PAST MASTERS 179

Edward Makepeace Thackeray
Mark Hellinger
G K Chesterton
Peter Cheyney
Oscar Wilde
Joseph Conrad
Edward Lucas White
Stacy Aumonier

and more

PAST MASTERS 179

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

2 Oct 2024

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1: The Man Who Went Too Far

E. F. Benson

1867-1940

The Pall Mall Magazine, June 1904

THE LITTLE VILLAGE of St. Faith's nestles in a hollow of wooded hill up on the north bank of the river Fawn in the county of Hampshire, huddling close round its gray Norman church as if for spiritual protection against the fays and fairies, the trolls and "little people," who might be supposed still to linger in the vast empty spaces of the New Forest, and to come after dusk and do their doubtful businesses. Once outside the hamlet you may walk in any direction (so long as you avoid the high road which leads to Brockenhurst) for the length of a summer afternoon without seeing sign of human habitation, or possibly even catching sight of another human being. Shaggy wild ponies may stop their feeding for a moment as you pass, the white scuts of rabbits will vanish into their burrows, a brown viper perhaps will glide from your path into a clump of heather, and unseen birds will chuckle in the bushes, but it may easily happen that for a long day you will see nothing human. But you will not feel in the least lonely; in summer, at any rate, the sunlight will be gay with butterflies, and the air thick with all those woodland sounds which like instruments in an orchestra combine to play the great symphony of the yearly festival of June. Winds whisper in the birches, and sigh among the firs; bees are busy with their redolent labor among the heather, a myriad birds chirp in the green temples of the forest trees, and the voice of the river prattling over stony places, bubbling into pools, chuckling and gulping round corners, gives you the sense that many presences and companions are near at hand.

Yet, oddly enough, though one would have thought that these benign and cheerful influences of wholesome air and spaciousness of forest were very healthful comrades for a man, in so far as nature can really influence this wonderful human genus which has in these centuries learned to defy her most violent storms in its well-established houses, to bridle her torrents and make them light its streets, to tunnel her mountains and plow her seas, the inhabitants of St. Faith's will not willingly venture into the forest after dark. For in spite of the silence and loneliness of the hooded night it seems that a man is not sure in what company he may suddenly find himself, and though it is difficult to get from these villagers any very clear story of occult appearances, the feeling is widespread. One story indeed I have heard with some definiteness, the tale of a monstrous goat that has been seen to skip with hellish glee about the woods and shady places, and this perhaps is connected with the story which I have here attempted to piece together. It too is well-known to them; for all remember the young artist who died here not long ago,

a young man, or so he struck the beholder, of great personal beauty, with something about him that made men's faces to smile and brighten when they looked on him. His ghost they will tell you "walks" constantly by the stream and through the woods which he loved so, and in especial it haunts a certain house, the last of the village, where he lived, and its garden in which he was done to death. For my part I am inclined to think that the terror of the Forest dates chiefly from that day. So, such as the story is, I have set it forth in connected form. It is based partly on the accounts of the villagers, but mainly on that of Darcy, a friend of mine and a friend of the man with whom these events were chiefly concerned.

The day had been one of untarnished midsummer splendor, and as the sun drew near to its setting, the glory of the evening grew every moment more crystalline, more miraculous. Westward from St. Faith's the beechwood which stretched for some miles toward the heathery upland beyond already cast its veil of clear shadow over the red roofs of the village, but the spire of the gray church, over-topping all, still pointed a flaming orange finger into the sky. The river Fawn, which runs below, lay in sheets of sky-reflected blue, and wound its dreamy devious course round the edge of this wood, where a rough two-planked bridge crossed from the bottom of the garden of the last house in the village, and communicated by means of a little wicker gate with the wood itself. Then once out of the shadow of the wood the stream lay in flaming pools of the molten crimson of the sunset, and lost itself in the haze of woodland distances.

This house at the end of the village stood outside the shadow, and the lawn which sloped down to the river was still flecked with sunlight. Garden-beds of dazzling color lined its gravel walks, and down the middle of it ran a brick pergola, half-hidden in clusters of rambler-rose and purple with starry clematis. At the bottom end of it, between two of its pillars, was slung a hammock containing a shirt-sleeved figure.

The house itself lay somewhat remote from the rest of the village, and a footpath leading across two fields, now tall and fragrant with hay, was its only communication with the high road. It was low-built, only two stories in height, and like the garden, its walls were a mass of flowering roses. A narrow stone terrace ran along the garden front, over which was stretched an awning, and on the terrace a young silent-footed man-servant was busied with the laying of the table for dinner. He was neat-handed and quick with his job, and having finished it he went back into the house, and reappeared again with a large rough bath-towel on his arm. With this he went to the hammock in the pergola.

"Nearly eight, sir," he said.

"Has Mr. Darcy come yet?" asked a voice from the hammock.

"No, sir."

"If I'm not back when he comes, tell him that I'm just having a bathe before dinner."

The servant went back to the house, and after a moment or two Frank Halton struggled to a sitting posture, and slipped out on to the grass. He was of medium height and rather slender in build, but the supple ease and grace of his movements gave the impression of great physical strength: even his descent from the hammock was not an awkward performance. His face and hands were of very dark complexion, either from constant exposure to wind and sun, or, as his black hair and dark eyes tended to show, from some strain of southern blood. His head was small, his face of an exquisite beauty of modeling, while the smoothness of its contour would have led you to believe that he was a beardless lad still in his teens. But something, some look which living and experience alone can give, seemed to contradict that, and finding yourself completely puzzled as to his age, you would next moment probably cease to think about that, and only look at this glorious specimen of young manhood with wondering satisfaction.

He was dressed as became the season and the heat, and wore only a shirt open at the neck, and a pair of flannel trousers. His head, covered very thickly with a somewhat rebellious crop of short curly hair, was bare as he strolled across the lawn to the bathing-place that lay below. Then for a moment there was silence, then the sound of splashed and divided waters, and presently after, a great shout of ecstatic joy, as he swam up-stream with the foamed water standing in a frill round his neck. Then after some five minutes of limb-stretching struggle with the flood, he turned over on his back, and with arms thrown wide, floated down-stream, ripple-cradled and inert. His eyes were shut, and between half-parted lips he talked gently to himself.

"I am one with it," he said to himself, "the river and I, I and the river. The coolness and splash of it is I, and the water-herbs that wave in it are I also. And my strength and my limbs are not mine but the river's. It is all one, all one, dear Fawn."

A quarter of an hour later he appeared again at the bottom of the lawn, dressed as before, his wet hair already drying into its crisp short curls again. There he paused a moment, looking back at the stream with the smile with which men look on the face of a friend, then turned towards the house. Simultaneously his servant came to the door leading on to the terrace, followed by a man who appeared to be some half-way through the fourth decade of his years. Frank and he saw each other across the bushes and

garden-beds, and each quickening his step, they met suddenly face to face round an angle of the garden walk, in the fragrance of syringa.

"My dear Darcy," cried Frank, "I am charmed to see you."

But the other stared at him in amazement.

"Frank!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, that is my name," he said laughing, "what is the matter?"

Darcy took his hand.

"What have you done to yourself?" he asked. "You are a boy again."

"Ah, I have a lot to tell you," said Frank. "Lots that you will hardly believe, but I shall convince you— "

He broke off suddenly, and held up his hand.

"Hush, there is my nightingale," he said.

The smile of recognition and welcome with which he had greeted his friend faded from his face, and a look of rapt wonder took its place, as of a lover listening to the voice of his beloved. His mouth parted slightly, showing the white line of teeth, and his eyes looked out and out till they seemed to Darcy to be focused on things beyond the vision of man. Then something perhaps startled the bird, for the song ceased.

"Yes, lots to tell you," he said. "Really I am delighted to see you. But you look rather white and pulled down; no wonder after that fever. And there is to be no nonsense about this visit. It is June now, you stop here till you are fit to begin work again. Two months at least."

"Ah, I can't trespass quite to that extent."

Frank took his arm and walked him down the grass.

"Trespass? Who talks of trespass? I shall tell you quite openly when I am tired of you, but you know when we had the studio together, we used not to bore each other. However, it is ill talking of going away on the moment of your arrival. Just a stroll to the river, and then it will be dinner-time."

Darcy took out his cigarette case, and offered it to the other.

Frank laughed.

"No, not for me. Dear me, I suppose I used to smoke once. How very odd!"

"Given it up?"

"I don't know. I suppose I must have. Anyhow I don't do it now. I would as soon think of eating meat."

"Another victim on the smoking altar of vegetarianism?"

"Victim?" asked Frank. "Do I strike you as such?"

He paused on the margin of the stream and whistled softly. Next moment a moor-hen made its splashing flight across the river, and ran up the bank. Frank took it very gently in his hands and stroked its head, as the creature lay against his shirt.

"And is the house among the reeds still secure?" he half-crooned to it. "And is the missus quite well, and are the neighbors flourishing? There, dear, home with you," and he flung it into the air.

"That bird's very tame," said Darcy, slightly bewildered.

"It is rather," said Frank, following its flight.

During dinner Frank chiefly occupied himself in bringing himself up-to-date in the movements and achievements of this old friend whom he had not seen for six years. Those six years, it now appeared, had been full of incident and success for Darcy; he had made a name for himself as a portrait painter which bade fair to outlast the vogue of a couple of seasons, and his leisure time had been brief. Then some four months previously he had been through a severe attack of typhoid, the result of which as concerns this story was that he had come down to this sequestered place to recruit.

"Yes, you've got on," said Frank at the end. "I always knew you would. A.R.A. with more in prospect. Money? You roll in it, I suppose, and, O Darcy, how much happiness have you had all these years? That is the only imperishable possession. And how much have you learned? Oh, I don't mean in Art. Even I could have done well in that."

Darcy laughed.

"Done well? My dear fellow, all I have learned in these six years you knew, so to speak, in your cradle. Your old pictures fetch huge prices. Do you never paint now?"

Frank shook his head.

"No, I'm too busy," he said.

"Doing what? Please tell me. That is what every one is for ever asking me."

"Doing? I suppose you would say I do nothing."

Darcy glanced up at the brilliant young face opposite him.

"It seems to suit you, that way of being busy," he said. "Now, it's your turn. Do you read? Do you study? I remember you saying that it would do us all— all us artists, I mean— a great deal of good if we would study any one human face carefully for a year, without recording a line. Have you been doing that?"

Frank shook his head again.

"I mean exactly what I say," he said, "I have been *doing* nothing. And I have never been so occupied. Look at me; have I not done something to myself to begin with?"

"You are two years younger than I," said Darcy, "at least you used to be. You therefore are thirty-five. But had I never seen you before I should say you were just twenty. But was it worth while to spend six years of greatly-occupied life in order to look twenty? Seems rather like a woman of fashion."

Frank laughed boisterously.

"First time I've ever been compared to that particular bird of prey," he said. "No, that has not been my occupation— in fact I am only very rarely conscious that one effect of my occupation has been that. Of course, it must have been if one comes to think of it. It is not very important. Quite true my body has become young. But that is very little; I have become young."

Darcy pushed back his chair and sat sideways to the table looking at the other.

"Has that been your occupation then?" he asked.

"Yes, that anyhow is one aspect of it. Think what youth means! It is the capacity for growth, mind, body, spirit, all grow, all get stronger, all have a fuller, firmer life every day. That is something, considering that every day that passes after the ordinary man reaches the full-blown flower of his strength, weakens his hold on life. A man reaches his prime, and remains, we say, in his prime, for ten years, or perhaps twenty. But after his primest prime is reached, he slowly, insensibly weakens. These are the signs of age in you, in your body, in your art probably, in your mind. You are less electric than you were. But I, when I reach my prime— I am nearing it— ah, you shall see."

The stars had begun to appear in the blue velvet of the sky, and to the east the horizon seen above the black silhouette of the village was growing dove-colored with the approach of moon-rise. White moths hovered dimly over the garden-beds, and the footsteps of night tip-toed through the bushes. Suddenly Frank rose.

"Ah, it is the supreme moment," he said softly. "Now more than at any other time the current of life, the eternal imperishable current runs so close to me that I am almost enveloped in it. Be silent a minute."

He advanced to the edge of the terrace and looked out standing stretched with arms outspread. Darcy heard him draw a long breath into his lungs, and after many seconds expel it again. Six or eight times he did this, then turned back into the lamplight.

"It will sound to you quite mad, I expect," he said, "but if you want to hear the soberest truth I have ever spoken and shall ever speak, I will tell you about myself. But come into the garden if it is not too damp for you. I have never told any one yet, but I shall like to tell you. It is long, in fact, since I have even tried to classify what I have learned."

They wandered into the fragrant dimness of the pergola, and sat down. Then Frank began:

"Years ago, do you remember," he said, "we used often to talk about the decay of joy in the world. Many impulses, we settled, had contributed to this decay, some of which were good in themselves, others that were quite completely bad. Among the good things, I put what we may call certain

Christian virtues, renunciation, resignation, sympathy with suffering, and the desire to relieve sufferers. But out of those things spring very bad ones, useless renunciations, asceticism for its own sake, mortification of the flesh with nothing to follow, no corresponding gain that is, and that awful and terrible disease which devastated England some centuries ago, and from which by heredity of spirit we suffer now, Puritanism. That was a dreadful plague, the brutes held and taught that joy and laughter and merriment were evil: it was a doctrine the most profane and wicked. Why, what is the commonest crime one sees? A sullen face. That is the truth of the matter.

"Now all my life I have believed that we are intended to be happy, that joy is of all gifts the most divine. And when I left London, abandoned my career, such as it was, I did so because I intended to devote my life to the cultivation of joy, and, by continuous and unsparing effort, to be happy. Among people, and in constant intercourse with others, I did not find it possible; there were too many distractions in towns and work-rooms, and also too much suffering. So I took one step backwards or forwards, as you may choose to put it, and went straight to Nature, to trees, birds, animals, to all those things which quite clearly pursue one aim only, which blindly follow the great native instinct to be happy without any care at all for morality, or human law or divine law. I wanted, you understand, to get all joy first-hand and unadulterated, and I think it scarcely exists among men; it is obsolete."

Darcy turned in his chair.

"Ah, but what makes birds and animals happy?" he asked. "Food, food and mating."

Frank laughed gently in the stillness.

"Do not think I became a sensualist," he said. "I did not make that mistake. For the sensualist carries his miseries pick-a-back, and round his feet is wound the shroud that shall soon enwrap him. I may be mad, it is true, but I am not so stupid anyhow as to have tried that. No, what is it that makes puppies play with their own tails, that sends cats on their prowling ecstatic errands at night?".

He paused a moment.

"So I went to Nature," he said. "I sat down here in this New Forest, sat down fair and square, and looked. That was my first difficulty, to sit here quiet without being bored, to wait without being impatient, to be receptive and very alert, though for a long time nothing particular happened. The change in fact was slow in those early stages."

"Nothing happened?" asked Darcy rather impatiently, with the sturdy revolt against any new idea which to the English mind is synonymous with nonsense. "Why, what in the world *should* happen?"

Now Frank as he had known him was the most generous but most quick-tempered of mortal men; in other words his anger would flare to a prodigious beacon, under almost no provocation, only to be quenched again under a gust of no less impulsive kindliness. Thus the moment Darcy had spoken, an apology for his hasty question was half-way up his tongue. But there was no need for it to have traveled even so far, for Frank laughed again with kindly, genuine mirth.

"Oh, how I should have resented that a few years ago," he said. "Thank goodness that resentment is one of the things I have got rid of. I certainly wish that you should believe my story— in fact, you are going to— but that you at this moment should imply that you do not, does not concern me."

"Ah, your solitary sojournings have made you inhuman," said Darcy, still very English.

"No, human," said Frank. "Rather more human, at least rather less of an ape."

"Well, that was my first quest," he continued, after a moment, "the deliberate and unswerving pursuit of joy, and my method, the eager contemplation of Nature. As far as motive went, I daresay it was purely selfish, but as far as effect goes, it seems to me about the best thing one can do for one's fellow-creatures, for happiness is more infectious than small-pox. So, as I said, I sat down and waited; I looked at happy things, zealously avoided the sight of anything unhappy, and by degrees a little trickle of the happiness of this blissful world began to filter into me. The trickle grew more abundant, and now, my dear fellow, if I could for a moment divert from me into you one half of the torrent of joy that pours through me day and night, you would throw the world, art, everything aside, and just live, exist. When a man's body dies, it passes into trees and flowers. Well, that is what I have been trying to do with my soul before death."

The servant had brought into the pergola a table with syphons and spirits, and had set a lamp upon it. As Frank spoke he leaned forward towards the other, and Darcy for all his matter-of-fact commonsense could have sworn that his companion's face shone, was luminous in itself. His dark brown eyes glowed from within, the unconscious smile of a child irradiated and transformed his face. Darcy felt suddenly excited, exhilarated.

"Go on," he said. "Go on. I can feel you are somehow telling me sober truth. I daresay you are mad; but I don't see that matters."

Frank laughed again.

"Mad?" he said. "Yes, certainly, if you wish. But I prefer to call it sane. However, nothing matters less than what anybody chooses to call things. God

never labels his gifts; He just puts them into our hands; just as he put animals in the garden of Eden, for Adam to name if he felt disposed."

"So by the continual observance and study of things that were happy," continued he, "I got happiness, I got joy. But seeking it, as I did, from Nature, I got much more which I did not seek, but stumbled upon originally by accident. It is difficult to explain, but I will try.

"About three years ago I was sitting one morning in a place I will show you to-morrow. It is down by the river brink, very green, dappled with shade and sun, and the river passes there through some little clumps of reeds. Well, as I sat there, doing nothing, but just looking and listening, I heard the sound quite distinctly of some flute-like instrument playing a strange unending melody. I thought at first it was some musical yokel on the highway and did not pay much attention. But before long the strangeness and indescribable beauty of the tune struck me. It never repeated itself, but it never came to an end, phrase after phrase ran its sweet course, it worked gradually and inevitably up to a climax, and having attained it, it went on; another climax was reached and another and another. Then with a sudden gasp of wonder I localized where it came from. It came from the reeds and from the sky and from the trees. It was everywhere, it was the sound of life. It was, my dear Darcy, as the Greeks would have said, it was Pan playing on his pipes, the voice of Nature. It was the life-melody, the world-melody."

Darcy was far too interested to interrupt, though there was a question he would have liked to ask, and Frank went on:

"Well, for the moment I was terrified, terrified with the impotent horror of nightmare, and I stopped my ears and just ran from the place and got back to the house panting, trembling, literally in a panic. Unknowingly, for at that time I only pursued joy, I had begun, since I drew my joy from Nature, to get in touch with Nature. Nature, force, God, call it what you will, had drawn across my face a little gossamer web of essential life. I saw that when I emerged from my terror, and I went very humbly back to where I had heard the Pan-pipes. But it was nearly six months before I heard them again."

"Why was that?" asked Darcy.

"Surely because I had revolted, rebelled, and worst of all been frightened. For I believe that just as there is nothing in the world which so injures one's body as fear, so there is nothing that so much shuts up the soul. I was afraid, you see, of the one thing in the world which has real existence. No wonder its manifestation was withdrawn."

"And after six months?"

"After six months one blessed morning I heard the piping again. I wasn't afraid that time. And since then it has grown louder, it has become more

constant. I now hear it often, and I can put myself into such an attitude towards Nature that the pipes will almost certainly sound. And never yet have they played the same tune, it is always something new, something fuller, richer, more complete than before."

"What do you mean by 'such an attitude towards Nature'?" asked Darcy.

"I can't explain that; but by translating it into a bodily attitude it is this."

Frank sat up for a moment quite straight in his chair, then slowly sunk back with arms outspread and head drooped.

"That," he said, "an effortless attitude, but open, resting, receptive. It is just that which you must do with your soul."

Then he sat up again.

"One word more," he said, "and I will bore you no further. Nor unless you ask me questions shall I talk about it again. You will find me, in fact, quite sane in my mode of life. Birds and beasts you will see behaving somewhat intimately to me, like that moor-hen, but that is all. I will walk with you, ride with you, play golf with you, and talk with you on any subject you like. But I wanted you on the threshold to know what has happened to me. And one thing more will happen."

He paused again, and a slight look of fear crossed his eyes.

"There will be a final revelation," he said, "a complete and blinding stroke which will throw open to me, once and for all, the full knowledge, the full realization and comprehension that I am one, just as you are, with life. In reality there is no 'me,' no 'you,' no 'it.' Everything is part of the one and only thing which is life. I know that that is so, but the realization of it is not yet mine. But it will be, and on that day, so I take it, I shall see Pan. It may mean death, the death of my body, that is, but I don't care. It may mean immortal, eternal life lived here and now and for ever. Then having gained that, ah, my dear Darcy, I shall preach such a gospel of joy, showing myself as the living proof of the truth, that Puritanism, the dismal religion of sour faces, shall vanish like a breath of smoke, and be dispersed and disappear in the sunlit air. But first the full knowledge must be mine."

Darcy watched his face narrowly.

"You are afraid of that moment," he said.

Frank smiled at him.

"Quite true; you are quick to have seen that. But when it comes I hope I shall not be afraid."

For some little time there was silence; then Darcy rose.

"You have bewitched me, you extraordinary boy," he said. "You have been telling me a fairy-story, and I find myself saying, 'Promise me it is true.'"

"I promise you that," said the other.

"And I know I shan't sleep," added Darcy.

Frank looked at him with a sort of mild wonder as if he scarcely understood.

"Well, what does that matter?" he said.

"I assure you it does. I am wretched unless I sleep."

"Of course I can make you sleep if I want," said Frank in a rather bored voice.

"Well, do."

"Very good: go to bed. I'll come upstairs in ten minutes."

Frank busied himself for a little after the other had gone, moving the table back under the awning of the veranda and quenching the lamp. Then he went with his quick silent tread upstairs and into Darcy's room. The latter was already in bed, but very wide-eyed and wakeful, and Frank with an amused smile of indulgence, as for a fretful child, sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Look at me," he said, and Darcy looked.

"The birds are sleeping in the brake," said Frank softly, "and the winds are asleep. The sea sleeps, and the tides are but the heaving of its breast. The stars swing slow, rocked in the great cradle of the Heavens, and— — "

He stopped suddenly, gently blew out Darcy's candle, and left him sleeping.

Morning brought to Darcy a flood of hard commonsense, as clear and crisp as the sunshine that filled his room. Slowly as he woke he gathered together the broken threads of the memories of the evening which had ended, so he told himself, in a trick of common hypnotism. That accounted for it all; the whole strange talk he had had was under a spell of suggestion from the extraordinary vivid boy who had once been a man; all his own excitement, his acceptance of the incredible had been merely the effect of a stronger, more potent will imposed on his own. How strong that will was, he guessed from his own instantaneous obedience to Frank's suggestion of sleep. And armed with impenetrable commonsense he came down to breakfast. Frank had already begun, and was consuming a large plateful of porridge and milk with the most prosaic and healthy appetite.

"Slept well?" he asked.

"Yes, of course. Where did you learn hypnotism?"

"By the side of the river."

"You talked an amazing quantity of nonsense last night," remarked Darcy, in a voice prickly with reason.

"Rather. I felt quite giddy. Look, I remembered to order a dreadful daily paper for you. You can read about money markets or politics or cricket matches."

Darcy looked at him closely. In the morning light Frank looked even fresher, younger, more vital than he had done the night before, and the sight of him somehow dinted Darcy's armor of commonsense.

"You are the most extraordinary fellow I ever saw," he said. "I want to ask you some more questions."

"Ask away," said Frank.

For the next day or two Darcy plied his friend with many questions, objections and criticisms on the theory of life and gradually got out of him a coherent and complete account of his experience. In brief then, Frank believed that "by lying naked," as he put it, to the force which controls the passage of the stars, the breaking of a wave, the budding of a tree, the love of a youth and maiden, he had succeeded in a way hitherto undreamed of in possessing himself of the essential principle of life. Day by day, so he thought, he was getting nearer to, and in closer union with the great power itself which caused all life to be, the spirit of nature, of force, or the spirit of God. For himself, he confessed to what others would call paganism; it was sufficient for him that there existed a principle of life. He did not worship it, he did not pray to it, he did not praise it. Some of it existed in all human beings, just as it existed in trees and animals; to realize and make living to himself the fact that it was all one, was his sole aim and object.

Here perhaps Darcy would put in a word of warning. "Take care," he said. "To see Pan meant death, did it not?"

Frank's eyebrows would rise at this.

"What does that matter?" he said. "True, the Greeks were always right, and they said so, but there is another possibility. For the nearer I get to it, the more living, the more vital and young I become."

"What then do you expect the final revelation will do for you?"

"I have told you," said he. "It will make me immortal."

But it was not so much from speech and argument that Darcy grew to grasp his friend's conception, as from the ordinary conduct of his life. They were passing, for instance, one morning down the village street, when an old woman, very bent and decrepit, but with an extraordinary cheerfulness of face, hobbled out from her cottage. Frank instantly stopped when he saw her.

"You old darling! How goes it all?" he said.

But she did not answer, her dim old eyes were riveted on his face; she seemed to drink in like a thirsty creature the beautiful radiance which shone there. Suddenly she put her two withered old hands on his shoulders.

"You're just the sunshine itself," she said, and he kissed her and passed on.

But scarcely a hundred yards further a strange contradiction of such tenderness occurred. A child running along the path towards them fell on its

face, and set up a dismal cry of fright and pain. A look of horror came into Frank's eyes, and, putting his fingers in his ears, he fled at full speed down the street, and did not pause till he was out of hearing. Darcy, having ascertained that the child was not really hurt, followed him in bewilderment.

"Are you without pity then?" he asked.

Frank shook his head impatiently.

"Can't you see?" he asked. "Can't you understand that that sort of thing, pain, anger, anything unlovely throws me back, retards the coming of the great hour! Perhaps when it comes I shall be able to piece that side of life on to the other, on to the true religion of joy. At present I can't."

"But the old woman. Was she not ugly?"

Frank's radiance gradually returned.

