere known to you) exert your utmost efforts to do away. But I am also persuaded that you know no more of its existence than (in the words of the Country Song)

'That which walks in Betton Wood
Knows why it walks or why it cries.' "

Then indeed I did sit up in my chair, and run my finger along the lines to make sure that I had read them right. There was no mistake. Nothing more was to be gathered from the rest of the pamphlet. The next paragraph definitely changed the subject: "But I have said enough upon this *Topick*," were its

opening words. So discreet, too, was the namelessness of the Beneficed Clergyman that he refrained even from initials, and had his letter printed in London.

The riddle was of a kind that might faintly interest anyone: to me, who have dabbled a good deal in works of folk-lore, it was really exciting. I was set upon solving it— on finding out, I mean, what story lay behind it; and, at least, I felt myself lucky in one point, that, whereas I might have come on the paragraph in some College Library far away, here I was at Betton, on the very scene of action.

The Church clock struck five, and a single stroke on a gong followed. This, I knew, meant tea. I heaved myself out of the deep chair, and obeyed the summons.

My host and I were alone at the Court. He came in soon, wet from a round of landlord's errands, and with pieces of local news which had to be passed on before I could make an opportunity of asking whether there was a particular place in the parish that was still known as Betton Wood.

"Betton Wood," he said, "was a short mile away, just on the crest of Betton Hill, and my father stubbed up the last bit of it when it paid better to grow corn than scrub oaks. Why do you want to know about Betton Wood?"

"Because," I said, "in an old pamphlet I was reading just now, there are two lines of a country song which mention it, and they sound as if there was a story belonging to them. Someone says that someone else knows no more of whatever it may be—

'Than that which walks in Betton Wood
Knows why it walks or why it cries.'"

"Goodness," said Philipson, "I wonder whether that was why... I must ask old Mitchell." He muttered something else to himself, and took some more tea, thoughtfully.

"Whether that was why—?" I said.

"Yes, I was going to say, whether that was why my father had the Wood stubbed up. I said just now it was to get more plough-land, but I don't really know if it was. I don't believe he ever broke it up: it's rough pasture at this moment. But there's one old chap at least who'd remember something of it— old Mitchell." He looked at his watch. "Blest if I don't go down there and ask him. I don't think I'll take you," he went on; "he's not so likely to tell anything he thinks is odd if there's a stranger by."

"Well, mind you remember every single thing he does tell. As for me, if it clears up, I shall go out, and if it doesn't, I shall go on with the books."

It did clear up, sufficiently at least to make me think it worth while to walk up the nearest hill and look over the country. I did not know the lie of the land; it was the first visit I had paid to Philipson, and this was the first day of it. So I went down the garden and through the wet shrubberies with a very open mind, and offered no resistance to the indistinct impulse— was it, however, so very indistinct?— which kept urging me to bear to the left whenever there was a forking of the path. The result was that after ten minutes or more of dark going between dripping rows of box and laurel and privet, I was confronted by a stone arch in the Gothic style set in the stone wall which encircled the whole demesne. The door was fastened by a spring-lock, and I took the precaution of leaving this on the jar as I passed out into the road. That road I crossed, and entered a narrow lane between hedges which led upward; and that lane I pursued at a leisurely pace for as much as half a mile, and went on to the field to which it led. I was now on a good point of vantage for taking in the situation of the Court, the village, and the environment; and I leant upon a gate and gazed westward and downward.

I think we must all know the landscapes— are they by Birket Foster, or somewhat earlier?— which, in the form of wood-cuts, decorate the volumes of poetry that lay on the drawing-room tables of our fathers and grandfathers— volumes in "Art Cloth, embossed bindings"; that strikes me as being the right phrase. I confess myself an admirer of them, and especially of those which show the peasant leaning over a gate in a hedge and surveying, at the bottom of a downward slope, the village church spire— embosomed amid venerable trees, and a fertile plain intersected by hedgerows, and bounded by distant hills, behind which the orb of day is sinking (or it may be rising) amid level clouds illumined by his dying (or nascent) ray. The expressions employed here are those which seem appropriate to the pictures I have in mind; and were there opportunity, I would try to work in the Vale, the Grove, the Cot, and the Flood. Anyhow, they are beautiful to me, these landscapes, and it was just such a one that I was now surveying. It might have come straight out of "Gems of Sacred Song, selected by a Lady" and given as a birthday present to Eleanor Philipson in 1852 by her attached friend Millicent Graves. All at once I turned as if I had been stung. There thrilled into my right ear and pierced my head a note of incredible sharpness, like the shriek of a bat, only ten times intensified— the kind of thing that makes one wonder if something has not given way in one's brain. I held my breath, and covered my ear, and shivered. Something in the circulation: another minute or two, I thought, and I return home. But I must fix the view a little more firmly in my mind. Only, when I turned to it again, the taste was gone out of it. The sun was down behind the hill, and the light was off the fields, and when the clock bell in the Church

tower struck seven, I thought no longer of kind mellow evening hours of rest, and scents of flowers and woods on evening air; and of how someone on a farm a mile or two off would be saying "How clear Betton bell sounds to-night after the rain!"; but instead images came to me of dusty beams and creeping spiders and savage owls up in the tower, and forgotten graves and their ugly contents below, and of flying Time and all it had taken out of my life. And just then into my left ear— close as if lips had been put within an inch of my head, the frightful scream came thrilling again.

There was no mistake possible now. It *was* from outside. "With no language but a cry" was the thought that flashed into my mind. Hideous it was beyond anything I had heard or have heard since, but I could read no emotion in it, and doubted if I could read any intelligence. All its effect was to take away every vestige, every possibility, of enjoyment, and make this no place to stay in one moment more. Of course there was nothing to be seen: but I was convinced that, if I waited, the thing would pass me again on its aimless, endless beat, and I could not bear the notion of a third repetition. I hurried back to the lane and down the hill. But when I came to the arch in the wall I stopped. Could I be sure of my way among those dank alleys, which would be danker and darker now! No, I confessed to myself that I was afraid: so jarred were all my nerves with the cry on the hill that I really felt I could not afford to be startled even by a little bird in a bush, or a rabbit. I followed the road which followed the wall, and I was not sorry when I came to the gate and the lodge, and descried Philipson coming up towards it from the direction of the village.

"And where have you been?" said he.

"I took that lane that goes up the hill opposite the stone arch in the wall."

"Oh! did you? Then you've been very near where Betton Wood used to be: at least, if you followed it up to the top, and out into the field."

And if the reader will believe it, that was the first time that I put two and two together. Did I at once tell Philipson what had happened to me? I did not. I have not had other experiences of the kind which are called super-natural, or -normal, or -physical, but, though I knew very well I must speak of this one before long, I was not at all anxious to do so; and I think I have read that this is a common case.

So all I said was: "Did you see the old man you meant to?"

"Old Mitchell? Yes, I did; and got something of a story out of him. I'll keep it till after dinner. It really is rather odd."

So when we were settled after dinner he began to report, faithfully, as he said, the dialogue that had taken place. Mitchell, not far off eighty years old, was in his elbow-chair. The married daughter with whom he lived was in and out preparing for tea.

After the usual salutations: "Mitchell, I want you to tell me something about the Wood."

"What Wood's that, Master Reginald?"

"Betton Wood. Do you remember it?"

Mitchell slowly raised his hand and pointed an accusing forefinger. "It were your father done away with Betton Wood, Master Reginald, I can tell you that much."

"Well, I know it was, Mitchell. You needn't look at me as if it were my fault."

"Your fault? No, I says it were your father done it, before your time."

"Yes, and I dare say if the truth was known, it was your father that advised him to do it, and I want to know why."

Mitchell seemed a little amused. "Well," he said, "my father were woodman to your father and your grandfather before him, and if he didn't know what belonged to his business, he'd oughter done. And if he did give advice that way, I suppose he might have had his reasons, mightn't he now?"

"Of course he might, and I want you to tell me what they were."

"Well now, Master Reginald, whatever makes you think as I know what his reasons might 'a been I don't know how many year ago?"

"Well, to be sure, it is a long time, and you might easily have forgotten, if ever you knew. I suppose the only thing is for me to go and ask old Ellis what he can recollect about it."

That had the effect I hoped for.

"Old Ellis!" he growled. "First time ever I hear anyone say old Ellis were any use for any purpose. I should 'a thought you know'd better than that yourself, Master Reginald. What do you suppose old Ellis can tell you better'n what I can about Betton Wood, and what call have he got to be put afore me, I should like to know. His father warn't woodman on the place: he were ploughman—that's what he was, and so anyone could tell you what knows; anyone could tell you that, I says."

"Just so, Mitchell, but if you know all about Betton Wood and won't tell me, why, I must do the next best I can, and try and get it out of somebody else; and old Ellis has been on the place very nearly as long as you have."

"That he ain't, not by eighteen months! Who says I wouldn't tell you nothing about the Wood? I ain't no objection; only it's a funny kind of a tale, and 'taint right to my thinkin' it should be all about the parish. You, Lizzie, do you keep in your kitchen a bit. Me and Master Reginald wants to have a word or two private. But one thing I'd like to know, Master Reginald, what come to put you upon asking about it to-day?"

"Oh! well, I happened to hear of an old saying about something that walks in Betton Wood. And I wondered if that had anything to do with its being cleared away: that's all."

"Well, you was in the right, Master Reginald, however you come to hear of it, and I believe I can tell you the rights of it better than anyone in this parish, let alone old Ellis. You see it came about this way: that the shortest road to Allen's Farm laid through the Wood, and when we was little my poor mother she used to go so many times in the week to the farm to fetch a quart of milk, because Mr. Allen what had the farm then under your father, he was a good man, and anyone that had a young family to bring up, he was willing to allow 'em so much in the week. But never you mind about that now. And my poor mother she never liked to go through the Wood, because there was a lot of talk in the place, and sayings like what you spoke about just now. But every now and again, when she happened to be late with her work, she'd have to take the short road through the Wood, and as sure as ever she did, she'd come home in a rare state. I remember her and my father talking about it, and he'd say, 'Well, but it can't do you no harm, Emma,' and she'd say, 'Oh! but you haven't an idear of it, George. Why, it went right through my head,' she says, 'and I came over all bewildered-like, and as if I didn't know where I was. You see, George,' she says, 'it ain't as if you was about there in the dusk. You always goes there in the daytime, now don't you?' and he says: 'Why, to be sure I do; do you take me for a fool?' And so they'd go on. And time passed by, and I think it wore her out, because, you understand, it warn't no use to go for the milk not till the afternoon, and she wouldn't never send none of us children instead, for fear we should get a fright. Nor she wouldn't tell us about it herself. 'No,' she says, 'it's bad enough for me. I don't want no one else to go through it, nor yet hear talk about it.' But one time I recollect she says, 'Well, first it's a rustling-like all along in the bushes, coming very quick, either towards me or after me according to the time, and then there comes this scream as appears to pierce right through from the one ear to the other, and the later I am coming through, the more like I am to hear it twice over; but thanks be, I never yet heard it the three times.' And then I asked her, and I says: 'Why, that seems like someone walking to and fro all the time, don't it?' and she says, 'Yes, it do, and whatever it is she wants, I can't think': and I says, 'Is it a woman, mother?' and she says, 'Yes, I've heard it is a woman.'

"Anyway, the end of it was my father he spoke to your father, and told him the Wood was a bad wood. 'There's never a bit of game in it, and there's never a bird's nest there,' he says, 'and it ain't no manner of use to you.' And after a lot of talk, your father he come and see my mother about it, and he see she warn't one of these silly women as gets nervish about nothink at all, and he

made up his mind there was somethink in it, and after that he asked about in the neighbourhood, and I believe he made out somethink, and wrote it down in a paper what very like you've got up at the Court, Master Reginald. And then he gave the order, and the Wood was stubbed up. They done all the work in the daytime, I recollect, and was never there after three o'clock."

"Didn't they find anything to explain it, Mitchell? No bones or anything of that kind?"

"Nothink at all, Master Reginald, only the mark of a hedge and ditch along the middle, much about where the quickset hedge run now; and with all the work they done, if there had been anyone put away there, they was bound to find 'em. But I don't know whether it done much good, after all. People here don't seem to like the place no better than they did afore."

"That's about what I got out of Mitchell," said Philipson, "and as far as any explanation goes, it leaves us very much where we were. I must see if I can't find that paper."

"Why didn't your father ever tell you about the business?" I said.

"He died before I went to school, you know, and I imagine he didn't want to frighten us children by any such story. I can remember being shaken and slapped by my nurse for running up that lane towards the Wood when we were coming back rather late one winter afternoon: but in the daytime no one interfered with our going into the Wood if we wanted to—only we never did want."

"Hm!" I said, and then, "Do you think you'll be able to find that paper that your father wrote?"

"Yes," he said, "I do. I expect it's no farther away than that cupboard behind you. There's a bundle or two of things specially put aside, most of which I've looked through at various times, and I know there's one envelope labelled Betton Wood: but as there was no Betton Wood any more, I never thought it would be worth while to open it, and I never have. We'll do it now, though."

"Before you do," I said (I was still reluctant, but I thought this was perhaps the moment for my disclosure), "I'd better tell you I think Mitchell was right when he doubted if clearing away the Wood had put things straight." And I gave the account you have heard already: I need not say Philipson was interested. "Still there?" he said. "It's amazing. Look here, will you come out there with me now, and see what happens?"

"I will do no such thing," I said, "and if you knew the feeling, you'd be glad to walk ten miles in the opposite direction. Don't talk of it. Open your envelope, and let's hear what your father made out."

He did so, and read me the three or four pages of jottings which it contained. At the top was written a motto from Scott's *Glenfinlas*, which seemed to me well-chosen:

"Where walks, they say, the shrieking ghost."

Then there were notes of his talk with Mitchell's mother, from which I extract only this much. "I asked her if she never thought she saw anything to account for the sounds she heard. She told me, no more than once, on the darkest evening she ever came through the Wood; and then she seemed forced to look behind her as the rustling came in the bushes, and she thought she saw something all in tatters with the two arms held out in front of it coming on very fast, and at that she ran for the stile, and tore her gown all to flinders getting over it."

Then he had gone to two other people whom he found very shy of talking. They seemed to think, among other things, that it reflected discredit on the parish. However, one, Mrs. Emma Frost, was prevailed upon to repeat what her mother had told her. "They say it was a lady of title that married twice over, and her first husband went by the name of Brown, or it might have been Bryan ("Yes, there were Bryans at the Court before it came into our family," Philipson put in), and she removed her neighbour's landmark: leastways she took in a fair piece of the best pasture in Betton parish what belonged by rights to two children as hadn't no one to speak for them, and they say years after she went from bad to worse, and made out false papers to gain thousands of pounds up in London, and at last they was proved in law to be false, and she would have been tried and put to death very like, only she escaped away for the time. But no one can't avoid the curse that's laid on them that removes the landmark, and so we take it she can't leave Betton before someone take and put it right again."

At the end of the paper there was a note to this effect. "I regret that I cannot find any clue to previous owners of the fields adjoining the Wood. I do not hesitate to say that if I could discover their representatives, I should do my best to indemnify them for the wrong done to them in years now long past: for it is undeniable that the Wood is very curiously disturbed in the manner described by the people of the place. In my present ignorance alike of the extent of the land wrongly appropriated, and of the rightful owners, I am reduced to keeping a separate note of the profits derived from this part of the estate, and my custom has been to apply the sum that would represent the annual yield of about five acres to the common benefit of the parish and to charitable uses: and I hope that those who succeed me may see fit to continue this practice."

So much for the elder Mr. Philipson's paper. To those who, like myself, are readers of the State Trials it will have gone far to illuminate the situation. They will remember how between the years 1678 and 1684 the Lady Ivy, formerly Theodosia Bryan, was alternately Plaintiff and Defendant in a series of trials in which she was trying to establish a claim against the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's for a considerable and very valuable tract of land in Shadwell: how in the last of those trials, presided over by L.C.J. Jeffreys, it was proved up to the hilt that the deeds upon which she based her claim were forgeries executed under her orders: and how, after an information for perjury and forgery was issued against her, she disappeared completely— so completely, indeed, that no expert has ever been able to tell me what became of her.

Does not the story I have told suggest that she may still be heard of on the scene of one of her earlier and more successful exploits?

"THAT," said my friend, as he folded up his papers, "is a very faithful record of my one extraordinary experience. And now—"

But I had so many questions to ask him, as for instance, whether his friend had found the proper owner of the land, whether he had done anything about the hedge, whether the sounds were ever heard now, what was the exact title and date of his pamphlet, etc., etc., that bed-time came and passed, without his having an opportunity to revert to the Literary Supplement of *The Times*.

[THANKS TO the researches of Sir John Fox, in his book on *The Lady Ivie's Trial* (Oxford, 1929), we now know that my heroine died in her bed in 1695, having— heaven knows how— been acquitted of the forgery, for which she had undoubtedly been responsible.]

———————

17: A Wagner Matinee

Willa Cather

1873-1947

Everybody's Magazine, March 1904

I RECEIVED one morning a letter, written in pale ink on glassy, blue-lined notepaper, and bearing the postmark of a little Nebraska village. This communication, worn and rubbed, looking as though it had been carried for some days in a coat pocket that was none too clean, was from my Uncle Howard and informed me that his wife had been left a small legacy by a bachelor relative who had recently died, and that it would be necessary for her to go to Boston to attend to the settling of the estate. He requested me to meet her at the station and render her whatever services might be necessary. On examining the date indicated as that of her arrival I found it no later than tomorrow. He had characteristically delayed writing until, had I been away from home for a day, I must have missed the good woman altogether.

The name of my Aunt Georgiana called up not alone her own figure, at once pathetic and grotesque, but opened before my feet a gulf of recollection so wide and deep that, as the letter dropped from my hand, I felt suddenly a stranger to all the present conditions of my existence, wholly ill at ease and out of place amid the familiar surroundings of my study. I became, in short, the gangling farm boy my aunt had known, scourged with chilblains and bashfulness, my hands cracked and sore from the corn husking. I felt the knuckles of my thumb tentatively, as though they were raw again. I sat again before her parlor organ, fumbling the scales with my stiff, red hands, while she, beside me, made canvas mittens for the huskers.

The next morning, after preparing my landlady somewhat, I set out for the station. When the train arrived I had some difficulty in finding my aunt. She was the last of the passengers to alight, and it was not until I got her into the carriage that she seemed really to recognize me. She had come all the way in a day coach; her linen duster had become black with soot, and her black bonnet gray with dust, during the journey. When we arrived at my boardinghouse the landlady put her to bed at once and I did not see her again until the next morning.

Whatever shock Mrs. Springer experienced at my aunt's appearance she considerately concealed. As for myself, I saw my aunt's misshapen figure with that feeling of awe and respect with which we behold explorers who have left their ears and fingers north of Franz Josef Land, or their health somewhere along the Upper Congo. My Aunt Georgiana had been a music teacher at the Boston Conservatory, somewhere back in the latter sixties. One summer, while visiting in the little village among the Green Mountains where her ancestors

had dwelt for generations, she had kindled the callow fancy of the most idle and shiftless of all the village lads, and had conceived for this Howard Carpenter one of those extravagant passions which a handsome country boy of twenty-one sometimes inspires in an angular, spectacled woman of thirty. When she returned to her duties in Boston, Howard followed her, and the upshot of this inexplicable infatuation was that she eloped with him, eluding the reproaches of her family and the criticisms of her friends by going with him to the Nebraska frontier. Carpenter, who, of course, had no money, had taken a homestead in Red Willow County, fifty miles from the railroad. There they had measured off their quarter section themselves by driving across the prairie in a wagon, to the wheel of which they had tied a red cotton handkerchief, and counting off its revolutions. They built a dugout in the red hillside, one of those cave dwellings whose inmates so often reverted to primitive conditions. Their water they got from the lagoons where the buffalo drank, and their slender stock of provisions was always at the mercy of bands of roving Indians. For thirty years my aunt had not been further than fifty miles from the homestead.

But Mrs. Springer knew nothing of all this, and must have been considerably shocked at what was left of my kinswoman.

Beneath the soiled linen duster which, on her arrival, was the most conspicuous feature of her costume, she wore a black stuff dress, whose ornamentation showed that she had surrendered herself unquestioningly into the hands of a country dressmaker. My poor aunt's figure, however, would have presented astonishing difficulties to any dressmaker. Originally stooped, her shoulders were now almost bent together over her sunken chest. She wore no stays, and her gown, which trailed unevenly behind, rose in a sort of peak over her abdomen. She wore ill-fitting false teeth, and her skin was as yellow as a Mongolian's from constant exposure to a pitiless wind and to the alkaline water which hardens the most transparent cuticle into a sort of flexible leather.

I owed to this woman most of the good that ever came my way in my boyhood, and had a reverential affection for her. During the years when I was riding herd for my uncle, my aunt, after cooking the three meals-the first of which was ready at six o'clock in the morning-and putting the six children to bed, would often stand until midnight at her ironing board, with me at the kitchen table beside her, hearing me recite Latin declensions and conjugations, gently shaking me when my drowsy head sank down over a page of irregular verbs. It was to her, at her ironing or mending, that I read my first Shakespeare', and her old textbook on mythology was the first that ever came into my empty hands.

She taught me my scales and exercises, too-on the little parlor organ, which her husband had bought her after fifteen years, during which she had not so much as seen any instrument, but an accordion that belonged to one of the Norwegian farmhands. She would sit beside me by the hour, darning and counting while I struggled with the "Joyous Farmer," but she seldom talked to me about music, and I understood why. She was a pious woman; she had the consolations of religion and, to her at least, her martyrdom was not wholly sordid. Once when I had been doggedly beating out some easy passages from an old score of Euryanthe I had found among her music books, she came up to me and, putting her hands over my eyes, gently drew my head back upon her shoulder, saying tremulously, "Don't love it so well, Clark, or it may be taken from you. Oh, dear boy, pray that whatever your sacrifice may be, it be not that."

When my aunt appeared on the morning after her arrival she was still in a semi-somnambulant state. She seemed not to realize that she was in the city where she had spent her youth, the place longed for hungrily half a lifetime. She had been so wretchedly train-sick throughout the journey that she bad no recollection of anything but her discomfort, and, to all intents and purposes, there were but a few hours of nightmare between the farm in Red Willow County and my study on Newbury Street. I had planned a little pleasure for her that afternoon, to repay her for some of the glorious moments she had given me when we used to milk together in the straw-thatched cowshed and she, because I was more than usually tired, or because her husband had spoken sharply to me, would tell me of the splendid performance of the Huguenots she had seen in Paris, in her youth. At two o'clock the Symphony Orchestra was to give a Wagner program, and I intended to take my aunt; though, as I conversed with her I grew doubtful about her enjoyment of it. Indeed, for her own sake, I could only wish her taste for such things quite dead, and the long struggle mercifully ended at last. I suggested our visiting the Conservatory and the Common before lunch, but she seemed altogether too timid to wish to venture out. She questioned me absently about various changes in the city, but she was chiefly concerned that she had forgotten to leave instructions about feeding half-skimmed milk to a certain weakling calf, "old Maggie's calf, you know, Clark," she explained, evidently having forgotten how long I had been away. She was further troubled because she had neglected to tell her daughter about the freshly opened kit of mackerel in the cellar, which would spoil if it were not used directly.