"Ah, no. She was like me. She longed for joy, and knew it when she saw it, the old darling."

Another question suggested itself.

"Then what about Christianity?" asked Darcy.

"I can't accept it. I can't believe in any creed of which the central doctrine is that God who is Joy should have had to suffer. Perhaps it was so; in some inscrutable way I believe it may have been so, but I don't understand how it was possible. So I leave it alone; my affair is joy."

They had come to the weir above the village, and the thunder of riotous cool water was heavy in the air. Trees dipped into the translucent stream with slender trailing branches, and the meadow where they stood was starred with midsummer blossomings. Larks shot up caroling into the crystal dome of blue, and a thousand voices of June sang round them. Frank, bare-headed as was his wont, with his coat slung over his arm and his shirt sleeves rolled up above the elbow, stood there like some beautiful wild animal with eyes half-shut and mouth half-open, drinking in the scented warmth of the air. Then suddenly he flung himself face downwards on the grass at the edge of the stream, burying his face in the daisies and cowslips, and lay stretched there in wide-armed ecstasy, with his long fingers pressing and stroking the dewy herbs of the field. Never before had Darcy seen him thus fully possessed by his idea; his caressing fingers, his half-buried face pressed close to the grass, even the clothed lines of his figure were instinct with a vitality that somehow was different from that of other men. And some faint glow from it reached Darcy, some thrill, some vibration from that charged recumbent body passed to him, and for a moment he understood as he had not understood before, despite his persistent questions and the candid answers they received, how real, and how realized by Frank, his idea was.

Then suddenly the muscles in Frank's neck became stiff and alert, and he half-raised his head, whispering, "The Pan-pipes, the Pan-pipes. Close, oh, so close."

Very slowly, as if a sudden movement might interrupt the melody, he raised himself and leaned on the elbow of his bent arm. His eyes opened wider, the lower lids drooped as if he focused his eyes on something very far away, and the smile on his face broadened and quivered like sunlight on still water, till the exultance of its happiness was scarcely human. So he remained motionless and rapt for some minutes, then the look of listening died from his face, and he bowed his head satisfied.

"Ah, that was good," he said. "How is it possible you did not hear? Oh, you poor fellow! Did you really hear nothing?"

A week of this outdoor and stimulating life did wonders in restoring to Darcy the vigor and health which his weeks of fever had filched from him, and as his normal activity and higher pressure of vitality returned, he seemed to himself to fall even more under the spell which the miracle of Frank's youth cast over him. Twenty times a day he found himself saying to himself suddenly at the end of some ten minutes' silent resistance to the absurdity of Frank's idea: "But it isn't possible; it can't be possible," and from the fact of his having to assure himself so frequently of this, he knew that he was struggling and arguing with a conclusion which already had taken root in his mind. For in any case a visible living miracle confronted him, since it was equally impossible that this youth, this boy, trembling on the verge of manhood, was thirty-five. Yet such was the fact.

July was ushered in by a couple of days of blustering and fretful rain, and Darcy, unwilling to risk a chill, kept to the house. But to Frank this weeping change of weather seemed to have no bearing on the behavior of man, and he spent his days exactly as he did under the suns of June, lying in his hammock, stretched on the dripping grass, or making huge rambling excursions into the forest, the birds hopping from tree to tree after him, to return in the evening, drenched and soaked, but with the same unquenchable flame of joy burning within him.

"Catch cold?" he would ask, "I've forgotten how to do it, I think. I suppose it makes one's body more sensible always to sleep out-of-doors. People who live indoors always remind me of something peeled and skinless."

"Do you mean to say you slept out-of-doors last night in that deluge?" asked Darcy. "And where, may I ask?"

Frank thought a moment.

"I slept in the hammock till nearly dawn," he said. "For I remember the light blinked in the east when I awoke. Then I went— where did I go?— oh, yes, to

the meadow where the Pan-pipes sounded so close a week ago. You were with me, do you remember? But I always have a rug if it is wet."

And he went whistling upstairs.

Somehow that little touch, his obvious effort to recall where he had slept, brought strangely home to Darcy the wonderful romance of which he was the still half-incredulous beholder. Sleep till close on dawn in a hammock, then the tramp— or probably scamper— underneath the windy and weeping heavens to the remote and lonely meadow by the weir! The picture of other such nights rose before him; Frank sleeping perhaps by the bathing-place under the filtered twilight of the stars, or the white blaze of moon-shine, a stir and awakening at some dead hour, perhaps a space of silent wide-eyed thought, and then a wandering through the hushed woods to some other dormitory, alone with his happiness, alone with the joy and the life that suffused and enveloped him, without other thought or desire or aim except the hourly and never-ceasing communion with the joy of nature.

They were in the middle of dinner that night, talking on indifferent subjects, when Darcy suddenly broke off in the middle of a sentence.

"I've got it," he said. "At last I've got it."

"Congratulate you," said Frank. "But what?"

"The radical unsoundness of your idea. It is this: All nature from highest to lowest is full, crammed full of suffering; every living organism in nature preys on another, yet in your aim to get close to, to be one with nature, you leave suffering altogether out; you run away from it, you refuse to recognize it. And you are waiting, you say, for the final revelation."

Frank's brow clouded slightly.

"Well?" he asked, rather wearily.

"Cannot you guess then when the final revelation will be? In joy you are supreme, I grant you that; I did not know a man could be so master of it. You have learned perhaps practically all that nature can teach. And if, as you think, the final revelation is coming to you, it will be the revelation of horror, suffering, death, pain in all its hideous forms. Suffering does exist: you hate it and fear it."

Frank held up his hand.

"Stop; let me think," he said.

There was silence for a long minute.

"That never struck me," he said at length. "It is possible that what you suggest is true. Does the sight of Pan mean that, do you think? Is it that nature, take it altogether, suffers horribly, suffers to a hideous inconceivable extent? Shall I be shown all the suffering?"

He got up and came round to where Darcy sat.

"If it is so, so be it," he said. "Because, my dear fellow, I am near, so splendidly near to the final revelation. To-day the pipes have sounded almost without pause. I have even heard the rustle in the bushes, I believe, of Pan's coming. I have seen, yes, I saw to-day, the bushes pushed aside as if by a hand, and piece of a face, not human, peered through. But I was not frightened, at least I did not run away this time."

He took a turn up to the window and back again.

"Yes, there is suffering all through," he said, "and I have left it all out of my search. Perhaps, as you say, the revelation will be that. And in that case, it will be good-bye. I have gone on one line. I shall have gone too far along one road, without having explored the other. But I can't go back now. I wouldn't if I could; not a step would I retrace! In any case, whatever the revelation is, it will be God. I'm sure of that."

The rainy weather soon passed, and with the return of the sun Darcy again joined Frank in long rambling days. It grew extraordinarily hotter, and with the fresh bursting of life, after the rain, Frank's vitality seemed to blaze higher and higher. Then, as is the habit of the English weather, one evening clouds began to bank themselves up in the west, the sun went down in a glare of coppery thunder-rack, and the whole earth broiling under an unspeakable oppression and sultriness paused and panted for the storm. After sunset the remote fires of lightning began to wink and flicker on the horizon, but when bed-time came the storm seemed to have moved no nearer, though a very low unceasing noise of thunder was audible. Weary and oppressed by the stress of the day, Darcy fell at once into a heavy uncomforting sleep.

He woke suddenly into full consciousness, with the din of some appalling explosion of thunder in his ears, and sat up in bed with racing heart. Then for a moment, as he recovered himself from the panic-land which lies between sleeping and waking, there was silence, except for the steady hissing of rain on the shrubs outside his window. But suddenly that silence was shattered and shredded into fragments by a scream from somewhere close at hand outside in the black garden, a scream of supreme and despairing terror. Again, and once again it shrilled up, and then a babble of awful words was interjected. A quivering sobbing voice that he knew, said:

"My God, oh, my God; oh, Christ!"

And then followed a little mocking, bleating laugh. Then was silence again; only the rain hissed on the shrubs.

All this was but the affair of a moment, and without pause either to put on clothes or light a candle, Darcy was already fumbling at his door-handle. Even as he opened it he met a terror-stricken face outside, that of the man-servant who carried a light.

"Did you hear?" he asked.

The man's face was bleached to a dull shining whiteness.

"Yes, sir," he said. "It was the master's voice."

Together they hurried down the stairs, and through the dining-room where an orderly table for breakfast had already been laid, and out on to the terrace. The rain for the moment had been utterly stayed, as if the tap of the heavens had been turned off, and under the lowering black sky, not quite dark, since the moon rode somewhere serene behind the conglomerated thunder-clouds, Darcy stumbled into the garden, followed by the servant with the candle. The monstrous leaping shadow of himself was cast before him on the lawn; lost and wandering odors of rose and lily and damp earth were thick about him, but more pungent was some sharp and acrid smell that suddenly reminded him of a certain châlet in which he had once taken refuge in the Alps. In the blackness of the hazy light from the sky, and the vague tossing of the candle behind him, he saw that the hammock in which Frank so often lay was tenanted. A gleam of white shirt was there, as if a man sitting up in it, but across that there was an obscure dark shadow, and as he approached the acrid odor grew more intense.

He was now only some few yards away, when suddenly the black shadow seemed to jump into the air, then came down with tappings of hard hoofs on the brick path that ran down the pergola, and with frolicsome skippings galloped off into the bushes. When that was gone Darcy could see quite clearly that a shirted figure sat up in the hammock. For one moment, from sheer terror of the unseen, he hung on his step, and the servant joining him they walked together to the hammock.

It was Frank. He was in shirt and trousers only, and he sat up with braced arms. For one half-second he stared at them, his face a mask of horrible contorted terror. His upper lip was drawn back so that the gums of the teeth appeared, and his eyes were focused not on the two who approached him but on something quite close to him; his nostrils were widely expanded, as if he panted for breath, and terror incarnate and repulsion and deathly anguish ruled dreadful lines on his smooth cheeks and forehead. Then even as they looked the body sank backwards, and the ropes of the hammock wheezed and strained.

Darcy lifted him out and carried him indoors. Once he thought there was a faint convulsive stir of the limbs that lay with so dead a weight in his arms, but when they got inside, there was no trace of life. But the look of supreme terror and agony of fear had gone from his face, a boy tired with play but still smiling in his sleep was the burden he laid on the floor. His eyes had closed, and the beautiful mouth lay in smiling curves, even as when a few mornings ago, in the

meadow by the weir, it had quivered to the music of the unheard melody of Pan's pipes. Then they looked further.

Frank had come back from his bath before dinner that night in his usual costume of shirt and trousers only. He had not dressed, and during dinner, so Darcy remembered, he had rolled up the sleeves of his shirt to above the elbow. Later, as they sat and talked after dinner on the close sultriness of the evening, he had unbuttoned the front of his shirt to let what little breath of wind there was play on his skin. The sleeves were rolled up now, the front of the shirt was unbuttoned, and on his arms and on the brown skin of his chest were strange discolorations which grew momently more clear and defined, till they saw that the marks were pointed prints, as if caused by the hoofs of some monstrous goat that had leaped and stamped upon him.

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2: Typhoon

Joseph Conrad

Teodor Josef Konrad Korzeniowski, 1857-1924

The Pall Mall Magazine Jan-Mar 1902

Far as the mariner on highest mast
Can see all around upon the calmed vast,
So wide was Neptune's hall...
— KEATS

CAPTAIN MACWHIRR, of the steamer *Nan-Shan*, had a physiognomy that, in the order of material appearances, was the exact counterpart of his mind: it presented no marked characteristics of firmness or stupidity; it had no pronounced characteristics whatever; it was simply ordinary, irresponsive, and unruffled.

The only thing his aspect might have been said to suggest, at times, was bashfulness; because he would sit, in business offices ashore, sunburnt and smiling faintly, with downcast eyes. When he raised them, they were perceived to be direct in their glance and of blue colour. His hair was fair and extremely fine, clasping from temple to temple the bald dome of his skull in a clamp as of fluffy silk. The hair of his face, on the contrary, carroty and flaming, resembled a growth of copper wire clipped short to the line of the lip; while, no matter how close he shaved, fiery metallic gleams passed, when he moved his head, over the surface of his cheeks. He was rather below the medium height, a bit round-shouldered, and so sturdy of limb that his clothes always looked a shade too tight for his arms and legs. As if unable to grasp what is due to the difference of latitudes, he wore a brown bowler hat, a complete suit of a brownish hue, and clumsy black boots. These harbour togs gave to his thick figure an air of stiff and uncouth smartness. A thin silver watch chain looped his waistcoat, and he never left his ship for the shore without clutching in his powerful, hairy fist an elegant umbrella of the very best quality, but generally unrolled. Young Jukes, the chief mate, attending his commander to the gangway, would sometimes venture to say, with the greatest gentleness, "Allow me, sir"— and possessing himself of the umbrella deferentially, would elevate the ferule, shake the folds, twirl a neat furl in a jiffy, and hand it back; going through the performance with a face of such portentous gravity, that Mr. Solomon Rout, the chief engineer, smoking his morning cigar over the skylight, would turn away his head in order to hide a smile. "Oh! aye! The blessed gamp.... Thank 'ee, Jukes, thank 'ee," would mutter Captain MacWhirr, heartily, without looking up.

Having just enough imagination to carry him through each successive day, and no more, he was tranquilly sure of himself; and from the very same cause he was not in the least conceited. It is your imaginative superior who is touchy, overbearing, and difficult to please; but every ship Captain MacWhirr commanded was the floating abode of harmony and peace. It was, in truth, as impossible for him to take a flight of fancy as it would be for a watchmaker to put together a chronometer with nothing except a two-pound hammer and a whip-saw in the way of tools. Yet the uninteresting lives of men so entirely given to the actuality of the bare existence have their mysterious side. It was impossible in Captain MacWhirr's case, for instance, to understand what under heaven could have induced that perfectly satisfactory son of a petty grocer in Belfast to run away to sea. And yet he had done that very thing at the age of fifteen. It was enough, when you thought it over, to give you the idea of an immense, potent, and invisible hand thrust into the ant-heap of the earth, laying hold of shoulders, knocking heads together, and setting the unconscious faces of the multitude towards inconceivable goals and in undreamt-of directions.

His father never really forgave him for this undutiful stupidity. "We could have got on without him," he used to say later on, "but there's the business. And he an only son, too!" His mother wept very much after his disappearance. As it had never occurred to him to leave word behind, he was mourned over for dead till, after eight months, his first letter arrived from Talcahuano. It was short, and contained the statement: "We had very fine weather on our passage out." But evidently, in the writer's mind, the only important intelligence was to the effect that his captain had, on the very day of writing, entered him regularly on the ship's articles as Ordinary Seaman. "Because I can do the work," he explained. The mother again wept copiously, while the remark, "Tom's an ass," expressed the emotions of the father. He was a corpulent man, with a gift for sly chaffing, which to the end of his life he exercised in his intercourse with his son, a little pityingly, as if upon a half-witted person.

MacWhirr's visits to his home were necessarily rare, and in the course of years he despatched other letters to his parents, informing them of his successive promotions and of his movements upon the vast earth. In these missives could be found sentences like this: "The heat here is very great." Or: "On Christmas day at 4 P. M. we fell in with some icebergs." The old people ultimately became acquainted with a good many names of ships, and with the names of the skippers who commanded them— with the names of Scots and English shipowners— with the names of seas, oceans, straits, promontories— with outlandish names of lumber-ports, of rice-ports, of cotton-ports— with the names of islands— with the name of their son's young woman. She was

called Lucy. It did not suggest itself to him to mention whether he thought the name pretty. And then they died.

The great day of MacWhirr's marriage came in due course, following shortly upon the great day when he got his first command.

All these events had taken place many years before the morning when, in the chart-room of the steamer *Nan-Shan*, he stood confronted by the fall of a barometer he had no reason to distrust. The fall— taking into account the excellence of the instrument, the time of the year, and the ship's position on the terrestrial globe— was of a nature ominously prophetic; but the red face of the man betrayed no sort of inward disturbance. Omens were as nothing to him, and he was unable to discover the message of a prophecy till the fulfilment had brought it home to his very door. "That's a fall, and no mistake," he thought. "There must be some uncommonly dirty weather knocking about."

The *Nan-Shan* was on her way from the southward to the treaty port of Fu-chau, with some cargo in her lower holds, and two hundred Chinese coolies returning to their village homes in the province of Fo-kien, after a few years of work in various tropical colonies. The morning was fine, the oily sea heaved without a sparkle, and there was a queer white misty patch in the sky like a halo of the sun. The fore-deck, packed with Chinamen, was full of sombre clothing, yellow faces, and pigtails, sprinkled over with a good many naked shoulders, for there was no wind, and the heat was close. The coolies lounged, talked, smoked, or stared over the rail; some, drawing water over the side, sluiced each other; a few slept on hatches, while several small parties of six sat on their heels surrounding iron trays with plates of rice and tiny teacups; and every single Celestial of them was carrying with him all he had in the world— a wooden chest with a ringing lock and brass on the corners, containing the savings of his labours: some clothes of ceremony, sticks of incense, a little opium maybe, bits of nameless rubbish of conventional value, and a small hoard of silver dollars, toiled for in coal lighters, won in gambling-houses or in petty trading, grubbed out of earth, sweated out in mines, on railway lines, in deadly jungle, under heavy burdens— amassed patiently, guarded with care, cherished fiercely.

A cross swell had set in from the direction of Formosa Channel about ten o'clock, without disturbing these passengers much, because the *Nan-Shan*, with her flat bottom, rolling chocks on bilges, and great breadth of beam, had the reputation of an exceptionally steady ship in a sea-way. Mr. Jukes, in moments of expansion on shore, would proclaim loudly that the "old girl was as good as she was pretty." It would never have occurred to Captain MacWhirr to express his favourable opinion so loud or in terms so fanciful.

She was a good ship, undoubtedly, and not old either. She had been built in Dumbarton less than three years before, to the order of a firm of merchants in Siam— Messrs. Sigg and Son. When she lay afloat, finished in every detail and ready to take up the work of her life, the builders contemplated her with pride.

"Sigg has asked us for a reliable skipper to take her out," remarked one of the partners; and the other, after reflecting for a while, said: "I think MacWhirr is ashore just at present." "Is he? Then wire him at once. He's the very man," declared the senior, without a moment's hesitation.

Next morning MacWhirr stood before them unperturbed, having travelled from London by the midnight express after a sudden but undemonstrative parting with his wife. She was the daughter of a superior couple who had seen better days.

"We had better be going together over the ship, Captain," said the senior partner; and the three men started to view the perfections of the *Nan-Shan* from stem to stern, and from her keelson to the trucks of her two stumpy pole-masts.

Captain MacWhirr had begun by taking off his coat, which he hung on the end of a steam windless embodying all the latest improvements.

"My uncle wrote of you favourably by yesterday's mail to our good friends— Messrs. Sigg, you know— and doubtless they'll continue you out there in command," said the junior partner. "You'll be able to boast of being in charge of the handiest boat of her size on the coast of China, Captain," he added.

"Have you? Thank 'ee," mumbled vaguely MacWhirr, to whom the view of a distant eventuality could appeal no more than the beauty of a wide landscape to a purblind tourist; and his eyes happening at the moment to be at rest upon the lock of the cabin door, he walked up to it, full of purpose, and began to rattle the handle vigorously, while he observed, in his low, earnest voice, "You can't trust the workmen nowadays. A brand-new lock, and it won't act at all. Stuck fast. See? See?"

As soon as they found themselves alone in their office across the yard: "You praised that fellow up to Sigg. What is it you see in him?" asked the nephew, with faint contempt.

"I admit he has nothing of your fancy skipper about him, if that's what you mean," said the elder man, curtly. "Is the foreman of the joiners on the *Nan-Shan* outside?... Come in, Bates. How is it that you let Tait's people put us off with a defective lock on the cabin door? The Captain could see directly he set eye on it. Have it replaced at once. The little straws, Bates... the little straws...."

The lock was replaced accordingly, and a few days afterwards the *Nan-Shan* steamed out to the East, without MacWhirr having offered any further

remark as to her fittings, or having been heard to utter a single word hinting at pride in his ship, gratitude for his appointment, or satisfaction at his prospects.

With a temperament neither loquacious nor taciturn he found very little occasion to talk. There were matters of duty, of course— directions, orders, and so on; but the past being to his mind done with, and the future not there yet, the more general actualities of the day required no comment— because facts can speak for themselves with overwhelming precision.

Old Mr. Sigg liked a man of few words, and one that "you could be sure would not try to improve upon his instructions." MacWhirr satisfying these requirements, was continued in command of the *Nan-Shan*, and applied himself to the careful navigation of his ship in the China seas. She had come out on a British register, but after some time Messrs. Sigg judged it expedient to transfer her to the Siamese flag.

At the news of the contemplated transfer Jukes grew restless, as if under a sense of personal affront. He went about grumbling to himself, and uttering short scornful laughs. "Fancy having a ridiculous Noah's Ark elephant in the ensign of one's ship," he said once at the engine-room door. "Dash me if I can stand it: I'll throw up the billet. Don't it make you sick, Mr. Rout?" The chief engineer only cleared his throat with the air of a man who knows the value of a good billet.

The first morning the new flag floated over the stern of the *Nan-Shan* Jukes stood looking at it bitterly from the bridge. He struggled with his feelings for a while, and then remarked, "Queer flag for a man to sail under, sir."

"What's the matter with the flag?" inquired Captain MacWhirr. "Seems all right to me." And he walked across to the end of the bridge to have a good look.

"Well, it looks queer to me," burst out Jukes, greatly exasperated, and flung off the bridge.

Captain MacWhirr was amazed at these manners. After a while he stepped quietly into the chart-room, and opened his *International Signal Code-book* at the plate where the flags of all the nations are correctly figured in gaudy rows. He ran his finger over them, and when he came to Siam he contemplated with great attention the red field and the white elephant. Nothing could be more simple; but to make sure he brought the book out on the bridge for the purpose of comparing the coloured drawing with the real thing at the flagstaff astern. When next Jukes, who was carrying on the duty that day with a sort of suppressed fierceness, happened on the bridge, his commander observed:

"There's nothing amiss with that flag."

"Isn't there?" mumbled Jukes, falling on his knees before a deck-locker and jerking therefrom viciously a spare lead-line.

"No. I looked up the book. Length twice the breadth and the elephant exactly in the middle. I thought the people ashore would know how to make the local flag. Stands to reason. You were wrong, Jukes...."

"Well, sir," began Jukes, getting up excitedly, "all I can say—" He fumbled for the end of the coil of line with trembling hands.

"That's all right." Captain MacWhirr soothed him, sitting heavily on a little canvas folding-stool he greatly affected. "All you have to do is to take care they don't hoist the elephant upside-down before they get quite used to it."

Jukes flung the new lead-line over on the fore-deck with a loud "Here you are, bo'ss'en— don't forget to wet it thoroughly," and turned with immense resolution towards his commander; but Captain MacWhirr spread his elbows on the bridge-rail comfortably.

"Because it would be, I suppose, understood as a signal of distress," he went on. "What do you think? That elephant there, I take it, stands for something in the nature of the Union Jack in the flag...."

"Does it!" yelled Jukes, so that every head on the *Nan-Shan*'s decks looked towards the bridge. Then he sighed, and with sudden resignation: "It would certainly be a dam' distressful sight," he said, meekly.

Later in the day he accosted the chief engineer with a confidential, "Here, let me tell you the old man's latest."

Mr. Solomon Rout (frequently alluded to as Long Sol, Old Sol, or Father Rout), from finding himself almost invariably the tallest man on board every ship he joined, had acquired the habit of a stooping, leisurely condescension. His hair was scant and sandy, his flat cheeks were pale, his bony wrists and long scholarly hands were pale, too, as though he had lived all his life in the shade.

He smiled from on high at Jukes, and went on smoking and glancing about quietly, in the manner of a kind uncle lending an ear to the tale of an excited schoolboy. Then, greatly amused but impassive, he asked:

"And did you throw up the billet?"

"No," cried Jukes, raising a weary, discouraged voice above the harsh buzz of the *Nan-Shan*'s friction winches. All of them were hard at work, snatching slings of cargo, high up, to the end of long derricks, only, as it seemed, to let them rip down recklessly by the run. The cargo chains groaned in the gins, clinked on coamings, rattled over the side; and the whole ship quivered, with her long gray flanks smoking in wreaths of steam. "No," cried Jukes, "I didn't. What's the good? I might just as well fling my resignation at this bulkhead. I don't believe you can make a man like that understand anything. He simply knocks me over."

At that moment Captain MacWhirr, back from the shore, crossed the deck, umbrella in hand, escorted by a mournful, self-possessed Chinaman, walking behind in paper-soled silk shoes, and who also carried an umbrella.

The master of the *Nan-Shan*, speaking just audibly and gazing at his boots as his manner was, remarked that it would be necessary to call at Fu-chau this trip, and desired Mr. Rout to have steam up to-morrow afternoon at one o'clock sharp. He pushed back his hat to wipe his forehead, observing at the same time that he hated going ashore anyhow; while overtopping him Mr. Rout, without deigning a word, smoked austerely, nursing his right elbow in the palm of his left hand. Then Jukes was directed in the same subdued voice to keep the forward 'tween-deck clear of cargo. Two hundred coolies were going to be put down there. The Bun Hin Company were sending that lot home. Twenty-five bags of rice would be coming off in a sampan directly, for stores. All seven-years'-men they were, said Captain MacWhirr, with a camphor-wood chest to every man. The carpenter should be set to work nailing three-inch battens along the deck below, fore and aft, to keep these boxes from shifting in a sea-way. Jukes had better look to it at once. "D'ye hear, Jukes?" This chinaman here was coming with the ship as far as Fu-chau— a sort of interpreter he would be. Bun Hin's clerk he was, and wanted to have a look at the space. Jukes had better take him forward. "D'ye hear, Jukes?"

Jukes took care to punctuate these instructions in proper places with the obligatory "Yes, sir," ejaculated without enthusiasm. His brusque "Come along, John; make look see" set the Chinaman in motion at his heels.