I asked her whether she had ever heard any of the Wagnerian operas and found that she had not, though she was perfectly familiar with their respective situations, and had once possessed the piano score of *The Flying Dutchman*. I

began to think it would have been best to get her back to Red Willow County without waking her, and regretted having suggested the concert.

From the time we entered the concert hall, however, she was a trifle less passive and inert, and for the first time seemed to perceive her surroundings. I had felt some trepidation lest she might become aware of the absurdities of her attire, or might experience some painful embarrassment at stepping suddenly into the world to which she had been dead for a quarter of a century.

But, again, I found how superficially I had judged her. She sat looking about her with eyes as impersonal, almost as stony, as those with which the granite Rameses in a museum watches the froth and fret that ebbs and flows about his pedestal-separated from it by the lonely stretch of centuries. I have seen this same aloofness in old miners who drift into the Brown Hotel at Denver, their pockets full of bullion, their linen soiled, their haggard faces unshaven; standing in the thronged corridors as solitary as though they were still in a frozen camp on the Yukon, conscious that certain experiences have isolated them from their fellows by a gulf no haberdasher could bridge.

We sat at the extreme left of the first balcony, facing the arc of our own and the balcony above us, veritable hanging gardens, brilliant as tulip beds. The matinee audience was made up chiefly of women. One lost the contour of faces and figures-indeed, any effect of line whatever-and there was only the color of bodices past counting, the shimmer of fabrics soft and firm, silky and sheer: red, mauve, pink, blue, lilac, purple, ecru, rose, yellow, cream, and white, all the colors that an impressionist finds in a sunlit landscape, with here and there the dead shadow of a frock coat. My Aunt Georgiana regarded them as though they had been so many daubs of tube-paint on a palette.

When the musicians came out and took their places, she gave a little stir of anticipation and looked with quickening interest down over the rail at that invariable grouping, perhaps the first wholly familiar thing that had greeted her eye since she had left old Maggie and her weakling calf. I could feel how all those details sank into her soul, for I had not forgotten how they had sunk into mine when. I came fresh from plowing forever and forever between green aisles of corn, where, as in a treadmill, one might walk from daybreak to dusk without perceiving a shadow of change. The clean profiles of the musicians, the gloss of their linen, the dull black of their coats, the beloved shapes of the instruments, the patches of yellow light thrown by the greenshaded lamps on the smooth, varnished bellies of the cellos and the bass viols in the rear, the restless, wind-tossed forest of fiddle necks and bows-I recalled how, in the first orchestra I had ever heard, those long bow strokes seemed to draw the heart out of me, as a conjurer's stick reels out yards of paper ribbon from a hat.

The first number was the *Tannhauser* overture. When the horns drew out the first strain of the Pilgrim's chorus my Aunt Georgiana clutched my coat sleeve. Then it was I first realized that for her this broke a silence of thirty years; the inconceivable silence of the plains. With the battle between the two motives, with the frenzy of the Venusberg theme and its ripping of strings, there came to me an overwhelming sense of the waste and wear we are so powerless to combat; and I saw again the tall, naked house on the prairie, black and grim as a wooden fortress; the black pond where I had learned to swim, its margin pitted with sun-dried cattle tracks; the rain-gullied clay banks about the naked house, the four dwarf ash seedlings where the dishcloths were always hung to dry before the kitchen door. The world there was the flat world of the ancients; to the east, a cornfield that stretched to daybreak; to the west, a corral that reached to sunset; between, the conquests of peace, dearer bought than those of war.

The overture closed; my aunt released my coat sleeve, but she said nothing. She sat staring at the orchestra through a dullness of thirty years, through the films made little by little by each of the three hundred and sixty-five days in every one of them. What, I wondered, did she get from it? She had been a good pianist in her day I knew, and her musical education had been broader than that of most music teachers of a quarter of a century ago. She had often told me of Mozart's operas and Meyerbeer's, and I could remember hearing her sing, years ago, certain melodies of Verdi's. When I had fallen ill with a fever in her house she used to sit by my cot in the evening-when the cool, night wind blew in through the faded mosquito netting tacked over the window, and I lay watching a certain bright star that burned red above the cornfield-and sing "Home to our mountains, O, let us return!" in a way fit to break the heart of a Vermont boy near dead of homesickness already.

I watched her closely through the prelude to *Tristan and Isolde*, trying vainly to conjecture what that seething turmoil of strings and winds might mean to her, but she sat mutely staring at the violin bows that drove obliquely downward, like the pelting streaks of rain in a summer shower. Had this music any message for her? Had she enough left to at all comprehend this power which had kindled the world since she had left it? I was in a fever of curiosity, but Aunt Georgiana sat silent upon her peak in Darien. She preserved this utter immobility throughout the number from *The Flying Dutchman*, though her fingers worked mechanically upon her black dress, as though, of themselves, they were recalling the piano score they had once played. Poor old hands! They had been stretched and twisted into mere tentacles to hold and lift and knead with; the palms unduly swollen, the fingers bent and knotted-on one of them a thin, worn band that had once been a wedding ring. As I pressed and

gently quieted one of those groping hands I remembered with quivering eyelids their services for me in other days.

Soon after the tenor began the "Prize Song," I heard a quick drawn breath and turned to my aunt. Her eyes were closed, but the tears were glistening on her cheeks, and I think, in a moment more, they were in my eyes as well. It never really died, then-the soul that can suffer so excruciatingly and so interminably; it withers to the outward eye only; like that strange moss which can lie on a dusty shelf half a century and yet, if placed in water, grows green again. She wept so throughout the development and elaboration of the melody.

During the intermission before the second half of the concert, I questioned my aunt and found that the "Prize Song" was not new to her. Some years before there had drifted to the farm in Red Willow County a young German, a tramp cowpuncher, who had sung the chorus at Bayreuth, when he was a boy, along with the other peasant boys and girls. Of a Sunday morning he used to sit on his gingham-sheeted bed in the hands' bedroom which opened off the kitchen, cleaning the leather of his boots and saddle, singing the "Prize Song," while my aunt went about her work in the kitchen.

She had hovered about him until she had prevailed upon him to join the country church, though his sole fitness for this step, insofar as I could gather, lay in his boyish face and his possession of this divine melody. Shortly afterward he had gone to town on the Fourth of July, been drunk for several days, lost his money at a faro table, ridden a saddled Texan steer on a bet, and disappeared with a fractured collarbone. All this my aunt told me huskily, wanderingly, as though she were talking in the weak lapses of illness.

"Well, we have come to better things than the old *Trovatore* at any rate, Aunt Georgie?" I queried, with a well-meant effort at jocularity.

Her lip quivered and she hastily put her handkerchief up to her mouth. From behind it she murmured, "And you have been hearing this ever since you left me, Clark?" Her question was the gentlest and saddest of reproaches.

The second half of the program consisted of four numbers from the *Ring*, and closed with Siegfried's funeral march. My aunt wept quietly, but almost continuously, as a shallow vessel overflows in a rainstorm. From time to time her dim eyes looked up at the lights which studded the ceiling, burning softly under their dull glass globes; doubtless they were stars in truth to her. I was still perplexed as to what measure of musical comprehension was left to her, she who had heard nothing but the singing of gospel hymns at Methodist services in the square frame schoolhouse on Section Thirteen for so many years. I was wholly unable to gauge how much of it had been dissolved in soapsuds, or worked into bread, or milked into the bottom of a pail.

The deluge of sound poured on and on; I never knew what she found in the shining current of it; I never knew how far it bore her, or past what happy islands. From the trembling of her face I could well believe that before the last numbers she had been carried out where the myriad graves are, into the gray, nameless burying grounds of the sea; or into some world of death vaster yet, where, from the beginning of the world, hope has lain down with hope and dream with dream and, renouncing, slept.

The concert was over; the people filed out of the hall chattering and laughing, glad to relax and find the living level again, but my kinswoman made no effort to rise. The harpist slipped its green felt cover over his instrument; the flute players shook the water from their mouthpieces; the men of the orchestra went out one by one, leaving the stage to the chairs and music stands, empty as a winter cornfield.

I spoke to my aunt. She burst into tears and sobbed pleadingly.

"I don't want to go, Clark, I don't want to go!"

I understood. For her, just outside the door of the concert hall, lay the black pond with the cattle-tracked bluffs; the tall, unpainted house, with weather-curled boards; naked as a tower, the crook-backed ash seedlings where the dishcloths hung to dry; the gaunt, molting turkeys picking up refuse about the kitchen door.

18: Real People

Wadsworth Camp

1879-1936

Collier's Weekly, 9 July 1921

ELISE GLANCED indifferently at her brother Ransome's sullen face.

"Do you know," he asked, "that Tony Brown is arriving for dinner?"

She nodded.

"Guess why he's coming?" he persisted.

"Yes, Ransome. Mother must have spoken to you too. I fancy he's going to ask me to marry him."

She looked, a trifle puzzled, beyond his shoulders across the formal garden of Broadmeadows. What was the matter with Ransome? She had noticed that sullen glow in his eyes before— scarcely a Carter quality, or hardly to be explained by this prospect of her marriage to a man with whom she had never been on terms even approaching intimacy. For that matter, she had never been on such terms with any male. How could she have been? For the grumbling or malicious comment of the town wasn't wholly unjustified.

"It's quite absurd," you would hear. "They're actually kowtowed to like royalty. When Old Lady Carter enters a room she might be the Empress of Half the World. No heir to a throne ever had the manner of young Ransome Carter. Elise! Give you my word, in this wide open, high-flying day, she's more guarded than a princess of the blood; and, hang it all, they behave as if this ridiculous damn foolishness was no more than their right."

In Elise and her brother, however, the envious were forced to admit, had culminated generations of carefully selected marriage, of formal rearing, of a habit of exceptional wealth, of an increasing custom of repression and retirement; and their mother took pains to see her children lost nothing from the past, for Mr. Carter had long since been conquered by the impertinent democracy of death. What, therefore, could Ransome find out of the way in a marriage arranged with so suitable a house as that of the New England Browns?

He paused, staring at her tall, slender, white-robed figure, too immobile for her youth; at her wistful face, whose fineness was transformed into delicacy by the dissonance of her heavy black hair and her dark eyes. These, indeed, suggested a compelling warmth where, apparently, merely a stubborn frigidity existed; and it may have occurred to him that a strain of coarser blood would have been useful in her veins; that the Carter system of selective marriages had culminated almost too finely in this inanimate girl of twenty.

"Poor little sister," he mused. She responded to a slight curiosity. Why this extraordinary and unasked sympathy? "Something wrong with Tony?" she asked. "Tell mother."

He laughed. "Nothing wrong. Quite all right. About as good as the sumptuous Carters."

She interrupted him; she felt she had to. "Ransome! You're not ill?"

"Rotten sick," he growled, swinging on his heels.

Revolt! It sounded like insubordination in the house of Carter, and she became alarmed. Through her coldness stole a tiny warmth. Perhaps it was that stealthy and infrequently experienced invasion of an emotion that made her afraid.

A moment later she had confirmation. There was, in fact, a tentative insubordination at Broadmeadows, for a hack from the village, proletarian in appearance and sound, scurried along the driveway.

"Who could that possibly be?" she asked.

Ransome flushed. "Chap I told to come. Aviator. Taxied me over to Cuba last month. Ran into him in town the other day, and he wanted to show me a model of some invention or other. Make flying as safe as perambulating—"

She yawned. "Don't they all say that? Why not play the races?"

"You're like mother," he grunted.

"And does she know that you're entering finance?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "No reason she shouldn't, but she won't be down before dinner—"

The cab paused at the foot of the terrace, and from its rusty depths emerged a tall, thickset youth clothed in slightly too-noticeable checks. He came forward, carrying a wooden box under his arm.

"Greetings, Mr. Carter!"

Certainly there was no affected softness about his resonant voice; Ransome glanced anxiously aloft.

"Oh! You've brought the thingumajig! If you don't mind, we'll take it to the library. Be quite untroubled there."

The big young man paused by Elise's chair. Out of a good-looking, wind-coarsened face he smiled in friendly fashion down at her. "Is this your sister?"

"Oh, yes—"

Elise glanced up, startled.

"Glad to meet you," the young man said cordially. "I've seen your pictures in the papers often enough to recognize you."

He stretched out his hand. She failed to notice it. Then, before she had any idea what was happening, she felt her fingers absorbed by a coarse, broad grasp that crushed and hurt.

"My name's Withers— Walter Withers."

She managed a change of expression— nearly a smile. She was glad to have her fingers back. She stared at them, their customary whiteness destroyed by patches of red. From the hall, to which the two men had gone, escaped Withers's deep and unaffected tones: "Some looker, your sister, Carter! They don't make too many like her—"

She continued to stare at ,her hand. One really knew nothing about such people. It was an experience— a trifle painful— to be instructed.

ELISE and her mother came down the great staircase to Ransome and Tony, who waited in the hall.

Neither from Elise nor Tony, during the dinner which persisted interminably, escaped the slightest recognition of courtship. Behind the white indifference of the girl, however, lurked a startled curiosity. How were such things done? She rather shrank from the painful, probably fallacious excitements of the popular novels her maid recommended, and which she didn't trouble to discuss with her mother. Tony scarcely helped her to an answer. He seemed interested only in Mrs. Carter's favorite charities, discussing them with high, rapid accents acquired at Oxford and polished during an occasional season in London. An inappreciable mustache mocked his size, for he was all of six feet, and, at thirty, well-proportioned; so that, as a mate, he would be, unquestionably, approved by the world.

After dinner, although it was quite warm, Elise threw a scarf over her shoulders, wondering that she should need it. Mrs. Carter didn't care to go out. Ransome did, lingering with a curious stubbornness until a servant glided to the terrace bringing a message rather obviously from the throne.

Doubtfully she watched her brother go. She felt herself invaded by a withering cold. She drew the scarf closer about her shoulders. In a moment the mystery would be unfolded. A man was going to ask her hand in marriage. Why didn't Ransome want him to do it?

Tony finished his coffee, replaced the cup on a table, lighted a cigarette, rose, and glanced down at her. She couldn't look at him, so she failed to see the warmth of his eyes or the anxious movement of his hand. "Elise! Do you. think you could ever possibly learn to put up with me?"

She felt a sting of anger, like a lash across her face. It ought not to have come like that. She had an envy for the amorous technique of the books, but she was also conscious of the nearby, gaping house windows. She stood up, slowly, gracefully, and strolled into a shrubbery-bordered alley down which the rising moon peered, saffron, enormous, inquisitive.

"I say, what's up, Elise? I've not blundered?"

Tony was at her heels. She turned slowly, facing him, her anger, her coldness, routed by a reluctant, apprehensive warmth. In a moment it would be this man's right to take her in his arms.

"How could I possibly love you, Tony?" she asked lightly. "We've been good friends, I know, but—"

"Quite appreciate all that," he said quickly, puffing at his cigarette. "Realize how difficult it is, but you're awfully jolly to me, Elise; and your mother doesn't mind the idea. If you'd take time to get accustomed— mean, if you'd give a chap a word of hope— terrific honor to ask, and all that— hanged if I know how to express it—"

She laughed nervously. "Thanks, Tony. You're right about mother, so I suppose one tries."

With an involuntary motion she shrank back. This new warmth seemed urging her to a defensive attitude. Through the inquisitive moonlight she observed him narrowly; but he, watching her, merely tossed his cigarette aside, lifted one of her hands gently, gave it a fugitive touch with his lips, and spoke measured words of gratitude. "Happiest duty to see you never regret it, dear old Elise," he finished.

She relaxed, shamefully aware that she would have liked it better if Tony had grasped at her hand with the painful impetuosity of Ransome's inventor. But, of course, one's own kind never did such things.

One's own kind, instead, sat beneath the random scrutiny of the house windows.

That night, moreover, Ransome irritated her as he had never done. He slipped into her sitting room and waved her maid away. "So it's settled," he sneered, "and you're cooked for life— done up Brown, what?"

"Rather obvious," she remarked, "you're seeing too much of your financial genius in superb checks."

"Do you good if you could too," he muttered.

There was a real appeal in her dark and normally inscrutable eyes. She wanted to ask him: "Brother, oughtn't Tony to have tried to touch my lips?" What she actually managed was: "Why don't you want me to marry Tony, Ransome?"

He took her hand and led her to a mirror. For a moment they stared at themselves in the gold-framed glass.

"Well?" she whispered. "Tarred with the same brush. That's why I'm not crazy about him."

She summoned her maid and drove Ransome out, but the pretty, full-blooded servant didn't ease her misgivings. She knew what was in the wind, and couldn't quite repress her excitement, drifting into scattered

reminiscences of her own brief skirmish with love. She affected to brush her eyes.

"He treated me like the dirt beneath his feet, Miss Elise, but, believe me, it was worth it."

Elise yawned. Too bad Ransome wasn't by to hear, for evidently the girl was human also in the mold of Withers.

"I'll never forget the night he asked me, Miss Elise. You just naturally can't forget that first kiss—"

Elise yawned. "No? I'm tired. Don't bother about the lights. Good night."

THAT WASN'T the first time Elise stared at her glass, and sometimes she had an uncomfortable suspicion her brother was wrong, for after an evening spent with Tony before the admiring eyes of the town, or alone with him in a secluded corner of the Carter town house, she would conceive a jealousy of her pretty maid whom some man had wanted; would experience shame that she couldn't love or make herself loved; and at such moments she combated an impulse to run to her mother and cry out: "I won't do it. I don't want to marry a model of deportment. Why should I marry a man I don't love?"

Withers walked up to her one day when she sat in her automobile outside a shop: "It's Miss Carter, isn't it?"

And again he took her fingers and submitted them to his agonizing good will. "I don't quite remember—"

But she stopped, knowing she was lying, for she remembered him sharply enough.

"I'm Wally Withers. I saw you at your country place a few weeks ago."

She smiled. "Of course. You're revolutionizing flying, or something."

"*And* something," he laughed. "Make it so safe a child could bring a busload back from Bernini without spilling a single souse."

His good humor defeated her instinct to withdraw to an unapproachable distance. She couldn't help laughing back.

His face became serious, apologetic. "Sorry. I know I ought to throttle down my tongue when I talk to you."

"I don't see why—"

He pretended to glance anxiously around. He indicated the liveried backs of the two men on the front seat.

"My word!" he drawled under his breath with studied affectation. "Hope those jolly old statues didn't hear me."

She had an ugly feeling that he mocked Ransome or Tony, but he gave her no opportunity for rebuke. The traffic broke. He sprang in, slammed the door,

and sat coolly down beside her. His smile was daring, but she was quite sure he didn't mean to mock her.

"Can't let you fly away without asking pardon. You see, I got brought up in an airplane back yard."

His pleasant expression faded. His face became serious. "But you watch. I'll make a landing in the goldenrod yet."

There was a warm and intriguing quality about his open desire to please her; yet she was glad she had chosen the landaulet, for no one was likely to detect his bulky figure in its depths. By the time they had reached Fifty-ninth Street she had absorbed a number of the epic adventures of a veteran aviator.

As he stepped out at Fifty-ninth Street she thrust her hands purposefully into her muff.

"It's been a treat to see you, I'll announce from the altitude record," he said warmly.

With a premonitory shudder, in order to hurry him away, she accepted his persistent hand.

"I used to think," he enthused, "that people like you couldn't be quite human."

"I fancy," she said, "we're all more or less that."

IN THE HALL she ran across Ransome, restless as usual.

"Where you been? Trousseauing?"

"Only partly," she answered. "Much more partly, becoming acquainted with your genius inventor."

He stared. "Withers?"

"Why not? You know you said it would be a good thing if I could see more of him. Perhaps you meant hear more. Congratulate me. I've done both— I'll announce from the altitude record."

He turned on her. "Stop laughing, or laugh at him all you please, but not at what he stands for."

"Seems to me one stands for him," she mocked. "Already he's taught me a lot of things— I'll announce from the altitude record."

"He's a darn shot more of a he-man than Tony or I."

She nodded. "You'd like me to agree?"

"At least," he hurried on, "he's shown me there are people in the world who say what they think, go where they please, and do what they choose. I'm trying to learn to know some of them— surreptitiously. Right people mustn't hear about it. Wouldn't approve. Get back to mother. The more I see of real people the more I hate the way I drone along. Own up, Elise, we're about as real and useful as a pair of jelly molds. We do as we're jolly well told."

Her breath came quickly. Unaccustomed color flooded her face. "You mean I've no business marrying Tony?"

After a momentary hesitation he accepted her challenge. "You've no business marrying Tony or any man unless you love him. Do you love Tony?"

She answered wistfully: "I— I don't know. How should I?"

"How should you!" he cried. "And you've been engaged two months or more. Can you fancy a real man— take Withers, since you choose to laugh at him— can you fancy him letting his fiancee run two months without knowing whether she wanted to kiss or kill him?"

She was aware of a tightening of her throat, but she spoke easily, ironically: "Perhaps you'd rather I married your real man Withers."

"I'd rather see you married to a complete bust, just so you really loved him."

"Somebody been suggesting to our darling Ransome—"

He broke in, flushing angrily: "When it comes to me, I'll marry where I choose, and I'll marry a girl who'll love me and who'll be real enough to make me love her."

AFTER Mr. Withers's rough friendliness Tony seemed particularly unreal when he appeared that evening. He met Elise at the foot of the stairs, took her hand, and led her across the hall. "Does one dare say you are looking lovelier than ever to-night, my dear Elise?" he asked in his drawling voice that invariably seemed to her ears without meaning. "You know you are. Word of honor, you're breath-taking."

As a matter of fact, she felt it was true. When she dressed, her mirror had disclosed in the depths of her dark eyes a restlessness, perhaps caught from her brother. Within Tony's hand she moved her fingers slightly, involuntarily, and fancied a faint pressure from his; but they were at the entrance of the drawing room, where guests were gathered, and he let her hand go.

In the rear of a box at the opera; at a dance after, she received her share of Tony's meaningless chatter, of his chivalrous attention; and once or twice she nearly laughed at a wrong time, wondering how some of Withers's phrases would sound on his inappreciably mustached lips.

He lingered at the house. They sat in a corner of the dimly lit library, but Elise was on a lounge, and Tony's chair was not close. With perverse self-abandon she set herself deliberately to provoke him from his courtly attitude. She half closed her inscrutable eyes. She let her hand fall invitingly on a cushion. She turned slowly.

"Appalling, Tony, to picture that, unless something interferes, we'll be married within three months."

He did bend forward then, anxiously, and he touched the inviting hand. In anticipation she felt her fingers crushed, but his pressure failed to tighten. Hadn't he the strength? When he spoke his voice was not quite steady: "Dashed sorry it appalls you, Elise. My fault altogether, of course. Know I'm an awkward donkey; but just what do you mean, dear girl?"

Her eyes closed. "I don't know you, Tony," she whispered.

There was movement in the hall. Voices reached them, and they glanced up as Ransome strolled in. "I say! No idea of an invasion. Expected to find downstairs empty."

Tony arose. Elise yawned.

"No invasion," she said. "Who's with you?"

Ransome hesitated, glancing over his shoulder. A laugh, a trifle unrestrained, obviously embarrassed, penetrated the huge and shadowed room.

"Run along in, Withers," Tony directed. He attempted to make his voice amused. "It's the genius of the heavens— the man who is going to put a jitney plane in the very humblest homes."

Elise stared at Withers, smiling. "Please enter, great benefactor."

Withers obeyed, smiling back at her, glancing suspiciously at Tony, confessing his effort to appear at ease through a hasty fondling of his tie, a quick pull at his dinner coat. Patently uncomfortable himself, Ransome helped him out.

"Have business to talk with Withers. Financially interested in his show. Bully good show too. Talk somewheres else. Thought we might smother a drink."

"I'm just off," Tony said wearily. "Don't ring."

Elise arose and went with him to the door. His voice seemed a trifle wistful as he said good night. "You know you're pretty tired, Elise, and maybe a bit fanciful? You're off to bed now— instanter!"

"Tony! Please!" she begged. "At least the three months aren't up yet."

She shuddered to think that someday they would be. She shrank from being alone. To postpone the evil moment, she glanced in at the library and said good night. Withers sprang to his feet. "You're not going just because I've come. Miss Carter?"

She smiled indulgently. The man really wanted her to stay.

"Business—" Ransome began.

Elise turned her smile on him. "With your permission I'll attend to great affairs for half an hour, then I'm off."

But she heard nothing of affairs, great or small, listening instead to well-meant chatter from the benefactor, while Ransome's restlessness grew. She

paid little heed to that, although she could appreciate her brother's anxiety that she should have caught him bringing Withers to the house. The man's ambition to impress her, after weeks of Tony's impersonal courtesy, was vastly amusing; more than that, an anodyne for her crumbling nerves. What was his object? Did he honestly think she was "some looker"? Her weariness diminished. She reassured Ransome, who, when she said good night, followed her to the hall. "I'm not a tattle-tale, dear Ransome."

He glanced down. "Perhaps I oughtn't to have brought him. Seemed all right."

"Is," she said, and moved impulsively back to the door.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Withers. Come again when you've business to talk."

IT HADN'T occurred to her that the benefactor would accept that impulsive invitation which, she told herself, she had designed as a rebuke for her brother.

One day, however, Withers did under vastly disturbing circumstances, but much had intervened— a number of amusing meetings with him, for instance, when she was in the automobile alone. She hadn't sufficient faith in Providence not to suspect that the big man had considerately assisted, and always she was on the point of forbidding him to try that again, but she shrank from coloring with so much importance anything he might do. Coming, as such encounters naturally would, on the heels of Tony's aloof daily politenesses, they aroused in her soul a new confidence, a breathless type of happiness; for if the aviator could so frankly desire her, someone of her own kind might someday.

Then one afternoon he ventured to commence his adieu too soon, and with flaming cheeks she tore her fingers free.

"What's the matter?" he challenged her, and she thought she saw temper in his face. "You can't blame me. God made you too beautiful for any man to pass by."

She smiled, a real thrill at her bleak heart. Too beautiful for any man to pass by! Yet Tony, without a flutter, was doing it. "How flattering! Let's talk about the great invention."

He looked away, suddenly depressed, and wouldn't talk about it. He prepared to leave her.

"And really not any more," she said. "Inventions bring you to this neighborhood too much."

Sullenly he got out of the car.

BEFORE dinner that evening Mrs. Carter made an unaccustomed invasion of her room. "You're nearly ready, Elise?"

"Not quite. What is it, mother?"

"Nothing. I thought I'd see. Oh, yes. I really think it would be better for you not to drift downtown alone again."

Elise turned away. Surely she had taken Ransome's advice. She was becoming altogether human, for she realized her face was guilty. "Why, mother?"

"Because," Mrs. Carter said easily, "we're rather near a wedding. It would be better not. You won't be long?"

"Not long."

Yet she was. For some time she stared at her reflection, feeling a little ashamed, the least bit soiled. Yet it was worth it, well worth it to have been told she was too beautiful for any man to pass by. No matter what the source of her information, she commenced to believe it might be true. In her mind a resolution formed, flourished, and became like steel. Through the entire evening she was aware of that growth and hardening, so that when they were at home it was quite simple for her to say to Tony: "Don't go just yet. Come along and have a chat."

Her mother nodded approval and went upstairs. Elise led Tony to the scene of their usual impersonal conferences. "Smoke," she commanded him.

He obeyed with an unfamiliar reluctance, gazing at her curiously; and all at once, in the face of that unemotional scrutiny, she found she didn't know how to begin. He spoke softly. He seemed to have forgotten his cigarette. It burned, unheeded, in a tray. "Elise! Was it anything out of the ordinary you had to say?"

"What makes you ask that?" she temporized.

He bent over and took her hand: "You're not quite so appalled?"

She snatched her hand free, sprang to her feet, and stood facing him, her back to the fireplace, her shoulders squared, her chin up. "More, Tony! More! It won't do. I can't go through with it."

For a moment his face expressed shock, but almost immediately it resumed its habitual repression. "Elise!" he said quietly. "What are you talking about?"

She clasped her hands. At last she experienced sufficient warm emotion. "It's absurd. It— it's unbearable. I don't love you, and you don't love me. So we can't marry."

He turned and lifted his cigarette from the tray. He puffed at it once or twice. "Really, you know, you've no right to speak for anyone except your self. I mean, it should be left for me to say whether or not I love you."

"You don't need to say it," she whispered. "It's sufficiently obvious."

"Who's been talking to you?" he asked quietly.

Abruptly she turned her back to him.

"It's another obvious thing," he said, "that somebody has. Would you mind telling me who?"

"I mind being catechized," she said irritably. "I'm sorry, Tony, but I've made up my mind. Nothing can change it— nothing in the world."

He arose. "Then, Elise, I suppose I ought to go. One small catechism more first. Is there some other chap you love?"

Slowly she shook her head. Her voice was barely audible. "I think I'm incapable of loving anyone."

For a long time she didn't turn around, thinking he must still be in the room. When at last she realized she was alone she suffered an invasion of panic. Figuratively she drew back to a corner, waiting there, crouched in a defensive attitude, for the attack would come. Her mother would have to know; Tony's family; a tongue-wagging, jealous world. For it wasn't to be supposed Tony's pride hadn't been cut painfully enough. Undoubtedly he had wanted to marry her for what she was— a peculiarly fitting ornament for the house of Brown. Then to her in her corner strolled her brother.

"What you up so late for, Elise? Tony just torn himself away?"

She looked straight in his eyes. "I've taken your advice, Ransome. I've sent him away."

He stared back at her, gaping. "Talk up," he said at last.

"Steady, Ransome. A few weeks ago you were practically urging me to do just this."

"And you didn't," he reminded her, "but now you have."

He lighted a cigarette and smoked nervously. He seemed to have difficulty finding the words he wanted. "No secret," he muttered, "you've been making a fool of yourself. Wouldn't have believed it of you."

All at once she laughed. "So my attempts to be decent and human haven't been sufficiently surreptitious?"

"People have been talking," he said, not meeting her eyes. "Wouldn't have been so bad, except with a bird like that."

Her dark eyes twinkled. "What's the matter with the bird? Brother just finding out that great inventions are expensive luxuries?"

"Nothing to do with it," he said sullenly. "Wasn't his fault somebody else took out the same patent about the time Noah tried to make the ark fly."

"How much," she smiled, "has it cost our socialistic financier?"

"I can afford it," was all he would say. "Has nothing to do with his value as a social stimulant— a democratic eye-opener."

She responded to a perverse desire to annoy him as completely as he had irritated her.

"I quite agree with you. Since you think another man is necessary, why shouldn't I tell you it's your admired Withers? He's sure to land in the goldenrod— has snipped off a few blossoms already, hasn't he, generous promoter? Besides, I have in my own right rather more than enough for both."

"That's it," Ransome snapped; "don't you suppose he's thought of that?"

"I don't see," she said, "why, just because he's decent and human, just because he says what he thinks, goes where he pleases, and does what he chooses, he should be a hopeless scoundrel. You amaze me. What's become of your precious ideas?"

"They've hit rather close home," he grumbled.

"Directly at the pocketbook," she said.

"Directly at my sister," he answered. "The fact just won't fit the theory— makes it seem all out of shape."

She started for the door. "Then run and tattle to mother, although I do think it would be better to let Tony break the news."

He nodded slowly. "Maybe you're right. See here, Elise, you're not going to be such a little fool. It's impossible. It would be laughable if it were anyone but you."

"All your own fault, Ransome."

She flushed. She spoke daringly. "You once exclaimed: 'God help your children. After all, one can do something for oneself— you don't want another generation posing around the clubs, not daring to break a golf stick over a caddy's head, or get beastly drunk against the law—"

"Hush! Where did you learn such words? From Withers?"

"Or his great admirer, my renegade brother," she laughed.

Yet when she reached her room she was sufficiently serious, sufficiently angry at Tony because he had accepted his dismissal, as he had suffered the engagement, with a perfectly schooled tranquility; with Ransome, who had urged her to rebellion, then attacked her because she had put her feet on the path of liberty. Tarred with the same brush! And impossible to get the stain off! Was it, though? Withers's unpolished vehemence would be sufficiently cleansing. Her money would land him in the goldenrod. She had never really thought of him in that way before; his brusque impulsiveness had merely opened her eyes as her mother wouldn't, as Ransome couldn't. Rotten luck it couldn't have been done by someone more suitable!

But they had made her angry! Where once she had exhaled an icy passivity she now glowed with the fire of new-born, scarcely understood emotion. Was

such a thing possible— to escape from the rarefied air of her own kind, to breathe the dusty and delectable atmosphere of exciting reality?

IT WAS during the following afternoon that Withers chose to accept her random invitation. As she stared doubtfully at his card she was swept by a breath of conspiracy.

When she entered, Withers swung on her eagerly, offering his hands with an unrestrained appeal. His voice rose: "I was afraid you wouldn't come down at all."

She listened. The house was very quiet. Her mother, Elise remembered, was asleep in her room. Ransome was out. She felt dreadfully alone with the big man. She didn't dare accept his hands. She affected, indeed, not to see them. She bade him sit down, but he shook his head vehemently: "I've got to make a landing, Miss Carter."

She tried to laugh, but he stepped closer. She moved back until she leaned against a chair.

"I must touch earth," he hurried on. "Maybe I forgot myself yesterday, but you can't blame me. It must have been plain enough to you all along that I've been crazy about you since the first time I set eyes on you."

She found she couldn't laugh, couldn't even manage a smile. She was afraid of the sharp air of reality. She struggled to catch her breath: "Surely you know I— I'm supposed to be accounted for."

He nodded jerkily. "You wouldn't think much of me if I let that make any difference," he cried. "That kind of man! You'd better think. What is he? A tailor's dummy!"

He raised his powerful hands. "I could crack the heads of a squadron like him."

"What are you saying?" she said faintly. "Please don't talk that way."

The anger and anxiety of his face persisted, but he tried to make his voice persuasive. "Why are you afraid to let me touch you?"

She tried to hide the trembling of her hands. "You must really go," she murmured. "That's why I came down, to tell you not to come again—"

His temper broke. "Have you been figuring all along on making a wreck of me? Haven't you known we had to get to this show-down?"

With all her soul she was sorry she had come. Why was the great house so quiet? At last she made a sound like laughter, but it was unconvincing in her own ears.

"You're not asking me to marry you, Mr. Withers—"

His face grew redder. "What is there about that to make you laugh? I believe I'd try to get you if you were a queen on a throne. Don't laugh like that. I never thought you'd laugh at me."

She moved toward the door, stammering: "I— I'm trying not to."

The words seemed to sting his temper too sharply. He sprang after her and roughly grasped her shoulders. "You listen to me!"

She gave a cry. If he should dare— at least one of the house servants would come— Then she knew someone had entered the room, for, while Withers's grasp didn't slacken, his eyes stared furiously beyond her face. "Let me go," she cried hysterically.

"Not a bad idea," came Tony's calm voice. "I'm not intruding against your wishes, Elise?"

The huge hands didn't relax. "I— I'm glad, Tony; only do— do be careful—"

"Better take her advice," Withers threatened. "I came here to talk to Miss Carter alone. You get that clear?"

"Drop it now, my good chap." Withers frowned at Tony, who had stepped within Elise's vision. He did look helplessly like a tailor's model.

"Rotten uncomfortable here in your house, Elise. Must be done, eh, Withers?"

Withers's face became passionate. "You get out," he commanded, raising his fists.

Suddenly Tony reached and caught one of Withers's great arms. Elise felt herself freed, saw the aviator swing around and commence to move those powerful fists, good for cracking the head of a squadron of tailor's dummies.

"Look out, Tony!"

Withers lunged viciously. Tony stepped to one side. Withers's head jerked back— once, twice. Then he bent at the middle. Elise had a vague idea that Tony's arms had moved, saw a great rent appear in the back of his coat. Then Withers lay on the floor, his eyes looking queer, one temple discolored.

"Tony," she said, "you're all right?"

"On the contrary," he answered. "Silly thing to try with one's coat on. Apologies, Elise, but tell me what else was there to do?"

He stepped to the door and beckoned. A servant entered, eyebrows raised. Withers had struggled as far as his knees. Tony spoke to him: "Oh, yes. Want some more?"

Withers mumbled. "How far did I fall?"

The servant helped him up, led him toward the door. There he turned. "Mind my asking," he said, "if you're the masked wrestler?"

Tony shook his head. "Never wrestled. Always thought it a slow way to take one's fun."

Tony waited until the others were gone. Then he glanced at Elise. "Hope you weren't hurt by the brute."

She laughed, honestly enough this time. "If he's a brute, what are you?"

"Some sort of a dashed fool, I expect, since you want to turn me loose. Had a talk with Ransome a while ago. Wouldn't have believed it, Elise. Mustn't mind, after what's just happened, my saying you're a little of a dashed fool too. What about taking me on for an other round?"

She shook her head.

"Elise! Haven't you any heart at all?"

She felt his arms around her. He had no more right than that other man; had never had any right.

"Let me go."

But he held her tighter. She hadn't dreamed he could hold one so tight, and it was all wrong. Her eyes were closed. She tried desperately to push him away. Her hand struck his cheek too hard, and she opened her eyes and saw a red patch there, and was contrite. But she also detected something in his glance that was reassuring— an unbelievable, a thrilling thing; and she couldn't face it.

"I've tried to be decent," she heard him say. "I've tried to give you time to get used to me, to like me a little. See here, Elise, it's no use. I've been crazy about you since the first time I set eyes on you."

She dared look at him again. The very words of that violent man.

"I'm only human," he stumbled on.

"Don't," she begged. "I— I guess you'd better not be."

Then all at once her lips were crushed. What was it her maid had gossiped? The girl was right enough. Unforgettable!

"I'm not at all what you think," she whispered, "what anyone thinks me, because, for one thing, I'd like you to kiss me again."

"Now— wait, Tony. I won't be an ornament. I insist on being a wife. You shall swear at me when I'm dull at bridge. You must swing a golf club at me when I don't please you. And— oh, yes— you'll go on shocking parties, won't you? I mean, I shan't marry you unless we can be decent, real people."

"Quite human, you mean."

She looked down. "I believe we're going to be happy, really happy, Tony, aren't we?"

He touched the cheek she had unintentionally bruised. He smiled.

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19: When the Cuckoo Called

H. D. Umbstaetter

1851-1913

The Black Cat, July 1900

THE announcement that London music hall audiences are losing their heads and hearts over "The Girl with the Guitar" causes Mr. Seymour Gaston to smile as he looks down upon the world from his offices on the nineteenth floor of a New York sky-scraper. Mr. Gaston is an ingenious, much traveled young bachelor with a history and a fortune. He recently invented a folding fire-escape, which also has a history and in which another fortune is said to await him. And "The Girl with the Guitar" is one of the two Zillerthaler sisters, whose permanent address is unknown and who receive two hundred guineas a night for presenting their Tyrolean second-sight séance. To such an extent do these mysterious maidens from the mountains hypnotize the public that they appear nightly at four different music halls. At the Alhambra they open the performance at eight o'clock, after which they are rushed by their manager in an automobile to the stage door of the second music hall, where they appear at eight forty-five, and so on, winding up at the Aquarium at a few minutes before ten with a thousand dollars in their pockets for the evening's work.

When the curtain rises upon their ten-minute act it discloses a typical Tyrolean scene— dim mountains in the background, a sombre pine forest, a toylike, gabled cottage in the distance. The lights are low and the stage is empty. The orchestra begins almost inaudibly a simple melody in the minor key. Presently a rich voice, that raises doubt in the mind of the listener as to whether it is male or female, joins in. It is a song of love, a serenade. The lights grow dimmer. A new sound steals into the concerted music of voice and instruments; there are strange, bizarre chords and rippling arpeggios, and then the music is drowned in the burst of wild applause that greets the appearance of "The Girl with the Guitar." She bows modestly, the lights go up, the rich voice is heard again in a joyous yodel, and the sister, too, appears, dressed in the picturesque attire of an Alpine hunter. This artistically conceived prologue brings the audience into closer sympathy with what follows. "The Girl with the Guitar," unheeding the applause and the demonstrations of the male portion of the audience, seats herself at the extreme right of the stage near the footlights. The sister is led by the manager along a narrow platform projecting into the centre of the hall, where, after being blindfolded, she seats herself with her back to the stage, and the real performance begins, to the muted music of the orchestra and the sad, fantastic chords of the guitar. The second-sight seance progresses in the time-honored way, except that no word is spoken save by the blindfolded sister, who accurately names and describes, in

a clear, musical voice, each article as it is borrowed from the audience and held up in silence before the footlights by the manager, some thirty feet behind her back. "A gold watch with a picture of a lady on its face"; "a pair of pearl opera glasses"; "a half-crown piece with a hole in it"; and so on, the blindfolded girl describes the exhibits as though they were held out before her naked eyes. She never falters, never misses, and the puzzled look that comes to every face shows how completely she has mastered her art. But it is the strange, brilliant beauty and the fantastic music of "The Girl with the Guitar," who, seemingly unconscious of her surroundings, gazes idly across the stage, that hold the breathless attention of the audience. Music like hers has never before been heard from any instrument. It is absolutely unique; a new scale and new system of harmonica seem to have been discovered by this sombre-eyed girl. It is her weird, haunting melodies that trouble the mind with strange thoughts, and the impression of mystical, occult powers at work, produced by the performance, is really traceable to this music and the mysterious personality of the girl which pervades and dominates it all.

All this vividly recalls to Mr. Gaston a ten-minute drama of life in which he once played a part and which illustrates how a man can regain his lost peace of mind by being suddenly brought to the brink of eternity.

Four years ago, while he was managing the affairs of a large American enterprise in London, a cablegram announced to him one day that his business partner in the United States had robbed him of all he possessed. Brooding over his juined business, to which he had given ten years of his life and sacrificed his health, his peace of mind fled and he traveled aimlessly over the Continent in search of anything that might bring him sleep and help him to bury the past. The doctors sent him to Baden-Baden, but he soon found that the conventional watering-place, where one reads suffering in almost every face, proved an irritant to his insomnia. The more he came in contact with humanity the more he felt drawn toward Nature. So he started on a tour of the Black Forest. At Trieberg, the picturesque little village which stands on the edge of a great waterfall high up in the dark, pine-clothed mountains, he found pleasure for a few days in visiting the quaint cottages scattered through the surrounding wilderness where the cuckoo clocks, music-boxes and wood carvings are made that al- ways attract foreigners. The mountaineers carry these clocks and carvings on the back for miles down the winding, perilous pathways to a public exhibition hall at Trieberg in which is kept a full line of samples for the convenience of purchasers.

But the novelty of these scenes soon wore off, and on the third day after his arrival Gaston, craving excitement, bribed the custodian of this exhibition hall to set off all the clocks and instruments at intervals of one second. The

chorus of a thousand cuckoos, reinforced by the patriotic rendering of *Die Wacht am Rhein*, the *William Tell Overture* and *Die Lorelei* by scores of orchestrions and music-boxes, delighted him, but proved demoralizing to a party of American tourists bent on doing Europe in ten days. Mistaking their excited brandishing of alpen-stocks, umbrellas and *Baedekers* for demonstrations of approval, the keeper kept up the performance until the inexorable schedule dragged the prospective purchasers away. They had spent the ten minutes allotted to the Black Forest.

In his wanderings and search for adventure, Gaston came one day upon what seemed like an unused trail that led higher up the mountain from an almost impenetrable jumble of rocks and pines near the waterfall.

"The Witches' Path," exclaimed his landlord, when questioned, "and whoever follows it never returns." It might have an outlet in another valley beyond, he added, but, shaking his head, there were strange stories about the Witches' Path, and while he could not verify them he knew that no one of his guests who had essayed to explore it had ever come back.