"Wanchee look see, all same look see can do," said Jukes, who having no talent for foreign languages mangled the very pidgin-English cruelly. He pointed at the open hatch. "Catchee number one piecie place to sleep in. Eh?"

He was gruff, as became his racial superiority, but not unfriendly. The Chinaman, gazing sad and speechless into the darkness of the hatchway, seemed to stand at the head of a yawning grave.

"No catchee rain down there— savee?" pointed out Jukes. "Suppose all'ee same fine weather, one piecie coolie-man come topside," he pursued, warming up imaginatively. "Make so— Phooooo!" He expanded his chest and blew out his cheeks. "Savee, John? Breathe— fresh air. Good. Eh? Washee him piecie pants, chow-chow top-side— see, John?"

With his mouth and hands he made exuberant motions of eating rice and washing clothes; and the Chinaman, who concealed his distrust of this pantomime under a collected demeanour tinged by a gentle and refined melancholy, glanced out of his almond eyes from Jukes to the hatch and back again. "Velly good," he murmured, in a disconsolate undertone, and hastened smoothly along the decks, dodging obstacles in his course. He disappeared,

ducking low under a sling of ten dirty gunny-bags full of some costly merchandise and exhaling a repulsive smell.

Captain MacWhirr meantime had gone on the bridge, and into the chart-room, where a letter, commenced two days before, awaited termination. These long letters began with the words, "My darling wife," and the steward, between the scrubbing of the floors and the dusting of chronometer-boxes, snatched at every opportunity to read them. They interested him much more than they possibly could the woman for whose eye they were intended; and this for the reason that they related in minute detail each successive trip of the *Nan-Shan*.

Her master, faithful to facts, which alone his consciousness reflected, would set them down with painstaking care upon many pages. The house in a northern suburb to which these pages were addressed had a bit of garden before the bow-windows, a deep porch of good appearance, coloured glass with imitation lead frame in the front door. He paid five-and-forty pounds a year for it, and did not think the rent too high, because Mrs. MacWhirr (a pretentious person with a scraggy neck and a disdainful manner) was admittedly ladylike, and in the neighbourhood considered as "quite superior." The only secret of her life was her abject terror of the time when her husband would come home to stay for good. Under the same roof there dwelt also a daughter called Lydia and a son, Tom. These two were but slightly acquainted with their father. Mainly, they knew him as a rare but privileged visitor, who of an evening smoked his pipe in the dining-room and slept in the house. The lanky girl, upon the whole, was rather ashamed of him; the boy was frankly and utterly indifferent in a straightforward, delightful, unaffected way manly boys have.

And Captain MacWhirr wrote home from the coast of China twelve times every year, desiring quaintly to be "remembered to the children," and subscribing himself "your loving husband," as calmly as if the words so long used by so many men were, apart from their shape, worn-out things, and of a faded meaning.

The China seas north and south are narrow seas. They are seas full of every-day, eloquent facts, such as islands, sand-banks, reefs, swift and changeable currents— tangled facts that nevertheless speak to a seaman in clear and definite language. Their speech appealed to Captain MacWhirr's sense of realities so forcibly that he had given up his state-room below and practically lived all his days on the bridge of his ship, often having his meals sent up, and sleeping at night in the chart-room. And he indited there his home letters. Each of them, without exception, contained the phrase, "The weather has been very fine this trip," or some other form of a statement to that effect.

And this statement, too, in its wonderful persistence, was of the same perfect accuracy as all the others they contained.

Mr. Rout likewise wrote letters; only no one on board knew how chatty he could be pen in hand, because the chief engineer had enough imagination to keep his desk locked. His wife relished his style greatly. They were a childless couple, and Mrs. Rout, a big, high-bosomed, jolly woman of forty, shared with Mr. Rout's toothless and venerable mother a little cottage near Teddington. She would run over her correspondence, at breakfast, with lively eyes, and scream out interesting passages in a joyous voice at the deaf old lady, prefacing each extract by the warning shout, "Solomon says!" She had the trick of firing off Solomon's utterances also upon strangers, astonishing them easily by the unfamiliar text and the unexpectedly jocular vein of these quotations. On the day the new curate called for the first time at the cottage, she found occasion to remark, "As Solomon says: 'the engineers that go down to the sea in ships behold the wonders of sailor nature';" when a change in the visitor's countenance made her stop and stare.

"Solomon.... Oh!... Mrs. Rout," stuttered the young man, very red in the face, "I must say... I don't...."

"He's my husband," she announced in a great shout, throwing herself back in the chair. Perceiving the joke, she laughed immoderately with a handkerchief to her eyes, while he sat wearing a forced smile, and, from his inexperience of jolly women, fully persuaded that she must be deplorably insane. They were excellent friends afterwards; for, absolving her from irreverent intention, he came to think she was a very worthy person indeed; and he learned in time to receive without flinching other scraps of Solomon's wisdom.

"For my part," Solomon was reported by his wife to have said once, "give me the dullest ass for a skipper before a rogue. There is a way to take a fool; but a rogue is smart and slippery." This was an airy generalization drawn from the particular case of Captain MacWhirr's honesty, which, in itself, had the heavy obviousness of a lump of clay. On the other hand, Mr. Jukes, unable to generalize, unmarried, and unengaged, was in the habit of opening his heart after another fashion to an old chum and former shipmate, actually serving as second officer on board an Atlantic liner.

First of all he would insist upon the advantages of the Eastern trade, hinting at its superiority to the Western ocean service. He extolled the sky, the seas, the ships, and the easy life of the Far East. The *Nan-Shan*, he affirmed, was second to none as a sea-boat.

"We have no brass-bound uniforms, but then we are like brothers here," he wrote. "We all mess together and live like fighting-cocks.... All the chaps of

the black-squad are as decent as they make that kind, and old Sol, the Chief, is a dry stick. We are good friends. As to our old man, you could not find a quieter skipper. Sometimes you would think he hadn't sense enough to see anything wrong. And yet it isn't that. Can't be. He has been in command for a good few years now. He doesn't do anything actually foolish, and gets his ship along all right without worrying anybody. I believe he hasn't brains enough to enjoy kicking up a row. I don't take advantage of him. I would scorn it. Outside the routine of duty he doesn't seem to understand more than half of what you tell him. We get a laugh out of this at times; but it is dull, too, to be with a man like this— in the long-run. Old Sol says he hasn't much conversation. Conversation! O Lord! He never talks. The other day I had been yarning under the bridge with one of the engineers, and he must have heard us. When I came up to take my watch, he steps out of the chart-room and has a good look all round, peeps over at the sidelights, glances at the compass, squints upward at the stars. That's his regular performance. By-and-by he says: 'Was that you talking just now in the port alleyway?' 'Yes, sir.' 'With the third engineer?' 'Yes, sir.' He walks off to starboard, and sits under the dodger on a little campstool of his, and for half an hour perhaps he makes no sound, except that I heard him sneeze once. Then after a while I hear him getting up over there, and he strolls across to port, where I was. 'I can't understand what you can find to talk about,' says he. 'Two solid hours. I am not blaming you. I see people ashore at it all day long, and then in the evening they sit down and keep at it over the drinks. Must be saying the same things over and over again. I can't understand.'

"Did you ever hear anything like that? And he was so patient about it. It made me quite sorry for him. But he is exasperating, too, sometimes. Of course one would not do anything to vex him even if it were worth while. But it isn't. He's so jolly innocent that if you were to put your thumb to your nose and wave your fingers at him he would only wonder gravely to himself what got into you. He told me once quite simply that he found it very difficult to make out what made people always act so queerly. He's too dense to trouble about, and that's the truth."

Thus wrote Mr. Jukes to his chum in the Western ocean trade, out of the fulness of his heart and the liveliness of his fancy.

He had expressed his honest opinion. It was not worthwhile trying to impress a man of that sort. If the world had been full of such men, life would have probably appeared to Jukes an unentertaining and unprofitable business. He was not alone in his opinion. The sea itself, as if sharing Mr. Jukes' good-natured forbearance, had never put itself out to startle the silent man, who seldom looked up, and wandered innocently over the waters with the only

visible purpose of getting food, raiment, and house-room for three people ashore. Dirty weather he had known, of course. He had been made wet, uncomfortable, tired in the usual way, felt at the time and presently forgotten. So that upon the whole he had been justified in reporting fine weather at home. But he had never been given a glimpse of immeasurable strength and of immoderate wrath, the wrath that passes exhausted but never appeased— the wrath and fury of the passionate sea. He knew it existed, as we know that crime and abominations exist; he had heard of it as a peaceable citizen in a town hears of battles, famines, and floods, and yet knows nothing of what these things mean— though, indeed, he may have been mixed up in a street row, have gone without his dinner once, or been soaked to the skin in a shower. Captain MacWhirr had sailed over the surface of the oceans as some men go skimming over the years of existence to sink gently into a placid grave, ignorant of life to the last, without ever having been made to see all it may contain of perfidy, of violence, and of terror. There are on sea and land such men thus fortunate— or thus disdained by destiny or by the sea.

ii

OBSERVING the steady fall of the barometer, Captain MacWhirr thought, "There's some dirty weather knocking about." This is precisely what he thought. He had had an experience of moderately dirty weather— the term dirty as applied to the weather implying only moderate discomfort to the seaman. Had he been informed by an indisputable authority that the end of the world was to be finally accomplished by a catastrophic disturbance of the atmosphere, he would have assimilated the information under the simple idea of dirty weather, and no other, because he had no experience of cataclysms, and belief does not necessarily imply comprehension. The wisdom of his country had pronounced by means of an Act of Parliament that before he could be considered as fit to take charge of a ship he should be able to answer certain simple questions on the subject of circular storms such as hurricanes, cyclones, typhoons; and apparently he had answered them, since he was now in command of the *Nan-Shan* in the China seas during the season of typhoons. But if he had answered he remembered nothing of it. He was, however, conscious of being made uncomfortable by the clammy heat. He came out on the bridge, and found no relief to this oppression. The air seemed thick. He gasped like a fish, and began to believe himself greatly out of sorts.

The *Nan-Shan* was ploughing a vanishing furrow upon the circle of the sea that had the surface and the shimmer of an undulating piece of gray silk. The sun, pale and without rays, poured down leaden heat in a strangely indecisive

light, and the Chinamen were lying prostrate about the decks. Their bloodless, pinched, yellow faces were like the faces of bilious invalids. Captain MacWhirr noticed two of them especially, stretched out on their backs below the bridge. As soon as they had closed their eyes they seemed dead. Three others, however, were quarrelling barbarously away forward; and one big fellow, half naked, with herculean shoulders, was hanging limply over a winch; another, sitting on the deck, his knees up and his head drooping sideways in a girlish attitude, was plaiting his pigtail with infinite languor depicted in his whole person and in the very movement of his fingers. The smoke struggled with difficulty out of the funnel, and instead of streaming away spread itself out like an infernal sort of cloud, smelling of sulphur and raining soot all over the decks.

"What the devil are you doing there, Mr. Jukes?" asked Captain MacWhirr.

This unusual form of address, though mumbled rather than spoken, caused the body of Mr. Jukes to start as though it had been prodded under the fifth rib. He had had a low bench brought on the bridge, and sitting on it, with a length of rope curled about his feet and a piece of canvas stretched over his knees, was pushing a sail-needle vigorously. He looked up, and his surprise gave to his eyes an expression of innocence and candour.

"I am only roping some of that new set of bags we made last trip for whipping up coals," he remonstrated, gently. "We shall want them for the next coaling, sir."

"What became of the others?"

"Why, worn out of course, sir."

Captain MacWhirr, after glaring down irresolutely at his chief mate, disclosed the gloomy and cynical conviction that more than half of them had been lost overboard, "if only the truth was known," and retired to the other end of the bridge. Jukes, exasperated by this unprovoked attack, broke the needle at the second stitch, and dropping his work got up and cursed the heat in a violent undertone.

The propeller thumped, the three Chinamen forward had given up squabbling very suddenly, and the one who had been plaiting his tail clasped his legs and stared dejectedly over his knees. The lurid sunshine cast faint and sickly shadows. The swell ran higher and swifter every moment, and the ship lurched heavily in the smooth, deep hollows of the sea.

"I wonder where that beastly swell comes from," said Jukes aloud, recovering himself after a stagger.

"North-east," grunted the literal MacWhirr, from his side of the bridge. "There's some dirty weather knocking about. Go and look at the glass."

When Jukes came out of the chart-room, the cast of his countenance had changed to thoughtfulness and concern. He caught hold of the bridge-rail and stared ahead.

The temperature in the engine-room had gone up to a hundred and seventeen degrees. Irritated voices were ascending through the skylight and through the fiddle of the stokehold in a harsh and resonant uproar, mingled with angry clangs and scrapes of metal, as if men with limbs of iron and throats of bronze had been quarrelling down there. The second engineer was falling foul of the stokers for letting the steam go down. He was a man with arms like a blacksmith, and generally feared; but that afternoon the stokers were answering him back recklessly, and slammed the furnace doors with the fury of despair. Then the noise ceased suddenly, and the second engineer appeared, emerging out of the stokehold streaked with grime and soaking wet like a chimney-sweep coming out of a well. As soon as his head was clear of the fiddle he began to scold Jukes for not trimming properly the stokehold ventilators; and in answer Jukes made with his hands deprecatory soothing signs meaning: "No wind— can't be helped— you can see for yourself." But the other wouldn't hear reason. His teeth flashed angrily in his dirty face. He didn't mind, he said, the trouble of punching their blanked heads down there, blank his soul, but did the condemned sailors think you could keep steam up in the God-forsaken boilers simply by knocking the blanked stokers about? No, by George! You had to get some draught, too— may he be everlastingly blanked for a swab-headed deck-hand if you didn't! And the chief, too, rampaging before the steam-gauge and carrying on like a lunatic up and down the engine-room ever since noon. What did Jukes think he was stuck up there for, if he couldn't get one of his decayed, good-for-nothing deck-cripples to turn the ventilators to the wind?

The relations of the "engine-room" and the "deck" of the *Nan-Shan* were, as is known, of a brotherly nature; therefore Jukes leaned over and begged the other in a restrained tone not to make a disgusting ass of himself; the skipper was on the other side of the bridge. But the second declared mutinously that he didn't care a rap who was on the other side of the bridge, and Jukes, passing in a flash from lofty disapproval into a state of exaltation, invited him in unflattering terms to come up and twist the beastly things to please himself, and catch such wind as a donkey of his sort could find. The second rushed up to the fray. He flung himself at the port ventilator as though he meant to tear it out bodily and toss it overboard. All he did was to move the cowl round a few inches, with an enormous expenditure of force, and seemed spent in the effort. He leaned against the back of the wheelhouse, and Jukes walked up to him.

"Oh, Heavens!" ejaculated the engineer in a feeble voice. He lifted his eyes to the sky, and then let his glassy stare descend to meet the horizon that, tilting up to an angle of forty degrees, seemed to hang on a slant for a while and settled down slowly. "Heavens! Phew! What's up, anyhow?"

Jukes, straddling his long legs like a pair of compasses, put on an air of superiority. "We're going to catch it this time," he said. "The barometer is tumbling down like anything, Harry. And you trying to kick up that silly row...."

The word "barometer" seemed to revive the second engineer's mad animosity. Collecting afresh all his energies, he directed Jukes in a low and brutal tone to shove the unmentionable instrument down his gory throat. Who cared for his crimson barometer? It was the steam— the steam— that was going down; and what between the firemen going faint and the chief going silly, it was worse than a dog's life for him; he didn't care a tinker's curse how soon the whole show was blown out of the water. He seemed on the point of having a cry, but after regaining his breath he muttered darkly, "I'll faint them," and dashed off. He stopped upon the fiddle long enough to shake his fist at the unnatural daylight, and dropped into the dark hole with a whoop.

When Jukes turned, his eyes fell upon the rounded back and the big red ears of Captain MacWhirr, who had come across. He did not look at his chief officer, but said at once, "That's a very violent man, that second engineer."

"Jolly good second, anyhow," grunted Jukes. "They can't keep up steam," he added, rapidly, and made a grab at the rail against the coming lurch.

Captain MacWhirr, unprepared, took a run and brought himself up with a jerk by an awning stanchion.

"A profane man," he said, obstinately. "If this goes on, I'll have to get rid of him the first chance."

"It's the heat," said Jukes. "The weather's awful. It would make a saint swear. Even up here I feel exactly as if I had my head tied up in a woollen blanket."

Captain MacWhirr looked up. "D'ye mean to say, Mr. Jukes, you ever had your head tied up in a blanket? What was that for?"

"It's a manner of speaking, sir," said Jukes, stolidly.

"Some of you fellows do go on! What's that about saints swearing? I wish you wouldn't talk so wild. What sort of saint would that be that would swear? No more saint than yourself, I expect. And what's a blanket got to do with it— or the weather either.... The heat does not make me swear— does it? It's filthy bad temper. That's what it is. And what's the good of your talking like this?"

Thus Captain MacWhirr expostulated against the use of images in speech, and at the end electrified Jukes by a contemptuous snort, followed by words of

passion and resentment: "Damme! I'll fire him out of the ship if he don't look out."

And Jukes, incorrigible, thought: "Goodness me! Somebody's put a new inside to my old man. Here's temper, if you like. Of course it's the weather; what else? It would make an angel quarrelsome— let alone a saint."

All the Chinamen on deck appeared at their last gasp.

At its setting the sun had a diminished diameter and an expiring brown, rayless glow, as if millions of centuries elapsing since the morning had brought it near its end. A dense bank of cloud became visible to the northward; it had a sinister dark olive tint, and lay low and motionless upon the sea, resembling a solid obstacle in the path of the ship. She went floundering towards it like an exhausted creature driven to its death. The coppery twilight retired slowly, and the darkness brought out overhead a swarm of unsteady, big stars, that, as if blown upon, flickered exceedingly and seemed to hang very near the earth. At eight o'clock Jukes went into the chart-room to write up the ship's log.

He copies neatly out of the rough-book the number of miles, the course of the ship, and in the column for "wind" scrawled the word "calm" from top to bottom of the eight hours since noon. He was exasperated by the continuous, monotonous rolling of the ship. The heavy inkstand would slide away in a manner that suggested perverse intelligence in dodging the pen. Having written in the large space under the head of "Remarks" "Heat very oppressive," he stuck the end of the penholder in his teeth, pipe fashion, and mopped his face carefully.

"Ship rolling heavily in a high cross swell," he began again, and commented to himself, "Heavily is no word for it." Then he wrote: "Sunset threatening, with a low bank of clouds to N. and E. Sky clear overhead."

Sprawling over the table with arrested pen, he glanced out of the door, and in that frame of his vision he saw all the stars flying upwards between the teakwood jambs on a black sky. The whole lot took flight together and disappeared, leaving only a blackness flecked with white flashes, for the sea was as black as the sky and speckled with foam afar. The stars that had flown to the roll came back on the return swing of the ship, rushing downwards in their glittering multitude, not of fiery points, but enlarged to tiny discs brilliant with a clear wet sheen.

Jukes watched the flying big stars for a moment, and then wrote: "8 P.M. Swell increasing. Ship labouring and taking water on her decks. Battened down the coolies for the night. Barometer still falling." He paused, and thought to himself, "Perhaps nothing whatever'll come of it." And then he closed resolutely his entries: "Every appearance of a typhoon coming on."

On going out he had to stand aside, and Captain MacWhirr strode over the doorstep without saying a word or making a sign.

"Shut the door, Mr. Jukes, will you?" he cried from within.

Jukes turned back to do so, muttering ironically: "Afraid to catch cold, I suppose." It was his watch below, but he yearned for communion with his kind; and he remarked cheerily to the second mate: "Doesn't look so bad, after all— does it?"

The second mate was marching to and fro on the bridge, tripping down with small steps one moment, and the next climbing with difficulty the shifting slope of the deck. At the sound of Jukes' voice he stood still, facing forward, but made no reply.

"Hallo! That's a heavy one," said Jukes, swaying to meet the long roll till his lowered hand touched the planks. This time the second mate made in his throat a noise of an unfriendly nature.

He was an oldish, shabby little fellow, with bad teeth and no hair on his face. He had been shipped in a hurry in Shanghai, that trip when the second officer brought from home had delayed the ship three hours in port by contriving (in some manner Captain MacWhirr could never understand) to fall overboard into an empty coal-lighter lying alongside, and had to be sent ashore to the hospital with concussion of the brain and a broken limb or two.

Jukes was not discouraged by the unsympathetic sound. "The Chinamen must be having a lovely time of it down there," he said. "It's lucky for them the old girl has the easiest roll of any ship I've ever been in. There now! This one wasn't so bad."

"You wait," snarled the second mate.

With his sharp nose, red at the tip, and his thin pinched lips, he always looked as though he were raging inwardly; and he was concise in his speech to the point of rudeness. All his time off duty he spent in his cabin with the door shut, keeping so still in there that he was supposed to fall asleep as soon as he had disappeared; but the man who came in to wake him for his watch on deck would invariably find him with his eyes wide open, flat on his back in the bunk, and glaring irritably from a soiled pillow. He never wrote any letters, did not seem to hope for news from anywhere; and though he had been heard once to mention West Hartlepool, it was with extreme bitterness, and only in connection with the extortionate charges of a boarding-house. He was one of those men who are picked up at need in the ports of the world. They are competent enough, appear hopelessly hard up, show no evidence of any sort of vice, and carry about them all the signs of manifest failure. They come aboard on an emergency, care for no ship afloat, live in their own atmosphere of casual connection amongst their shipmates who know nothing of them, and

make up their minds to leave at inconvenient times. They clear out with no words of leavetaking in some God-forsaken port other men would fear to be stranded in, and go ashore in company of a shabby sea-chest, corded like a treasure-box, and with an air of shaking the ship's dust off their feet.

"You wait," he repeated, balanced in great swings with his back to Jukes, motionless and implacable.

"Do you mean to say we are going to catch it hot?" asked Jukes with boyish interest.

"Say?... I say nothing. You don't catch me," snapped the little second mate, with a mixture of pride, scorn, and cunning, as if Jukes' question had been a trap cleverly detected. "Oh, no! None of you here shall make a fool of me if I know it," he mumbled to himself.

Jukes reflected rapidly that this second mate was a mean little beast, and in his heart he wished poor Jack Allen had never smashed himself up in the coal-lighter. The far-off blackness ahead of the ship was like another night seen through the starry night of the earth— the starless night of the immensities beyond the created universe, revealed in its appalling stillness through a low fissure in the glittering sphere of which the earth is the kernel.

"Whatever there might be about," said Jukes, "we are steaming straight into it."

"You've said it," caught up the second mate, always with his back to Jukes. "You've said it, mind— not I."

"Oh, go to Jericho!" said Jukes, frankly; and the other emitted a triumphant little chuckle.

"You've said it," he repeated.

"And what of that?"

"I've known some real good men get into trouble with their skippers for saying a dam' sight less," answered the second mate feverishly. "Oh, no! You don't catch me."

"You seem deucedly anxious not to give yourself away," said Jukes, completely soured by such absurdity. "I wouldn't be afraid to say what I think."

"Aye, to me! That's no great trick. I am nobody, and well I know it."

The ship, after a pause of comparative steadiness, started upon a series of rolls, one worse than the other, and for a time Jukes, preserving his equilibrium, was too busy to open his mouth. As soon as the violent swinging had quieted down somewhat, he said: "This is a bit too much of a good thing. Whether anything is coming or not I think she ought to be put head on to that swell. The old man is just gone in to lie down. Hang me if I don't speak to him."

But when he opened the door of the chart-room he saw his captain reading a book. Captain MacWhirr was not lying down: he was standing up with one

hand grasping the edge of the bookshelf and the other holding open before his face a thick volume. The lamp wriggled in the gimbals, the loosened books toppled from side to side on the shelf, the long barometer swung in jerky circles, the table altered its slant every moment. In the midst of all this stir and movement Captain MacWhirr, holding on, showed his eyes above the upper edge, and asked, "What's the matter?"

"Swell getting worse, sir."

"Noticed that in here," muttered Captain MacWhirr. "Anything wrong?"

Jukes, inwardly disconcerted by the seriousness of the eyes looking at him over the top of the book, produced an embarrassed grin.

"Rolling like old boots," he said, sheepishly.

"Aye! Very heavy— very heavy. What do you want?"

At this Jukes lost his footing and began to flounder. "I was thinking of our passengers," he said, in the manner of a man clutching at a straw.

"Passengers?" wondered the Captain, gravely. "What passengers?"

"Why, the Chinamen, sir," explained Jukes, very sick of this conversation.

"The Chinamen! Why don't you speak plainly? Couldn't tell what you meant. Never heard a lot of coolies spoken of as passengers before. Passengers, indeed! What's come to you?"

Captain MacWhirr, closing the book on his forefinger, lowered his arm and looked completely mystified. "Why are you thinking of the Chinamen, Mr. Jukes?" he inquired.

Jukes took a plunge, like a man driven to it. "She's rolling her decks full of water, sir. Thought you might put her head on perhaps— for a while. Till this goes down a bit— very soon, I dare say. Head to the eastward. I never knew a ship roll like this."

He held on in the doorway, and Captain MacWhirr, feeling his grip on the shelf inadequate, made up his mind to let go in a hurry, and fell heavily on the couch.

"Head to the eastward?" he said, struggling to sit up. "That's more than four points off her course."

"Yes, sir. Fifty degrees.... Would just bring her head far enough round to meet this...."

Captain MacWhirr was now sitting up. He had not dropped the book, and he had not lost his place.

"To the eastward?" he repeated, with dawning astonishment. "To the... Where do you think we are bound to? You want me to haul a full-powered steamship four points off her course to make the Chinamen comfortable! Now, I've heard more than enough of mad things done in the world— but this.... If I didn't know you, Jukes, I would think you were in liquor. Steer four points

off.... And what afterwards? Steer four points over the other way, I suppose, to make the course good. What put it into your head that I would start to tack a steamer as if she were a sailing-ship?"

"Jolly good thing she isn't," threw in Jukes, with bitter readiness. "She would have rolled every blessed stick out of her this afternoon."