Sick of chattering men and women, harrowed day and night by his troubles, Gaston rejoiced in the prospect of an adventure of any kind, and while he smiled at the suggestion of danger lurking in the recesses of the Witches' Path, he secretly hoped there might be. Life was not a joyful possession to Seymour Gaston in those days, and he cared little whether he lived or died. So, early the following morning, with a well-provisioned knapsack on his back and an alpenstock in his hand, he set out upon the Witches' Path. After ten hours of climbing, crawling, sliding and slipping over almost impassable rocks and through impossible thickets, the trail led into a stretch of forest so dense as to completely shut out the fading daylight, and the wanderer was glad to accept as a bed the thick, endless carpet of pine needles that lay stretched out before him. The following morning he resumed his journey and at noon discovered, high on the inountain side, what appeared like a gray toy-house hidden among the rocks and pines. After another hour of tiresome climbing he stood before a cottage built upon the very edge of an immense cleft. From far below echoed the hoarse booming of a mountain stream. His knock was answered by a short, white-bearded mountaineer with piercing gray eyes, who, upon learning that his visitor spoke German, received him hospitably with the remark that it was seldom indeed that visitors came his way to brighten the lonely lives of himself and niece, who, he added, lived by making cuckoo clocks. It required no urging on the part of Caspar Kollner, the cottager, to induce his guest to defer his return until the following day, and after supper, served by the mountaineer's attractive young niece, the tourist was equally willing to join his host in a pipe and game of *ecarte*, while the

young lady looked on and played weird airs upon her guitar. Whether it was the strange quality of her undeniable beauty and the sombre mystery of her eyes, or her music, Gaston soon lost interest in the game. Although there seemed little purpose or training in her half listless playing, the sounds seemed to hint at unfathomable things, at fancies such as Gaston supposed might visit the soul of one who had strayed from the paths of his fellow-men into an exotic, unhealthy world, of his own, where strange birds sang in a dusky, scented twilight. He played recklessly, lost steadily, and was repeatedly compelled to resort to the Bank of England notes in his wallet.

"You are in bad luck to-night. Shall we stop? You must be tired after your long tramp," at last suggested the host. Then, counting the money slowly and with evident pleasure, he handed to Graston all the latter had lost. It was promptly pushed back protestingly, whereupon Kollner exclaimed, "Never! The pleasure is mine; the money is yours. It is my custom to play for stakes to lend interest to the game, but the law of hospitality forbids my keeping what I win." So Gaston returned the money to his wallet and bade his generous host and hostess good-night. Kollner led him to a large, low-studded room on the upper floor in which every article of fumitiire was elaborately hand-carved.

"The masterpiece of my craft," exclaimed Kollner, as he pointed with pride to a mammoth cuckoo clock, fully four feet wide and reaching nearly to the ceiling. "But our proudest possession," he continued, as he led his guest through a tall French window upon a small veranda, "is this," pointing to a view that caused Gaston to gasp for breath. The balcony directly overhung the mighty gorge, and from the gulf of blackness far below rose the sound of the tumultuous stream, while an uncertain moon threw fantastic shadows over the towering peaks above. Most wonderful of all," continued Kollner, "is the echo, 'The Ghost of the Gorge' as it is called. You shall hear it at dawn." With that he wound up and set the big clock, adding, "When the cuckoo calls, rise and come to this balcony. My niece shall play from the rocks below and you will hear the spirit answer. Good-night! "

As on many other weary nights, sleep refused to come to G-aston. He lay for hours listening to the gurgle of the water and hearing in it echoes of the wild music of the guitar. Towards morning a feverish slumber came, from which he was aroused by the shrill "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" of the mechanical bird.

Clad in his pajamas he drowsily groped his way in the dusk towards the balcony. He had almost reached it when he overturned the chair which had served to keep the window half open during the night. In its outward fall it carried down the balcony with a crash and Gaston, horror-stricken, barely kept his balance by grasping the window casing. From the dark chasm rose the weird strains of the guitar, echoing through the gorge. The Lorelei was calling!

But her notes were drowned by the shrill creaking of the iron hinges upon which the balcony now swung to and fro below Gaston, and which, like a flash, told him he had been led to a man-trap of hellish ingenuity. Instantly horror gave way to anger and the instinct of self-defence roused him to action. For months he had been reckless of danger, almost courted death. Now he was seized with an overpowering desire to live. He turned from the window and began to dress hurriedly when a noise attracted his attention to the cuckoo clock. Was it a hideous delusion? No! The thing was actually moving towards the centre of the room! In another instant Kollner appeared from an adjoining room through a door which the clock had concealed, his eyes glaring fiendishly as they rested upon the empty bed. Then, as he turned and saw Gaston, his face became a mask of absolute fright and bewilderment. For a moment only he recoiled, then flung himself upon his guest with the fury of a beast. Each instantly realized that the struggle would be to the death. Frenzied by the miscarrying of his diabolical plot, the mountaineer struggled madly, blindly, for a grip that should enable him to hurl his adversary over the mighty precipice. Foiled again and again by the agility of Gaston and forced to the defensive, he turned towards the open door to escape. As he did so Gaston rushed upon him, pinned his arms to his sides, and pushed him inch by inch to the open window, and— Caspar Kollner reached the end of the Witches' Path! Ten minutes later Gaston found the niece quietly preparing breakfast. She looked surprised, but when he told her that her uncle and not he had an swered the Lorelei's call, she asked, with naive innocence, what he meant. It was only after he had threatened to hand her over to the police at Trieberg that she made this confession:—

SHE had been brought up by her uncle, who had invented the folding balcony, and who always engaged his guests in a game of cards. He invariably won because he had taught her as a child to signal, by means of notes and chords on the guitar, the cards held by his opponent. He thus learned if his guests were supplied with money, and to gain their full confidence returned all they had lost. He was enabled to set the man-trap from his room below. Although the gorge held the remains of thirty victims, it was his boast that he had never killed a man, that each had of his own free will walked into eternity.

Gaston had heard enough. He did not stop for breakfast. He left Trieberg the following evening and thoughts of his business troubles no longer occupied his mind. When he returned to America he set to work to retrieve his lost fortune, and the folding fire-escape, he tells his friends, was suggested by something he saw abroad.

Gaston does not claim the gift of second sight, but he knows, he says, that in the performance of the Zillerthalers, the weird strains produced by "The Girl with the Guitar" describe to her blindfolded sister the articles borrowed of the audience.

20: There Was a Lady

Frances Noyes Hart

1890-1943

The Saturday Evening Post, 18 Feb 1922

THERE is one point on which Larry Benedick's best friend and worst enemy and a lot of other less emphatic individuals are thoroughly and cordially agreed. Ask his closest female relative or his remotest business acquaintance or the man who plays an occasional hand of auction with him at the club why Benedick has never married, and they will one and all yield to sardonic mirth, and assure you that the woman who could interest that imperturbable individual has not yet been born— that he is without exception the coldest-hearted, hardest-headed bachelor who has ever driven fluttering debutantes and radiant ladies from the chorus into a state of utter and abject despair— that romance is anathema to him and sentiment an abomination.

"Benedick!" they will chorus with convincing unanimity. "My dear fellow, he's been immune since birth. He's never given any girl that lived or breathed a second thought— it's extremely doubtful if he ever gave one a first. You can say what you please about him, but this you can take as a fact; you know one man who is going down to the grave as single as the day he was born."

Well, you can take it as a fact if you care to, and it's more than likely that you and the rest of the world will be right. Certainly, no one would ever have called him susceptible, even at the age when any decent, normal young cub is ready to count the world well lost for an eyelash. But not our Benedick— no, long before the gray steel had touched the blue of his eyes and the black of his hair he had apparently found a use for it in an absolutely invulnerable strong box for what he was pleased to call his heart. Then as now, he had faced his world with curled lips and cool eyes— graceful and graceless, spoiled, arrogant, and indifferent, with more money and more brains and more charm and a better conceit of himself than any two men should have— and a wary and sceptical eye for the charming creatures who circled closer and closer about him. The things that he used to think and occasionally say about those circling enchantresses were certainly unromantic and unchivalrous to a degree. Rather an intolerable young puppy, for all his brilliant charm— and the years have not mellowed him to any perceptible extent. Hardly likely to fall victim to the wiles of any lady, according to his worst enemy and his best friend and the world in general. No, hardly. But there was a lady....

It wasn't yesterday that he first saw her— and it wasn't a hundred years ago, either. It was at Raoul's; if you are one of the large group of apparently intelligent people whose mania consists

in believing that there is only one place in the world that any one could possibly reside in, and that that place is about a quarter of a mile square and a mile and and a half long and runs up from a street called Forty-second on an island called Manhattan, you undoubtedly know Raoul's. Not a tea room— Heaven save the mark! Not a restaurant— God forbid! Something between the two; a small room, clean and shabby, fragrant with odours more delectable than flowers. No one is permitted to smoke at Raoul's, not even ladies, because the light blue haze might disturb the heavenly aroma, at once spiced and bland, that broods over the place like a benediction. Nothing quite like it anywhere else in America, those who have been there will tell you; nothing quite like it anywhere else in the world. It costs fine gold to sit at one of the little round tables in the corner, but mere gold cannot pay for what you receive. For to Raoul the preparation of food is an art and a ceremony and a ritual and a science— not a commercial enterprise. The only thing that he purchases with your gold is leisure in which to serve you better. So who are you to grudge it to him?

Larry Benedick lunched there every day of his life, when he was in New York, heedless of a steady shower of invitations. He lived then in one of those coveted apartments not a stone's throw from Raoul's brown door— a luxurious box of a place that one of the charming creatures (who happened to be his sister-in-law) had metamorphosed into a bachelor's paradise, so successfully that any bachelor should have frothed at the mouth with envy at the mere sight of it.

It had a fair-sized living room, with very masculine crash curtains, darned in brilliant colours, and rough gray walls and an old Florentine chest skillfully stuffed with the most expensive phonograph on the market, and rows and rows of beautifully bound books. There was a deep gray velvet sofa with three Chinese-red cushions in front of the small black fireplace (of course it wasn't possible to light a fire in it without retiring from the apartment with a wet towel tied around the head, crawling rather rapidly on the hands and knees because all the first-aid books state that any fresh air will be near the floor— but what of that? After all, you can't have everything!)— and there were wrought-iron lamps that threw the light at exactly the right angle for reading, and very good English etchings and very gay Viennese prints in red lacquer frames, and a really charming old Venetian mirror over the mantel. It was a perfect room for a fastidious young man, and Benedick loathed it with an awful loathing.

"All the elusive charm of a window in a furniture shop," he remarked pensively to his best friend— but at least he refrained from destroying the pretty sister-in-law's transports of altruistic enthusiasm, and left it grimly

alone, keeping his eyes averted from its charms as frequently as possible, and leaving for South Carolina or northern Canada on the slightest provocation— or else swinging off to Raoul's at twelve o'clock with a feeling of profound relief, when what he fantastically referred to as "business" kept him chained to New York and the highly successful living room.

"Business" for Benedick consisted largely of a series of more or less amicable colloquies with a gray-faced, incisive gentleman in a large, dark, shining office, and the even more occasional gift of his presence at those convivial functions known as board meetings. His father, long dead, had been imprudent enough to sow the wind of financial speculation, and his unworthy son was now languidly engaged in reaping a whirlwind of coupons and dividends. It is painful to dwell on so rudimentary a lack of fair play on the part of Fate, though Benedick occasionally did dwell on it, with a sardonic grin at the recollection of the modest incomes received by the more prudent and thrifty members of the family. He made what atonement he could for his father's unjustifiable success by a series of astoundingly lavish gifts, however, and wasted the rest of it more or less successfully.

"Business" had kept him in town on that March day when he first saw her. He had arrived at Raoul's doorstep at exactly five minutes past twelve; he lunched early, because he was a disciple of the Continental schedule, and it also avoided interruptions from over-fervent friends who frequented the place. The pretty cashier with her red cheeks and her elaborate Gallic coiffure bestowed her usual radiant smile on him, and Benedick smiled back, with a swift response that many a debutante would have given a large piece of her small soul to obtain. Jules, the sallow and gentle-eyed, pulled out the little round chair with its padded cushions, pushed in the little round table with its threadbare and spotless cloth, and bent forward with pencil poised, the embodiment of discreet and eager interest.

"*Bon jour, monsieur! Monsieur désire*—?"

This, after all, was nearer a home than anything that Larry Benedick had known for many a weary year— this warm and peaceful corner, with old Jules and young Genevieve spreading friendliness all about him, with Raoul out in the tiled and copper-hung kitchen, alert to turn his skill to service. Monsieur desired? Well, kidneys flamboyant, perhaps— and then some artichokes with Raoul's Hollandaise— and the little curled pancakes with orange and burnt sugar in the chafing-dish. Demi-tasse, of course, and Bénédictine. Not yesterday, you see, that March afternoon!— Jules slipped away, as elated as though he were bearing with him great good tidings, and the brown-and-gray kitten came out from under the table, tapping at the cuff of his trousers with an imperious paw, and he had a smile for it, too. Here in this tranquil space

Monsieur had all that he desired, had he not? Surely, all. He bent forward to stroke the pink nose of his enterprising visitor, the smile deepening until the dark face was suddenly young— and the brown door opened and she came in.

Benedick knew quite well that it was a raw and abominable day outside— but he could have sworn that he looked up because the room was suddenly full of the smell of pear blossoms, and lilacs, and the damp moss that grows beside running brooks— and that he felt the sunlight on his hands. There she stood, straight and slim, in her rough green tweed, with her sapphire-blue scarf and the sapphire-blue feather in the little tweed hat that she had pulled down over the bright wings of her hair, her face as fresh and gay as though she had just washed it in that running brook, her lovely mouse-coloured eyes soft and mischievous, as though she were keeping some amusing secret. There was mud on her high brown boots, and she was swinging a shining new brief case in one bare hand. Benedick stared at that hand incredulously. It wasn't possible that anything real could be so beautiful; velvet white, steel strong, fine and slim and flexible— such a hand Ghirlandaijo's great ladies of the Renaissance lifted to their hearts— such a hand a flying nymph on a Grecian frieze flung out in quest of mercy. And yet there it was, so close to him that if he stretched out his fingers he could touch it !

The owner of this white wonder stood poised for a moment, apparently speculating as to whether this was the most perfect place in the world in which to lunch; she cast a swift glance of appraisal about the shadowed room with its hangings and cushions of faded peacock-blue, with its coal fire glowing and purring in the corner and its pots of pansies sitting briskly and competently along the deep window-sills; she gave a swift nod of recognition, as though she had found something that she had long been seeking, and slipped lightly into the chair at the table next to Benedicks. Her flying eyes had brushed by the startled wonder of his face as though it had not been there, and it was obvious that he was still not there, in so far as the lady was concerned. She pounced exultantly on the *carte du jour* and gave it her rapt and undivided attention; when Jules arrived carrying Benedick's luncheon as carefully as though it were a delicate and cherished baby she was ready and waiting for him— and Jules succumbed instantly to the hopeful friendliness of her voice.

But certainly, Mademoiselle could have *sole bonne femme* and potatoes allumettes, and a small salad— *oui, oui, entendu— bien fatiguée*, that salad, with a *soupçon* of garlic in a crust of bread, and the most golden of oils— yes, and a souffle of chocolate with a demi-tasse in which should be just one dash of cognac— oh, rest assured of the quality of the cognac. Ah, it was to be seen that Mademoiselle was fine gourmet— which was, alas, not too common a quality in *ces dames*! Fifteen minutes would not be too long to wait, no? The

potatoes— bon , bon— Mademoiselle should see. Jules trotted rapidly off in the direction of the kitchen, and Benedick's luncheon grew cold before him while he watched to see what the miracle at the table beside him would do next.

How long, how long you had waited for her. Benedick the cynic— so long that you had forgotten how lovely she would be. After all, it had not been you who had waited; it had been a little black-headed, blue-eyed dreamer, fast asleep these many years— you had forgotten him, too, had you not? He was awake now with a vengeance, staring through your incredulous eyes at the lovely lady of his dreams, sitting, blithe and serene, within hand's touch— the lovely lady who was not too proud to have mud on her boots and who actually knew what to order for lunch. All the girls that Benedick had ever known from the fuzzy-headed little ladies in the chorus to the sleek-locked wives of his best friend and his worst enemy, ordered chicken a la King and fruit salad and indescribable horrors known as maple walnut sundaes and chocolate marshmallow ice cream. But not this lady— oh, not this one! He leaned forward, breathless; what further enchantments had she in store? Well, next she took off her hat, tossing it recklessly across the table, and the golden wings of her hair sprang out alive and joyous, like something suddenly uncaged— and then she was uncaging something else, a shabby brownish red book, prying it out of the depths of the new brief case as though she could hardly wait; he could see from the way that the white hands touched it that they loved it dearly— that they had loved it dearly for a long, long time. It flew open, as though it remembered the place itself, and she dipped her bright head to it, and was off! Benedick pushed his untouched plate far from him, leaning forward across the table, caution and courtesy and decent reserve clean forgotten. What was she reading that could make her face dance like that— all her face, the gold-tipped lashes and the brave lips, and the elusive fugitive in the curve of the cheek turned toward him, too fleeting to be a dimple— too enchanting not to be one— what in the name of heaven was she reading? If only she would move her hand a little— ah !

Something came pattering eagerly toward him out of the printed page— a small, brisk, portly individual with long ears and a smart waistcoat— his heart greeted it with a shout of incredulous delight. By all that was wonderful, the White Rabbit! The dim room with its round tables faded, faded— Benedick the cynic. Benedick the sceptic, faded with it— he was back in another room, warm with firelight and bright with lamplight, in which a small black-headed boy sat upright in a crib, and listened to a lady reading from a red-brown book— a curly-headed lady, soft- voiced, soft-handed, and soft-eyed, who for ten enchanted years had read the lucky little boy to sleep; he had never

believed in fairy tales again, after that soft voice had trailed off into silence. But now— now it was speaking once more— and once more he believed !

"Oh, the Duchess, the Duchess! Oh, my dear paws ! Oh, my fur and whiskers! She'll have me arrested as sure as ferrets are ferrets! Where can I have dropped them?"

The little boy was leaning forward, flushed and enchanted. "Well, but motherie darling, where could he have dropped them? Where could *he have dropped those gloves?"*

"Monsieur désire—?"

Benedick stared blankly at the solicitous countenance, wrenching himself back across the years. Monsieur desired— ah, Monsieur desired— Monsieur desired—

He sat very still after that, until she had sipped the last drop of black coffee out of the little blue cup, until she had pulled the hat down over the golden wings and wrapped the sapphire scarf about her white throat and wedged "Alice" back into the brief case, and smiled at Jules, and smiled at Genevieve, and smiled at the gray kitten, and vanished through the brown door.

He sat even stiller for quite a while after she had gone; and then suddenly bounded to his feet and flung out of the room before the startled Jules could ask him whether there was not something that he preferred to the untouched Benedictine.

It was drizzling in the gray street and he turned his face to it as though it were sunshine; he glanced in the direction of the large dark office, and dismissed it with a light-hearted shrug. Business— business, by the Lord! Not while there was still a spot to dream in undisturbed. He raced up the apartment-house stairs three at a time, scorning the elevator, and was in the living room before the petrified Harishidi could do more than leap goggle-eyed from his post by the Florentine chest. Harishidi had obviously been indulging his passion for Occidental music, though you would not have gathered it from the look of horrified rebuke that he directed at the Renaissance treasure's spirited rendition of the "Buzz Town Darkies' Ball." The look conveyed the unmistakable impression that Harishidi had done everything in his power to prevent the misguided instrument from breaking out in this unfortunate manner during his master's absence, but that his most earnest efforts had proved of no avail. Benedick, however, was unimpressed.

"For the love of God, shut off that infernal noise!"

Harishidi flung himself virtuously on the offending treasure, and Benedick stood deliberating for a moment.

"Bring me the records out of the drawer— no, over to the couch— I'm half dead for sleep after that damned party. Get my pipe; the briar, idiot. Matches. This the lot Mrs. Benedick sent?"

Harishidi acknowledged it freely, and Benedick shuffled rapidly through the black disks. Cello rendition of "Eli Eli"; the Smith Sisters in a saxophone medley; highly dramatic interpretation of the little idyll from Samson et Delilah; "Kiss Your Baby and Away We Go" specially rendered by Dolpho, the xylophone king— yes, here it was. "An Elizabethan Song, sung by Mr. Roger Grahame of the Santa Clara Opera Company."

"Here you are, Hari; put this on your infernal machine. Take the telephone off the hook and give me another of those cushions. Where's an ashtray? All right— let her rip!"

"I play her now?" demanded the incredulous Harishidi.

"You play her now, and you keep right on playing her until I tell you to stop. What's more, if I hear another word out of you, you're fired. All right— what are you waiting for? Go ahead!"

The quiet room was suddenly flooded with grace and gallantry and a gay melancholy; a light tenor voice singing easily and happily of something that was not joy— and was not sorrow—

"There was a lady, fair and kind.
Was never face so pleased my mind;
I did but see her, passing by.
And yet I love her till I die.
Till— I— die - "

Fair and kind— a lady with gold wings for hair and gray velvet for eyes— a lady who knew what to have for lunch and who read *Alice in Wonderlan*— a lady who was tall and slim, and had a mouth like a little girl, and mud on her high boots— white-handed and white-throated— pear blossoms in the sunlight— fair and kind—

"Her gesture, motion, and her smile.
Her wit, her voice, my heart beguile.
Beguile my heart, I know not why,
And yet I love her till I die.
Till— I— die."

Her grace, her voice— a lady who walked as though she were about to dance— a lady who spoke as though she were about to sing— fair and kind— gold and ivory— he had seen her before— she lived in a castle and her hair hung down to her heels— he had ridden by on a black horse and she had thrown him a rose— a castle by the sea— a castle behind a hedge of thorns— a castle in a dreaming wood— but he had found her and waked her with a kiss— no, no, it was he who had been asleep— a long time— a long time

asleep— he wanted to hear the end of the story, but he was so warm and happy, it was hard to keep awake— the firelight made strange shadows...

"And so they both lived happily ever after!"
"Then he did find her, Motherie?"
"Of course, of course, he found her. Sleepy Head."
"Ever, ever after, Motherie?"
"Ever, ever after, little boy."...

Fair and kind, Golden Hair, smiling in the firelight— smile again— ever after, she said— ever, ever after ....

THE NEXT DAY he was at Raoul's at a quarter to twelve, and when Jules asked what Monsieur desired, he told him to bring anything, it made no difference to him! The stupefied Jules departed to the kitchen, where he was obliged to remain seated for several moments, owing to a slight touch of vertigo, and Monsieur sat unmolested in his chair in the corner, his eyes fastened on the brown door as though they would never leave it. He was still sitting there, feverish and preoccupied, half an hour later, having dutifully consumed everything that Jules put before him without once removing his eyes from the door. It wasn't possible— it wasn't possible that she wouldn't come again. Fate could not play him so scurvy a trick; but let him lay eyes on her just once more, and he would take no further chances with Fate! He would walk up to her the second that she crossed the threshold, and demand her name and address and telephone number and occupation -

And the door opened, and she came in, and he sat riveted to his chair while she bestowed a bunch of violets the size of a silver dollar on the enchanted Genevieve, a smile of joyous complicity on the infatuated Jules, and a rapturous pat on the gray kitten. After a while he transferred his gaze from the door to the table next to him, but otherwise he did not stir. He was thinking a great many things very rapidly— unflattering and derisive comments on the mentality of one Larry Benedick. Idiot— ass! As though any lady who held her bright head so high would not disdain him out of measure if she could get so much as a glimpse into the depths of his fatuous and ignoble mind. Ask her for her address indeed! His blood froze at the thought.

The lady, in the meantime, had ordered lunch and discarded her hat and pried another treasure from the brief case; this time it was brown and larger, and she held it so that Benedick could see, the title without irreparably ruining his eyes. "Tommy and Grizel"— the unspeakable Tommy! She was reading it with breathless intensity, too, and a look on her face that struck terror to his heart, a look at once scornful and delighted and disturbed, as though Tommy

himself were sitting opposite her. So this— this w~as the kind of fellow that she liked to lunch with— a sentimental, posturing young hypocrite, all arrogance and blarney— it was incredible that she couldn't see through him ! What magic had this worthless idiot for ladies?

Benedick glared at the humble-looking brown volume as though he would cheerfully rip the heart out of it. He continued to glare until the white hands put it back into the brief case with a lingering and regretful touch, and carried it away through the door; no sooner had it closed than he jammed on his hat and brushed rudely by the smiling Genevieve and out into the wind-swept street. There he paused, staring desperately about him, but the sapphire feather was nowhere to be seen, and after a moment he started off at a tremendous pace for his apartment, where he proceeded to keep his finger on the elevator bell for a good minute and a half, and scowled forbiddingly at the oblivious elevator boy for seven stories, and slammed the door of the living room so vigorously that the red-lacquered frames leapt on the wall.

He crossed the room in three lengthy strides, and slammed his bedroom door behind him even more vigorously. The bedroom was exactly half the size of the tiled bathroom, so that the artistic sister-in-law had only been able to wedge in a Renaissance day-bed and a painted tin scrap basket— but Benedick found it perfectly satisfactory, as she had permitted him to use books instead of wall-paper. All the ones that she considered too shabby for the living room rose in serried ranks to the high ceiling— Benedick had substituted a nice arrangement of green steps instead of a chair, and had discovered that he could put either these or the scrap basket in the bathroom, if it was necessary to move around. He mounted the steps now, and snatched a brown volume from its peaceful niche on the top shelf next to "Sentimental Tommy," climbed down and sat on the Renaissance day-bed, wrenched the book open so violently that he nearly broke its back, and read about what happened to Tommy on the last few pages— served him damned well right, too, except that hanging was too good for him. Sentiment! Sentiment was a loathsome thing, not to be borne for a moment.

The third time that he read it he felt a little better. and he got up and kicked the scrap basket hard, and telephoned to the incisive gentleman in the office that he wouldn't be around because he had neuralgia and phlebitis and a jumping toothache, and telephoned his ravished sister-in-law that he'd changed his mind and would be around for dinner at eight if she'd swear to seat him next to a brunette. Subsequently he was so attentive to the brunette that she went home in a fever of excitement— and Benedick ground his teeth, and prayed that somehow his golden lady might know about it and feel a pang of the soft and bitter madness known as jealousy, which is the exclusive

prerogative of women. He lay with his head in the pillow on the Renaissance bed most of the night, cursing his idiocy with profound fervour, wondering what insanity had made him think for a moment that he was interested in that yellow-haired girl, and resolving not to go near Raoul's for at least a week. She was probably someone's stenographer— or a lady authoress. Every now and then he slipped off into horrid little dreams; he was building a gallows out of pear trees for a gentleman called Tommy, and just when he had the noose ready, it slipped about his own throat— and he could feel it tightening, tightening, while someone laughed just behind him, very soft and clear— he woke with a shiver, and the dawn was in the room. He wouldn't go to Raoul's for a month....

At five minutes to twelve he crossed the threshold, and she was there already with her hat off and a little fat green-and-gold book propped up against her goblet. Thank God that she had left that brown bounder at home! Benedick stared earnestly, and felt a deeper gratitude to Robert Herrick and his songs than he had ever known before. It was easy to see that she was safe in green meadows, brave with cowslips and violets and hawthorn and silver streams, playing with those charming maids, Corinna and Julia. Benedick breathed a sigh of relief, and when her lunch arrived he was stricken again with admiration at the perfection of her choice. Herrick himself could have done no better; the whole- wheat bread, the primrose pats of butter, the bowl in which the salad lurked discreetly— but he could see the emerald green of cress, and something small and silver and something round and ruddy— radishes and onions shining like jewels! There was a jar of amber honey, a little blue pitcher of thick cream, and a great blue bowl of crimson berries— strawberries in March, with a drift of fresh green mint leaves about them. Here was a lady who was either incredibly wealthy or incredibly spendthrift! She closed her book when Jules put this other pastoral before her, and ate as though it might be a long, long time before she would eat anything again. though she managed to look as though she were singing all the time. There was a bit of cream left for the kitten, and she fed it carefully, patted its white whiskers, and was gone.

Benedick strolled out thoughtfully, remembering to smile at Genevieve, and feeling more like a good little boy than a ripened cynic. It was incredible how virtuous it made one feel to be happy! He wanted to adopt a yellow dog and give money to a beggar and buy out a florist shop. The florist shop was the only object accessible, and he walked in promptly; the clerk had spoken to him before he realized that he couldn't send her flowers, because he didn't happen to know who she was. He might tell him to send them to the Loveliest Lady in New York, but it was a little risky. However, he bought an armful of daffodils,

and a great many rose-red tulips, and enough blue and white hyacinths to fill a garden, and went straight back to his apartment without even waiting for change from the gold piece that he gave to the clerk. He handed them over to the startled Harishidi with the curt order to put them in water; never mind if he didn't have enough vases. Put them in high-ball glasses— finger-bowls— anywhere— he wanted them all over the place. The buyer of flowers then retired and put on a gorgeous and festively striped necktie, washed his face and hands with a bland and pleasing soap, brushed his black hair until it shone, smiled gravely at the dark face in the mirror, and returned to the sitting room. There he selected a white hyacinth blossom with meticulous care, placed it in his buttonhole, and earnestly requested Harishidi to retire and remain in retirement until summoned.

He spent quite a long time after that, drawing the curtains to shut out the grayness, struggling despairingly over the diminutive fire, piling the cushions so that they made a brilliant nest at one end of the velvet sofa, placing a gold-tooled volume of Aucassin and Nicolette where she could reach it easily— oh, if he could not send his flowers to her, he would bring her to his flowers! He adjusted the reading lamp with its painted parchment shade and dragged a stool up to the sofa. It was his sister-in-law's best find— a broad and solid stool, sedate and comely— he sat there clasping his knees, his cheek against the velvet of the sofa— waiting. After a long time, he drew a deep breath, and smiled into the shadows. He did not turn his head; what need to turn it?

She was there— he could see her sinking far back into the scarlet cushions, greeting his flowers with joyous eyes. She had on a cream-coloured dress of some soft stuff, and a long chain of amber beads; the lamplight fell on her hair and on her clasped hands— and still he sat there, waiting. What need had they of speech? There was a perfume in her hair— a perfume of springtime, fleeting and exquisite; if he reached out his hand he could touch her. He sat very still; after a little while he felt her hand on his dark head, but still he did not stir— he only smiled more deeply into the shadows, and closed his eyes - His eyes were still closed when Harishidi came in to ask him if he had forgotten dinner, and his lips were parted, like a little boy lost in a happy dream— in a happy, happy dream....

After that, the days passed by in an orderly and enchanted procession; he watched them bringing gifts to the corner table at Raoul's, feeling warm and grateful and safe; too content to risk his joy by so much as stirring a finger. By and by he would speak to her, of course; in some easy, simple way he would step across the threshold of her life, and their hands would touch, never to fall apart again. She would drop her brief case, perhaps, and he would give it back to her, and she would smile; she would come into some drawing room where

he was standing waiting patiently and the hostess would say, "You know Mr. Benedick, don't you? He's going to take you in to dinner." He would go to more dinners— surely she must dine somewhere, and dances— surely she danced! Or the gray kitten might capture that wisp of a handkerchief, and bring it to him as booty— he would rescue it and carry it back to her— and she would smile her thanks— she would smile - It would all be as simple as that— simpler, perhaps; for the time, he asked no more than to let the days slip by while he sat watching her across the table; that was enough.

Ah, those days! There was the one when she brought out a great volume of Schopenhauer, and laughed all the time she read it; twice she laughed aloud, and so gay and clear was her derision that Jules joined in, too. It was probably the essay on Woman, Benedick decided— the part where he said that ladies were little animals with long hair and limited intelligence. There was the day when she read out of a slim book of vellum about that small, enchanting mischief, Marjorie Fleming, and when Jules put the iced melon down before her she did not see it for almost a minute— her eyes were too full of tears. There was the day when she read *War and Peace* with her hands over her ears and such a look of terror on her face that Benedick had all that he could do to keep from crossing over and putting his arms about her, to close out all the dangers that she feared— even the ones she read about in books.

And suddenly March was over, and it was April, and there was the day when she took a new volume out of the brief case— so new that it still had its paper cover with large black letters announcing that it contained desirable information about Small Country Houses for Limited Incomes, Colonial Style. She read it with tremendous intensity and a look wavering between rapture and despair; once she sighed forlornly, and once she made a small, defiant face at some invisible adversary— and once she patted a picture lingeringly.

After she had gone, Benedick took his sister-in-law's automobile, and drove out to Connecticut, and bought a house— a little old white house with many-paned windows, that sat on a hill with lilac bushes around it, and looked at the silver waters of the Sound. It was perfectly preposterous that she shouldn't have a house if she wanted it, and he was glad that she wanted a small country house, Colonial style, even though it didn't necessarily imply a moderate income. For the first time in his life he was glad that his income was not moderate. When he got back to town he bought a gray roadster— not too heavy, so that she could drive it. She might want to be in and out of town a lot; you never could tell.

He told his sister-in-law that he was going to raise Airedales, because it was impossible to buy a decent puppy these days, and he discoursed lucidly and affably about a highly respectable Scotch couple that he was going to get to

look after the white house and supervise the Airedales. After that he devoted most of his leisure hours to antique shops and auctions, where he purchased any amount of Sheraton furniture and Lowestoft china and Bristol glass and hooked rugs and old English chintzes for the benefit of the Airedale puppies and the Scotch couple. He hadn't as much time as formerly, because he had been growing steadily more uncomfortable at the thought of explaining to those gray eyes and gay lips the undeniable fact that he had twenty-four hours of leisure to dispose of every day of his life; so he had wandered over to the dark office one morning and remarked casually to the gray gentleman at the desk that he might blow in every now and then and see if there was anything around for him to do. It appeared that there was plenty around— so much that he took to blowing in at about nine and blowing out at about five— and he did it not so badly, though a good clerk might have done it better. He continued to spend a generous hour over lunch, however, proving a total loss to the firm for a considerable time after he returned, sometimes in such an abandoned mood that there was a flower in his buttonhole.

And then it was May, and the sapphire feather was gone, and she would come in through the brown door with flowers on her drooping hat and pale frocks tinted like flowers, cool and crisp as dresses in a dream. She still had the brief case, but it was absurd to think that a stenographer would wear such hats; anything so ravishing would cost a year's salary. When he wasn't too busy watching the way her hair rippled back, showing just the tips of her ears, he would wonder whether she were a great heiress with an aversion to jewellery or a successful novelist who had to choose between pearls and Raoul's. He had never seen even the smallest glint of jewels about her; never a gleam of beads at her throat or a brooch at her waist or a ring on her fingers— sometimes he thought that it would be pleasant to slip a long string of pearls about her neck and a band of frosted diamonds about her wrist, to see her eyes widen at their whiteness. Still, this way she was dearer, with flowers for her jewels— better leave the pearls alone— pearls were for tears.

It was incredible how radiant she looked those days; when she came through the door with her flying step and her flying smile the very kitten would purr at the sight of her; her eyes said that the secret that they knew was more delightful and amusing than ever, and her hands were always full of flowers.

And then there was the day that she came in looking so exultant that she frightened him; it wasn't fair that she should look so happy when she didn't know about the house on the hill, or the gray roadster, or the lucky person who was going to give them to her— it wasn't fair and it was rather terrifying. Perhaps it would be better not to wait any longer to tell her about them; she couldn't be disdainful and unkind through all that happiness. Of course he

would lead up to it skilfully. He wasn't a blundering schoolboy; he was a man of the world, rather more than sophisticated, with all his wits about him and a light touch. He would catch her eye and smile, deferential and whimsical, and try some casual opening— "Our friend the kitten" or "good old Jules slower than usual— spring turns the best of us to idlers!" and the rest would follow as the night the day— or better still, as the day the night. It mightn't be a bad idea to upset something— his wine glass, for instance; he raised a reckless hand, with a swift glance at the next table— and then he dropped it. She was reading a letter, an incredibly long letter, page after page of someone's office paper covered with thick black words that marched triumphantly across the sheets, and her face was flooded with such eloquent light that he jerked back his head swiftly, as though he had been reading over her shoulder. He could not speak to her with that light on her face; he sat watching her read it through twice, feeling cold and sick and lonely. He was afraid— he was afraid— he would speak to her to-morrow—

To-morrow came, and with it his lady in a green muslin frock, and a shadowy hat wreathed with lilacs; he noted with a slow breath of relief that she had no brief case, no book, no letters. His coast was clear then at least; this day she had no better comrade to share her table— he would go to her, and ask her to understand. He had risen to his feet before he saw that she had not taken off her hat; she was sitting with her head a little bent, as though she was looking at something on the table, her face shadowed by the drooping hat, her hands clasped before her— and then Benedick saw what she was looking at. There was a ring on her finger, a small, trivial, inconsequential diamond, sparkling in its little golden claw like a frivolous dewdrop; and suddenly she bent her head, and kissed it. He sat down, slowly and stiffly— he felt old. He did not even see her go; it was Jules' voice that made him lift his head.

"Ah, le printemps, le printemps! V'là la jolie demoiselle qui s'est fiancée."

"Yes," said Benedick. "Spring— in spring it is
agreeable to have a fiance."

"Monsieur, perhaps, knows who she is?"

"No," replied Monsieur amiably. "But she is, as you say, a pretty girl."

"She is more than that, if Monsieur pardons. The man whose bride she will be has a little treasure straight from the good God. What a nature— what a nature! Generous as a queen with her silver, but she turns it to gold with her smile. Monsieur has perhaps noted her smile?"

"No," replied Monsieur, still amiably. "Bring me a bottle of the Widow Clicquot, however, and I will drink to her smile. Bring a large bottle so that I can drink often. It might be better to bring two."

He drank both of them under the eyes of the horrified Jules; it took him all of the afternoon and part of the evening to accomplish it, but he won out. All during the hours that he sat sipping the yellow stuff he was driving his mind in circles, round and round over the same unyielding ground, round and round again. It was a hideous mistake, of course; there was nothing irretrievable in an engagement. He could make her see how impossible it was in just a few minutes; it might be a little hard on this other fellow at first, but that couldn't be helped. He hadn't been looking for her, starving for her, longing for her all the days of his life, this other fellow, had he? Probably he had told half-a-dozen girls he loved them— well, let him find another to tell. But Benedick— whom else had Benedick loved? No one, no one, all the days of his life.

Surely she would see that; surely when he told her about the white house and the gray roadster she would understand that he couldn't let her go. He had been lonely too long— he had been hard and bitter and reckless too long— he would tell her how black and empty a thing was loneliness; when she saw how desperately he needed her, she would stay. When he told her about the two corner cupboards in the low-ceilinged dining room, full of lilac lustre and sprigged Lowestoft, and the painted red chairs in the kitchen, and the little stool for her feet with the fat white poodle embroidered in cross-stitch, she would see all the other things that he had never told her! There was the tarnished mirror with the painted clipper spreading all its sails— he had hung it so that it would catch her smile when she first crossed the threshold; there was the little room at the head of the stairs that the sun always shone into— he had built shelves there himself, and put in all his Jules Verne and R. L. S. and Oliver Optic and Robin Hood and the Three Musketeers and some unspeakably bad ones of Henty; he had been waiting for her to tell him what kind of books little girls read, and then he was going to put them in, too. Of course she couldn't understand those things unless he told her— to-morrow when she came he would tell her everything and she would understand, and be sorry that she had hurt him; she would never go away again.

At eleven o'clock Jules once more despairingly suggested that Monsieur must be indeed fatigued, and that it would perhaps be better if Monsieur retired. Monsieur, however, explained with great determination and considerable difficulty that he had an extremely important engagement to keep, and that all things considered, he would wait there until he kept it. True, it was not until to-morrow, but he was not going to take any chances; he would wait where he was. Raoul was called in, and expostulated fervently, "*Mais enfin, Monsieur! Ce n'est pas convenable, Monsieur!*"

Monsieur smiled at him, vague and obstinate, and Raoul finally departed with a Gallic shrug, leaving poor Jules in charge, who sat nodding reproachfully

in a far corner, with an occasional harrowed glance at the other occupant of the room. The other occupant sat very stiff and straight far into the night; it was toward morning that he made a curious sound, between defeat and despair, and dropped his dark head on his arms, and slept. Once he stirred, and cried desperately: "Don't go— don't go, don't go!"

Jules was at his side in a moment, forgiving and solicitous.

"*Monsieur désire*—?"

And Monsieur started up and stared at him strangely— only to shake his head, and once more bury it deep in his arms. It was not Jules who could get what Monsieur desired....

It was late the next morning when he waked and he consumed a huge amount of black coffee, and sat back in his corner, haggard and unshaven, with a withered flower in his buttonhole, waiting for her to come through the door— but she did not come. Not that day, nor the next, nor the next; he sat in his corner from twelve to two, waiting, with a carefully mocking smile on his lips and a curious expression in his eyes, wary and incredulous. He had worked himself into an extremely reasonable state of mind; a state of mind in which he was acidly amused at himself and tepidly interested in watching the curtain fall on the comedy— he blamed a good deal on the spring and a taste for ridiculously unbalanced literature; the whole performance was at once diverting and distasteful. This kind of mania came from turning his back on pleasant flirtations and normal *affaires de coeur*; it was a neatly ironical punishment that the God of Comedy was meting out to pay him for his overweening sense of superiority. Well, it was merited— and it was over! But he still sat in the corner, watching, and the fourth day the door opened, and she came in.

She had on a gray dress, with a trail of yellow roses across her hat and a knot of them at her waist, and a breeze came in with her. She stood hesitating for a moment in the sunlight, and then she went quickly to where Genevieve sat at her high desk, and stretched out her hands, with a pretty gesture, shy and proud. The sunlight fell across them, catching at a circle above the diamond ring— a little golden circle, very new and bright. Benedick rose to his feet, pushing back his chair— he brushed by her so close that he could smell the roses; he closed the brown door behind him gently and leaned against it, staring down the shining street, where the green leaves danced, joyous and sedate, upon the stunted trees. Well, the curtain had fallen on the comedy; that was over. After a minute, he shrugged his shoulders, and strolled leisurely down to the real-estate agent and sold him the little white house, lock, stock, and barrel, including some rather good china and a lot of old junk that he had picked up here and there. It was fortunate that the young couple from

Gramercy Square wanted it; he was willing to let it go for a song. Yes, there was a view of the Sound, and he'd done quite a lot of planting; oh, yes. there was a room that could be used as a nursery— lots of sun. There was his signature, and there was the end of it— the papers could be sent to his lawyers. He then sauntered over to his sister-in-law's and presented her with the gray roadster;

he was about fed up with motoring, and he'd changed his mind about Airedales. Dogs were a nuisance. After a little pleasant banter he dropped in at the club and played three extremely brilliant rubbers of auction, and signed up for a stag theatre party to see a rather nasty little French farce. He didn't touch any of the numerous cocktails— he wasn't going to pay her the compliment of getting drunk again— but he laughed harder than any one at the farce, and made a good many comments that were more amusing than the play, and his best friend and his worst enemy agreed that they had never seen him in such high spirits.

He went back to the apartment humming to himself, and yawned ostentatiously for Harishidi's benefit, and left word not to wake him in the morning— and yawned again, and went to bed. He lay there in the blackness for what seemed hours, listening to his heart beat; there was a tune that kept going round in his head, some idiotic thing by an Elizabethan— Fair and kind"— he must go lighter on the coffee. "Was never face so pleased my mind - " Coffee played the deuce with your

nerves. "Passing by—" Oh, to hell with it! He stumbled painfully out of bed, groping his way to the living room, jerking on the light with a violence that nearly broke the cord. One o'clock; the damned clock must have stopped. No, it was still ticking away, relentless and competent. He stood staring about him irresolutely for a moment, and then moved slowly to the Florentine chest, fumbling at the drawer. Yes, there it was— "An Elizabethan Song, Sung by Mr. Roger Grahame"— "There was a lady, fair and kind"—

There was a lady— He flung up the window with a gesture of passionate haste, and leaning far out, hurled the little black disk into deeper blackness. Far off he heard a tinkling splinter from the area; he closed the window, and pulled the cord on the wrought-iron lamp, and stumbled back to the Renaissance bed.

He was shaking uncontrollably, like someone in a chill, and he had a sickening desire to weep— to lay his hot cheek against some kind hand, and weep away the hardness and the bitterness and despair. Loathsome, brain-sick fool! He clenched his hands and glared defiance to the darkness, he who had not wept since a voice had ceased to read him fairy tales a long time ago. After eternities of staring the hands relaxed, and he turned his head, and slept.

He woke with a start— there was something salt and bitter on his lips; he brushed it away fiercely, and the clock in the living room struck four. After that he did not sleep again; he set his teeth and stared wide-eyed into the shadows— he would not twice be trapped to shame. He was still lying there when the sun drifted through the window; he turned his face to the wall, so that he would not see it, but he did not unclench his teeth....

It was June, and he took a passage for Norway, and tore it up the day that the boat sailed. There was a chance in a thousand that she might need him, and it would be like that grim cat Fate to drop him off in Norway when he might serve her. For two or three days she had been looking pale; the triumphant happiness that for so long she had flaunted in his face, joyous and unheeding, was wavering like the rose-red in her lips. It was probably nothing but the heat; why couldn't that fool she had married see that she couldn't stand heat? She should be sitting somewhere against green pines, with the sea in her eyes and a breeze lifting the bright hair from her forehead.

She never read any more. She sat idle with her hands linked before her; it must be something worse than heat that was painting those shadows under her eyes, that look of heart-breaking patience about her lips. And Benedick, who had flinched from her happiness, suddenly desired it more passionately than he had ever desired anything else in his life. Let the cur who had touched that gay courage to this piteous submission give it back— let him give it back— he would ask nothing more. How could a man live black enough to make her suffer? She hardly touched the food that was placed before her; Jules hovered about her in distress, and she tried to smile at him— and Benedick turned his eyes from that smile. She would sit very quiet, staring at her linked hands with their two circles, as though she were afraid to breathe— she, to whom the air had seemed flowers and wine and music. Once he saw her lips shake, terribly, though a moment later she lifted her head with the old, valiant gesture, and went out smiling.