"Aye! And you just would have had to stand and see them go," said Captain MacWhirr, showing a certain animation. "It's a dead calm, isn't it?"

"It is, sir. But there's something out of the common coming, for sure."

"Maybe. I suppose you have a notion I should be getting out of the way of that dirt," said Captain MacWhirr, speaking with the utmost simplicity of manner and tone, and fixing the oilcloth on the floor with a heavy stare. Thus he noticed neither Jukes' discomfiture nor the mixture of vexation and astonished respect on his face.

"Now, here's this book," he continued with deliberation, slapping his thigh with the closed volume. "I've been reading the chapter on the storms there."

This was true. He had been reading the chapter on the storms. When he had entered the chart-room, it was with no intention of taking the book down. Some influence in the air— the same influence, probably, that caused the steward to bring without orders the Captain's sea-boots and oilskin coat up to the chart-room— had as it were guided his hand to the shelf; and without taking the time to sit down he had waded with a conscious effort into the terminology of the subject. He lost himself amongst advancing semi-circles, left- and right-hand quadrants, the curves of the tracks, the probable bearing of the centre, the shifts of wind and the readings of barometer. He tried to bring all these things into a definite relation to himself, and ended by becoming contemptuously angry with such a lot of words, and with so much advice, all head-work and supposition, without a glimmer of certitude.

"It's the damnedest thing, Jukes," he said. "If a fellow was to believe all that's in there, he would be running most of his time all over the sea trying to get behind the weather."

Again he slapped his leg with the book; and Jukes opened his mouth, but said nothing.

"Running to get behind the weather! Do you understand that, Mr. Jukes? It's the maddest thing!" ejaculated Captain MacWhirr, with pauses, gazing at the floor profoundly. "You would think an old woman had been writing this. It passes me. If that thing means anything useful, then it means that I should at once alter the course away, away to the devil somewhere, and come booming down on Fu-chau from the northward at the tail of this dirty weather that's supposed to be knocking about in our way. From the north! Do you understand, Mr. Jukes? Three hundred extra miles to the distance, and a pretty

coal bill to show. I couldn't bring myself to do that if every word in there was gospel truth, Mr. Jukes. Don't you expect me...."

And Jukes, silent, marvelled at this display of feeling and loquacity.

"But the truth is that you don't know if the fellow is right, anyhow. How can you tell what a gale is made of till you get it? He isn't aboard here, is he? Very well. Here he says that the centre of them things bears eight points off the wind; but we haven't got any wind, for all the barometer falling. Where's his centre now?"

"We will get the wind presently," mumbled Jukes.

"Let it come, then," said Captain MacWhirr, with dignified indignation. "It's only to let you see, Mr. Jukes, that you don't find everything in books. All these rules for dodging breezes and circumventing the winds of heaven, Mr. Jukes, seem to me the maddest thing, when you come to look at it sensibly."

He raised his eyes, saw Jukes gazing at him dubiously, and tried to illustrate his meaning.

"About as queer as your extraordinary notion of dodging the ship head to sea, for I don't know how long, to make the Chinamen comfortable; whereas all we've got to do is to take them to Fu-chau, being timed to get there before noon on Friday. If the weather delays me— very well. There's your log-book to talk straight about the weather. But suppose I went swinging off my course and came in two days late, and they asked me: 'Where have you been all that time, Captain?' What could I say to that? 'Went around to dodge the bad weather,' I would say. 'It must've been dam' bad,' they would say. 'Don't know,' I would have to say; 'I've dodged clear of it.' See that, Jukes? I have been thinking it all out this afternoon."

He looked up again in his unseeing, unimaginative way. No one had ever heard him say so much at one time. Jukes, with his arms open in the doorway, was like a man invited to behold a miracle. Unbounded wonder was the intellectual meaning of his eye, while incredulity was seated in his whole countenance.

"A gale is a gale, Mr. Jukes," resumed the Captain, "and a full-powered steam-ship has got to face it. There's just so much dirty weather knocking about the world, and the proper thing is to go through it with none of what old Captain Wilson of the Melita calls 'storm strategy.' The other day ashore I heard him hold forth about it to a lot of shipmasters who came in and sat at a table next to mine. It seemed to me the greatest nonsense. He was telling them how he outmanoeuvred, I think he said, a terrific gale, so that it never came nearer than fifty miles to him. A neat piece of head-work he called it. How he knew there was a terrific gale fifty miles off beats me altogether. It was

like listening to a crazy man. I would have thought Captain Wilson was old enough to know better."

Captain MacWhirr ceased for a moment, then said, "It's your watch below, Mr. Jukes?"

Jukes came to himself with a start. "Yes, sir."

"Leave orders to call me at the slightest change," said the Captain. He reached up to put the book away, and tucked his legs upon the couch. "Shut the door so that it don't fly open, will you? I can't stand a door banging. They've put a lot of rubbishy locks into this ship, I must say."

Captain MacWhirr closed his eyes.

He did so to rest himself. He was tired, and he experienced that state of mental vacuity which comes at the end of an exhaustive discussion that has liberated some belief matured in the course of meditative years. He had indeed been making his confession of faith, had he only known it; and its effect was to make Jukes, on the other side of the door, stand scratching his head for a good while.

Captain MacWhirr opened his eyes.

He thought he must have been asleep. What was that loud noise? Wind? Why had he not been called? The lamp wriggled in its gimbals, the barometer swung in circles, the table altered its slant every moment; a pair of limp sea-boots with collapsed tops went sliding past the couch. He put out his hand instantly, and captured one.

Jukes' face appeared in a crack of the door: only his face, very red, with staring eyes. The flame of the lamp leaped, a piece of paper flew up, a rush of air enveloped Captain MacWhirr. Beginning to draw on the boot, he directed an expectant gaze at Jukes' swollen, excited features.

"Came on like this," shouted Jukes, "five minutes ago... all of a sudden."

The head disappeared with a bang, and a heavy splash and patter of drops swept past the closed door as if a pailful of melted lead had been flung against the house. A whistling could be heard now upon the deep vibrating noise outside. The stuffy chart-room seemed as full of draughts as a shed. Captain MacWhirr collared the other sea-boot on its violent passage along the floor. He was not flustered, but he could not find at once the opening for inserting his foot. The shoes he had flung off were scurrying from end to end of the cabin, gambolling playfully over each other like puppies. As soon as he stood up he kicked at them viciously, but without effect.

He threw himself into the attitude of a lunging fencer, to reach after his oilskin coat; and afterwards he staggered all over the confined space while he jerked himself into it. Very grave, straddling his legs far apart, and stretching his neck, he started to tie deliberately the strings of his sou'-wester under his

chin, with thick fingers that trembled slightly. He went through all the movements of a woman putting on her bonnet before a glass, with a strained, listening attention, as though he had expected every moment to hear the shout of his name in the confused clamour that had suddenly beset his ship. Its increase filled his ears while he was getting ready to go out and confront whatever it might mean. It was tumultuous and very loud— made up of the rush of the wind, the crashes of the sea, with that prolonged deep vibration of the air, like the roll of an immense and remote drum beating the charge of the gale.

He stood for a moment in the light of the lamp, thick, clumsy, shapeless in his panoply of combat, vigilant and red-faced.

"There's a lot of weight in this," he muttered.

As soon as he attempted to open the door the wind caught it. Clinging to the handle, he was dragged out over the doorstep, and at once found himself engaged with the wind in a sort of personal scuffle whose object was the shutting of that door. At the last moment a tongue of air scurried in and licked out the flame of the lamp.

Ahead of the ship he perceived a great darkness lying upon a multitude of white flashes; on the starboard beam a few amazing stars drooped, dim and fitful, above an immense waste of broken seas, as if seen through a mad drift of smoke.

On the bridge a knot of men, indistinct and toiling, were making great efforts in the light of the wheelhouse windows that shone mistily on their heads and backs. Suddenly darkness closed upon one pane, then on another. The voices of the lost group reached him after the manner of men's voices in a gale, in shreds and fragments of forlorn shouting snatched past the ear. All at once Jukes appeared at his side, yelling, with his head down.

"Watch— put in— wheelhouse shutters— glass— afraid— blow in."

Jukes heard his commander upbraiding.

"This— come— anything— warning— call me."

He tried to explain, with the uproar pressing on his lips.

"Light air— remained— bridge— sudden— north-east— could turn— thought— you— sure— hear."

They had gained the shelter of the weather-cloth, and could converse with raised voices, as people quarrel.

"I got the hands along to cover up all the ventilators. Good job I had remained on deck. I didn't think you would be asleep, and so... What did you say, sir? What?"

"Nothing," cried Captain MacWhirr. "I said— all right."

"By all the powers! We've got it this time," observed Jukes in a howl.

"You haven't altered her course?" inquired Captain MacWhirr, straining his voice.

"No, sir. Certainly not. Wind came out right ahead. And here comes the head sea."

A plunge of the ship ended in a shock as if she had landed her forefoot upon something solid. After a moment of stillness a lofty flight of sprays drove hard with the wind upon their faces.

"Keep her at it as long as we can," shouted Captain MacWhirr.

Before Jukes had squeezed the salt water out of his eyes all the stars had disappeared.

iii

JUKES WAS as ready a man as any half-dozen young mates that may be caught by casting a net upon the waters; and though he had been somewhat taken aback by the startling viciousness of the first squall, he had pulled himself together on the instant, had called out the hands and had rushed them along to secure such openings about the deck as had not been already battened down earlier in the evening. Shouting in his fresh, stentorian voice, "Jump, boys, and bear a hand!" he led in the work, telling himself the while that he had "just expected this."

But at the same time he was growing aware that this was rather more than he had expected. From the first stir of the air felt on his cheek the gale seemed to take upon itself the accumulated impetus of an avalanche. Heavy sprays enveloped the *Nan-Shan* from stem to stern, and instantly in the midst of her regular rolling she began to jerk and plunge as though she had gone mad with fright.

Jukes thought, "This is no joke." While he was exchanging explanatory yells with his captain, a sudden lowering of the darkness came upon the night, falling before their vision like something palpable. It was as if the masked lights of the world had been turned down. Jukes was uncritically glad to have his captain at hand. It relieved him as though that man had, by simply coming on deck, taken most of the gale's weight upon his shoulders. Such is the prestige, the privilege, and the burden of command.

Captain MacWhirr could expect no relief of that sort from any one on earth. Such is the loneliness of command. He was trying to see, with that watchful manner of a seaman who stares into the wind's eye as if into the eye of an adversary, to penetrate the hidden intention and guess the aim and force of the thrust. The strong wind swept at him out of a vast obscurity; he felt under his feet the uneasiness of his ship, and he could not even discern the

shadow of her shape. He wished it were not so; and very still he waited, feeling stricken by a blind man's helplessness.

To be silent was natural to him, dark or shine. Jukes, at his elbow, made himself heard yelling cheerily in the gusts, "We must have got the worst of it at once, sir." A faint burst of lightning quivered all round, as if flashed into a cavern— into a black and secret chamber of the sea, with a floor of foaming crests.

It unveiled for a sinister, fluttering moment a ragged mass of clouds hanging low, the lurch of the long outlines of the ship, the black figures of men caught on the bridge, heads forward, as if petrified in the act of butting. The darkness palpitated down upon all this, and then the real thing came at last.

It was something formidable and swift, like the sudden smashing of a vial of wrath. It seemed to explode all round the ship with an overpowering concussion and a rush of great waters, as if an immense dam had been blown up to windward. In an instant the men lost touch of each other. This is the disintegrating power of a great wind: it isolates one from one's kind. An earthquake, a landslip, an avalanche, overtake a man incidentally, as it were— without passion. A furious gale attacks him like a personal enemy, tries to grasp his limbs, fastens upon his mind, seeks to rout his very spirit out of him.

Jukes was driven away from his commander. He fancied himself whirled a great distance through the air. Everything disappeared— even, for a moment, his power of thinking; but his hand had found one of the rail-stanchions. His distress was by no means alleviated by an inclination to disbelieve the reality of this experience. Though young, he had seen some bad weather, and had never doubted his ability to imagine the worst; but this was so much beyond his powers of fancy that it appeared incompatible with the existence of any ship whatever. He would have been incredulous about himself in the same way, perhaps, had he not been so harassed by the necessity of exerting a wrestling effort against a force trying to tear him away from his hold. Moreover, the conviction of not being utterly destroyed returned to him through the sensations of being half-drowned, bestially shaken, and partly choked.

It seemed to him he remained there precariously alone with the stanchion for a long, long time. The rain poured on him, flowed, drove in sheets. He breathed in gasps; and sometimes the water he swallowed was fresh and sometimes it was salt. For the most part he kept his eyes shut tight, as if suspecting his sight might be destroyed in the immense flurry of the elements. When he ventured to blink hastily, he derived some moral support from the green gleam of the starboard light shining feebly upon the flight of rain and sprays. He was actually looking at it when its ray fell upon the uprearing sea

which put it out. He saw the head of the wave topple over, adding the mite of its crash to the tremendous uproar raging around him, and almost at the same instant the stanchion was wrenched away from his embracing arms. After a crushing thump on his back he found himself suddenly afloat and borne upwards. His first irresistible notion was that the whole China Sea had climbed on the bridge. Then, more sanely, he concluded himself gone overboard. All the time he was being tossed, flung, and rolled in great volumes of water, he kept on repeating mentally, with the utmost precipitation, the words: "My God! My God! My God! My God!"

All at once, in a revolt of misery and despair, he formed the crazy resolution to get out of that. And he began to thresh about with his arms and legs. But as soon as he commenced his wretched struggles he discovered that he had become somehow mixed up with a face, an oilskin coat, somebody's boots. He clawed ferociously all these things in turn, lost them, found them again, lost them once more, and finally was himself caught in the firm clasp of a pair of stout arms. He returned the embrace closely round a thick solid body. He had found his captain.

They tumbled over and over, tightening their hug. Suddenly the water let them down with a brutal bang; and, stranded against the side of the wheelhouse, out of breath and bruised, they were left to stagger up in the wind and hold on where they could.

Jukes came out of it rather horrified, as though he had escaped some unparalleled outrage directed at his feelings. It weakened his faith in himself. He started shouting aimlessly to the man he could feel near him in that fiendish blackness, "Is it you, sir? Is it you, sir?" till his temples seemed ready to burst. And he heard in answer a voice, as if crying far away, as if screaming to him fretfully from a very great distance, the one word "Yes!" Other seas swept again over the bridge. He received them defencelessly right over his bare head, with both his hands engaged in holding.

The motion of the ship was extravagant. Her lurches had an appalling helplessness: she pitched as if taking a header into a void, and seemed to find a wall to hit every time. When she rolled she fell on her side headlong, and she would be righted back by such a demolishing blow that Jukes felt her reeling as a clubbed man reels before he collapses. The gale howled and scuffled about gigantically in the darkness, as though the entire world were one black gully. At certain moments the air streamed against the ship as if sucked through a tunnel with a concentrated solid force of impact that seemed to lift her clean out of the water and keep her up for an instant with only a quiver running through her from end to end. And then she would begin her tumbling again as

if dropped back into a boiling cauldron. Jukes tried hard to compose his mind and judge things coolly.

The sea, flattened down in the heavier gusts, would uprise and overwhelm both ends of the *Nan-Shan* in snowy rushes of foam, expanding wide, beyond both rails, into the night. And on this dazzling sheet, spread under the blackness of the clouds and emitting a bluish glow, Captain MacWhirr could catch a desolate glimpse of a few tiny specks black as ebony, the tops of the hatches, the battened companions, the heads of the covered winches, the foot of a mast. This was all he could see of his ship. Her middle structure, covered by the bridge which bore him, his mate, the closed wheelhouse where a man was steering shut up with the fear of being swept overboard together with the whole thing in one great crash— her middle structure was like a half-tide rock awash upon a coast. It was like an outlying rock with the water boiling up, streaming over, pouring off, beating round— like a rock in the surf to which shipwrecked people cling before they let go— only it rose, it sank, it rolled continuously, without respite and rest, like a rock that should have miraculously struck adrift from a coast and gone wallowing upon the sea.

The *Nan-Shan* was being looted by the storm with a senseless, destructive fury: trysails torn out of the extra gaskets, double-lashed awnings blown away, bridge swept clean, weather-cloths burst, rails twisted, light-screens smashed— and two of the boats had gone already. They had gone unheard and unseen, melting, as it were, in the shock and smother of the wave. It was only later, when upon the white flash of another high sea hurling itself amidships, Jukes had a vision of two pairs of davits leaping black and empty out of the solid blackness, with one overhauled fall flying and an iron-bound block capering in the air, that he became aware of what had happened within about three yards of his back.

He poked his head forward, groping for the ear of his commander. His lips touched it— big, fleshy, very wet. He cried in an agitated tone, "Our boats are going now, sir."

And again he heard that voice, forced and ringing feebly, but with a penetrating effect of quietness in the enormous discord of noises, as if sent out from some remote spot of peace beyond the black wastes of the gale; again he heard a man's voice— the frail and indomitable sound that can be made to carry an infinity of thought, resolution and purpose, that shall be pronouncing confident words on the last day, when heavens fall, and justice is done— again he heard it, and it was crying to him, as if from very, very far— "All right."

He thought he had not managed to make himself understood. "Our boats— I say boats— the boats, sir! Two gone!"

The same voice, within a foot of him and yet so remote, yelled sensibly, "Can't be helped."

Captain MacWhirr had never turned his face, but Jukes caught some more words on the wind.

"What can— expect— when hammering through— such— Bound to leave— something behind— stands to reason."

Watchfully Jukes listened for more. No more came. This was all Captain MacWhirr had to say; and Jukes could picture to himself rather than see the broad squat back before him. An impenetrable obscurity pressed down upon the ghostly glimmers of the sea. A dull conviction seized upon Jukes that there was nothing to be done.

If the steering-gear did not give way, if the immense volumes of water did not burst the deck in or smash one of the hatches, if the engines did not give up, if way could be kept on the ship against this terrific wind, and she did not bury herself in one of these awful seas, of whose white crests alone, topping high above her bows, he could now and then get a sickening glimpse— then there was a chance of her coming out of it. Something within him seemed to turn over, bringing uppermost the feeling that the *Nan-Shan* was lost.

"She's done for," he said to himself, with a surprising mental agitation, as though he had discovered an unexpected meaning in this thought. One of these things was bound to happen. Nothing could be prevented now, and nothing could be remedied. The men on board did not count, and the ship could not last. This weather was too impossible.

Jukes felt an arm thrown heavily over his shoulders; and to this overture he responded with great intelligence by catching hold of his captain round the waist.

They stood clasped thus in the blind night, bracing each other against the wind, cheek to cheek and lip to ear, in the manner of two hulks lashed stem to stern together.

And Jukes heard the voice of his commander hardly any louder than before, but nearer, as though, starting to march athwart the prodigious rush of the hurricane, it had approached him, bearing that strange effect of quietness like the serene glow of a halo.

"D'ye know where the hands got to?" it asked, vigorous and evanescent at the same time, overcoming the strength of the wind, and swept away from Jukes instantly.

Jukes didn't know. They were all on the bridge when the real force of the hurricane struck the ship. He had no idea where they had crawled to. Under the circumstances they were nowhere, for all the use that could be made of them. Somehow the Captain's wish to know distressed Jukes.

"Want the hands, sir?" he cried, apprehensively.

"Ought to know," asserted Captain MacWhirr. "Hold hard."

They held hard. An outburst of unchained fury, a vicious rush of the wind absolutely steadied the ship; she rocked only, quick and light like a child's cradle, for a terrific moment of suspense, while the whole atmosphere, as it seemed, streamed furiously past her, roaring away from the tenebrous earth.

It suffocated them, and with eyes shut they tightened their grasp. What from the magnitude of the shock might have been a column of water running upright in the dark, butted against the ship, broke short, and fell on her bridge, crushingly, from on high, with a dead burying weight.

A flying fragment of that collapse, a mere splash, enveloped them in one swirl from their feet over their heads, filling violently their ears, mouths and nostrils with salt water. It knocked out their legs, wrenched in haste at their arms, seethed away swiftly under their chins; and opening their eyes, they saw the piled-up masses of foam dashing to and fro amongst what looked like the fragments of a ship. She had given way as if driven straight in. Their panting hearts yielded, too, before the tremendous blow; and all at once she sprang up again to her desperate plunging, as if trying to scramble out from under the ruins.

The seas in the dark seemed to rush from all sides to keep her back where she might perish. There was hate in the way she was handled, and a ferocity in the blows that fell. She was like a living creature thrown to the rage of a mob: hustled terribly, struck at, borne up, flung down, leaped upon. Captain MacWhirr and Jukes kept hold of each other, deafened by the noise, gagged by the wind; and the great physical tumult beating about their bodies, brought, like an unbridled display of passion, a profound trouble to their souls. One of those wild and appalling shrieks that are heard at times passing mysteriously overhead in the steady roar of a hurricane, swooped, as if borne on wings, upon the ship, and Jukes tried to outscream it.

"Will she live through this?"

The cry was wrenched out of his breast. It was as unintentional as the birth of a thought in the head, and he heard nothing of it himself. It all became extinct at once— thought, intention, effort— and of his cry the inaudible vibration added to the tempest waves of the air.

He expected nothing from it. Nothing at all. For indeed what answer could be made? But after a while he heard with amazement the frail and resisting voice in his ear, the dwarf sound, unconquered in the giant tumult.

"She may!"

It was a dull yell, more difficult to seize than a whisper. And presently the voice returned again, half submerged in the vast crashes, like a ship battling against the waves of an ocean.

"Let's hope so!" it cried— small, lonely and unmoved, a stranger to the visions of hope or fear; and it flickered into disconnected words: "Ship..... This.... Never— Anyhow... for the best." Jukes gave it up.

Then, as if it had come suddenly upon the one thing fit to withstand the power of a storm, it seemed to gain force and firmness for the last broken shouts:

"Keep on hammering... builders... good men..... And chance it... engines.... Rout... good man."

Captain MacWhirr removed his arm from Jukes' shoulders, and thereby ceased to exist for his mate, so dark it was; Jukes, after a tense stiffening of every muscle, would let himself go limp all over. The gnawing of profound discomfort existed side by side with an incredible disposition to somnolence, as though he had been buffeted and worried into drowsiness. The wind would get hold of his head and try to shake it off his shoulders; his clothes, full of water, were as heavy as lead, cold and dripping like an armour of melting ice: he shivered— it lasted a long time; and with his hands closed hard on his hold, he was letting himself sink slowly into the depths of bodily misery. His mind became concentrated upon himself in an aimless, idle way, and when something pushed lightly at the back of his knees he nearly, as the saying is, jumped out of his skin.

In the start forward he bumped the back of Captain MacWhirr, who didn't move; and then a hand gripped his thigh. A lull had come, a menacing lull of the wind, the holding of a stormy breath— and he felt himself pawed all over. It was the boatswain. Jukes recognized these hands, so thick and enormous that they seemed to belong to some new species of man.

The boatswain had arrived on the bridge, crawling on all fours against the wind, and had found the chief mate's legs with the top of his head. Immediately he crouched and began to explore Jukes' person upwards with prudent, apologetic touches, as became an inferior.

He was an ill-favoured, undersized, gruff sailor of fifty, coarsely hairy, short-legged, long-armed, resembling an elderly ape. His strength was immense; and in his great lumpy paws, bulging like brown boxing-gloves on the end of furry forearms, the heaviest objects were handled like playthings. Apart from the grizzled pelt on his chest, the menacing demeanour and the hoarse voice, he had none of the classical attributes of his rating. His good nature almost amounted to imbecility: the men did what they liked with him, and he had not an ounce of initiative in his character, which was easy-going and

talkative. For these reasons Jukes disliked him; but Captain MacWhirr, to Jukes' scornful disgust, seemed to regard him as a first-rate petty officer.

He pulled himself up by Jukes' coat, taking that liberty with the greatest moderation, and only so far as it was forced upon him by the hurricane.

"What is it, boss'n, what is it?" yelled Jukes, impatiently. What could that fraud of a boss'n want on the bridge? The typhoon had got on Jukes' nerves. The husky bellowings of the other, though unintelligible, seemed to suggest a state of lively satisfaction.

There could be no mistake. The old fool was pleased with something.

The boatswain's other hand had found some other body, for in a changed tone he began to inquire: "Is it you, sir? Is it you, sir?" The wind strangled his howls.

"Yes!" cried Captain MacWhirr.

iv

ALL THAT the boatswain, out of a superabundance of yells, could make clear to Captain MacWhirr was the bizarre intelligence that "All them Chinamen in the fore 'tween deck have fetched away, sir."

Jukes to leeward could hear these two shouting within six inches of his face, as you may hear on a still night half a mile away two men conversing across a field. He heard Captain MacWhirr's exasperated "What? What?" and the strained pitch of the other's hoarseness. "In a lump... seen them myself.... Awful sight, sir... thought... tell you."

Jukes remained indifferent, as if rendered irresponsible by the force of the hurricane, which made the very thought of action utterly vain. Besides, being very young, he had found the occupation of keeping his heart completely steeled against the worst so engrossing that he had come to feel an overpowering dislike towards any other form of activity whatever. He was not scared; he knew this because, firmly believing he would never see another sunrise, he remained calm in that belief.

These are the moments of do-nothing heroics to which even good men surrender at times. Many officers of ships can no doubt recall a case in their experience when just such a trance of confounded stoicism would come all at once over a whole ship's company. Jukes, however, had no wide experience of men or storms. He conceived himself to be calm— inexorably calm; but as a matter of fact he was daunted; not abjectly, but only so far as a decent man may, without becoming loathsome to himself.

It was rather like a forced-on numbness of spirit. The long, long stress of a gale does it; the suspense of the interminably culminating catastrophe; and

there is a bodily fatigue in the mere holding on to existence within the excessive tumult; a searching and insidious fatigue that penetrates deep into a man's breast to cast down and sadden his heart, which is incorrigible, and of all the gifts of the earth— even before life itself— aspires to peace.

Jukes was benumbed much more than he supposed. He held on— very wet, very cold, stiff in every limb; and in a momentary hallucination of swift visions (it is said that a drowning man thus reviews all his life) he beheld all sorts of memories altogether unconnected with his present situation. He remembered his father, for instance: a worthy business man, who at an unfortunate crisis in his affairs went quietly to bed and died forthwith in a state of resignation. Jukes did not recall these circumstances, of course, but remaining otherwise unconcerned he seemed to see distinctly the poor man's face; a certain game of nap played when quite a boy in Table Bay on board a ship, since lost with all hands; the thick eyebrows of his first skipper; and without any emotion, as he might years ago have walked listlessly into her room and found her sitting there with a book, he remembered his mother— dead, too, now— the resolute woman, left badly off, who had been very firm in his bringing up.

It could not have lasted more than a second, perhaps not so much. A heavy arm had fallen about his shoulders; Captain MacWhirr's voice was speaking his name into his ear.

"Jukes! Jukes!"

He detected the tone of deep concern. The wind had thrown its weight on the ship, trying to pin her down amongst the seas. They made a clean breach over her, as over a deep-swimming log; and the gathered weight of crashes menaced monstrously from afar. The breakers flung out of the night with a ghostly light on their crests— the light of sea-foam that in a ferocious, boiling-up pale flash showed upon the slender body of the ship the toppling rush, the downfall, and the seething mad scurry of each wave. Never for a moment could she shake herself clear of the water; Jukes, rigid, perceived in her motion the ominous sign of haphazard floundering. She was no longer struggling intelligently. It was the beginning of the end; and the note of busy concern in Captain MacWhirr's voice sickened him like an exhibition of blind and pernicious folly.

The spell of the storm had fallen upon Jukes. He was penetrated by it, absorbed by it; he was rooted in it with a rigour of dumb attention. Captain MacWhirr persisted in his cries, but the wind got between them like a solid wedge. He hung round Jukes' neck as heavy as a millstone, and suddenly the sides of their heads knocked together.

"Jukes! Mr. Jukes, I say!"

He had to answer that voice that would not be silenced. He answered in the customary manner: "...Yes, sir."

And directly, his heart, corrupted by the storm that breeds a craving for peace, rebelled against the tyranny of training and command.

Captain MacWhirr had his mate's head fixed firm in the crook of his elbow, and pressed it to his yelling lips mysteriously. Sometimes Jukes would break in, admonishing hastily: "Look out, sir!" or Captain MacWhirr would bawl an earnest exhortation to "Hold hard, there!" and the whole black universe seemed to reel together with the ship. They paused. She floated yet. And Captain MacWhirr would resume, his shouts. ".... Says...whole lot... fetched away.... Ought to see... what's the matter."

Directly the full force of the hurricane had struck the ship, every part of her deck became untenable; and the sailors, dazed and dismayed, took shelter in the port alleyway under the bridge. It had a door aft, which they shut; it was very black, cold, and dismal. At each heavy fling of the ship they would groan all together in the dark, and tons of water could be heard scuttling about as if trying to get at them from above. The boatswain had been keeping up a gruff talk, but a more unreasonable lot of men, he said afterwards, he had never been with. They were snug enough there, out of harm's way, and not wanted to do anything, either; and yet they did nothing but grumble and complain peevishly like so many sick kids. Finally, one of them said that if there had been at least some light to see each other's noses by, it wouldn't be so bad. It was making him crazy, he declared, to lie there in the dark waiting for the blamed hooker to sink.

"Why don't you step outside, then, and be done with it at once?" the boatswain turned on him.

This called up a shout of execration. The boatswain found himself overwhelmed with reproaches of all sorts. They seemed to take it ill that a lamp was not instantly created for them out of nothing. They would whine after a light to get drowned by— anyhow! And though the unreason of their revilings was patent— since no one could hope to reach the lamp-room, which was forward— he became greatly distressed. He did not think it was decent of them to be nagging at him like this. He told them so, and was met by general contumely. He sought refuge, therefore, in an embittered silence. At the same time their grumbling and sighing and muttering worried him greatly, but by-and-by it occurred to him that there were six globe lamps hung in the 'tween-deck, and that there could be no harm in depriving the coolies of one of them.

The *Nan-Shan* had an athwartship coal-bunker, which, being at times used as cargo space, communicated by an iron door with the fore 'tween-deck. It was empty then, and its manhole was the foremost one in the alleyway. The

boatswain could get in, therefore, without coming out on deck at all; but to his great surprise he found he could induce no one to help him in taking off the manhole cover. He groped for it all the same, but one of the crew lying in his way refused to budge.

"Why, I only want to get you that blamed light you are crying for," he expostulated, almost pitifully.

Somebody told him to go and put his head in a bag. He regretted he could not recognize the voice, and that it was too dark to see, otherwise, as he said, he would have put a head on that son of a sea-cook, anyway, sink or swim. Nevertheless, he had made up his mind to show them he could get a light, if he were to die for it.

Through the violence of the ship's rolling, every movement was dangerous. To be lying down seemed labour enough. He nearly broke his neck dropping into the bunker. He fell on his back, and was sent shooting helplessly from side to side in the dangerous company of a heavy iron bar— a coal-trimmer's slice probably— left down there by somebody. This thing made him as nervous as though it had been a wild beast. He could not see it, the inside of the bunker coated with coal-dust being perfectly and impenetrably black; but he heard it sliding and clattering, and striking here and there, always in the neighbourhood of his head. It seemed to make an extraordinary noise, too— to give heavy thumps as though it had been as big as a bridge girder. This was remarkable enough for him to notice while he was flung from port to starboard and back again, and clawing desperately the smooth sides of the bunker in the endeavour to stop himself. The door into the 'tween-deck not fitting quite true, he saw a thread of dim light at the bottom.

Being a sailor, and a still active man, he did not want much of a chance to regain his feet; and as luck would have it, in scrambling up he put his hand on the iron slice, picking it up as he rose. Otherwise he would have been afraid of the thing breaking his legs, or at least knocking him down again. At first he stood still. He felt unsafe in this darkness that seemed to make the ship's motion unfamiliar, unforeseen, and difficult to counteract. He felt so much shaken for a moment that he dared not move for fear of "taking charge again." He had no mind to get battered to pieces in that bunker.

He had struck his head twice; he was dazed a little. He seemed to hear yet so plainly the clatter and bangs of the iron slice flying about his ears that he tightened his grip to prove to himself he had it there safely in his hand. He was vaguely amazed at the plainness with which down there he could hear the gale raging. Its howls and shrieks seemed to take on, in the emptiness of the bunker, something of the human character, of human rage and pain— being not vast but infinitely poignant. And there were, with every roll, thumps, too—

profound, ponderous thumps, as if a bulky object of five-ton weight or so had got play in the hold. But there was no such thing in the cargo. Something on deck? Impossible. Or alongside? Couldn't be.

He thought all this quickly, clearly, competently, like a seaman, and in the end remained puzzled. This noise, though, came deadened from outside, together with the washing and pouring of water on deck above his head. Was it the wind? Must be. It made down there a row like the shouting of a big lot of crazed men. And he discovered in himself a desire for a light, too— if only to get drowned by— and a nervous anxiety to get out of that bunker as quickly as possible.

He pulled back the bolt: the heavy iron plate turned on its hinges; and it was as though he had opened the door to the sounds of the tempest. A gust of hoarse yelling met him: the air was still; and the rushing of water overhead was covered by a tumult of strangled, throaty shrieks that produced an effect of desperate confusion. He straddled his legs the whole width of the doorway and stretched his neck. And at first he perceived only what he had come to seek: six small yellow flames swinging violently on the great body of the dusk.

It was stayed like the gallery of a mine, with a row of stanchions in the middle, and cross-beams overhead, penetrating into the gloom ahead— indefinitely. And to port there loomed, like the caving in of one of the sides, a bulky mass with a slanting outline. The whole place, with the shadows and the shapes, moved all the time. The boatswain glared: the ship lurched to starboard, and a great howl came from that mass that had the slant of fallen earth.

Pieces of wood whizzed past. Planks, he thought, inexpressibly startled, and flinging back his head. At his feet a man went sliding over, open-eyed, on his back, straining with uplifted arms for nothing: and another came bounding like a detached stone with his head between his legs and his hands clenched. His pigtail whipped in the air; he made a grab at the boatswain's legs, and from his opened hand a bright white disc rolled against the boatswain's foot. He recognized a silver dollar, and yelled at it with astonishment. With a precipitated sound of trampling and shuffling of bare feet, and with guttural cries, the mound of writhing bodies piled up to port detached itself from the ship's side and sliding, inert and struggling, shifted to starboard, with a dull, brutal thump. The cries ceased. The boatswain heard a long moan through the roar and whistling of the wind; he saw an inextricable confusion of heads and shoulders, naked soles kicking upwards, fists raised, tumbling backs, legs, pigtails, faces.

"Good Lord!" he cried, horrified, and banged-to the iron door upon this vision.

This was what he had come on the bridge to tell. He could not keep it to himself; and on board ship there is only one man to whom it is worth while to unburden yourself. On his passage back the hands in the alleyway swore at him for a fool. Why didn't he bring that lamp? What the devil did the coolies matter to anybody? And when he came out, the extremity of the ship made what went on inside of her appear of little moment.

At first he thought he had left the alleyway in the very moment of her sinking. The bridge ladders had been washed away, but an enormous sea filling the after-deck floated him up. After that he had to lie on his stomach for some time, holding to a ring-bolt, getting his breath now and then, and swallowing salt water. He struggled farther on his hands and knees, too frightened and distracted to turn back. In this way he reached the after-part of the wheelhouse. In that comparatively sheltered spot he found the second mate.

The boatswain was pleasantly surprised— his impression being that everybody on deck must have been washed away a long time ago. He asked eagerly where the Captain was.

The second mate was lying low, like a malignant little animal under a hedge.

"Captain? Gone overboard, after getting us into this mess." The mate, too, for all he knew or cared. Another fool. Didn't matter. Everybody was going by-and-by.

The boatswain crawled out again into the strength of the wind; not because he much expected to find anybody, he said, but just to get away from "that man." He crawled out as outcasts go to face an inclement world. Hence his great joy at finding Jukes and the Captain. But what was going on in the 'tween-deck was to him a minor matter by that time. Besides, it was difficult to make yourself heard. But he managed to convey the idea that the Chinaman had broken adrift together with their boxes, and that he had come up on purpose to report this. As to the hands, they were all right. Then, appeased, he subsided on the deck in a sitting posture, hugging with his arms and legs the stand of the engine-room telegraph— an iron casting as thick as a post. When that went, why, he expected he would go, too. He gave no more thought to the coolies.

Captain MacWhirr had made Jukes understand that he wanted him to go down below— to see.

"What am I to do then, sir?" And the trembling of his whole wet body caused Jukes' voice to sound like bleating.

"See first... Boss'n... says... adrift."

"That boss'n is a confounded fool," howled Jukes, shakily.

The absurdity of the demand made upon him revolted Jukes. He was as unwilling to go as if the moment he had left the deck the ship were sure to sink.

"I must know... can't leave. . . ."

"They'll settle, sir."

"Fight... boss'n says they fight.... Why? Can't have... fighting... board ship.... Much rather keep you here... case... I should... washed overboard myself.... Stop it... some way. You see and tell me... through engine-room tube. Don't want you... come up here... too often. Dangerous... moving about... deck."

Jukes, held with his head in chancery, had to listen to what seemed horrible suggestions.

"Don't want... you get lost... so long... ship isn't.... Rout... Good man... Ship... may... through this... all right yet."

All at once Jukes understood he would have to go.

"Do you think she may?" he screamed.

But the wind devoured the reply, out of which Jukes heard only the one word, pronounced with great energy ".... Always...."

Captain MacWhirr released Jukes, and bending over the boatswain, yelled, "Get back with the mate." Jukes only knew that the arm was gone off his shoulders. He was dismissed with his orders— to do what? He was exasperated into letting go his hold carelessly, and on the instant was blown away. It seemed to him that nothing could stop him from being blown right over the stern. He flung himself down hastily, and the boatswain, who was following, fell on him.

"Don't you get up yet, sir," cried the boatswain. "No hurry!"

A sea swept over. Jukes understood the boatswain to splutter that the bridge ladders were gone. "I'll lower you down, sir, by your hands," he screamed. He shouted also something about the smoke-stack being as likely to go overboard as not. Jukes thought it very possible, and imagined the fires out, the ship helpless.... The boatswain by his side kept on yelling. "What? What is it?" Jukes cried distressfully; and the other repeated, "What would my old woman say if she saw me now?"

In the alleyway, where a lot of water had got in and splashed in the dark, the men were still as death, till Jukes stumbled against one of them and cursed him savagely for being in the way. Two or three voices then asked, eager and weak, "Any chance for us, sir?"

"What's the matter with you fools?" he said brutally. He felt as though he could throw himself down amongst them and never move any more. But they seemed cheered; and in the midst of obsequious warnings, "Look out! Mind that manhole lid, sir," they lowered him into the bunker. The boatswain

tumbled down after him, and as soon as he had picked himself up he remarked, "She would say, 'Serve you right, you old fool, for going to sea.'"

The boatswain had some means, and made a point of alluding to them frequently. His wife— a fat woman— and two grown-up daughters kept a greengrocer's shop in the East-end of London.

In the dark, Jukes, unsteady on his legs, listened to a faint thunderous patter. A deadened screaming went on steadily at his elbow, as it were; and from above the louder tumult of the storm descended upon these near sounds. His head swam. To him, too, in that bunker, the motion of the ship seemed novel and menacing, sapping his resolution as though he had never been afloat before.

He had half a mind to scramble out again; but the remembrance of Captain MacWhirr's voice made this impossible. His orders were to go and see. What was the good of it, he wanted to know. Enraged, he told himself he would see— of course. But the boatswain, staggering clumsily, warned him to be careful how he opened that door; there was a blamed fight going on. And Jukes, as if in great bodily pain, desired irritably to know what the devil they were fighting for.

"Dollars! Dollars, sir. All their rotten chests got burst open. Blamed money skipping all over the place, and they are tumbling after it head over heels— tearing and biting like anything. A regular little hell in there."

Jukes convulsively opened the door. The short boatswain peered under his arm.

One of the lamps had gone out, broken perhaps. Rancorous, guttural cries burst out loudly on their ears, and a strange panting sound, the working of all these straining breasts. A hard blow hit the side of the ship: water fell above with a stunning shock, and in the forefront of the gloom, where the air was reddish and thick, Jukes saw a head bang the deck violently, two thick calves waving on high, muscular arms twined round a naked body, a yellow-face, open-mouthed and with a set wild stare, look up and slide away. An empty chest clattered turning over; a man fell head first with a jump, as if lifted by a kick; and farther off, indistinct, others streamed like a mass of rolling stones down a bank, thumping the deck with their feet and flourishing their arms wildly. The hatchway ladder was loaded with coolies swarming on it like bees on a branch. They hung on the steps in a crawling, stirring cluster, beating madly with their fists the underside of the battened hatch, and the headlong rush of the water above was heard in the intervals of their yelling. The ship heeled over more, and they began to drop off: first one, then two, then all the rest went away together, falling straight off with a great cry.

Jukes was confounded. The boatswain, with gruff anxiety, begged him, "Don't you go in there, sir."

The whole place seemed to twist upon itself, jumping incessantly the while; and when the ship rose to a sea Jukes fancied that all these men would be shot upon him in a body. He backed out, swung the door to, and with trembling hands pushed at the bolt....

As soon as his mate had gone Captain MacWhirr, left alone on the bridge, sidled and staggered as far as the wheelhouse. Its door being hinged forward, he had to fight the gale for admittance, and when at last he managed to enter, it was with an instantaneous clatter and a bang, as though he had been fired through the wood. He stood within, holding on to the handle.

The steering-gear leaked steam, and in the confined space the glass of the binnacle made a shiny oval of light in a thin white fog. The wind howled, hummed, whistled, with sudden booming gusts that rattled the doors and shutters in the vicious patter of sprays. Two coils of lead-line and a small canvas bag hung on a long lanyard, swung wide off, and came back clinging to the bulkheads. The gratings underfoot were nearly afloat; with every sweeping blow of a sea, water squirted violently through the cracks all round the door, and the man at the helm had flung down his cap, his coat, and stood propped against the gear-casing in a striped cotton shirt open on his breast. The little brass wheel in his hands had the appearance of a bright and fragile toy. The cords of his neck stood hard and lean, a dark patch lay in the hollow of his throat, and his face was still and sunken as in death.

Captain MacWhirr wiped his eyes. The sea that had nearly taken him overboard had, to his great annoyance, washed his sou'-wester hat off his bald head. The fluffy, fair hair, soaked and darkened, resembled a mean skein of cotton threads festooned round his bare skull. His face, glistening with sea-water, had been made crimson with the wind, with the sting of sprays. He looked as though he had come off sweating from before a furnace.

"You here?" he muttered, heavily.

The second mate had found his way into the wheelhouse some time before. He had fixed himself in a corner with his knees up, a fist pressed against each temple; and this attitude suggested rage, sorrow, resignation, surrender, with a sort of concentrated unforgiveness. He said mournfully and defiantly, "Well, it's my watch below now: ain't it?"

The steam gear clattered, stopped, clattered again; and the helmsman's eyeballs seemed to project out of a hungry face as if the compass card behind the binnacle glass had been meat. God knows how long he had been left there to steer, as if forgotten by all his shipmates. The bells had not been struck; there had been no reliefs; the ship's routine had gone down wind; but he was

trying to keep her head north-north-east. The rudder might have been gone for all he knew, the fires out, the engines broken down, the ship ready to roll over like a corpse. He was anxious not to get muddled and lose control of her head, because the compass-card swung far both ways, wriggling on the pivot, and sometimes seemed to whirl right round. He suffered from mental stress. He was horribly afraid, also, of the wheelhouse going. Mountains of water kept on tumbling against it. When the ship took one of her desperate dives the corners of his lips twitched.

Captain MacWhirr looked up at the wheelhouse clock. Screwed to the bulk-head, it had a white face on which the black hands appeared to stand quite still. It was half-past one in the morning.

"Another day," he muttered to himself.

The second mate heard him, and lifting his head as one grieving amongst ruins, "You won't see it break," he exclaimed. His wrists and his knees could be seen to shake violently. "No, by God! You won't...."

He took his face again between his fists.

The body of the helmsman had moved slightly, but his head didn't budge on his neck,— like a stone head fixed to look one way from a column. During a roll that all but took his booted legs from under him, and in the very stagger to save himself, Captain MacWhirr said austerely, "Don't you pay any attention to what that man says." And then, with an indefinable change of tone, very grave, he added, "He isn't on duty."

The sailor said nothing.

The hurricane boomed, shaking the little place, which seemed air-tight; and the light of the binnacle flickered all the time.

"You haven't been relieved," Captain MacWhirr went on, looking down. "I want you to stick to the helm, though, as long as you can. You've got the hang of her. Another man coming here might make a mess of it. Wouldn't do. No child's play. And the hands are probably busy with a job down below.... Think you can?"

The steering-gear leaped into an abrupt short clatter, stopped smouldering like an ember; and the still man, with a motionless gaze, burst out, as if all the passion in him had gone into his lips: "By Heavens, sir! I can steer for ever if nobody talks to me."

"Oh! aye! All right...." The Captain lifted his eyes for the first time to the man, "...Hackett."

And he seemed to dismiss this matter from his mind. He stooped to the engine-room speaking-tube, blew in, and bent his head. Mr. Rout below answered, and at once Captain MacWhirr put his lips to the mouthpiece.

With the uproar of the gale around him he applied alternately his lips and his ear, and the engineer's voice mounted to him, harsh and as if out of the heat of an engagement. One of the stokers was disabled, the others had given in, the second engineer and the donkey-man were firing-up. The third engineer was standing by the steam-valve. The engines were being tended by hand. How was it above?

"Bad enough. It mostly rests with you," said Captain MacWhirr. Was the mate down there yet? No? Well, he would be presently. Would Mr. Rout let him talk through the speaking-tube?— through the deck speaking-tube, because he— the Captain— was going out again on the bridge directly. There was some trouble amongst the Chinamen. They were fighting, it seemed. Couldn't allow fighting anyhow....

Mr. Rout had gone away, and Captain MacWhirr could feel against his ear the pulsation of the engines, like the beat of the ship's heart. Mr. Rout's voice down there shouted something distantly. The ship pitched headlong, the pulsation leaped with a hissing tumult, and stopped dead. Captain MacWhirr's face was impassive, and his eyes were fixed aimlessly on the crouching shape of the second mate. Again Mr. Rout's voice cried out in the depths, and the pulsating beats recommenced, with slow strokes— growing swifter.

Mr. Rout had returned to the tube. "It don't matter much what they do," he said, hastily; and then, with irritation, "She takes these dives as if she never meant to come up again."

"Awful sea," said the Captain's voice from above.

"Don't let me drive her under," barked Solomon Rout up the pipe.

"Dark and rain. Can't see what's coming," uttered the voice. "Must— keep— her— moving— enough to steer— and chance it," it went on to state distinctly.

"I am doing as much as I dare."

"We are— getting— smashed up— a good deal up here," proceeded the voice mildly. "Doing— fairly well— though. Of course, if the wheelhouse should go...."

Mr. Rout, bending an attentive ear, muttered peevishly something under his breath.

But the deliberate voice up there became animated to ask: "Jukes turned up yet?" Then, after a short wait, "I wish he would bear a hand. I want him to be done and come up here in case of anything. To look after the ship. I am all alone. The second mate's lost...."

"What?" shouted Mr. Rout into the engine-room, taking his head away. Then up the tube he cried, "Gone overboard?" and clapped his ear to.

"Lost his nerve," the voice from above continued in a matter-of-fact tone. "Damned awkward circumstance."

Mr. Rout, listening with bowed neck, opened his eyes wide at this. However, he heard something like the sounds of a scuffle and broken exclamations coming down to him. He strained his hearing; and all the time Beale, the third engineer, with his arms uplifted, held between the palms of his hands the rim of a little black wheel projecting at the side of a big copper pipe.

He seemed to be poising it above his head, as though it were a correct attitude in some sort of game.

To steady himself, he pressed his shoulder against the white bulkhead, one knee bent, and a sweat-rag tucked in his belt hanging on his hip. His smooth cheek was begrimed and flushed, and the coal dust on his eyelids, like the black pencilling of a make-up, enhanced the liquid brilliance of the whites, giving to his youthful face something of a feminine, exotic and fascinating aspect. When the ship pitched he would with hasty movements of his hands screw hard at the little wheel.

"Gone crazy," began the Captain's voice suddenly in the tube. "Rushed at me.... Just now. Had to knock him down.... This minute. You heard, Mr. Rout?"

"The devil!" muttered Mr. Rout. "Look out, Beale!"

His shout rang out like the blast of a warning trumpet, between the iron walls of the engine-room. Painted white, they rose high into the dusk of the skylight, sloping like a roof; and the whole lofty space resembled the interior of a monument, divided by floors of iron grating, with lights flickering at different levels, and a mass of gloom lingering in the middle, within the columnar stir of machinery under the motionless swelling of the cylinders. A loud and wild resonance, made up of all the noises of the hurricane, dwelt in the still warmth of the air. There was in it the smell of hot metal, of oil, and a slight mist of steam. The blows of the sea seemed to traverse it in an unringing, stunning shock, from side to side.

Gleams, like pale long flames, trembled upon the polish of metal; from the flooring below the enormous crank-heads emerged in their turns with a flash of brass and steel— going over; while the connecting-rods, big-jointed, like skeleton limbs, seemed to thrust them down and pull them up again with an irresistible precision. And deep in the half-light other rods dodged deliberately to and fro, crossheads nodded, discs of metal rubbed smoothly against each other, slow and gentle, in a commingling of shadows and gleams.

Sometimes all those powerful and unerring movements would slow down simultaneously, as if they had been the functions of a living organism, stricken suddenly by the blight of languor; and Mr. Rout's eyes would blaze darker in his long sallow face. He was fighting this fight in a pair of carpet slippers. A

short shiny jacket barely covered his loins, and his white wrists protruded far out of the tight sleeves, as though the emergency had added to his stature, had lengthened his limbs, augmented his pallor, hollowed his eyes.

He moved, climbing high up, disappearing low down, with a restless, purposeful industry, and when he stood still, holding the guard-rail in front of the starting-gear, he would keep glancing to the right at the steam-gauge, at the water-gauge, fixed upon the white wall in the light of a swaying lamp. The mouths of two speaking-tubes gaped stupidly at his elbow, and the dial of the engine-room telegraph resembled a clock of large diameter, bearing on its face curt words instead of figures. The grouped letters stood out heavily black, around the pivot-head of the indicator, emphatically symbolic of loud exclamations: AHEAD, ASTERN, SLOW, Half, STAND BY; and the fat black hand pointed downwards to the word FULL, which, thus singled out, captured the eye as a sharp cry secures attention.

The wood-encased bulk of the low-pressure cylinder, frowning portly from above, emitted a faint wheeze at every thrust, and except for that low hiss the engines worked their steel limbs headlong or slow with a silent, determined smoothness. And all this, the white walls, the moving steel, the floor plates under Solomon Rout's feet, the floors of iron grating above his head, the dusk and the gleams, uprose and sank continuously, with one accord, upon the harsh wash of the waves against the ship's side. The whole loftiness of the place, booming hollow to the great voice of the wind, swayed at the top like a tree, would go over bodily, as if borne down this way and that by the tremendous blasts.

"You've got to hurry up," shouted Mr. Rout, as soon as he saw Jukes appear in the stokehold doorway.

Jukes' glance was wandering and tipsy; his red face was puffy, as though he had overslept himself. He had had an arduous road, and had travelled over it with immense vivacity, the agitation of his mind corresponding to the exertions of his body. He had rushed up out of the bunker, stumbling in the dark alleyway amongst a lot of bewildered men who, trod upon, asked "What's up, sir?" in awed mutters all round him;— down the stokehold ladder, missing many iron rungs in his hurry, down into a place deep as a well, black as Tophet, tipping over back and forth like a see-saw. The water in the bilges thundered at each roll, and lumps of coal skipped to and fro, from end to end, rattling like an avalanche of pebbles on a slope of iron.