Then for a day she did not come— for another day— for another— and when once more she stood in the door. Benedick felt his heart give a great leap, and stand still. She was in black, black from head to foot, with a strange little veil that hid her eyes. She crossed the room to her table, and sat down quietly, and ordered food, and ate, and drank a little wine. After Jules had taken the things away she still sat there, pressing her hands together, her lips quite steady— only when she unlinked them, he saw the faint red crescents where the nails had cut.

So that was why she had had shadows painted beneath her eyes; he had been ill, the man who had given her the rings; he had died. It would be cruel to break the hushed silence that hung about her with his clumsy pity, but soon he

would go to her and say, "Do not be sad. Sadness is an ugly thing, believe me. I cannot give you what he gave you, perhaps, but here is the heart from my body. It is cold and hard and empty; take it in your hands, and warm it. My need of you is greater than your need of him— you can not leave me." He would say that to her, after a little while.

The gray kitten touched her black skirt with its paw, and she caught it up swiftly, and laid her cheek against its fur. It was no longer the round puff that she had first smiled on, but it was still soft— it still purred. She put it down very gently, and rose, looking about her as on that first day; at the place where the fire had burned in the corner, at the pansies, jaded and drooping in their green pots; once again her eyes swept by Benedick as though he were not there. They lingered on Genevieve for a moment, and when they met Jules' anxious, faithful gaze she parted her lips as though to speak, and gave it up with a little shake of her head, and smiled instead— a piteous and a lovely smile— and she was gone....

He never saw her again. That was not a hundred years ago— no, and it was not yesterday; the steel has come into his hair and his eyes since then, but sometimes he still goes to Raoul's to lunch, and sits at the corner table, where he can see the brown door. Who can tell when it might open and let in the spring— who can tell what day might find her standing there once more, with her gay eyes and her tilted lips and the sunlight dancing in her hair?

Benedick's best friend and his worst enemy and the world and his pretty sister-in-law are very wise, no doubt, but once— once there was a lady—

He never touched the tip of her fingers, but she was the only lady that Benedick ever loved.

———————

21: On Board the Martian Liner

Miles J. Breuer, M.D.

1889-1945

Amazing Stories, March 1931

Vintage "scientifiction" from the early days.

WHEN space travel is an accepted matter— who knows but that it might be soon— there must undoubtedly be much room for adventure— not only what we know would be incident to the danger of moving through space, or what would be due to the unknown factors that might be met with on landing. Because a man ts going through space, it ts not a foregone conclusion that he will become all that is noble. Neither will mysterious offenses be confined to the earth. But we can't send a detective on every ship. Dr. Breuer has a much better plan and amply proves the efficacy of his method in this thrilling short story. There is definite literary merit in it and scientific interest.

"YES sir!" said "Streak" Burgess, star reporter of the *Times*, into the telephone.

"And write me up a good feature-article of the trip," the editor's voice barked into his ear. "Give me vivid, human stuff. The public is sick of these dry science articles. And remember that we're trying to arouse people to space-mindedness. Here's three good planets, with no end of business opportunities, and the people are asleep. Wake 'em up!"

Burgess hung up the receiver and whirled on his heel.

"Where do you have to go this time, Mr. Burgess?" inquired a youthful voice at his side.

"Oh, hello Chick!" said Burgess.

Burgess knew Chick merely as a boy of about seventeen who ran loose about the premises of the Club on his father's membership, and who in his youthful fashion idolized the popular and successful reporter. In spite of the discrepancy in their ages, the two had become chummy, although Burgess hardly remembered Chick's real name. Johnson, or some such common, everyday name, it was.

"I've got to start for Mars in four hours," Burgess explained. "You see, to the *Times* managing-editor, a reporter is not a person; he's merely a projectile."

"Oh, Mr. Burgess, please take me with you. Please do!" implored the boy. "I'll pay all your expenses in grand style. Please let me go with you. I'd give anything to go to Mars!"

"Well, at least you're space-minded anyway," the reporter laughed. "I'm sorry, kid," he said gravely. "I couldn't do it. It would get me into trouble with my paper. And the laws are mighty strict about anyone under twenty-one going up in a space-liner, except under the care of a parent or guardian. But, I'll tell you all about it when I get back."

"I'm going to Mars some day!" the boy said desperately. "I'll show you!"

"I haven't the least doubt about it," Streak Burgess laughed. "I wish I could take you along. I'd do it just to get you away from that precious gang of young toughs you are running with. I've got to meet your father some day and warn him that if he don't get away from his money for a while and look after you, you'll— you'll get into bad company."

"You mean The Science Club?" Chick asked.

"Sweet name, I'd call it. Remember, Chick, I've seen a lot of the world. Your Science Club looks like a bunch of crooks to me, who are going to use you for a tool. Your ugly president with the birthmark on his cheek is all labeled for the electric chair."

"Oh, Pug? Pug isn't bad. You just ought to know him better," Chick protested with the faith of youth.

"Well, so long!" Streak Burgess went off with the speed that had earned him his nickname. Momentarily he forgot the adventure-hungry boy; and when the time came to leave the Club and betake himself to the spaceport, Chick was nowhere to be found.

The departure of a space-liner is always a thrilling spectacle. To the casual onlooker, it looks like a mad, chaotic turmoil of people and vehicles about the base of the vast, silvery bulk that looms hugely into the sky. Immense trucks backing up with the last consignments of fast freight to the platform overhung by countless cranes reaching out of the blackness of the vessel's ports ; a stream of lighter trucks carrying baggage; one aerotaxi after another depositing now a man, now a woman, now a group of several on the platform; the flashing of the brilliant uniforms of the space-fleet officers, the hoarse shouts of the crew and stevedores, the dense crowd outside the railing, waiting for the moment when the bulging vessel would rise slowly and majestically upwards, and disappear as a brilliant speck in the sky. Who has not been thrilled again and again by the arrival or the departure of a space-ship?

The reporter was at the dock early, watching. His job as observer of human-nature on a Martian trip had begun. Already he was making notes in his mind: the timid-looking little lady who had just stepped out of an aero-taxi and hesitated a moment, clasping her hands and drawing a deep breath before plunging into the blackness of the ship's door, must be on her first trip. But the two swaggering men who walked nonchalantly in, puffing their cigars over

some sort of an argument that was more important than the picturesqueness of the scene, must have made the trip more than once: obviously commercial traveling-men. All of a sudden he noted Pug's purple cheek on the platform. The presence of the big bully on the spot gave Burgess an odd sense of uneasiness. But, in a moment Pug was out of sight, and Burgess saw no more of him.

Burgess waited at the edge of the platform, watching the passengers go aboard, and planning to be the last one to go on himself. Just as the edge of the platform, which was really the lowered hatch of the ship's door, began to rise, he stepped up on it. As he did, a sudden commotion arose that nearly startled him into falling off. An aero-taxi dashed down dangerously near the heads of the crowd, and skimmed within a hair's breadth of the rising platform. Out of it jumped and rolled and landslid a great, round bulk of a man, showing a red face now and then as he pursued his pell-mell course down the rapidly inclining platform and into the ship's door. Three traveling bags hurtled out of the aero-taxi into the ship's corridor.

Fat man, traveling-bags, and Burgess, all landed in a heap on the floor of the bottom-corridor, as the big hatch swung to. Burgess, still on his feet, backed away. Down the corridor to the right, was more commotion: shouts and clanking and the roar of motors. Some belated piece of freight was being forced into the other door, against the protests of the ship's crew, who had already begun to close the hatch. When that was over, Burgess looked at the fat man who sat on the floor among his traveling-bags, a rueful picture of melancholy despair. He tried to rise, and his face twisted into an expression of pain because of some bruise.

"Porter!" he yelled sharply. "Porter!"

THE great, ungainly figure of the porter stalked down the corridor from the left. Gently it helped the fat man to his feet and picked up his traveling-bags ; and the two of them departed into the gloom of the ship. The porter was a size No. 3 televox-robot. He stood six and a half feet high, and moved with a curious croaking sound. There is a rather odd thing about the televoxrobots that the General Electric has never been able to explain: although their manufacture is rigidly standardized nevertheless each machine turns out to have its individual peculiarities, and differs from all the others.

It seems to have a personality of its own. Machines of this type have a square head with eyes and ears, an opening for oil, and a little diaphragm with which they can answer simple questions of a routine nature.

"When you're through, come back and show me my room," Burgess called after the robot.

And indeed, in a few minutes the huge figure came stalking back, its queer croak re-echoing through the metal corridor. The porter led Burgess to the elevator, which carried them off to the upper deck. In contrast to the glaring confusion outside, it was cool and quiet inside the ship. As the elevator went up, they left behind the musty odor that came from the hold, passed the smell of oil and ozone that came from the engine-room level, and stepped out into the fresh air of the passengers quarters, where the air-renovating apparatus had already been started. The mahogany enamel on the duralumin walls, the upholstered velvet furniture, the soft greenand brown carpets all looked quite pleasant and comfortable, and Burgess felt a little glow of anticipation of a few comfortable days ahead. Most people considered the trip a hardship and a nuisance, but his life was a lively one, and for him the trip would mean a rest.

The passengers' quarters occupied the topmost level of the after portion of the ship. Ahead of them were the officers' quarters, and forward of these, the quarters of the crew, or the forecastle. Below was the vast hold for freight, except in the center of the ship, where the machinery was located.

Burgess took a look about his stateroom and then hurried to the after-gallery. Always the passengers congregate in the above place when the ship takes off; for it is entirely walled in with glass, and from it the Earth can be seen sinking downwards. Even the two traveling-men who had already made a dozen trips, were looking eagerly down out of the window, for no one can ever become quite accustomed to that amazing spectacle. The Earth at first seems like a huge concave bowl, with a high rim all around, and a deep cavity below. The rim sinks lower and lower, and all of a sudden by some queer magic, it has become small and convex. Even after one has seen that change a dozen times, one never gets over the wonder of it.

There were twelve people gathered in the after-gallery ; twelve people who were daring to venture across sixty million miles of space; who were to live together for six days almost as closely as a family. Five of them were women. The only one absent was the poor old fat man who had boarded so precipitately. The sounds of the sealing of the ports had ceased, the hammering, the sizzling of air, the shouts, the grating of huge screwlevers. Then came the toot of the hoarse whistle and the roar of the reaction-motors.

In a moment the two traveling-men had turned away and were deep in argument about the cost of some commodity. They were always arguing about prices. A newly-married couple who were making a honeymoon out of the trip, were whispering excitedly to each other. The little lady whom Burgess had already observed coming aboard, had her face set hard; the emotion of the moment was almost too much for her. She was a Miss Waterbury, a Pittsburgh school-teacher who had been saving her pennies for years in order to make the

trip to Mars. Possibly her expression was due partly to the sickening sensation which was felt for a few moments by all, as one feels a sinking when an elevator starts.

One by one the passengers trickled away from the after-gallery, down the corridor, into their staterooms or into the drawing-room at its opposite end. Burgess' stateroom was at the middle of the corridor and just opposite that of the fat man, whom he could see sitting glumly in the corner as he went into his own room. Next to him he could hear an elderly couple fussing vehemently; later he became acquainted with them as Colonel Thayer of the Air Guard, and his wife, *en route* to the Colonel's new post on Mars.

At the dinner-table, Burgess got a good look at all the passengers. Always there was in his mind the question: Why are these people taking this trip? What motives prompt them to risk their lives to get to Mars? One by one he checked them, and all of them seemed to be quite in place, except the poor, nervous, timid old fat man. Next to Burgess sat Kaufman, a keen, able-looking man, who was on his way to look into some business openings, which on that new-old world, with its degenerate inhabitants and its wealth of heavy-metal ores, looked wonderfully promising. Across from him sat the fat man, anxious, worried, thoroughly miserable. Next to him were a wealthy young society couple, utterly bored and blasé, hoping to find new thrills in a new world, because everything on Earth was tame to them. Then there was Kaufman's secretary, a very pretty young woman who was just now in the thrills of delight because the young engineer, Harry Flynn, going out penniless to seek his fortune on Mars, had turned out to be an old home-town acquaintance of hers.

One could understand why these people were on the trip. But the red-faced fat man was the soft, comfortable type of person, who groans when he has to get up out of his chair. He looked timid. He looked as though he ought to be by the fireside in bathrobe and slippers. What did he want on the long, hard, dangerous trip to Mars?

Mystery on Board

AFTER dinner, Burgess managed to stroll down the A corridor, just behind the fat man, in the hopes of getting better acquainted with him. Several of the passengers went out on the after-gallery to contemplate the marvelous wealth of brilliant stars in their inky black setting; but the fat man headed for his room. As he stepped into his door, Burgess touched him on the shoulder, intending to start a friendly conversation. The fat man gave a violent start and

whirled about; and Burgess found himself looking into the muzzle of a big forty-five automatic pistol.

The fat man was white and trembling; one could see that he was not used to handling a pistol. But that made it all the more dangerous for Burgess, at whom the thing was pointed. With a quick movement, Burgess ducked to the ground and knocked the pistol out of the man's hand. It fell with a crash to the floor. Hoping that no one else had heard it, Burgess swept it up, pushed himself into the stateroom, and closed the door. He sat down with the gun on his knees, The old man was backed into a corner facing him, pale as a sheet, and panting desperately. Burgess was tremendously sorry for him.

"Now what's the trouble?" Burgess asked kindly. "I certainly wouldn't do you any harm."

"Who are you?" the old man panted.

Burgess flipped his coat lapel and showed his badge.

"I am a *Times* reporter. Tell me what you are afraid of. These little affairs are right in my line, and perhaps I can help you out."

The fat man studied Burgess for some minutes. Finally, without a word, he reached into his pocket and handed out a letter for Burgess to read. It was written in white ink on a brilliant scarlet paper :

"Most of the recipients of the red letter have been wise enough to hand over the money promptly. Three were foolish and refused. They were Lowell, Hirsch, and Carlotti. Do you remember what happened to themP No one can save you from the same fate unless you fork over at once.

"I need another million dollars for my project. You can spare it as easily as the ordinary man can spare a quarter. Have it ready in twenty-four hours in liquid securities or banknotes. A man will call for it at your home. He does not know me nor where I stay; therefore, if you have him followed, the money will be lost, and I shall be compelled to use you as an example to the next man upon whom I call for help.

"If I do not get the money, there is no way in which you can escape me, no place where you will be safe. I'll get you, no matter what pree cautions you take."

"I got it early this morning. Do you remember Lowell, Hirsch, and Corlotti?" the fat man asked.

The reporter nodded.

"Three hideous murders of wealthy men within the past year, and unsolved to date," he mused. "The letter seems to have been written by a man who is intelligent, but somewhat insane. That's the most dangerous kind. Have any idea who it might be?"

The fat man shook his head.

"Now, I'm worried because of the impulse which made me rush to this ship as soon as I got the letter. I thought this the best way to escape. But, after I had thought it over, I realized that to anyone else, it would obviously be the first thing I would do. I'm afraid I bungled."

"Why should flight on a space-liner be so obvious?" the reporter asked.

"Well, you see, I'm Johnson, the president of the company that owns this line, *The Mars, Ganymede, and Callisto Transportation Company*. I was so scared by the letter that I did a very simple-minded thing to come here."

There was a rap on the door, at which Mr. Johnson started violently. It turned out to be several sailors, making the routine search of the ship for stowaways. Behind them came the Captain of the ship, and peered into the room.

"I got your letter of introduction," he said gruffly to Burgess. Then he spied Mr. Johnson.

"Oh, how do you do, sir," he said, all meekness and courtesy. "I've got to be careful," he explained to the President, who was virtually the owner of the vessel. "There has been too much of this stowaway stuff. There's danger in it, and the law has recently made it a capital offense. A few weeks ago, on the Aristotle, a little overcrowded ship twenty-one days on the way to Ganymede, a stowaway used up more air than had been figured on; this in turn resulted in a deeper breathing on the part of the passengers, which exhausted the oxygen supply prematurely, and the ship arrived in port with half a dozen passengers unconscious from asphyxia. If I ever find one of those rats on my ship, I'll— "

He strode down the hallway, finishing the threat into his whiskers.

"Unless a stowaway is discovered, your enemy, if he is on board, must be one of the passengers," Burgess said to Mr. Johnson. "Could that be possible?"

"I don't know any of them. And he might be anybody." Mr. Johnson looked very much depressed.

"Well, I'll stay here with you and keep an eye open. You're not afraid that I might be the man who is trying to kill you?"

"I don't think so." Mr. Johnson studied the reporter. "There is your badge, and Captain Scott knew you. I shall be glad to have you stay."

"Or," suggested Burgess, "perhaps it would be better yet for both of us to move into my stateroom."

Mr. Johnson nodded in acquiescence, and started to push the button to summon the porter. Burgess stayed his hand.

"I'll carry your things. The fewer the people that know about this move, the better."

For eight hours of the twenty-four, the lights were turned down, and "night" prevailed on the ship. During the "evening" the wild young society

couple were playing bridge with the two traveling-men. Mrs. de Palogni's voice grated unpleasantly on Burgess' ears; but the sight of the honeymoon couple close together on the aftergallery again served to redeem his attitude toward his fellow-men. He could imagine the thrills that the two young people got out of being all alone out in space, with nothing but stars in all directions, and the brilliant disk of the Earth below. In another corner, Miss Waterbury and Cecilie May, Kaufman's pretty secretary, already well acquainted; were lost in wonder at the Heavens beneath them. The porter came croaking down the corridor. With a whispered "good-night," Burgess put Mr. Johnson into the upper berth and took the lower one himself, for strategic reasons.

SOME time in the night, Burgess woke up with a start. He glanced out of the port at the brilliant stars and the dense black sky, and felt his heart pounding in some unconscious alarm. He lay still and listened. There was a faint clicking sound, which came, was silent, and came again. It issued from the door on the opposite side of the corridor.

Burgess got silently out of bed, taking his pistol in one hand. Then, suddenly he threw open the door of the stateroom. A dark figure was just opening the door of the stateroom opposite, the one that had been Mr. Johnson's. It whirled and ran up the corridor. In an instant Burgess had snapped on the corridor light and was speeding in pursuit.

The dark figure ran ahead and into the drawing-room, with Burgess in pursuit. The drawing-room was dark; Burgess went in rather cautiously, pistol in hand. He found the switch and snapped on the light. There was no one in the room. With amazed glances he searched the room, but no one was there. He hurried to the door opposite the one by which he had entered, but found it locked. It was always kept locked, for it led to the officers' quarters. It could not have been unlocked and locked again during the second or two that it had taken him to turn on the light.

Burgess stared blankly around. The fugitive had disappeared !

The Stowaway

DOWN the corridor, doors were opening and sleepy D heads were poking out. The porter stalked up, the whirring of his gears audible in the night's quietude.

"Do you want anything?" he asked in soft, courteous tones.

"No," said Burgess. "I couldn't sleep, and came to find something to read." He had decided to say nothing for the present. Then he was assailed by a foolish little feeling: the porter could understand his "no" but nothing of the

rest of the explanation. It was difficult to keep in mind that these things were only machines; one felt like treating them as conscious human beings.

The passengers retired sleepily to their respective rooms, and the porter returned to his niche; his faint croaking stopped and the night was quiet again. The hum of the ship's reaction-motors was barely audible, for once the ship got under way, very little power was needed to maintain velocity.

Burgess was tremendously puzzled. The crew's thorough search had found no stowaway. It must be one of the passengers. Which one could it be?

He studied them all over at the breakfast table. They were all present except Mr. Johnson and Colonel Thayer's wife, both of whom were a little ill with spacesickness. Though the artificial gravity-fields had pretty well overcome space-sickness, some people were still susceptible to it. After breakfast he talked the matter over with Mr. Johnson, who lay in his berth, pale and nauseated.

"If anyone wants to kill me, why don't they do it now?" he asked with grim humor at his illness.

"Here they are." Burgess checked over the passenger list. "Kaufman is a big business man; the Colonel is a soldier; Cecilie May, Miss Waterbury, and Mrs, Thayer can be left out; they are not criminals, especially not murderers. The de Palognis are too rattle-brained; they couldn't even think up such a scheme. That leaves the two traveling-men and Flynn, the young engineer, and they're impossible. It can't be any of the passengers."

Mr. Johnson called for the Captain, who appeared in the stateroom shortly. The matter was explained, but the Captain was inclined to laugh at it.

"Impossible!" he snorted. "We went over this ship with a fine-toothed comb last night."

"Could it have been one of the crew?" Burgess asked.

"Say!" exclaimed the Captain. "Those fellows have to work. If one of them left his post for ten seconds, he'd be missed."

It was decided to take young Flynn into their confidence. He looked to be a very honest and earnest chap, with just the alert type of mind that was needed to help solve such a riddle. The plan was that either Burgess or Flynn would be constantly on guard.

By noon Mr. Johnson felt better and was up and around. In the afternoon the Captain sent word that they were passing quite near a large asteroid, and all the passengers were gathered in the after-gallery. Most of the passengers gazed in puzzled silence at the bleak and jagged surface of the huge, rocky fragment outside; only the de Palognis were trying to crack a few cheap jokes about it, comparing it to a French pleasure resort, where they had tried to

amuse themselves last summer. Mr. Johnson left the group early and went back to lie down. Suddenly his cries resounded from the corridor:

"Porter! Porter! Help! Help!"

"Buzz! buzz! buzz!" came the porter's busy-signal. It meant that he was engaged on some other job and could not come at once.

Flynn and Burgess were in the corridor in a couple of leaps. There they saw Mr. Johnson struggling and panting— alone. He was dishevelled and breathless, and as they appeared, sank slowly to the floor.

"What is it? What's the matter?" Burgess demanded.

"Something— somebody grabbed me by the throat," Mr. Johnson gasped. "But I couldn't see anything."

Burgess wondered if Mr. Johnson's illness and terror had begun to derange his mind. The porter came up and helped them carry the old man to his berth. No, the old fellow was, in spite of his nervous timidity, too shrewd and level-headed to go off that way. Something must really have happened. The passengers, remembering the scare during the night, gathered in the drawingroom and questioned each other.

In a couple of hours, Mr. Johnson felt better and was trying to be cheerful. Burgess, who had been at his side all of the time, noting that the old man was dozing, decided to let him sleep. He called the porter.

"Watch him while I walk about a little," he directed. "If he wants anything, call me."

As he came into the drawing-room, Burgess was assailed by a hundred questions. Mr. Johnson's identity had become known to the passengers; and this occurrence, combined with that of the "night" before, had roused their curiosity. He was still puzzling, trying to decide how much to tell them, when a pistol shot crashed out, down the corridor. Everybody turned in that direction, to see the tall form of the porter sway in Mr. Johnson's door, topple backwards, and fall with a great crash to the floor. There he lay still.