Somebody in there moaned with pain, and somebody else could be seen crouching over what seemed the prone body of a dead man; a lusty voice blasphemed; and the glow under each fire-door was like a pool of flaming blood radiating quietly in a velvety blackness.

A gust of wind struck upon the nape of Jukes' neck and next moment he felt it streaming about his wet ankles. The stokehold ventilators hummed: in front of the six fire-doors two wild figures, stripped to the waist, staggered and stooped, wrestling with two shovels.

"Hallo! Plenty of draught now," yelled the second engineer at once, as though he had been all the time looking out for Jukes. The donkeyman, a dapper little chap with a dazzling fair skin and a tiny, gingery moustache, worked in a sort of mute transport. They were keeping a full head of steam, and a profound rumbling, as of an empty furniture van trotting over a bridge, made a sustained bass to all the other noises of the place.

"Blowing off all the time," went on yelling the second. With a sound as of a hundred scoured saucepans, the orifice of a ventilator spat upon his shoulder a sudden gush of salt water, and he volleyed a stream of curses upon all things on earth including his own soul, ripping and raving, and all the time attending to his business. With a sharp clash of metal the ardent pale glare of the fire opened upon his bullet head, showing his spluttering lips, his insolent face, and with another clang closed like the white-hot wink of an iron eye.

"Where's the blooming ship? Can you tell me? blast my eyes! Under water— or what? It's coming down here in tons. Are the condemned cowls gone to Hades? Hey? Don't you know anything— you jolly sailor-man you... ?"

Jukes, after a bewildered moment, had been helped by a roll to dart through; and as soon as his eyes took in the comparative vastness, peace and brilliance of the engine-room, the ship, setting her stern heavily in the water, sent him charging head down upon Mr. Rout.

The chief's arm, long like a tentacle, and straightening as if worked by a spring, went out to meet him, and deflected his rush into a spin towards the speaking-tubes. At the same time Mr. Rout repeated earnestly:

"You've got to hurry up, whatever it is."

Jukes yelled "Are you there, sir?" and listened. Nothing. Suddenly the roar of the wind fell straight into his ear, but presently a small voice shoved aside the shouting hurricane quietly.

"You, Jukes?— Well?"

Jukes was ready to talk: it was only time that seemed to be wanting. It was easy enough to account for everything. He could perfectly imagine the coolies battened down in the reeking 'tween-deck, lying sick and scared between the rows of chests. Then one of these chests— or perhaps several at once— breaking loose in a roll, knocking out others, sides splitting, lids flying open, and all these clumsy Chinamen rising up in a body to save their property. Afterwards every fling of the ship would hurl that tramping, yelling mob here and there, from side to side, in a whirl of smashed wood, torn clothing, rolling

dollars. A struggle once started, they would be unable to stop themselves. Nothing could stop them now except main force. It was a disaster. He had seen it, and that was all he could say. Some of them must be dead, he believed. The rest would go on fighting. . . .

He sent up his words, tripping over each other, crowding the narrow tube. They mounted as if into a silence of an enlightened comprehension dwelling alone up there with a storm. And Jukes wanted to be dismissed from the face of that odious trouble intruding on the great need of the ship.

v

HE WAITED. Before his eyes the engines turned with slow labour, that in the moment of going off into a mad fling would stop dead at Mr. Rout's shout, "Look out, Beale!" They paused in an intelligent immobility, stilled in mid-stroke, a heavy crank arrested on the cant, as if conscious of danger and the passage of time. Then, with a "Now, then!" from the chief, and the sound of a breath expelled through clenched teeth, they would accomplish the interrupted revolution and begin another.

There was the prudent sagacity of wisdom and the deliberation of enormous strength in their movements. This was their work— this patient coaxing of a distracted ship over the fury of the waves and into the very eye of the wind. At times Mr. Rout's chin would sink on his breast, and he watched them with knitted eyebrows as if lost in thought.

The voice that kept the hurricane out of Jukes' ear began: "Take the hands with you... ," and left off unexpectedly.

"What could I do with them, sir?"

A harsh, abrupt, imperious clang exploded suddenly. The three pairs of eyes flew up to the telegraph dial to see the hand jump from FULL to STOP, as if snatched by a devil. And then these three men in the engineroom had the intimate sensation of a check upon the ship, of a strange shrinking, as if she had gathered herself for a desperate leap.

"Stop her!" bellowed Mr. Rout.

Nobody— not even Captain MacWhirr, who alone on deck had caught sight of a white line of foam coming on at such a height that he couldn't believe his eyes— nobody was to know the steepness of that sea and the awful depth of the hollow the hurricane had scooped out behind the running wall of water.

It raced to meet the ship, and, with a pause, as of girding the loins, the *Nan-Shan* lifted her bows and leaped. The flames in all the lamps sank, darkening the engine-room. One went out. With a tearing crash and a swirling,

raving tumult, tons of water fell upon the deck, as though the ship had darted under the foot of a cataract.

Down there they looked at each other, stunned.

"Swept from end to end, by God!" bawled Jukes.

She dipped into the hollow straight down, as if going over the edge of the world. The engine-room toppled forward menacingly, like the inside of a tower nodding in an earthquake. An awful racket, of iron things falling, came from the stokehold. She hung on this appalling slant long enough for Beale to drop on his hands and knees and begin to crawl as if he meant to fly on all fours out of the engine-room, and for Mr. Rout to turn his head slowly, rigid, cavernous, with the lower jaw dropping. Jukes had shut his eyes, and his face in a moment became hopelessly blank and gentle, like the face of a blind man.

At last she rose slowly, staggering, as if she had to lift a mountain with her bows.

Mr. Rout shut his mouth; Jukes blinked; and little Beale stood up hastily.

"Another one like this, and that's the last of her," cried the chief.

He and Jukes looked at each other, and the same thought came into their heads. The Captain! Everything must have been swept away. Steering-gear gone— ship like a log. All over directly.

"Rush!" ejaculated Mr. Rout thickly, glaring with enlarged, doubtful eyes at Jukes, who answered him by an irresolute glance.

The clang of the telegraph gong soothed them instantly. The black hand dropped in a flash from STOP to FULL.

"Now then, Beale!" cried Mr. Rout.

The steam hissed low. The piston-rods slid in and out. Jukes put his ear to the tube. The voice was ready for him. It said: "Pick up all the money. Bear a hand now. I'll want you up here." And that was all.

"Sir?" called up Jukes. There was no answer.

He staggered away like a defeated man from the field of battle. He had got, in some way or other, a cut above his left eyebrow— a cut to the bone. He was not aware of it in the least: quantities of the China Sea, large enough to break his neck for him, had gone over his head, had cleaned, washed, and salted that wound. It did not bleed, but only gaped red; and this gash over the eye, his dishevelled hair, the disorder of his clothes, gave him the aspect of a man worsted in a fight with fists.

"Got to pick up the dollars." He appealed to Mr. Rout, smiling pitifully at random.

"What's that?" asked Mr. Rout, wildly. "Pick up... ? I don't care. . . ." Then, quivering in every muscle, but with an exaggeration of paternal tone, "Go away now, for God's sake. You deck people'll drive me silly. There's that second mate

been going for the old man. Don't you know? You fellows are going wrong for want of something to do...."

At these words Jukes discovered in himself the beginnings of anger. Want of something to do— indeed.... Full of hot scorn against the chief, he turned to go the way he had come. In the stokehold the plump donkeyman toiled with his shovel mutely, as if his tongue had been cut out; but the second was carrying on like a noisy, undaunted maniac, who had preserved his skill in the art of stoking under a marine boiler.

"Hallo, you wandering officer! Hey! Can't you get some of your slush-slingers to wind up a few of them ashes? I am getting choked with them here. Curse it! Hallo! Hey! Remember the articles: Sailors and firemen to assist each other. Hey! D'ye hear?"

Jukes was climbing out frantically, and the other, lifting up his face after him, howled, "Can't you speak? What are you poking about here for? What's your game, anyhow?"

A frenzy possessed Jukes. By the time he was back amongst the men in the darkness of the alleyway, he felt ready to wring all their necks at the slightest sign of hanging back. The very thought of it exasperated him. He couldn't hang back. They shouldn't.

The impetuosity with which he came amongst them carried them along. They had already been excited and startled at all his comings and goings— by the fierceness and rapidity of his movements; and more felt than seen in his rushes, he appeared formidable— busied with matters of life and death that brooked no delay. At his first word he heard them drop into the bunker one after another obediently, with heavy thumps.

They were not clear as to what would have to be done. "What is it? What is it?" they were asking each other. The boatswain tried to explain; the sounds of a great scuffle surprised them: and the mighty shocks, reverberating awfully in the black bunker, kept them in mind of their danger. When the boatswain threw open the door it seemed that an eddy of the hurricane, stealing through the iron sides of the ship, had set all these bodies whirling like dust: there came to them a confused uproar, a tempestuous tumult, a fierce mutter, gusts of screams dying away, and the tramping of feet mingling with the blows of the sea.

For a moment they glared amazed, blocking the doorway. Jukes pushed through them brutally. He said nothing, and simply darted in. Another lot of coolies on the ladder, struggling suicidally to break through the battened hatch to a swamped deck, fell off as before, and he disappeared under them like a man overtaken by a landslide.

The boatswain yelled excitedly: "Come along. Get the mate out. He'll be trampled to death. Come on."

They charged in, stamping on breasts, on fingers, on faces, catching their feet in heaps of clothing, kicking broken wood; but before they could get hold of him Jukes emerged waist deep in a multitude of clawing hands. In the instant he had been lost to view, all the buttons of his jacket had gone, its back had got split up to the collar, his waistcoat had been torn open. The central struggling mass of Chinamen went over to the roll, dark, indistinct, helpless, with a wild gleam of many eyes in the dim light of the lamps.

"Leave me alone— damn you. I am all right," screeched Jukes. "Drive them forward. Watch your chance when she pitches. Forward with 'em. Drive them against the bulkhead. Jam 'em up."

The rush of the sailors into the seething 'tween-deck was like a splash of cold water into a boiling cauldron. The commotion sank for a moment.

The bulk of Chinamen were locked in such a compact scrimmage that, linking their arms and aided by an appalling dive of the ship, the seamen sent it forward in one great shove, like a solid block. Behind their backs small clusters and loose bodies tumbled from side to side.

The boatswain performed prodigious feats of strength. With his long arms open, and each great paw clutching at a stanchion, he stopped the rush of seven entwined Chinamen rolling like a boulder. His joints cracked; he said, "Ha!" and they flew apart. But the carpenter showed the greater intelligence. Without saying a word to anybody he went back into the alleyway, to fetch several coils of cargo gear he had seen there— chain and rope. With these life-lines were rigged.

There was really no resistance. The struggle, however it began, had turned into a scramble of blind panic. If the coolies had started up after their scattered dollars they were by that time fighting only for their footing. They took each other by the throat merely to save themselves from being hurled about. Whoever got a hold anywhere would kick at the others who caught at his legs and hung on, till a roll sent them flying together across the deck.

The coming of the white devils was a terror. Had they come to kill? The individuals torn out of the ruck became very limp in the seamen's hands: some, dragged aside by the heels, were passive, like dead bodies, with open, fixed eyes. Here and there a coolie would fall on his knees as if begging for mercy; several, whom the excess of fear made unruly, were hit with hard fists between the eyes, and cowered; while those who were hurt submitted to rough handling, blinking rapidly without a plaint. Faces streamed with blood; there were raw places on the shaven heads, scratches, bruises, torn wounds, gashes. The broken porcelain out of the chests was mostly responsible for the

latter. Here and there a Chinaman, wild-eyed, with his tail unplaited, nursed a bleeding sole.

They had been ranged closely, after having been shaken into submission, cuffed a little to allay excitement, addressed in gruff words of encouragement that sounded like promises of evil. They sat on the deck in ghastly, drooping rows, and at the end the carpenter, with two hands to help him, moved busily from place to place, setting taut and hitching the life-lines. The boatswain, with one leg and one arm embracing a stanchion, struggled with a lamp pressed to his breast, trying to get a light, and growling all the time like an industrious gorilla. The figures of seamen stooped repeatedly, with the movements of gleaners, and everything was being flung into the bunker: clothing, smashed wood, broken china, and the dollars, too, gathered up in men's jackets. Now and then a sailor would stagger towards the doorway with his arms full of rubbish; and dolorous, slanting eyes followed his movements.

With every roll of the ship the long rows of sitting Celestials would sway forward brokenly, and her headlong dives knocked together the line of shaven polls from end to end. When the wash of water rolling on the deck died away for a moment, it seemed to Jukes, yet quivering from his exertions, that in his mad struggle down there he had overcome the wind somehow: that a silence had fallen upon the ship, a silence in which the sea struck thunderously at her sides.

Everything had been cleared out of the 'tween-deck— all the wreckage, as the men said. They stood erect and tottering above the level of heads and drooping shoulders. Here and there a coolie sobbed for his breath. Where the high light fell, Jukes could see the salient ribs of one, the yellow, wistful face of another; bowed necks; or would meet a dull stare directed at his face. He was amazed that there had been no corpses; but the lot of them seemed at their last gasp, and they appeared to him more pitiful than if they had been all dead.

Suddenly one of the coolies began to speak. The light came and went on his lean, straining face; he threw his head up like a baying hound. From the bunker came the sounds of knocking and the tinkle of some dollars rolling loose; he stretched out his arm, his mouth yawned black, and the incomprehensible guttural hooting sounds, that did not seem to belong to a human language, penetrated Jukes with a strange emotion as if a brute had tried to be eloquent.

Two more started mouthing what seemed to Jukes fierce denunciations; the others stirred with grunts and growls. Jukes ordered the hands out of the 'tweendecks hurriedly. He left last himself, backing through the door, while the grunts rose to a loud murmur and hands were extended after him as after a

malefactor. The boatswain shot the bolt, and remarked uneasily, "Seems as if the wind had dropped, sir."

The seamen were glad to get back into the alleyway. Secretly each of them thought that at the last moment he could rush out on deck— and that was a comfort. There is something horribly repugnant in the idea of being drowned under a deck. Now they had done with the Chinamen, they again became conscious of the ship's position.

Jukes on coming out of the alleyway found himself up to the neck in the noisy water. He gained the bridge, and discovered he could detect obscure shapes as if his sight had become preternaturally acute. He saw faint outlines. They recalled not the familiar aspect of the *Nan-Shan*, but something remembered— an old dismantled steamer he had seen years ago rotting on a mudbank. She recalled that wreck.

There was no wind, not a breath, except the faint currents created by the lurches of the ship. The smoke tossed out of the funnel was settling down upon her deck. He breathed it as he passed forward. He felt the deliberate throb of the engines, and heard small sounds that seemed to have survived the great uproar: the knocking of broken fittings, the rapid tumbling of some piece of wreckage on the bridge. He perceived dimly the squat shape of his captain holding on to a twisted bridge-rail, motionless and swaying as if rooted to the planks. The unexpected stillness of the air oppressed Jukes.

"We have done it, sir," he gasped.

"Thought you would," said Captain MacWhirr.

"Did you?" murmured Jukes to himself.

"Wind fell all at once," went on the Captain.

Jukes burst out: "If you think it was an easy job— "

But his captain, clinging to the rail, paid no attention. "According to the books the worst is not over yet."

"If most of them hadn't been half dead with seasickness and fright, not one of us would have come out of that 'tween-deck alive," said Jukes.

"Had to do what's fair by them," mumbled MacWhirr, stolidly. "You don't find everything in books."

"Why, I believe they would have risen on us if I hadn't ordered the hands out of that pretty quick," continued Jukes with warmth.

After the whisper of their shouts, their ordinary tones, so distinct, rang out very loud to their ears in the amazing stillness of the air. It seemed to them they were talking in a dark and echoing vault.

Through a jagged aperture in the dome of clouds the light of a few stars fell upon the black sea, rising and falling confusedly. Sometimes the head of a watery cone would topple on board and mingle with the rolling flurry of foam

on the swamped deck; and the *Nan-Shan* wallowed heavily at the bottom of a circular cistern of clouds. This ring of dense vapours, gyrating madly round the calm of the centre, encompassed the ship like a motionless and unbroken wall of an aspect inconceivably sinister. Within, the sea, as if agitated by an internal commotion, leaped in peaked mounds that jostled each other, slapping heavily against her sides; and a low moaning sound, the infinite plaint of the storm's fury, came from beyond the limits of the menacing calm. Captain MacWhirr remained silent, and Jukes' ready ear caught suddenly the faint, long-drawn roar of some immense wave rushing unseen under that thick blackness, which made the appalling boundary of his vision.

"Of course," he started resentfully, "they thought we had caught at the chance to plunder them. Of course! You said— pick up the money. Easier said than done. They couldn't tell what was in our heads. We came in, smash— right into the middle of them. Had to do it by a rush."

"As long as it's done... ," mumbled the Captain, without attempting to look at Jukes. "Had to do what's fair."

"We shall find yet there's the devil to pay when this is over," said Jukes, feeling very sore. "Let them only recover a bit, and you'll see. They will fly at our throats, sir. Don't forget, sir, she isn't a British ship now. These brutes know it well, too. The damned Siamese flag."

"We are on board, all the same," remarked Captain MacWhirr.

"The trouble's not over yet," insisted Jukes, prophetically, reeling and catching on. "She's a wreck," he added, faintly.

"The trouble's not over yet," assented Captain MacWhirr, half aloud... . "Look out for her a minute."

"Are you going off the deck, sir?" asked Jukes, hurriedly, as if the storm were sure to pounce upon him as soon as he had been left alone with the ship.

He watched her, battered and solitary, labouring heavily in a wild scene of mountainous black waters lit by the gleams of distant worlds. She moved slowly, breathing into the still core of the hurricane the excess of her strength in a white cloud of steam— and the deep-toned vibration of the escape was like the defiant trumpeting of a living creature of the sea impatient for the renewal of the contest. It ceased suddenly. The still air moaned. Above Jukes' head a few stars shone into a pit of black vapours. The inky edge of the cloud-disc frowned upon the ship under the patch of glittering sky. The stars, too, seemed to look at her intently, as if for the last time, and the cluster of their splendour sat like a diadem on a lowering brow.

Captain MacWhirr had gone into the chart-room. There was no light there; but he could feel the disorder of that place where he used to live tidily. His armchair was upset. The books had tumbled out on the floor: he scrunched a

piece of glass under his boot. He groped for the matches, and found a box on a shelf with a deep ledge. He struck one, and puckering the corners of his eyes, held out the little flame towards the barometer whose glittering top of glass and metals nodded at him continuously.

It stood very low— incredibly low, so low that Captain MacWhirr grunted. The match went out, and hurriedly he extracted another, with thick, stiff fingers.

Again a little flame flared up before the nodding glass and metal of the top. His eyes looked at it, narrowed with attention, as if expecting an imperceptible sign. With his grave face he resembled a booted and misshapen pagan burning incense before the oracle of a Joss. There was no mistake. It was the lowest reading he had ever seen in his life.

Captain MacWhirr emitted a low whistle. He forgot himself till the flame diminished to a blue spark, burnt his fingers and vanished. Perhaps something had gone wrong with the thing!

There was an aneroid glass screwed above the couch. He turned that way, struck another match, and discovered the white face of the other instrument looking at him from the bulkhead, meaningly, not to be gainsaid, as though the wisdom of men were made unerring by the indifference of matter. There was no room for doubt now. Captain MacWhirr pshawed at it, and threw the match down.

The worst was to come, then— and if the books were right this worst would be very bad. The experience of the last six hours had enlarged his conception of what heavy weather could be like. "It'll be terrific," he pronounced, mentally. He had not consciously looked at anything by the light of the matches except at the barometer; and yet somehow he had seen that his water-bottle and the two tumblers had been flung out of their stand. It seemed to give him a more intimate knowledge of the tossing the ship had gone through. "I wouldn't have believed it," he thought. And his table had been cleared, too; his rulers, his pencils, the inkstand— all the things that had their safe appointed places— they were gone, as if a mischievous hand had plucked them out one by one and flung them on the wet floor. The hurricane had broken in upon the orderly arrangements of his privacy. This had never happened before, and the feeling of dismay reached the very seat of his composure. And the worst was to come yet! He was glad the trouble in the 'tween-deck had been discovered in time. If the ship had to go after all, then, at least, she wouldn't be going to the bottom with a lot of people in her fighting teeth and claw. That would have been odious. And in that feeling there was a humane intention and a vague sense of the fitness of things.

These instantaneous thoughts were yet in their essence heavy and slow, partaking of the nature of the man. He extended his hand to put back the matchbox in its corner of the shelf. There were always matches there— by his order. The steward had his instructions impressed upon him long before. "A box... just there, see? Not so very full... where I can put my hand on it, steward. Might want a light in a hurry. Can't tell on board ship what you might want in a hurry. Mind, now."

And of course on his side he would be careful to put it back in its place scrupulously. He did so now, but before he removed his hand it occurred to him that perhaps he would never have occasion to use that box any more. The vividness of the thought checked him and for an infinitesimal fraction of a second his fingers closed again on the small object as though it had been the symbol of all these little habits that chain us to the weary round of life. He released it at last, and letting himself fall on the settee, listened for the first sounds of returning wind.

Not yet. He heard only the wash of water, the heavy splashes, the dull shocks of the confused seas boarding his ship from all sides. She would never have a chance to clear her decks.

But the quietude of the air was startlingly tense and unsafe, like a slender hair holding a sword suspended over his head. By this awful pause the storm penetrated the defences of the man and unsealed his lips. He spoke out in the solitude and the pitch darkness of the cabin, as if addressing another being awakened within his breast.

"I shouldn't like to lose her," he said half aloud.

He sat unseen, apart from the sea, from his ship, isolated, as if withdrawn from the very current of his own existence, where such freaks as talking to himself surely had no place. His palms reposed on his knees, he bowed his short neck and puffed heavily, surrendering to a strange sensation of weariness he was not enlightened enough to recognize for the fatigue of mental stress.

From where he sat he could reach the door of a washstand locker. There should have been a towel there. There was. Good.... He took it out, wiped his face, and afterwards went on rubbing his wet head. He towelled himself with energy in the dark, and then remained motionless with the towel on his knees. A moment passed, of a stillness so profound that no one could have guessed there was a man sitting in that cabin. Then a murmur arose.

"She may come out of it yet."

When Captain MacWhirr came out on deck, which he did brusquely, as though he had suddenly become conscious of having stayed away too long, the calm had lasted already more than fifteen minutes— long enough to make

itself intolerable even to his imagination. Jukes, motionless on the forepart of the bridge, began to speak at once. His voice, blank and forced as though he were talking through hard-set teeth, seemed to flow away on all sides into the darkness, deepening again upon the sea.

"I had the wheel relieved. Hackett began to sing out that he was done. He's lying in there alongside the steering-gear with a face like death. At first I couldn't get anybody to crawl out and relieve the poor devil. That boss'n's worse than no good, I always said. Thought I would have had to go myself and haul out one of them by the neck."

"Ah, well," muttered the Captain. He stood watchful by Jukes' side.

"The second mate's in there, too, holding his head. Is he hurt, sir?"

"No— crazy," said Captain MacWhirr, curtly.

"Looks as if he had a tumble, though."

"I had to give him a push," explained the Captain.

Jukes gave an impatient sigh.

"It will come very sudden," said Captain MacWhirr, "and from over there, I fancy. God only knows though. These books are only good to muddle your head and make you jumpy. It will be bad, and there's an end. If we only can steam her round in time to meet it. . . ."

A minute passed. Some of the stars winked rapidly and vanished.

"You left them pretty safe?" began the Captain abruptly, as though the silence were unbearable.

"Are you thinking of the coolies, sir? I rigged lifelines all ways across that 'tween-deck."

"Did you? Good idea, Mr. Jukes."

"I didn't... think you cared to... know," said Jukes— the lurching of the ship cut his speech as though somebody had been jerking him around while he talked— "how I got on with... that infernal job. We did it. And it may not matter in the end."

"Had to do what's fair, for all— they are only Chinamen. Give them the same chance with ourselves— hang it all. She isn't lost yet. Bad enough to be shut up below in a gale— "

"That's what I thought when you gave me the job, sir," interjected Jukes, moodily.

"— without being battered to pieces," pursued Captain MacWhirr with rising vehemence. "Couldn't let that go on in my ship, if I knew she hadn't five minutes to live. Couldn't bear it, Mr. Jukes."

A hollow echoing noise, like that of a shout rolling in a rocky chasm, approached the ship and went away again. The last star, blurred, enlarged, as if

returning to the fiery mist of its beginning, struggled with the colossal depth of blackness hanging over the ship— and went out.

"Now for it!" muttered Captain MacWhirr. "Mr. Jukes."

"Here, sir."

The two men were growing indistinct to each other.

"We must trust her to go through it and come out on the other side. That's plain and straight. There's no room for Captain Wilson's storm-strategy here."

"No, sir."

"She will be smothered and swept again for hours," mumbled the Captain. "There's not much left by this time above deck for the sea to take away— unless you or me."

"Both, sir," whispered Jukes, breathlessly.

"You are always meeting trouble half way, Jukes," Captain MacWhirr remonstrated quaintly. "Though it's a fact that the second mate is no good. D'ye hear, Mr. Jukes? You would be left alone if. . . ."

Captain MacWhirr interrupted himself, and Jukes, glancing on all sides, remained silent.

"Don't you be put out by anything," the Captain continued, mumbling rather fast. "Keep her facing it. They may say what they like, but the heaviest seas run with the wind. Facing it— always facing it— that's the way to get through. You are a young sailor. Face it. That's enough for any man. Keep a cool head."

"Yes, sir," said Jukes, with a flutter of the heart.

In the next few seconds the Captain spoke to the engine-room and got an answer.

For some reason Jukes experienced an access of confidence, a sensation that came from outside like a warm breath, and made him feel equal to every demand. The distant muttering of the darkness stole into his ears. He noted it unmoved, out of that sudden belief in himself, as a man safe in a shirt of mail would watch a point.

The ship laboured without intermission amongst the black hills of water, paying with this hard tumbling the price of her life. She rumbled in her depths, shaking a white plummet of steam into the night, and Jukes' thought skimmed like a bird through the engine-room, where Mr. Rout— good man— was ready. When the rumbling ceased it seemed to him that there was a pause of every sound, a dead pause in which Captain MacWhirr's voice rang out startlingly.

"What's that? A puff of wind?"— it spoke much louder than Jukes had ever heard it before— "On the bow. That's right. She may come out of it yet."

The mutter of the winds drew near apace. In the forefront could be distinguished a drowsy waking plaint passing on, and far off the growth of a

multiple clamour, marching and expanding. There was the throb as of many drums in it, a vicious rushing note, and like the chant of a tramping multitude.

Jukes could no longer see his captain distinctly. The darkness was absolutely piling itself upon the ship. At most he made out movements, a hint of elbows spread out, of a head thrown up.

Captain MacWhirr was trying to do up the top button of his oilskin coat with unwonted haste. The hurricane, with its power to madden the seas, to sink ships, to uproot trees, to overturn strong walls and dash the very birds of the air to the ground, had found this taciturn man in its path, and, doing its utmost, had managed to wring out a few words. Before the renewed wrath of winds swooped on his ship, Captain MacWhirr was moved to declare, in a tone of vexation, as it were: "I wouldn't like to lose her."

He was spared that annoyance.

vi

ON A BRIGHT sunshiny day, with the breeze chasing her smoke far ahead, the *Nan-Shan* came into Fu-chau. Her arrival was at once noticed on shore, and the seamen in harbour said: "Look! Look at that steamer. What's that? Siamese— isn't she? Just look at her!"

She seemed, indeed, to have been used as a running target for the secondary batteries of a cruiser. A hail of minor shells could not have given her upper works a more broken, torn, and devastated aspect: and she had about her the worn, weary air of ships coming from the far ends of the world— and indeed with truth, for in her short passage she had been very far; sighting, verily, even the coast of the Great Beyond, whence no ship ever returns to give up her crew to the dust of the earth. She was incrusted and gray with salt to the trucks of her masts and to the top of her funnel; as though (as some facetious seaman said) "the crowd on board had fished her out somewhere from the bottom of the sea and brought her in here for salvage." And further, excited by the felicity of his own wit, he offered to give five pounds for her— "as she stands."

Before she had been quite an hour at rest, a meagre little man, with a red-tipped nose and a face cast in an angry mould, landed from a sampan on the quay of the Foreign Concession, and incontinently turned to shake his fist at her.

A tall individual, with legs much too thin for a rotund stomach, and with watery eyes, strolled up and remarked, "Just left her— eh? Quick work."

He wore a soiled suit of blue flannel with a pair of dirty cricketing shoes; a dingy gray moustache drooped from his lip, and daylight could be seen in two places between the rim and the crown of his hat.

"Hallo! what are you doing here?" asked the ex-second-mate of the *Nan-Shan*, shaking hands hurriedly.

"Standing by for a job— chance worth taking— got a quiet hint," explained the man with the broken hat, in jerky, apathetic wheezes.

The second shook his fist again at the *Nan-Shan*. "There's a fellow there that ain't fit to have the command of a scow," he declared, quivering with passion, while the other looked about listlessly.

"Is there?"

But he caught sight on the quay of a heavy seaman's chest, painted brown under a fringed sailcloth cover, and lashed with new manila line. He eyed it with awakened interest.

"I would talk and raise trouble if it wasn't for that damned Siamese flag. Nobody to go to— or I would make it hot for him. The fraud! Told his chief engineer— that's another fraud for you— I had lost my nerve. The greatest lot of ignorant fools that ever sailed the seas. No! You can't think..."

"Got your money all right?" inquired his seedy acquaintance suddenly.

"Yes. Paid me off on board," raged the second mate. "'Get your breakfast on shore,' says he."

"Mean skunk!" commented the tall man, vaguely, and passed his tongue on his lips. "What about having a drink of some sort?"

"He struck me," hissed the second mate.

"No! Struck! You don't say?" The man in blue began to bustle about sympathetically. "Can't possibly talk here. I want to know all about it. Struck— eh? Let's get a fellow to carry your chest. I know a quiet place where they have some bottled beer...."

Mr. Jukes, who had been scanning the shore through a pair of glasses, informed the chief engineer afterwards that "our late second mate hasn't been long in finding a friend. A chap looking uncommonly like a bummer. I saw them walk away together from the quay."

The hammering and banging of the needful repairs did not disturb Captain MacWhirr. The steward found in the letter he wrote, in a tidy chart-room, passages of such absorbing interest that twice he was nearly caught in the act. But Mrs. MacWhirr, in the drawing-room of the forty-pound house, stifled a yawn— perhaps out of self-respect— for she was alone.

She reclined in a plush-bottomed and gilt hammock-chair near a tiled fireplace, with Japanese fans on the mantel and a glow of coals in the grate. Lifting her hands, she glanced wearily here and there into the many pages. It

was not her fault they were so prosy, so completely uninteresting— from "My darling wife" at the beginning, to "Your loving husband" at the end. She couldn't be really expected to understand all these ship affairs. She was glad, of course, to hear from him, but she had never asked herself why, precisely.

"...They are called typhoons... The mate did not seem to like it... Not in books... Couldn't think of letting it go on...."

The paper rustled sharply. "...." A calm that lasted more than twenty minutes," she read perfunctorily; and the next words her thoughtless eyes caught, on the top of another page, were: "see you and the children again. . . ." She had a movement of impatience. He was always thinking of coming home. He had never had such a good salary before. What was the matter now?

It did not occur to her to turn back overleaf to look. She would have found it recorded there that between 4 and 6 A. M. on December 25th, Captain MacWhirr did actually think that his ship could not possibly live another hour in such a sea, and that he would never see his wife and children again. Nobody was to know this (his letters got mislaid so quickly)— nobody whatever but the steward, who had been greatly impressed by that disclosure. So much so, that he tried to give the cook some idea of the "narrow squeak we all had" by saying solemnly, "The old man himself had a dam' poor opinion of our chance."

"How do you know?" asked, contemptuously, the cook, an old soldier. "He hasn't told you, maybe?"

"Well, he did give me a hint to that effect," the steward brazened it out.

"Get along with you! He will be coming to tell me next," jeered the old cook, over his shoulder.

Mrs. MacWhirr glanced farther, on the alert. "...Do what's fair... Miserable objects... . Only three, with a broken leg each, and one... Thought had better keep the matter quiet... hope to have done the fair thing...."

She let fall her hands. No: there was nothing more about coming home. Must have been merely expressing a pious wish. Mrs. MacWhirr's mind was set at ease, and a black marble clock, priced by the local jeweller at £3 18s. 6d., had a discreet stealthy tick.

The door flew open, and a girl in the long-legged, short-frocked period of existence, flung into the room.

A lot of colourless, rather lanky hair was scattered over her shoulders. Seeing her mother, she stood still, and directed her pale prying eyes upon the letter.

"From father," murmured Mrs. MacWhirr. "What have you done with your ribbon?"

The girl put her hands up to her head and pouted.

"He's well," continued Mrs. MacWhirr languidly. "At least I think so. He never says." She had a little laugh. The girl's face expressed a wandering indifference, and Mrs. MacWhirr surveyed her with fond pride.

"Go and get your hat," she said after a while. "I am going out to do some shopping. There is a sale at Linom's."

"Oh, how jolly!" uttered the child, impressively, in unexpectedly grave vibrating tones, and bounded out of the room.

It was a fine afternoon, with a gray sky and dry sidewalks. Outside the draper's Mrs. MacWhirr smiled upon a woman in a black mantle of generous proportions armoured in jet and crowned with flowers blooming falsely above a bilious matronly countenance. They broke into a swift little babble of greetings and exclamations both together, very hurried, as if the street were ready to yawn open and swallow all that pleasure before it could be expressed.

Behind them the high glass doors were kept on the swing. People couldn't pass, men stood aside waiting patiently, and Lydia was absorbed in poking the end of her parasol between the stone flags. Mrs. MacWhirr talked rapidly.

"Thank you very much. He's not coming home yet. Of course it's very sad to have him away, but it's such a comfort to know he keeps so well." Mrs. MacWhirr drew breath. "The climate there agrees with him," she added, beamingly, as if poor MacWhirr had been away touring in China for the sake of his health.

Neither was the chief engineer coming home yet. Mr. Rout knew too well the value of a good billet.

"Solomon says wonders will never cease," cried Mrs. Rout joyously at the old lady in her armchair by the fire. Mr. Rout's mother moved slightly, her withered hands lying in black half-mittens on her lap.

The eyes of the engineer's wife fairly danced on the paper. "That captain of the ship he is in— a rather simple man, you remember, mother?— has done something rather clever, Solomon says."

"Yes, my dear," said the old woman meekly, sitting with bowed silvery head, and that air of inward stillness characteristic of very old people who seem lost in watching the last flickers of life. "I think I remember."

Solomon Rout, Old Sol, Father Sol, the Chief, "Rout, good man"— Mr. Rout, the condescending and paternal friend of youth, had been the baby of her many children— all dead by this time. And she remembered him best as a boy of ten— long before he went away to serve his apprenticeship in some great engineering works in the North. She had seen so little of him since, she had gone through so many years, that she had now to retrace her steps very far back to recognize him plainly in the mist of time. Sometimes it seemed that her daughter-in-law was talking of some strange man.

Mrs. Rout junior was disappointed. "H'm. H'm." She turned the page. "How provoking! He doesn't say what it is. Says I couldn't understand how much there was in it. Fancy! What could it be so very clever? What a wretched man not to tell us!"

She read on without further remark soberly, and at last sat looking into the fire. The chief wrote just a word or two of the typhoon; but something had moved him to express an increased longing for the companionship of the jolly woman. "If it hadn't been that mother must be looked after, I would send you your passage-money to-day. You could set up a small house out here. I would have a chance to see you sometimes then. We are not growing younger...."

"He's well, mother," sighed Mrs. Rout, rousing herself.

"He always was a strong healthy boy," said the old woman, placidly.

But Mr. Jukes' account was really animated and very full. His friend in the Western Ocean trade imparted it freely to the other officers of his liner. "A chap I know writes to me about an extraordinary affair that happened on board his ship in that typhoon— you know— that we read of in the papers two months ago. It's the funniest thing! Just see for yourself what he says. I'll show you his letter."

There were phrases in it calculated to give the impression of light-hearted, indomitable resolution. Jukes had written them in good faith, for he felt thus when he wrote. He described with lurid effect the scenes in the 'tween-deck. "... It struck me in a flash that those confounded Chinamen couldn't tell we weren't a desperate kind of robbers. 'Tisn't good to part the Chinaman from his money if he is the stronger party. We need have been desperate indeed to go thieving in such weather, but what could these beggars know of us? So, without thinking of it twice, I got the hands away in a jiffy. Our work was done— that the old man had set his heart on. We cleared out without staying to inquire how they felt. I am convinced that if they had not been so unmercifully shaken, and afraid— each individual one of them — to stand up, we would have been torn to pieces. Oh! It was pretty complete, I can tell you; and you may run to and fro across the Pond to the end of time before you find yourself with such a job on your hands."

After this he alluded professionally to the damage done to the ship, and went on thus:

"It was when the weather quieted down that the situation became confoundedly delicate. It wasn't made any better by us having been lately transferred to the Siamese flag; though the skipper can't see that it makes any difference— 'as long as we are on board'— he says. There are feelings that this man simply hasn't got— and there's an end of it. You might just as well try to make a bedpost understand. But apart from this it is an infernally lonely state

for a ship to be going about the China seas with no proper consuls, not even a gunboat of her own anywhere, nor a body to go to in case of some trouble.

"My notion was to keep these Johnnies under hatches for another fifteen hours or so; as we weren't much farther than that from Fu-chau. We would find there, most likely, some sort of a man-of-war, and once under her guns we were safe enough; for surely any skipper of a man-of-war— English, French or Dutch— would see white men through as far as row on board goes. We could get rid of them and their money afterwards by delivering them to their Mandarin or Taotai, or whatever they call these chaps in goggles you see being carried about in sedan-chairs through their stinking streets.

"The old man wouldn't see it somehow. He wanted to keep the matter quiet. He got that notion into his head, and a steam windlass couldn't drag it out of him. He wanted as little fuss made as possible, for the sake of the ship's name and for the sake of the owners— 'for the sake of all concerned,' says he, looking at me very hard.

"It made me angry hot. Of course you couldn't keep a thing like that quiet; but the chests had been secured in the usual manner and were safe enough for any earthly gale, while this had been an altogether fiendish business I couldn't give you even an idea of.

"Meantime, I could hardly keep on my feet. None of us had a spell of any sort for nearly thirty hours, and there the old man sat rubbing his chin, rubbing the top of his head, and so bothered he didn't even think of pulling his long boots off.

" 'I hope, sir,' says I, 'you won't be letting them out on deck before we make ready for them in some shape or other.' Not, mind you, that I felt very sanguine about controlling these beggars if they meant to take charge. A trouble with a cargo of Chinamen is no child's play. I was dam' tired, too. 'I wish,' said I, 'you would let us throw the whole lot of these dollars down to them and leave them to fight it out amongst themselves, while we get a rest.'

" 'Now you talk wild, Jukes,' says he, looking up in his slow way that makes you ache all over, somehow. 'We must plan out something that would be fair to all parties.'

"I had no end of work on hand, as you may imagine, so I set the hands going, and then I thought I would turn in a bit. I hadn't been asleep in my bunk ten minutes when in rushes the steward and begins to pull at my leg.

" 'For God's sake, Mr. Jukes, come out! Come on deck quick, sir. Oh, do come out!'

"The fellow scared all the sense out of me. I didn't know what had happened: another hurricane— or what. Could hear no wind.

" 'The Captain's letting them out. Oh, he is letting them out! Jump on deck, sir, and save us. The chief engineer has just run below for his revolver.'

"That's what I understood the fool to say. However, Father Rout swears he went in there only to get a clean pocket-handkerchief. Anyhow, I made one jump into my trousers and flew on deck aft. There was certainly a good deal of noise going on forward of the bridge. Four of the hands with the boss'n were at work abaft. I passed up to them some of the rifles all the ships on the China coast carry in the cabin, and led them on the bridge. On the way I ran against Old Sol, looking startled and sucking at an unlighted cigar.

" 'Come along,' I shouted to him.

"We charged, the seven of us, up to the chart-room. All was over. There stood the old man with his sea-boots still drawn up to the hips and in shirt-sleeves— got warm thinking it out, I suppose. Bun Hin's dandy clerk at his elbow, as dirty as a sweep, was still green in the face. I could see directly I was in for something.

" 'What the devil are these monkey tricks, Mr. Jukes?' asks the old man, as angry as ever he could be. I tell you frankly it made me lose my tongue. 'For God's sake, Mr. Jukes,' says he, 'do take away these rifles from the men. Somebody's sure to get hurt before long if you don't. Damme, if this ship isn't worse than Bedlam! Look sharp now. I want you up here to help me and Bun Hin's Chinaman to count that money. You wouldn't mind lending a hand, too, Mr. Rout, now you are here. The more of us the better.'

"He had settled it all in his mind while I was having a snooze. Had we been an English ship, or only going to land our cargo of coolies in an English port, like Hong-Kong, for instance, there would have been no end of inquiries and bother, claims for damages and so on. But these Chinamen know their officials better than we do.

"The hatches had been taken off already, and they were all on deck after a night and a day down below. It made you feel queer to see so many gaunt, wild faces together. The beggars stared about at the sky, at the sea, at the ship, as though they had expected the whole thing to have been blown to pieces. And no wonder! They had had a doing that would have shaken the soul out of a white man. But then they say a Chinaman has no soul. He has, though, something about him that is deuced tough. There was a fellow (amongst others of the badly hurt) who had had his eye all but knocked out. It stood out of his head the size of half a hen's egg. This would have laid out a white man on his back for a month: and yet there was that chap elbowing here and there in the crowd and talking to the others as if nothing had been the matter. They made a great hubbub amongst themselves, and whenever the old man showed

his bald head on the foreside of the bridge, they would all leave off jawing and look at him from below.

"It seems that after he had done his thinking he made that Bun Hin's fellow go down and explain to them the only way they could get their money back. He told me afterwards that, all the coolies having worked in the same place and for the same length of time, he reckoned he would be doing the fair thing by them as near as possible if he shared all the cash we had picked up equally among the lot. You couldn't tell one man's dollars from another's, he said, and if you asked each man how much money he brought on board he was afraid they would lie, and he would find himself a long way short. I think he was right there. As to giving up the money to any Chinese official he could scare up in Fu-chau, he said he might just as well put the lot in his own pocket at once for all the good it would be to them. I suppose they thought so, too.

"We finished the distribution before dark. It was rather a sight: the sea running high, the ship a wreck to look at, these Chinamen staggering up on the bridge one by one for their share, and the old man still booted, and in his shirt-sleeves, busy paying out at the chartroom door, perspiring like anything, and now and then coming down sharp on myself or Father Rout about one thing or another not quite to his mind. He took the share of those who were disabled himself to them on the No. 2 hatch. There were three dollars left over, and these went to the three most damaged coolies, one to each. We turned-to afterwards, and shovelled out on deck heaps of wet rags, all sorts of fragments of things without shape, and that you couldn't give a name to, and let them settle the ownership themselves.

"This certainly is coming as near as can be to keeping the thing quiet for the benefit of all concerned. What's your opinion, you pampered mail-boat swell? The old chief says that this was plainly the only thing that could be done. The skipper remarked to me the other day, 'There are things you find nothing about in books.' I think that he got out of it very well for such a stupid man."

3: The Everlasting Club

Stacy Aumonier

1877-1928

In: *The Baby Grand and other stories*, 1926

ON THE NIGHT of November 11th, 1918, seven men sat round a table in an old barn in an obscure spot in Picardy. The news of the Armistice had come through in the morning, and it was apparent that the occupants of the barn were about to celebrate this historic occasion with what means they had at their disposal. It cannot be said that their faces expressed the kind of hysterical elation which was at that moment marking the faces of the revellers in Paris. London, and New York. Their faces certainly expressed relief, but it was relief tempered by the too close contact of late experience. They were like men dazed and a little drugged. Perhaps their environment had something to do with this. The barn was dark, and cold, and draughty. The rain was beating against the roof. A small kerosene lamp, smelling abominably, gave out a feeble suggestion of warmth. The table was lighted with candles stuck into bottles. Perhaps their remoteness from their fellows gave them a feeling that the news was unbelievable, or that it might be contradicted any moment. The War had been on too long, and the weariness and agony of it were stamped upon their faces.

McLagan and Treadway were *pukka* soldiers of the old army. The other five had joined up early in the War. All had seen much active service. Ross had served a year in Salonica and two years in Mespot. Bessimer had nearly died from dysentery in Egypt. Reid-Andover and Pirbright had been in Russia with Denikin. McLagan, Treadway, and Dawbarn had spent the whole of their time in France and Flanders. The reason of their meeting in this obscure spot is of no consequence. It was in accordance with instructions of certain higher authorities, who were apparently as unprepared for the end of the War as they were for the beginning. It concerned a report that was to be drawn up upon the potentialities for military purposes of certain by-products in local quarries. This was looking far ahead, and now— well, the War was over. The 'vine having passed. McLagan, who was the senior officer present, rose and said rather huskily:

"Gentlemen, the King!"

They all rose and barked in chorus: "The King!"

They drank the King's health, and then, as though the toast had stirred them for the first time at some peculiar angle, making them feel a little self-conscious, a little ashamed of this surprising emotion, they began to task more animatedly.

Naturally they talked shop. They talked about "shows" and blunders and guns, and old friends who had gone west. They appeared diffident about discussing the future. They talked as though the War was still going on.

Monsieur Poiret, who owned the ruined farmstead adjoining, had supplied them with fowls and pork and vegetables. Their environment was depressing, but the dinner was adequate. There was an unlimited supply of fairly good red and white wine, and someone had produced a bottle of brandy.

Pirbright and Dawbarn had only arrived that day, and were strangers to the rest. But as the meal progressed, the whole company found they had much in common. This was probably due to the fact that in view of the nature of the enquiry they were called upon to make, they were men of somewhat similar training, experience, and education. In civilian life Pirbright and Bessimer were both metallurgists. Reid-Andover was a fuel expert. Dawbarn had done a lot of scientific research. Ross was a mining engineer. McLagan and Treadway had been in the Geological department of the Indian Army before the War.

Before the meal was finished they were discussing science and moral philosophy, metaphysics, history, astronomy, sociology, and even religion, the kind of subjects that are not habitually discussed in an officers' mess. The meal being finished, and cleared away, coffee was served and the bottle of brandy opened. The table they were seated at was a circular one, and so it cannot be said that anyone sat at the head of it. But if there was one man who dominated it by force of personality that man was McLagan.

He was a big man with a long tapering jaw, dark reflective eyes, and black hair. Celt was written all over him. He was nicknamed "The Wringer," and for this reason: he had a terrible grip. When he shook hands he would bring tears into the eyes of the strongest, and he was quite unconscious of it. He wore, moreover, a heavy signet ring on his third finger, and after shaking hands with him many a man would bear the impression of that ring upon his hand for days. He was as animated a listener as he was talker. His eyes wandered eagerly from one face to another as though he were drawing them all together. He presided over them by an implied sense of authority. His colleague, Treadway, sat on his right. He was a typical officer of the modern school, tall, and almost too spare, with close-cropped grey hair, sensitively modelled features, and eyes whose gentleness and kindliness seemed to belie the profession of arms. He listened, entranced by anything that McLagan said.

Bessimer was the only one of the company whose frame did not seem too lean in that guttering candlelight, and even he looked fit and hard in spite of greater girth, probably the result of taking less exercise than the others. For he had an artificial leg. Ross was a Scotsman, hollow-cheeked, and highly strung. He had a habit of nodding his head constantly when spoken to, and mumbling

staccato acquiescence, as though anxious to agree and be done with it. Reid-Andover, with his little clipped moustache and large appealingly dark eyes, looked like a small dog with a biscuit on its nose waiting for the words "Paid for!" He had left three fingers of his right hand somewhere in Northern Russia.

Dawbarn was the oldest man present, quite grey and nearly bald. His voice was almost inaudible and his eyes bloodshot, the result of being gassed in Flanders. He made pathetic attempts to be gay and to enter into the various arguments.

Pirbright was a poet. At least, he should have been a poet. He was a man of abstractions, ideas, and visions. He loved to theorize and speculate. He was the only one who talked of the future, and even then with languid detachment. When someone mentioned the Germans, he muttered: "Poor devils!" and lapsed into a reverie of his own. He was tall and fair, with a large nose, the track of a bullet along his left cheekbone, and a piece of his left ear missing.

The evening wore on, and the men, huddling round the little kerosene lamp, forgot the cold in the heat of argument. And they talked of life and death and immortality. Each one of them, it was found, believed in a life hereafter, but the manner in which man was to survive, and the conditions of his future state, supplied the matter for a spirited debate. The candles guttered in the bottles, and others were produced. The rain had penetrated the roof and dripped steadily into a pool in the corner. The brandy was finished, but there was still plenty of tobacco and red wine. McLagan did not smoke. He had a habit of leaning forward as he spoke, with his large hands interlocked, and suddenly he would throw back his head, disengage his hands, and emphasize a point by shaking his index finger in the air. He made a Macabre figure sitting there in the ill-lit barn, his dark eyes alight with a kind of malicious excitement.

It was considerably past midnight when someone suggested that it was time to turn in. McLagan had been silent for some time, deep in thought. Suddenly he spoke:

"Gentlemen, don't go for a moment. I want to make a suggestion."

They all regarded him, and he leaned forward, peering into the lamp.

"This is perhaps the most profound day in the history of human life. It is hall-marked for posterity. It is an everlasting day. We have all met under rather queer and exceptional circumstances. We have talked of immortality. We are seven— a good Biblical number. I suggest that in our fashion we immortalize this day."

He stopped, and the others watched him interestedly, expecting him to go on, but he only continued to stare into the stove. At last Bessimer said:

"In what way, McLagan?"

He looked up as though startled, and spoke quietly:

"Looking into the eyes of death every day for four years and a half as we all have, we should go mad if we did not believe in the Everlastingness of things. Let us form a club and demonstrate our faith— just as seven."

He paused again, and Ross said:

"What kind of club, McLagan?"

"An Everlasting Club. Roughly speaking, I propose that we meet on this date once a year in some remote place, like this barn. We have a chairman and a secretary. We conduct it quite formally. We dine perhaps, cooking our own food, for no stranger must be present. Then afterwards we have a debate— some man putting forward some new theory or record of experience or belief. We discuss it in the manner we talked things over to-night. That is all."

"But how would this be everlasting?" said Ross, nodding his head jerkily. "We shall all die one at a time. Do you mean that when we die another is elected in our place?"

"No," said McLagan. "That would be a negation of the idea. That would be a concession that things are not everlasting."

And then he explained his idea of the Everlasting Club. The others stared at him dumbfounded. The smoke from their pipes trailed between them and away into the dim obscure corners of the barn. A night bird screamed overhead, and McLagan went on talking. Treadway gaped at him like one bewitched. Pirbright forgot to smoke. Bessimer, Dawbarn, and Ross regarded him solemnly. Only Ross appeared frankly cynical, nodding approval and speaking disapproval.

"It's a mad idea, McLagan," he repeated more than once. "Besides, it's dangerous. I wouldn't have anything to do with it."

But when McLagan had finished his explanation, and the room remained silent, except for the water dripping into the pool, Pirbright stood up and said:

"I will join you for one, and I propose McLagan as President of the Everlasting Club."

"And I will join," said Dawbarn, "and I second that proposition."