"Murder !"

"It's the porter, poor fellow!"

"Someone has shot the porter!"

Cecilie May screamed, and Flynn was soothing her in a wonderfully tender tone of voice, though everyone was too tense to notice it.

"It's only a machine," Flynn said to her. She shrank toward him, also quite unconscious of her action, and laughed nervously.

Then Mr. Johnson appeared at the door of his stateroom with a smoking pistol in his hand, looking very sheepish. The Captain came in through the dining-room, disgust showing very plainly in his expression.

"Too bad," Mr. Johnson said to the Captain. "I was half asleep and saw the robot bending over me, and it rattled me. My nerves have been pretty shaky."

The Captain growled something and called two sailors to drag the porter away. Later on he announced that the apparatus could be repaired, but that it might take days, for the bullet had cut over a thousand wires.

"In the meanwhile," the Captain said, "you'll have to wait on yourselves. I can't spare a man from the crew, and we haven't any extra robots."

The Colonel groaned and the two traveling-men looked worried. Flynn grinned hugely at their concern. The porter did nothing but foolish, trivial little tasks, which everyone could have done just as well for himself. But most of them felt helpless.. There was much running to and fro. Burgess heard the Colonel and his wife fussing in the neighboring stateroom about the proper way to make up a bed, and Kaufman walked ostentatiously down the corridor fetching a pitcher of water.

"Be sure and let me know if you need anything," Flynn said to Cecilie May.

Flynn sat up with Mr. Johnson until midnight, and was then relieved by Burgess.

"Why is it that we can't radio from the ship to the Earth?" Burgess asked the engineer; "this would be a cracking good story for the *Times*."

"There is a layer of charged particles about sixty miles above the Earth's surface, and no radio wave has yet been sent through it. It would be convenient if we could keep up communication with the home folks, all tight."

Burgess sat and studied about the mystery, while up and down the corridor sounded the snores of tle passengers through the dim illumination. There_was something creepy about a night way off in space, millions of miles from anywhere. Something creaked down the corridor, and there was a swish and a rustle.

"Sh-h!" came a whisper from the darkness. "Mr. Burgess !"

Burgess leaped to his feet, pistol in hand.

"Don't shoot," came the whisper. "It's me."

Burgess snapped on the light and stood there aghast.

"Chick!" he gasped. "You here?"

The vicious threats of the Captain about stowaways flashed through his mind as he stood there in horror and looked at the grinning boy.

"How did you get here? How did you elude the search?" he demanded.

Chick laughed proudly at his own cleverness.

"Remember the box that came aboard at the last moment? I was in that."

"Well, hurry back there and hide. The Captain is fierce on stowaways and he'll murder you if he finds you. I'll bring you food and water."

"I've got all the food and water I want, but I'm tired of being shut up. I want to see what space-traveling is like."

Burgess' jaw suddenly fell. Down the corridor came the Captain, on his nightly rounds about the ship. Burgess felt a cold perspiration break out all over him, as the Captain peered into Chick's face.

"Aha! the prowler!" exclaimed the Captain.

He grabbed Chick's collar and blew a whistle. Two husky sailors ran up and seized the boy roughly.

"What are you going to do with him?" inquired Burgess in consternation.

"Throw him out af the air-valve with the garbage," growled the Captain. "I've got enough stowaways. Besides— prowling around and causing a lot of trouble."

The Disappearing Killer

SEVERAL PEOPLE in pajamas and bathrobes arrived on the scene. Mrs. de Palogni was gurgling with real excitement. For once her jaded senses were getting a real thrill out of something.

"Poor kid!" said Flynn, as the sailors gave Chick a shake that made his teeth rattle.

The grunts of Mr. Johnson could be heard coming from within the stateroom, as he got off his berth and came to the door.

"What's up?" he groaned, sticking his head out of the door.

Suddenly his eyes widened, as he saw the boy in the clutches of the two sailors. He straightened up and became all at once very severe.

"Charles!" he said sternly. "How in the world did you get here?"

"Father!" exclaimed the boy, going all to pieces in a hysterical laugh. "Father! Are you on this ship. Well, don't let them kill me."

"Well, I should say I won't," the old man said, a sudden tenderness coming into his voice. He studied the situation for a few minutes while everyone else stood silent. The Captain looked from father to son. Mr. Johnson's next words showed, however, how a meek and nervous man like himself could have succeeded in building up a gigantic corporation like the *Mars, Ganymede, and Callisto Transportation Company*. He could think quickly and to the point.

"We need a porter," said Mr. Johnson. "Charles wants a ride. All right. Charles, you're the porter, and can work for your ride, even if you are the President's son."

There was a burst of cheering from the passengers at the clever way in which a difficult situation had been solved.

"Thanks, dad!" said Chick simply.

"But— " gasped Burgess. 'What about the red letter? And the attempts on your life?"

"Well, it wasn't Charles," Mr. Johnson said with a gentle finality in his voice. He was proud of his son, but did not believe in spoiling him.

And the next morning Chick was making up beds and shining shoes. Most of the passengers protested against accepting these services from him, but the boy was a good sport, and did everything that his job required of him. During his spare time he spent every moment watching the ship's mechanics repairing the mechanism of the televox-robot. By evening Chick and Flynn were firm friends; they were talking about reaction-motors, meteorite deflectors, three-dimensional sextants, and such things with a fondness that only the two of them felt. Also, Chick's alert eye promptly noted Flynn's partiality toward Cecilie May, and that young lady was the recipient of real service from the new porter. The son of a millionaire seemed happy to lift suitcases, carry pitchers of water, and brush coats. And whenever he saw Burgess, he grinned at him triumphantly, as if to say, "I told you so!"

That evening was a pleasanter one for the little group of passengers. Everyone's space-sickness was over, and the tension of the past twenty-four hours was relaxed. A jolly party gathered in the drawing-room. Games of cards, ping-pong, and backgammon went gaily forward. Finally, the furniture was cleared away, a phonograph requisitioned, and a dance was started. The ladies, being in the minority, were very much in demand. Even the cranky Mrs. Thayer, the Colonel's wife, smiled and flushed as one of the traveling men gallantly offered her his arm and whirled her about in the dizzy steps of the new *whizsarro*, while the school teacher, floating in the arms of Burgess, was positively radiant. Mrs. de Palogni was trying to split up the bridal couple and get a dance with the young husband, but he was sublimely unconscious of her existence. However, he did give the Captain a dance with his bride. Likewise, Cecilie May gave her first courtesy dance to Kaufman, her employer, who then went back to his chair and watched the group abstractedly, undoubtedly figuring the prices of pitchblende and zirconite in his mind. Chick bustled about with a tray and glasses, and even Mr. Johnson seemed to have forgotten his nervousness for the time being, and beamed happily on the group as though it were his own family enjoying a good time. However, he slipped away early from the dance, looking rather tired, and went to his stateroom.

Burgess also withdrew from the activities and stood in the corridor, watching the crowd. The little by-plays of human nature appealed to him. However, before many minutes were up, he had a feeling that somehow, somewhere, all was not well. He did not believe in premonitions, realizing that they were always explainable on the ground of some sensory stimulus that had

set the subconscious mind alert, some faint sight or sound not registered in the consciousness. He therefore kept his eyes steadily on Mr. Johnson's door; in fact, he had up to the time that he noticed the queer unrest, maintained an uninterrupted watch without thinking, ever since Mr. Johnson had stepped into his room. He had seen nothing

Now there was some sort of a vague thumping. It seemed that he had already been hearing it for some minutes in the back of his mind. Now the thumping was growing weaker, and gradually it stopped.

In sudden alarm. he leaped down the corridor in big strides. A man dashed out of the door of Mr. Johnson's stateroom, and ran swiftly down the corridor in the opposite direction, toward the dining-room.

"Now we've got him," thought Burgess. "He can't get away this time."

With a shout, the reporter dashed after the fleeing figure. In the dining-room he stopped to snap on the lights. The room was empty. He hurried on through into the after-gallery. That also was empty. It contained no furniture, and the bright lights illuminated every nook and cranny of it. There was no way out of the two rooms except the corridor by which he had come in. What had become of the man?

There was a commotion behind Burgess in the corridor, exclamations and babbling of voices. He hurried back to find a crowd about Mr. Johnson's door. As he ran up, the people stepped aside and opened up a path for him to get through. Inside the stateroom Mr. Johnson lay on the bed motionless, his face a dark purple. He was not breathing. On his throat were five black marks.

"Strangled!" exclaimed somebody in the crowd.

Burgess tore open Mr. Johnson's shirt, and detected a faint flutter of the heart. The next moment the Captain was on the scene and in charge. Cold packs were put about the throat and artificial respiration instituted. Soon their strenuous and persistent efforts were rewarded by a flutter of the eyelids, several gasps, and finally a groan. Mr. Johnson turned over and sat up, choking and gasping, trying to talk.

"Hagan," Burgess could distinguish, though it meant nothing to him. "Wanted the money again," came in a whisper. "I hit him but he was too much for me."

A LUMP rose in Burgess' throat. The fat, flabby, nervous old President, on the inside, was a good sport.

The reporter counted the crowd. There were ten people. The Colonel's wife was in the drawing-room, fanning herself. The human face hides emotions, rather than displays them. Not the least suggestion of a clue could he find in the countenances of any of them. Could he but see behind the masks of

astonishment and horror, would it be possible to guess which one had done it? Yet he had to admit that the probability of any of these people having done the cowardly deed, was exceedingly 'remote, Everyone of them had been behind him, absorbed in the dance at the time when had had heard the thumping, which must have been the struggles of Mr. Johnson while he was being throttled.

The Captain came in and picked up Mr. Johnson's pistol, which lay on the floor beside the berth. Burgess was telling him the story:

"None of these passengers could have gotten past me, and I was between them and Mr. Johnson's room. The time I spent in the dining-room and after-gallery was only a few seconds, certainly not long enough to give anyone a chance to choke a man. I chased the fellow into the dining-room, and when I got there, he wasn't there."

"There's something fishy about this,' the Captain growled into his beard.

Burgess was determined to solve the puzzle, and made up his mind to work as he had never worked before. "TIMES REPORTER UNRAVELS INTERPLANETARY MYSTERY" he could see the headlines say in his mind's eye. ;

"You're sure it couldn't be one of the crew?" Burgess asked the Captain.

The Captain laughed.

"That shows how little you know about discipline on an interplanetary liner. I can account for the presence of every man during every minute of the time. But, we're going to go over this ship again. One man got by our first search; there must be another. And from now on, an armed guard stands by Mr. Johnson's door, day and night."

The man with a rifle was already in his place. The search of the ship began at once. The searchers began in the passenger section, going through trunks, looking into corners, searching the most impossible places, far too small for a man to hide in. They proceeded systematically, beginning at the drawing-room end. The rest of the night they could be heard down below, shifting the cargo, hammering on boxes and cases. The noises began at the forward end and gradually moved aft. In the morning the Captain showed up in the dining-room, tired and cross.

"How is Mr. Johnson?" he asked.

"His condition is good," replied Burgess, "except for his pain and discomfort. He will get over it perfectly."

"If there had been anything on board bigger than a rabbit, we would have dug it out last night," the Captain said. "We opened every case of freight that weighs over seventy-five pounds, unscrewed every hatch, threw light in every corner. It beats me."

The Captain clicked his jaw shut and looked fierce. Burgess grinned.

"You think that's a puzzle?" he said. "Well, what about this one? I chased a man down the corridor into the dining-room. He was not in the dining-room when I got there. He was not in the after-gallery. He did not pass me.

"What became of him?

"Is there any way of getting out of the dining-room or after-gallery except by the way I came in?"

The Captain stared at him.

"No. The only communications with the rest of the ship are the food service tubes which are four inches in diameter, and a hatch that it would take twenty minutes and a lot of noise to unscrew."

The Captain stopped and thought a moment.

"How did the man get out?"

Burgess was puzzled. By the strongest kind of logic, there was a man hidden on board, and this logic was confirmed by material proof on poor Mr. Johnson's person. Yet this man had disappeared before Burgess' eyes, and a thorough, systematic search of the ship had proved that he was not on board.

Technical Assistance

THE reporter took his turn at nursing the President, while the guard stood at the door with his rifle.

Noon lunch and the dinner meal in the evening were gloomy, nervous occasions. Everyone started at the least noise.. Kaufman's brows were drawn and dark. Only the de Palognis seemed to be getting a thrill out of the situation, whereas the honeymoon couple were quite impervious to it. The young engineer carried Cecilie May's service plate at both meals, and the two ate together, one talking enthusiastically, the other listening raptly. The girl seemed to feel safer near the young man, and was afraid to be about the ship except in his presence.

Burgess was intensely worried. The villain had almost gotten away with his nefarious scheme this time. There was still time enough before they reached Mars for many things to happen. He strolled to the aftergallery, and found himself in a secluded corner where he could think undisturbed; he stood there and looked out upon the deeps full of countless stars, and tried to marshall his ideas about the mystery.

He was roused from the depths of his reverie by low voices behind him. He was conscious of having heard them for some time without having paid much attention. A sudden embarrassment made him keep silent. They did not know he had overheard, and he did not want to break up the occasion. If they never found out he was there, it would be just as well.

"I love you," said a man very softly. It was Flynn.

"I love you, too," Cecilie May whispered timidly.

"I'm glad I found you."

"Isn't it wonderful?"

There was a long period of silence.

"I'm terribly sorry," the man's voice said, "that it will be so long before we can get married. I haven't a cent, and I don't even know what I'm going to do when I get to Mars. I'm afraid— that a professional man's start is a slow and difficult one."

Cecilie May cheered him with soft words and kisses.

Right there was where Burgess got the idea that eventually led to the solution of the mystery. It developed slowly while he was having to keep quiet as a mouse in order not to interrupt the lovers. Eventually the newly engaged couple wandered away, and Burgess hurried back to spend a little time at Mr. Johnson's bedside.

The old man could whisper a little, but swallowing was still terribly painful. The guard stood motionless at the door. After he thought he had allowed plenty of time, Burgess went out to look for the young engineer, and found him getting ready for bed.

"Would you like to help solve this mystery?" Burgess asked him.

"Anything I can do— " Flynn said. "I'm not much on mysteries."

"In two days we reach Mars," Burgess said. "Here, in closs quarters it is possible to watch Mr. Johnson carefully. When he gets to Mars the killer will have free rein, and the old man will be in greater danger. That's still a pretty wild country, you know. We've got to catch him before we land."

"I don't see how you're going to," the young engineer said. "The ship's been searched— "

"Well, I got an idea last night. I was thinking about you and about your work. You're an engineer?"

Flynn nodded.

"You know all about scientific things?"

Flynn laughed.

"I wish I did," he said.

"Well, this mystery needs science to solve it."

"I'd be mighty proud if I could help any."

They went into Burgess' stateroom and sat and talked and figured with pencils on paper; they leaned back and planned. Finally Flynn said:

"That ought to work. Now to see the Captain. But it will take me several hours of work in the ship's shop to get things ready."

They put their plan before the Captain.

"It's all right with me, as long as you don't interfere with the guard," the Captain said, but looked incredulous.

"We only want to move the guard ten feet up the corridor. He can stay within plain sight of the door, where he can reach it in one second; and we shall both keep our eyes on the door."

The Captain looked dubiously from one to the other.

"Burgess has a good reputation. Flynn looks as though he knew his stuff." This to himself— then aloud: "Go ahead. But I'll be around, too, and keep an eye on it."

As they came back into the corridor, they found Chick standing horrified with a piece of paper in his hand. The guard looked worried and frightened, and the Colonel was sputtering incoherently. It was a note that had been found on the floor of the sick man's room. Yet the guard insisted that he had not taken his eyes off his charge for an instant; and he was a tried and trusted man.

"*You cannot escape me*," the note read. "*In spite of your precautions, I'm going to get you. Fork over the million or you won't reach Mars alive. A check will do; leave payee line blank, and lay it on the doorsill*."

Burgess and Flynn nodded to each other and smiled.

"That confirms our idea," Burgess said to the Captain. "Do not blame the guard; I'm sure he is right in what he says. But there is no need to pay any attention to the note."

Flynn was busy all day in the ship's shop. But the next morning the passengers saw Flynn and Burgess playing catch with an indoor baseball down the length of the corridor. A crash and the tinkling of glass announced an accident: the smashing of the light-bulb over the middle of the corridor. Then Flynn attempted to replace the bulb; he tried several bulbs from different parts of the ship, but none of them would work. Finally he gave it up and left a dark bulb in the socket.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "There is plenty of light from the bulbs at the ends of the corridor."

However, some of the passengers were worried, for the dark bulb was right over Mr. Johnson's door, leaving it the darkest portion of the corridor. Chick was dispatched into the lower regions of the ship with a suitcase, and returned dragging it as though it were immensely heavy. Burgess and Flynn spent the whole afternoon in Burgess' room. Everyone was restless, and wandered from one thing to another, not knowing what to do. After dinner Burgess appeared among them, leading one of the traveling men by the arm.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said. "I have just learned that Mr. Banks here knows a lot of astonishing tricks with cards. You are all in need of diversion at this time. Let's get everybody together."

They gathered in the drawing-room, and the traveling man stood up in front of them with a deck of cards in his hand. He pulled his coat-sleeves up on his forearm, and spread his cards fanwise.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," he began. "Will one of the ladies please step forward. I shall turn the cards face down, so that I cannot see them. Now, Miss Waterbury, you draw out a card. Be careful not to let me see it, but remember it well. Now put it back. Do you all remember what the card was— "

He pattered on, and Burgess slipped out of the room as soon as Banks had the attention of all of them. In his stateroom he and Flynn bent over a strange conglomeration of apparatus. On one end was a great quartz lens, borrowed from the ship's bolometer. The other end looked like the receiving portion of a television apparatus, with a hood drawn over the screen.

"Is everybody busy in there?" Flynn asked.

"He's got 'em going," Burgess smiled.

"Then give the guard his signal."

The guard pretended to become interested in the card tricks, and gradually edged his way up the corridor, away from Mr. Johnson's door.

"I don't see the Captain," said Burgess, "but I'll bet he's somewhere on the job.

"Take a look into it," Flynn said. "I've hooded the screen because the light from it on our faces would reveal our presence in here. This way it is absolutely dark.

Burgess looked into the hood, at the screen.

"What about it?" he asked. "I see the corridor. It looks just the same as per naked eye."

"Look again," Flynn said, keeping his voice low. "Without the instrument the corridor right here is rather gloomy because the middle bulb gives no light; all the light there is comes from the bulbs at the ends of the corridor. Now look into the instrument."

"Ah," said Burgess. "I see. In here, the middle of the corridor is brilliantly lighted, and its ends are dark. Just the opposite. How do you work that?"

"The middle bulb is not dead. It gives infra-red light, which is not perceived by the human eye. This instrument sees by infra-red light; all visible light is screened off by a colloidal-silver filter. The lens gathers the infrated image, throws it on the infra-red sensitive photo-electric cells, which project it on the ordinary televisionscreen as visible to our eyes. In other words, this is a viewer for infra-red light.

"But why— "

"Sh-h. Suppose we wait. We've been talking too long now. Let's keep absolutely quiet. Tell me, after I have my face under the hood, if there is the least bit of me visible from the door? And let me have your gun."

There was a tense, silent wait. The sounds of the party in the drawing-room came to them, exclamations, titters, sudden floods of argument, a period of silence, a burst of laughter, rustling and commotion, and the performer's patter.

However, they had not long to wait.

There was a creak down the corridor, exceedingly faint. Then a faint swish. Flynn grew tense at his instrument, his breath coming fast. The reporter exerted his utmost to maintain silence in his excitement, for he could not see a thing anywhere. The corridor was empty, search it as he might, except for the guard half way toward the drawing-room. He breathed with his mouth wide open, for he was so excited that when he closed it, the breath shrilled loudly through his nostrils.

Unveiling the Inscrutable

SUDDENLY the engineer shouted out into the corridor: "Hands up! I've got you covered. Now take that cape off! I'll count ten, and if it isn't off by ten, I'll shoot. Your cape won't stop bullets."

The next instant his shot crashed. He leaped up, knocking Burgess in the ribs with his elbow. In two jumps he was across the corridor and in Mr. Johnson's room. Burgess dashed out after him, to see the Captain emerge from an adjoining stateroom. In another instant Chick was also on hand. The sounds of the party in the drawing-room suddenly stopped, and open-mouthed people trickled down the corridor. For there were sounds of a terrific commotion coming out of Mr. Johnson's room.

First there was a hoarse shriek from the sick man. Then there was the spectacle of the young engineer fighting violently all around the room— with nothing! His arms were out, as though locked around somebody; he heaved and grunted and staggered— all alone. A couple of times he almost went down. The rest of them, even Burgess, were too astonished to do anything except stand there staring and paralyzed. Mr. Johnson lay in bed like a man frozen stiff. Flynn staggered back against the wall as though someone had hit him.

After what seemed like an age, though it was only a few seconds, Burgess began to grasp the situation, and stepped into the room to see how he could be of assistance. But already, it was not necessary. 'Flynn was on his knees, six

inches above the ground, as though on top of something, though there was nothing there. He was pummeling terrific blows with his fists; and then desisted and began pulling and tearing at something under him. There was a loud rip, and a swing of his arm revealed a strip of clothing and a part of a face beneath him. Another pull disclosed another strip of clothing, an arm and a leg. Flynn was pulling something off a man who lay prostrate on the ground and who was becoming visible in long strips. In a moment Burgess and Chick were on the prostrate man and had him pinioned down.

Then Chick recoiled as though he had been shot. The man on the floor was ugly as sin and had a purple birthmark on his cheek!

"Pug!" cried out the boy, deeply hurt. "You?"

Burgess chuckled.

"I'm sorry it makes you feel bad," he said to Chick, patting him on the back. "But I'd call it a valuable piece of instruction."

The President sat up in bed. The prisoner stood between two husky sailors, with the Captain behind him.

"So you're the pretty fellow who wrote the red letters?" Mr. Johnson said, his sore throat wheezing in his excitement. "I've seen you about my place a time or two. What'll it be, Captain?"

"You can have him put in irons and brought back to New York for an expensive and long-drawn-out criminal trial. Or, I can take him under the space-navigation laws on two counts, as a stowaway and on insubordination, and put him out of the air-valve."

"Take him yourself. I should regret it if I took one chance too many. Brace up, Charles. We are sometimes mistaken in our friends. Your dad has learned lots of little lessons like that." He motioned to Flynn.

"You seem to have managed this business," he said, again displaying his innate shrewdness. 'Tell he how."

"Very simple, sir," answered Flynn, rather confused by the limelight suddenly turned on him. "Mr. Burgess presented to me the two facts: (1) There was a crook loose on the ship, and (2) He was not one of the passengers, officers, nor crew. Therefore, in some way he must be hidden, and had eluded the searches. The question was how? The fact that Burgess saw him go into a room from which there was no egress, and yet did not find him there, rather simplified the question.

"There popped into my head an item from *The Engineering Abstracts* about some experimental work with a double-refractile fabric made of a cellulose base combined with silicon salts, which will refract a light-ray through itself and continue it in its original straight line. If a light-ray is bent around an object and continued in its original straight line, that object becomes invtsible.

Objects in the laboratory where these experiments were carried out, were practically invisible. Only some rough preliminary work was described in the abstract.

"That offered a perfect explanation of the phenomena on this ship. Here the conditions are perfect. The light from these helium lamps gives a narrow wave-band and can be much more perfectly refracted than daylight. It occurred to me, in my effort to think of a way to discover this person, that if I could see by the light of a different wavelength, it would not be properly refracted, and I could detect the crook's presence. But any attempts to use such a light would give away our plans and put us all in serious danger. Therefore, I would have to see him by means of some invisible wavelength. Either the ultra-violet or the infra-red were available. But ultraviolet is difficult to generate, while the infra-red is easy: I merely blackened an old-fashioned nitrogen-filled incandescent-wire bulb. Then I rigged up an infra-red viewer and watched for him. I saw him sneak into Mr. Johnson's room, at a moment which we had purposely prepared, so that everyone's attention was obviously distracted elsewhere. I intended to shoot him, but he got in line with Mr. Johnson and I was afraid to take the chance, and had to jump on him."

Cecilie May was hanging on to Flynn's arm. Mr. Johnson fired a few rapid questions at both of them, and in the twinkle of an eye had all their intimate secrets out of them.

"I need a man to put in charge of the repair station for space-liners on Mars," he said to Flynn. "It is an out-of-the-way place, but it has in the past been a good stepping-stone to better jobs. The position is yours. Bless you two young people."

Kaufman raised his eyebrows.

"So, here's where I'm left without a secretary," he said. "But since it has happened this way, I guess I'll take it cheerfully. Here's a litle wedding present."

He wrote out a check and handed it to the confused and blushing Cecilie May.

A sailor stood in the door, saluted the Captain and announced the following:

"The lookout reports that Syrtis Major is visible through the front port. We ought to land in about four hours !"

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22: Neat Strip

Damon Runyon

1880-1946

Collier's, 9 April 1938

Collected in: *Take It Easy*, Stokes, 1938

NOW THIS Rose Viola is twenty years old and is five feet five inches tall in her high-heeled shoes, and weighs one hundred and twenty pounds, net, and has a twenty-six waist, and a thirty-six bust, and wears a four and one-half shoe.

Moreover, she has a seven-inch ankle, and an eleven-inch calf, and the reason I know all these intimate details is because a friend of mine by the name of Rube Goldstein has Rose Viola in a burlesque show and advertises her as the American Venus, and he always prints these specifications in his ads.

But of course Rube Goldstein has no way of putting down in figures how beautiful Rose Viola is, because after all any pancake may have the same specifications and still be a rutabaga. All Rube can do is to show photographs of Rose Viola and after you see these photographs and then see Rose Viola herself you have half a mind to look the photographer up and ask him what he means by so grossly underestimating the situation.

She has big blue eyes, and hair the colour of sun-up, and furthermore this colour is as natural as a six and five. Her skin is as white and as smooth as ivory and her teeth are like rows of new corn on the cob and she has a smile that starts slow and easy on her lips and in her eyes and seems to sort of flow over the rest of her face until any male characters observing same are wishing there is a murder handy that they can commit for her.

Well, I suppose by this time you are saying to yourself what is such a darberoo doing in a burlesque turkey, for burlesque is by no means an intellectual form of entertainment, and the answer to this question is that Rube Goldstein pays Rose Viola four hundred dollars per week, and this is by no means tin.

And the reason Rube Goldstein pays her such a sum is not because Rube is any philanthropist but because Rose Viola draws like a flaxseed poultice, for besides her looks she has that certain something that goes out across the footlights and hits every male character present smack-dab in the kisser and makes him hate to go home and gaze upon his ever-loving wife. In fact, I hear that for three weeks after Rose Viola plays a town the percentage of missing husbands appals the authorities.

It seems that the first time Rube Goldstein sees Rose Viola is in the city of Baltimore, Md., where his show is playing the old Gaiety, and one of Rube's chorus Judys, a sod widow who is with him nearly thirteen years and raises up

three sons to manhood under him, runs off and marries a joskin from over on the eastern shore.

Naturally, Rube considers this a dirty trick, as he is so accustomed to seeing this Judy in his chorus that he feels his show will never look the same to him again; but the same night the widow is missing, Rose Viola appears before him asking for a situation. Rube tells me he is greatly surprised at such a looking Judy seeking a place in a burlesque show and he explains to Rose Viola that it is a very tough life, to be sure, and that the pay is small, and that she will probably do better for herself if she gets a job dealing them off her arm in a beanery, or some such, but she requests Rube to kindly omit the alfalfa and give her a job, and Rube can see at once by the way she talks that she has personality.

So he hires her at twenty-five slugs per week to start with and raises her to half a C and makes her a principal the second night when he finds eighteen blokes lined up at the stage door after the show looking to date her up. In three weeks she is his star and he is three-sheeting her as if she is Katherine Cornell.

She comes out on the stage all dressed up in a beautiful evening gown and sings a little song, and as soon as she begins singing you wonder, unless you see her before, what she really is, as you can see by her voice that she is scarcely a singer by trade.

Her voice is not at all the same as Lily Pons's and in fact it is more like an old-fashioned coffee grinder, and about the time you commence to figure that she must be something like a magician and will soon start pulling rabbits out of a hat, Rose Viola begins to dance.

It is not a regular dance, to be sure. It is more of a hop and a skip and a jump back and forth across the stage, and as she is hopping and skipping and jumping, Rose Viola is also feeling around for zippers here and there about her person, and finally the evening gown disappears and she seems to be slightly dishabille but in a genteel manner, and then you can see by her shape that she is indeed a great artist.

Sometimes she will come down off the stage and work along the centre aisle, and this is when the audience really enjoys her most, as she will always stop before some bald-headed old character in an aisle seat where bald-headed characters are generally found, and will pretend to make a great fuss over him, singing to him, and maybe kissing him on top of the bald head and leaving the print of her lips in rouge there, which sometimes puts bald-headed characters to a lot of bother explaining when they get home.

She has a way of laughing and talking back to an audience and keeping it in good humour while she is working, although outside the theatre Rose Viola is

very serious, and seldom has much to say. In fact, Rose Viola has so little to say that there are rumours in some quarters that she is a trifle dumb, but personally I would not mind being dumb myself at four hundred boffoes per week.

Well, it seems that a character by the name of Newsbaum, who runs a spot called the Pigeon Club, hears of Rose Viola, and he goes to see her one night at the old Mid Theatre on Broadway where Rube's show is playing a New York engagement, and this Newsbaum is such a character as is always looking for novelties for his club and he decides that Rose Viola will go good there.

So he offers her a chance to double at his club, working there after she gets through with her regular show, and Rube Goldstein advises her to take it, as Rube is very fond of Rose and he says this may be a first step upward in her career because the Pigeon Club is patronized only by very high-class rumpots.

So Rose Viola opens one night at the Pigeon Club, and she is working on the dance floor close to the tables, and doing the same act she does in burlesque, when a large young character who is sitting at one of the front tables with a bunch of other young characters, including several nice-looking Judys, reaches out and touches Rose Viola with the end of a cigarette in a spot she just unzippers.

Now of course this is all in a spirit of fun, but it is something that never happens in a burlesque house, and naturally Rose is startled no little, and quite some, and in addition to this she is greatly pained, as it seems that it is the lighted end of the cigarette that the large young character touches her with.

So she begins letting out screams, and these screams attract the attention of Rube Goldstein, who is present to see how she gets along at her opening, and although Rube is nearly seventy years old, and is fat and slow and sleepy-looking, he steps forward and flattens the large young character with a dish of chicken a la king, which he picks up off a near-by table.

Well, it seems that the large young character is nobody but a character by the name of Mr. Choicer, who has great sums of money, and a fine social position, and this incident creates some little confusion, especially as old Rube Goldstein also flattens Newsbaum with another plate, this one containing lobster Newberg, when Newsbaum comes along complaining about Rube ruining his chinaware and also one of his best-paying customers.

Then Rube puts his arm around Rose Viola and makes her get dressed and leads her out of the Pigeon Club and up to Mindy's Restaurant on Broadway, where I am personally present to observe much of what follows.

They sit down at my table and order up a couple of oyster stews, and Rose Viola is still crying at intervals, especially when she happens to rub the spot where the lighted cigarette hits, and Rube Goldstein is saying that for two

cents he will go back to the Pigeon Club and flatten somebody again, when all of a sudden the door opens and in comes a young character in dinner clothes.

He is without a hat, and he is looking rumpled up no little, and on observing him, Rose Viola lets out a small cry, and Rube Goldstein picks up his bowl of oyster stew and starts getting to his feet, for it seems that they both recognize the young character as one of the characters at Mr. Choicer's table in the Pigeon Club.

This young character rushes up in great excitement, and grabs Rube's arm before Rube can let fly with the oyster stew, and he holds Rube down in his chair, and looks at Rose Viola and speaks to her as follows:

'Oh,' he says, 'I search everywhere for you after you leave the Pigeon Club. I wish to beg your pardon for what happens there. I am ashamed of my friend Mr. Choicer. I will never speak to him again as long as I live. He is a scoundrel. Furthermore, he is in bad shape from the chicken a la king. Oh,' the young character says, 'please forgive me for ever knowing him.'

Well, all the time he is talking, he is holding Rube Goldstein down and looking at Rose Viola, and she is looking back at him, and in five minutes more they do not know Rube Goldstein and me are in the restaurant, and in fact they are off by themselves at another table so the young character can make his apologies clearer, and Rube Goldstein is saying to me that after nearly seventy years he comes to the conclusion that the Judys never change.

So, then, this is the beginning of a wonderful romance, and in fact it is love at first sight on both sides, and very pleasant to behold, at that.

It seems that the name of the young character is Daniel Frame, and that he is twenty-six years of age, and in his last year in law school at Yale, and that he comes to New York for a week-end visit and runs into his old college chum, Mr. Choicer, and now here he is in love.

I learn these details afterward from Rose Viola, and I also learn that this Daniel Frame is an only child, and lives with his widowed mother in a two-story white colonial house with ivy on the walls, and a yard around it, just outside the city of Manchester, N.H.

I learn that his mother has an old poodle dog by the name of Rags, and three servants, and that she lives very quietly, and never goes anywhere much except maybe to church and that the moonlight is something wonderful up around Manchester, N.H.

Furthermore, I learn that Daniel Frame comes of the best people in New England, and that he likes ski-ing, and Benny Goodman's band, and hates mufflers around his neck, and is very fond of pop-overs for breakfast, and that his eyes are dark brown, and that he is six feet even and weighs one hundred and eighty pounds and that he never goes to a dentist in his life.

I also learn that the ring he wears on the little finger of his left hand is his family crest, and that he sings baritone with a glee club, and the chances are I will learn plenty more about Daniel Frame if I care to listen any further to Rose Viola.

'He wishes to marry me,' Rose says. 'He wishes to take me to the white colonial house outside of Manchester, N.H., where we can raise Sealyham terriers, and maybe children. I love Sealyham terriers,' she says. 'They are awfully cute. Daniel wishes me to quit burlesque entirely. He sees me work at the Mid the other night and he thinks I am wonderful, but,' Rose says, 'he says it worries him constantly to think of me out there on that stage running the risk of catching colds.

'Another thing,' Rose Viola says, 'Daniel wishes me to meet his mother, but he is afraid she will be greatly horrified if she finds out the way I am exposed to the danger of catching colds. He says,' Rose says, 'that his mother is very strict about such things.'

Personally, I consider Daniel Frame a very wishy-washy sort of character, and by no means suitable to a strong personality such as Rose Viola, but when I ask Rube Goldstein what he thinks about it, Rube says to me like this:

'Well,' he says, 'I think it will be a fine thing for her to marry this young character, although,' Rube says, 'from what he tells her of his mother, I do not see how they are going to get past her. I know these old New England broads,' he says. 'They consider burlesque anything but a worthy amusement. Still,' he says, 'I have no kick coming about the male characters of New England. They are always excellent customers of mine.'

'Why,' I say, 'Rose Viola is a fine artist, and does not need such a thing as marriage.'

'Yes,' Rube says, 'she is the finest artist in her line I ever see but one. Laura Legayo is still tops with me. She retires on me away back yonder before you ever see one of my shows. But,' he says, 'if Rose marries this young character, she will have a home, and a future. Rose needs a future.

'This burlesque business is about done around here for a while,' Rube says. 'I can see the signs. The blats are beefing, and the cops are complaining about this and that, and one thing and another. They have no soul for art, and besides we are the easiest marks around when the reformers start rousing the cops for anything whatever.

'It is always this way with burlesque,' Rube says. 'It is up and down. It is on the way down now, and Rose may not still be young enough by the time it goes up again. Yes,' he says, 'Rose needs a future.'

Well, it seems that old Rube is a pretty good guesser, because a couple of nights later he gets an order from the police commissioner that there must be

no more of this and that, and one thing and another, in his show, and what is more the police commissioner puts cops in all the burlesque houses to see that his order is obeyed.

At first Rube Goldstein figures that he may as well close down his New York run at once, and move to some city that is more hospitable to art, but he is wedged in at the Mid on a contract to pay rent for a few weeks longer, so while he is trying to think what is the best thing to do, he lets the show go on just the same, but omitting this and that, and one thing and another, so as not to offend the police commissioner in case he comes around looking for offence, or the cop the commissioner places on duty in the Mid, who is a character by the name of Halligan.

So there is Rose Viola out on the stage of the Mid doing her number in full costume without ever reaching for as much as a single zipper, and I can see what Rube Goldstein means when he says Rose needs a future, because looking at Rose in full costume really becomes quite monotonous after a while.

To tell the truth, the only one who seems to appreciate Rose in full costume is Daniel Frame when he comes down from Yale one week-end and finds her in this condition. In fact, Daniel Frame is really quite delighted with her.

'It is wonderful,' he says. 'It is especially wonderful because I tell my mother all about you, and she is talking of coming down from Manchester, N.H., to see you perform, and I have been worrying myself sick over her beholding you out there in danger of catching colds. I know she will be greatly pleased with you now, because,' he says, 'you look so sweet and modest and so well dressed.'

Naturally, as long as he is pleased, Rose Viola is pleased too, except that she suffers somewhat from the heat, for there is no doubt but what Rose is greatly in love with him and she scarcely ever talks about anything else, and does not seem to care if her art suffers from the change.

Now it comes on another Saturday night and I am backstage at the Mid talking to Rube Goldstein and he is telling me that he is greatly surprised to find business holding up so good. The house is packed to the doors, and I tell Rube that maybe he is wrong all these years and that the public appreciates art even when it has clothes on, but Rube says he thinks not. He says he thinks it is more likely that the customers are just naturally optimists.

Rose Viola is on the stage in full costume singing her song when all of a sudden somebody in the back of the audience lets out a yell of fire and this is an alarming cry in any theatre, to be sure, and especially in a spot like the Mid as it is an old house, and about as well fixed to stand off a fire as a barrel of grease. Then a duty fireman by the name of Rossoffsky, who is always on duty

in the Mid when a show is on, comes rushing backstage and says it is a fire all right.

It seems that a cafeteria next door to the Mid is blazing inside and the flames are eating their way through the theatre wall at the front of the house by the main entrance, and in fact when the alarm is raised the whole wall is blazing on both sides, and it is a most disturbing situation, to be sure.

Well, the audience in the Mid is composed mostly of male characters, because male characters always appreciate burlesque much more than females or children, and these male characters now rise from their seats and start looking for the exits nearest to them, but by now they are shut off from the main entrance by the fire.

So they commence looking for other exits, and there are several of these, but it seems from what Rossoffsky says afterward that these exits are not used for so long that nobody figures it will ever be necessary to use them again, and the doors do not come open so easy, especially with so many trying to open them at once.

Then the male characters begin fighting with each other for the privilege of opening the doors, and also of getting out through the doors after they are opened, and this results in some confusion. In fact, it is not long before the male characters are fighting all over the premises, and knocking each other down, and stepping on each other's faces in a most discourteous manner.

While it is well known to one and all that a burlesque theatre is no place to take an ever-loving wife to begin with, it seems that some of these male characters have their wives with them, and these wives start screaming, but of course they are among the first knocked down and stepped on, so not much is heard of them until afterward.

A few of the male characters are smart enough to leap up on the stage and high-tail it out of there by the back way, but most of them are so busy fighting on the floor of the theatre that they do not think of this means of exit, and it is just as well that they do not think of it all at once, at that, as there is but one narrow stage door, and a rush will soon pile them up like jack-rabbits there.

The orchestra quits playing and the musicians are dropping their instruments and getting ready to duck under the stage and Rose Viola is standing still in the centre of the stage with her mouth open, looking this way and that in some astonishment and alarm, when all of a sudden a tall, stern-looking old Judy with white hair, and dressed in grey, stands up on a seat in the front row right back of the orchestra leader, and says to Rose Viola like this:

'Quick,' she says. 'Go into your routine.'

Well, Rose Viola still stands there as if she cannot figure out what the old Judy is talking about, and the old Judy makes motions at her with her hands,

and then slowly unbuttons a little grey jacket she is wearing, and tosses it aside, and Rose gets the idea.

Now the stern-looking old Judy looks over to the orchestra leader, who is a character by the name of Butwell, and who is with Rube Goldstein's burlesque show since about the year one, and says to him:

'Hit 'er, Buttsy.'

Well, old Buttsy takes a look at her, and then he takes another look, and then he raises his hand, and his musicians settle back in their chairs, and as Buttsy lets his hand fall, they start playing Rose Viola's music, and the tall, stern-looking old Judy stands there on the seat in the front row pointing at the stage and hollering so loud her voice is heard above all the confusion of the male characters at their fighting.

'Look, boys,' she hollers.

And there on the stage is Rose Viola doing her hop, skip and a jump back and forth and feeling for the zippers here and there about her person, and finding same.

Now, on hearing the old Judy's voice, and on observing the scene on the stage, the customers gradually stop fighting with each other and begin easing themselves back into the seats, and paying strict attention to Rose Viola's performance, and all this time the wall behind them is blazing, and it is hotter than one hundred and six in the shade, and smoke is pouring into the Mid, and anybody will tell you that Rose Viola's feat of holding an audience against a house fire is really quite unsurpassed in theatrical history.

The tall, stern-looking old Judy remains standing on the seat in the front row until there are cries behind her to sit down, because it seems she is obstructing the view of some of those back of her, so finally she takes her seat, and Rose Viola keeps right on working.

By this time the fire department arrives and has the situation in the cafeteria under control, and the fire in the wall extinguished, and a fire captain and a squad of men come into the Mid, because it seems that rumours are abroad that a great catastrophe takes place in the theatre. In fact, the captain and his men are greatly alarmed because they cannot see a thing inside the Mid when they first enter on account of the smoke, and the captain sings out as follows:

'Is everybody dead in here?'

Then he sees through the smoke what is going on there on the stage, and he stops and begins enjoying the scene himself, and his men join him, and a good time is being had by one and all until all of a sudden Rose Viola keels over in a faint from her exertions. Rube orders the curtain down but the audience,

including the firemen, remain for some time afterward in the theatre, hoping they may get an encore.

While I am standing near the stage door in readiness to take it on the Jesse Owens out of there in case the fire gets close, who comes running up all out of breath but Daniel Frame.

'I just get off the train from New Haven,' he says. 'I run all the way from the station on hearing a report that the Mid is on fire. Is anybody hurt?' he says. 'Is Rose safe?'

Well, I suggest that the best way to find out about this is to go inside and see, so we enter together, and there among the scenery we find Rube Goldstein and a bunch of actors still in their make-ups gathered about Rose Viola, who is just getting to her feet and looking somewhat nonplussed.

At this same moment, Halligan, the cop stationed in the Mid, comes backstage, and pushes his way through the bunch around Rose Viola and taps her on the shoulder and says to her: 'You are under arrest,' Halligan says. 'I guess I will have to take you, too, Mr. Goldstein,' he says.

'My goodness,' Daniel Frame says. 'What is Miss Viola under arrest for?'

'For putting on that number out there just now,' Halligan says. 'It's a violation of the police commissioner's order.'

'Heavens and earth,' Daniel Frame says. 'Rose, do not tell me you are out there tonight running the risk of catching cold, as before?'

'Yes,' Rose says.

'Oh, my goodness,' Daniel Frame says, 'and all the time my mother is sitting out there in the audience. I figure this week is a great time for her to see you perform, Rose,' he says. 'I cannot get down from New Haven in time to go with her, but I send her alone to see you, and I am to meet her after the theatre with you and introduce you to her. What will she think?'

'Well,' Halligan says, 'I have plenty of evidence against this party. In fact, I see her myself. Not bad,' he says. 'Not bad.'

Rose Viola is standing there looking at Daniel Frame in a sad way, and Daniel Frame is looking at Rose Viola in even a sadder way, when Rossoffsky, the fireman, shoves his way into the gathering, and says to Halligan:

'Copper,' he says, 'I overhear your remarks. Kindly take a walk,' he says. 'If it is not for this party putting on that number out there, the chances are there will be a hundred dead in the aisles from the panic. In fact,' he says, 'I remember seeing you yourself knock over six guys trying to reach an exit before she starts dancing. She is a heroine,' he says. 'That is what she is, and I will testify to it in court.'

At this point who steps in through the stage door but the tall, stern-looking old Judy in grey, and when he sees her, Daniel Frame runs up to her and says:

'Oh, Mother,' he says, 'I am so mortified. Still,' he says, 'I love her just the same.'

But the old Judy scarcely notices him because by this time Rube Goldstein is shaking both of her hands and then over Rube's shoulder she sees Rose Viola, and she says to Rose like this:

'Well, miss,' she says, 'that is a right neat strip you do out there just now, although,' she says, 'you are mighty slow getting into it. You need polishing in spots, and then you will be okay. Rube,' she says, 'speaking of neat strips, who is the best you ever see?'

'Well,' Rube Goldstein says, 'if you are talking of the matter as art, I will say that thirty years ago, if they happen to be holding any competitions anywhere, I will be betting on you against the world, Laura.'

End