"And I," whispered Reid-Andover huskily.

"I will join," said Bessimer, "if I do not have to return to Egypt. I see no danger in it, Ross."

"No, no, not for me," said Ross. "I won't touch it."

"Come, come, Ross," said McLagan, "don't spoil our Biblical number. Whatever danger can there be in it? It is only an experiment, an experiment of faith. What else are we likely to extract from this chaos? The War is over, but the troubles of the poor old world are not over. Nevertheless, the whole thing may have been worth while if out of the ashes emerges a knowledge of the Everlasting."

"Knowledge!" gasped Ross. "I had an aunt once— in Edinburgh it was— she had knowledge— she— she— went mad!"

It is a remarkable tribute to the power of personality that McLagan persuaded these other six men— including Ross in the end— to join the astonishing club. Neither at first did there appear to be anything so very astonishing about it. It appeared an ordinary enough social club formed for the purposes of meeting once a year— on Armistice Day— to debate, and discuss, and establish a complete belief in the Everlasting. It did not meet for two years, partly owing to the fact that Bessimer did go to Egypt and Treadway had to return to India. But Bessimer again got fever in Egypt and had to return to England the following summer. Treadway retired from the Indian Army and came home at about the same time. McLagan persuaded Treadway to take on the secretaryship, and the first meeting was held on November 11th, 1920, in a bungalow up on Leith Hill in Surrey. It was a disused bungalow on an estate that had been left to McLagan by an uncle. The men had all been interested in each other, and felt drawn together by the associations of that historic evening in Picardy, and they fell in with the idea eagerly, all with the exception of Ross, who went down under protest, feeling, however, that he could not let his comrades in.

The first meeting was quite an ordinary and cheery evening. Except for the fact that the bungalow was waterproof, McLagan had tried to reproduce as far as possible the same conditions as those that prevailed in the barn in Picardy. They took food down with them, which he and Treadway cooked. The room was lighted by candles stuck in bottles, and warmed by a stove. Little Reid-Andover created a round of laughter by saying that he only made one stipulation about the Club, that was that he didn't have to have his hand shaken by the president every time. They dined gaily, talking of old times and friends, and drank red wine. When the meal was finished they cleared the table and started the discussion. Pirbright— by previous arrangement— read a brief but thoughtful paper on "The Reasonableness of Re-Incarnation." Bessimer spoke in opposition. Treadway, who wrote shorthand, took down a summary of all the speeches. They were to be copied out and embodied in the archives of the Club. Every member spoke in turn, and McLagan gave a judicial summing up. Forgetting his apprehensions in the excitement of debate, Ross spoke as eagerly as anyone.

There would have been little to distinguish between this meeting of the Everlasting Club and the next, had it not been that early in the following autumn Dawbarn died. He caught a chill playing golf one day in the rain, and, his lungs already affected by poison gas, he contracted double pneumonia and died within three days. This was in October, within three weeks of the next

meeting of the Everlasting Club. Now what was going to be McLagan's attitude? He had made it pretty clear in his original explanation of the aims of the Club. But how would it operate? Every man had signed a scroll that under no circumstances would he miss a meeting, and that he regarded it in very truth *as an Everlasting Club*. The members were notified, and the meeting took place. It was the turn of Ross to open the discussion.

He arrived late and was very much on edge, and his attention was immediately riveted upon the empty chair that had been set for Dawbarn; the empty chair, and the cutlery and glass, all as though he were actually there. The others occupied their accustomed places. He wanted to talk about Dawbarn, but some curious force restrained him. He found that it was not the thing. You could talk *to Dawbarn, but not about him*!

"Do you or do you not believe in the Everlasting?" a voice seemed to whisper.

Dawbarn's absence was ignored. McLagan was in great spirits, carrying in the fowl which he had roasted himself, making jokes with Reid-Andover, proposing toasts. And all the time Ross's eye kept wandering to the empty chair. He could almost see Dawbarn with close-cropped hair and little bald head leaning over his plate. He could almost hear his wheezy voice:

"My dear McLagan, my contention is—"

Treadway calmly read the minutes of the last meeting, as though nothing had happened.

There was something terrible in the sinister assurance of McLagan, and when in the course of the debate that followed he suddenly turned to the empty chair and said:

"You will remember that at our last meeting, Dawbarn, you referred to the Absolute—" Ross wanted to cry out. He could not concentrate. Pirbright was also obviously overwrought, but the others had succumbed to the spell of their chief. They carried on the discussion with spirit and enthusiasm. The Everlasting Club survived its first test.

In chronicling the activities of this remarkable Club, one must make allowances for the unusual nature of its mental composition, partly sentimental, partly ironic, partly genuinely interested in psychological experiment, and wholly dominated by one strong and dominating personality. The more Ross dreaded the meetings the more keenly did he look forward to them, the more influenced was he by the strange character of McLagan. Each meeting was like an entirely novel experience, and productive of stimulating thought. It was like an adventure on some uncharted island.

There were two meetings held around the empty chair of Dawbarn, and then an even greater disaster befell the Club. Treadway was killed in Ireland, and Bessimer died from blood-poisoning.

"That will leave four of us," Ross reflected shudderingly. "Three empty chairs!"

The contemplation of three empty chairs seemed less disturbing than the cold certainty of some ultimate and inevitable tragedy. Ross was the youngest member of the Club, but his heart was weak. When the four forgathered at the next meeting, his mind wavered between the horror of two alternate visions. Perhaps next year his chair would be empty, and still McLagan would be addressing him. "You will remember, my dear Ross, that last year you contended—" Would he be listening? Would he see the bubbles in the wine poured out for him?...but there was a horror that he dreaded more than that. He felt it coming, that inevitable fate—to be the last to prove the Everlasting. The years passed and Pirbright died.

And then Reid-Andover, Ross, and McLagan met and they looked into each other's eyes without expressing the thoughts that lay behind them. Four empty chairs! and Reid-Andover, who was now the secretary, quickly read the minutes of the last meeting. The records of the Club now formed quite a volume, and contained matter that was in the nature of revelation, sacred to the members alone. Nothing disturbed the equanimity of McLagan. He was more assured than ever. Only his dark eyes searched the faces of the other two, as though the only danger might lurk there.

The time had come when certain things had got to be said, and it was McLagan's mission to say them. He leaned across the table and gripped the hands of the other two men in his.

"Listen, you fellows," he said, "remember Treadway and Bessimer both went the same year. It's possible two of us might go this. Let us swear, whoever is left of us three, that he will see this through to the end. This is an Everlasting Club. Swear! Swear!"

"God! I hope it won't be me," said Reid-Andover, "but I swear."

"I swear, too," said Ross, his voice sounding faint and distant.

"I swear," said McLagan firmly.

Reid-Andover had his wish gratified with dramatic suddenness, for he was drowned the following autumn off the West Coast of Scotland, his sailing-boat capsizing in a sudden gale.

"Now there's only McLagan," thought Ross, when he heard the news. "I knew this would be. It was predestined. If only I could die!"

He thought of going abroad, or writing to McLagan to say he couldn't face it. But the more he desired to escape the closer he felt bound to his

obligations. He had promised. Besides, the thought of betraying McLagan brought beads of perspiration to his brow. It was he who held the book when they next met, and read the minutes with as much control as he could display. Five empty chairs! and McLagan never so buoyant. He had extended his spiritual adventures. He had much to say, and there was much to be entered in the book.

"On that night, Ross, in the barn at La Villanay, we little thought we should get as far as this..."

He seized Ross's hand once more in his strong grip.

"One of us, Ross, will be the last. Swear on your honour, for the last time perhaps, that if it is you who are left you will see this thing through."

"I shall be the last," Ross replied hoarsely. "I feel it. It's inevitable. I've known it from the first."

"Swear, then!"

"Yes, yes, I swear...I swear."

They closed up the bungalow and left it for a year. And the next year they met again. Ross had aged. His face was thin and drawn, his expression preoccupied. He felt ill and overwrought. They went through the usual formalities, lighting the candles, cooking a modest meal, setting the table for the seven. They read the book, and added to it.

A voice seemed to whisper to Ross: "I shall never see McLagan again. But perhaps before the year is out I, too, shall have gone."

They took the same vows over the book as before. As they were parting McLagan said:

"Queer that the only thing the Great War has perpetuated is— the Unknown. It is as though human society had reacted to the clamour of its idols. In our hearts we preserve the conviction of unknown faiths. In our temples we bury the— Unknown Soldier. It is like starting all over again in our search for the Everlasting."

One night in the late autumn McLagan was found dead in bed in an hotel at Deauville. There was a certain amount of mystery concerning his death. The tap of a gas-stove was turned on a fraction of an inch, but whether this was accidental or intentional no one could say. Death from misadventure was recorded. Ross heard the news with equanimity. He was fully prepared for it. What concerned him the more was the state of his own health. He consulted a specialist, who affirmed that the condition of his heart was serious. He should have a long and complete rest.

"Perhaps I will a little later on," he said. To himself he thought:

"I will not believe that McLagan ran away. He was not a coward. In any case, I am under my vow."

October came and went, and the yellow leaves vanished on the wind, dismantling the stage for the bleak and sombre entrance of November. Ross checked the procession of eleven days, wherein leaden skies, fog, rain, and darkness mingled in indivisible proportion. When the eleventh day dawned, he thought to himself: "And to think that it was this day so many years ago when the world went nearly mad with joy! Where is it all gone, the sense of relief, the spirit of brotherhood and forgiveness, that illumined the face of humanity for twelve brief hours'

Of the task before him he felt little apprehension. His mind had grown accustomed to it, and was more occupied with abstract problems than with concrete fears. He filled a despatch case with the records of the Everlasting Club. lie took wine with him and a little food and set off for the bungalow in the hills. It was pitch dark long before he got there.

He thrust the key into the rusty lock and stumbled in. He struck matches and lighted the candles and the stove. He set the table, and placed the seven chairs in position. He hummed to himself as he grilled a small piece of steak. The mist drifted in between the crevices of the windows and the door. The room seemed unnaturally dark. He drank two glasses of the red wine, and when he had eaten as much of the steak as he could, he stood up and said:

"Gentlemen, the King!"

He gulped the wine and glanced at the six empty chairs. There they all seemed to be, watching him. Dawbarn and Pirbright, little Reid-Andover, the solemn Bessimer, Treadway, elegant and urbane, and more insistent than all— McLagan. He could almost hear McLagan's sardonic laugh, and see the dark eyes checking his movements.

"Gentlemen, the Everlasting Club !"

He drank this second toast in grim silence. The boards creaked, and he thought he heard a mouse or rat gnawing in the wainscoting.

He read the minutes of the last meeting, stressing t? the full the balanced logic and the argument as promulgated by the president. He gave a brief summary of his own comments. Then he said:

"Is it your wish, gentlemen, that these minutes be passed?"

He glanced round the table and accepted the uncanny silence as consent. He signed them, and then rose once more to open the last debate. He spoke precisely as though all the other members were present. He struggled to concentrate on the abstraction of their united experiences. Once he thought he heard rain dripping into a pool in the corner of the room, and that he— and they— were back once more in the barn at La Villanay on Armistice night. He felt a sudden desire to scream. He wanted to scream into the growing obscurity across the table to McLagan:

"You fool!...You fool!...don't you know it yet? There's no such thing as the Everlasting. Everything changes."

He gazed wild-eyed at McLagan's chair, and a cold fear settled on his heart.

He pulled himself upright, and muttered:

"All right, McLagan, all right. I promised."

He struggled on till the candles guttered in the bottles and the stove went out. Suddenly he threw himself forward and stretched his right arm out in the direction of McLagan's chair.

A GARDENER on the estate found him next morning lying face downwards on the table, his right arm stretched out. And the gardener noticed that the fingers of his hand were pressed closely together, as though they had been held in a powerful grip, and on two of the fingers was a mark that might have been indented by a metal ring. By his side were the charred remnants of a book.

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4: The Fad of the Fisherman

G.K. Chesterton

1874–1936

Harper's Magazine June 1921

A Horne Fisher case

A THING can sometimes be too extraordinary to be remembered. If it is clean out of the course of things, and has apparently no causes and no consequences, subsequent events do not recall it; and it remains only a subconscious thing, to be stirred by some accident long after. It drifts apart like a forgotten dream; and it was in the hour of many dreams, at daybreak and very soon after the end of dark, that such a strange sight was given to a man sculling a boat down a river in the West Country. The man was awake; indeed, he considered himself rather wide awake, being a rising political journalist named Harold March, on his way to interview various political celebrities in their country seats. But the thing he saw was so inconsequent that it might have been imaginary. It simply slipped past his mind and was lost in later and utterly different events; nor did he even recover the memory, till he had long afterwards discovered the meaning.

Pale mists of morning lay on the fields and the rushes along one margin of the river; along the other side ran a wall of dark red brick almost overhanging the water. He had shipped his oars and was drifting for a moment with the stream, when he turned his head and saw that the monotony of the long brick wall was broken by a bridge; rather an elegant, eighteenth century sort of bridge, with little columns of white stone turning grey. There had been floods and the river still stood very high, with dwarfish trees waist deep in it, and rather a narrow arc of white dawn gleamed under the curve of the bridge.

As his own boat went under the dark archway he saw another boat coming towards him, rowed by a man as solitary as himself. His posture prevented much being seen of him; but as he neared the bridge he stood up in the boat and turned round. He was already so close to the dark entry, however, that his whole figure was black against the morning light; and March could see nothing of his face except the ends of two long whiskers or moustaches that gave something sinister to the silhouette, like the horns in the wrong place. Even these details March would never have noticed but for what happened in the same instant. As the man came under the low bridge he made a leap at it and hung, with his legs dangling, letting the boat float away from under him. March had a momentary vision of two black kicking legs; then of one black kicking leg, and then of nothing except the eddying stream and the long perspective of the wall. But whenever he thought of it again, long afterwards when he

understood the story in which it figured, it was always fixed in that one fantastic shape; as if those wild legs were a grotesque graven ornament of the bridge itself, in the manner of a gargoyle. At the moment he merely passed staring down the stream. He could see no flying figure on the bridge, so it must have already fled; but he was half conscious of some faint significance in the fact that among the trees round the bridge-head opposite the wall he saw a lamp-post, and, beside the lamp-post, the broad blue back of an unconscious policeman.

Even before reaching the shrine of his political pilgrimage he had many other things to think of besides the odd incident of the bridge; for the management of a boat by a solitary man was not always easy even on such a solitary stream. And, indeed, it was only by an unforeseen accident that he was solitary. The boat had been purchased and the whole expedition planned in conjunction with a friend, who had at the last moment been forced to alter all his arrangements. Harold March was to have travelled with his friend Horne Fisher on that inland voyage to Willowood Place, where the Prime Minister was a guest at the moment. More and more people were hearing of Harold March; for his striking political articles were opening to him the doors of larger and larger salons; but he had never met the Prime Minister yet. Scarcely anybody among the general public had ever heard of Horne Fisher; but he had known the Prime Minister all his life. For these reasons, had the two taken the projected journey together, March might have been slightly disposed to hasten it and Fisher vaguely content to lengthen it out. For Fisher was one of those people who are born knowing the Prime Minister. The knowledge seemed to have no very exhilarant effect; and in his case bore some resemblance to being born tired. Horne Fisher was a tall, fair man, with a bald brow and a listless manner; and it was seldom that he expressed irritation in any warmer form than that of weariness. But he was distinctly annoyed to receive, just as he was doing a little light packing of fishing tackle and cigars for the journey, a telegram from Willowood asking him to come down at once by train, as the Prime Minister had to leave that night. Fisher knew that his friend the journalist could not possibly start till the next day; and he liked his friend the journalist, and had looked forward to a few days on the river. He did not particularly like or dislike the Prime Minister; but he intensely disliked the alternative of a few hours in the train. Nevertheless, he accepted Prime Ministers as he accepted railway trains; as part of a system which he at least was not the revolutionist sent on earth to destroy. So he telephoned to March asking him, with many apologetic curses and faint damns, to take the boat down the river as arranged, that they might meet at Willowood by the time appointed. Then he went outside and hailed a taxicab to take him to the

railway station. There he paused at the bookstall to add to his light luggage a number of cheap murder stories, which he read with great pleasure, and without any premonition that he was about to walk into as strange a story in real life.

A little before sunset he arrived with his light suitcase in his hand before the gate of the long riverside gardens of Willowood Place, one of the smaller seats of Sir Isaac Hook, the master of much shipping and many newspapers. He entered by the gate giving on the road, at the opposite side to the river; but there was a mixed quality in all that watery landscape which perpetually reminded a traveller that the river was near. White gleams of water would shine suddenly like swords or spears in the green thickets; and even in the garden itself, divided into courts and curtained with hedges and high garden trees, there hung everywhere in the air the music of water. The first of the green courts which he entered appeared to be a somewhat neglected croquet lawn, in which was a solitary young man playing croquet against himself. Yet he was not an enthusiast for the game, thus snatching a moment's practice; and his sallow but well-featured face looked rather sullen than otherwise. He was only one of those young men who cannot support the burden of consciousness unless they are doing something, and whose conceptions of doing something are limited to a game of some kind. He was dark and well dressed in a light holiday fashion, and Fisher recognized him at once as a young man named James Bullen, called for some unknown reason Bunker. He was the nephew of Sir Isaac. But, what was much more important at the moment, he was also the private secretary of the Prime Minister.

"Hallo, Bunker," observed Horne Fisher. "You're the sort of man I wanted to see. Has your chief come down yet?"

"He's only staying for dinner," replied Bullen, with his eye on the yellow ball. "He's got a great speech to-morrow at Birmingham, and he's going straight through to-night. He's motoring himself there; driving the car, I mean. It's the one thing he's really proud of."

"You mean you're staying here with your uncle, like a good boy?" replied Fisher. "But what will he do at Birmingham without the epigrams whispered to him by his brilliant secretary?"

"Don't you start ragging me," said the young man called Bunker. "I'm only too glad not to go trailing after him. He doesn't know a thing about maps or money or hotels or anything, and I have to dance about like a courier. As for my uncle, as I'm supposed to come into the estate it's only decent to be here sometimes."

"Very proper," replied the other. "Well, I shall see you later on"; and crossing the lawn he passed out through a gap in the hedge.

He was walking across the lawn towards the landing-stage on the river, and still felt all around him, under the dome of golden evening, an old-world savour and reverberation in that river-haunted garden. The next square of turf which he crossed seemed at first sight quite deserted, till he saw in the twilight of trees in one corner of it a hammock, and in the hammock a man, reading a newspaper and swinging one leg over the edge of the net. Him also he hailed by name, and the man slipped to the ground and strolled forward. It seemed fated that he should feel something of the past in the accidents of that place; for the figure might well have been an Early Victorian ghost revisiting the ghosts of the croquet hoop and mallets. It was the figure of an elderly man with long whiskers that looked almost fantastic; and a quaint and careful cut of collar and cravat. Having been a fashionable dandy forty years ago he had managed to preserve the dandyism while ignoring the fashions. A white top hat lay beside the Morning Post in the hammock behind him. This was the Duke of Westmoreland, the relic of a family really some centuries old— and the antiquity was not heraldry but history. Nobody knew better than Fisher how rare such noblemen are in fact, and how numerous in fiction. But whether the duke owed the general respect he enjoyed to the genuineness of his pedigree or to the fact that he owned a vast amount of very valuable property, was a point about which Mr. Fisher's opinion might have been more interesting to discover.

"You were looking so comfortable," said Fisher, "that I thought you must be one of the servants. I'm looking for somebody to take this bag of mine. I haven't brought a man down, as I came away in a hurry."

"Nor have I, for that matter," replied the duke with some pride. "I never do. If there's one animal alive I loathe it's a valet. I learnt to dress myself at an early age, and was supposed to do it decently. I may be in my second childhood, but I've not got so far as being dressed like a child."

"The Prime Minister hasn't brought a valet, he's brought a secretary instead," observed Fisher. "Devilish inferior job. Didn't I hear that Harker was staying down here?"

"He's over there on the landing-stage," replied the duke indifferently, and resumed the study of the *Morning Post*.

Fisher made his way beyond the last green wall of the garden on to a sort of towing-path looking on the river and a wooded island opposite. There indeed he saw a lean dark figure with a stoop almost like that of a vulture; a posture well known in the law courts as that of Sir John Harker, the Attorney-General. His face was lined with headwork, for alone among the three idlers in the garden he was a man who had made his own way; and round his bald brow and hollow temples clung dull red hair quite flat like plates of copper.

"I haven't seen my host yet," said Horne Fisher in a slightly more serious tone than he had used to the others. "But I suppose I shall meet him at dinner."

"You can see him now, but you can't meet him," answered Harker.

He nodded his head towards one end of the island opposite, and looking steadily in the same direction the other guest could see the dome of a bald head and the top of a fishing-rod, both equally motionless, rising out of the tall undergrowth against the background of the stream beyond. The fisherman seemed to be seated against the stump of a tree and facing towards the other bank, so that his face could not be seen, but the shape of his head was unmistakable.

"He doesn't like to be disturbed when he's fishing," continued Harker. "It's a sort of fad of his to eat nothing but fish; and he's very proud of catching his own. Of course he's all for simplicity, like so many of these millionaires. He likes to come in saying he's worked for his daily food like a labourer."

"Does he explain how he blows all the glass and stuffs all the upholstery?" asked Fisher, "and makes all the silver forks, and grows all the grapes and peaches, and designs all the patterns on the carpets? I've always heard he was a busy man."

"I don't think he mentioned it," answered the lawyer. "What is the meaning of this social satire?"

"Well, I am a trifle tired," said Fisher, "of the Simple Life and the Strenuous Life as lived by our little set. We're all really dependent in nearly everything, and we all make a fuss about being independent in something. The Prime Minister prides himself on doing without a chauffeur, but he can't do without a factotum and jack-of-all-trades; and poor old Bunker has to play the part of a universal genius, which God knows he was never meant for. The duke prides himself on doing without a valet; but for all that, he must give a lot of people an infernal lot of trouble to collect such extraordinary old clothes as he wears. He must have them looked up in the British Museum or excavated out of the tombs. That white hat alone must require a sort of expedition fitted out to find it, like the North Pole. And here we have old Hook pretending to produce his own fish when he couldn't produce his own fish-knives or fish-forks to eat it with. He may be simple about simple things like food, but you bet he's luxurious about luxurious things, especially little things. I don't include you; you've worked too hard to enjoy playing at work."

"I sometimes think," said Harker, "that you conceal a horrid secret of being useful sometimes. Haven't you come down here to see Number One before he goes on to Birmingham?"

Horne Fisher answered in a lower voice: "Yes; and I hope to be lucky enough to catch him before dinner. He's got to see Sir Isaac about something just afterwards."

"Hallo," exclaimed Harker, "Sir Isaac's finished his fishing. I know he prides himself on getting up at sunrise and going in at sunset."

The old man on the island had indeed risen to his feet, facing round and showing a bush of grey beard with rather small sunken features but fierce eyebrows and keen choleric eyes.

Carefully carrying his fishing tackle he was already making his way back to the mainland across a bridge of flat stepping-stones a little way down the shallow stream; then he veered round, coming towards his guests and civilly saluting them. There were several fish in his basket, and he was in a good temper.

"Yes," he said, acknowledging Fisher's polite expression of surprise, "I get up before anybody else in the house, I think. The early bird catches the worm."

"Unfortunately," said Harker, "it is the early fish that catches the worm."

"But the early man catches the fish," replied the old man gruffly.

"But from what I hear, Sir Isaac, you are the late man, too," interposed Fisher. "You must do with very little sleep."

"I never had much time for sleeping," answered Hook, "and I shall have to be the late man to-night anyhow. The Prime Minister wants to have a talk, he tells me. And all things considered I think we'd better be dressing for dinner."

Dinner passed off that evening without a word of politics and little enough but ceremonial trifles. The Prime Minister, Lord Merivale, who was a long slim man with curly grey hair, was gravely complimentary to his host about his success as a fisherman, and the skill and patience he displayed; the conversation flowed like the shallow stream through the stepping-stones.

"It wants patience to wait for fish, no doubt," said Sir Isaac, "and skill to play them, but I'm generally pretty lucky with them."

"Does a big fish ever break the line and get away?" inquired the politician with respectful interest.

"Not the sort of line I use," answered Hook with satisfaction. "I rather specialize in tackle, as a matter of fact. If he were strong enough to do that, he'd be strong enough to pull me into the river."

"A great loss to the community," said the Prime Minister bowing.

Fisher had listened to all these futilities with inward impatience, waiting for his own opportunity, and when their host rose he sprang to his feet with an alertness he rarely showed. He managed to catch Lord Merivale before Sir Isaac bore him off for the final interview. He had only a few words to say, but he wanted to get them said.

He said in a low voice as he opened the door for the Premier: "I have seen Montmirail; he says that unless we protest immediately on behalf of Denmark, Sweden will certainly seize the ports."

Lord Merivale nodded.

"I'm just going to hear what Hook has to say about it," he said.

"I imagine," said Fisher with a faint smile, "that there is very little doubt what he will say about it."

Merivale did not answer but lounged gracefully towards the library, whither his host had already preceded him. The rest drifted towards the billiard-room; Fisher merely remarking to the lawyer: "They won't be long. We know they're practically in agreement."

"Hook entirely supports the Prime Minister," assented Harker.

"Or the Prime Minister entirely supports Hook," said Horne Fisher; and began idly to knock the balls about on the billiard-table.

Horne Fisher came down next morning in a late and leisurely fashion, as was his reprehensible habit; he had evidently no appetite for catching worms. But the other guests seemed to have felt a similar indifference, and they helped themselves to breakfast from the sideboard at intervals during the hours verging upon lunch. So that it was not many hours later when the first sensation of that strange day came upon them. It came in the form of a young man with light hair and a candid expression who came sculling down the river and disembarked at the landing-stage. It was in fact no other than Mr. Harold March, the journalistic friend of Mr. Fisher, whose journey had begun far away up the river in the earliest hours of that day. He arrived late in the afternoon, having stopped for tea in a large riverside town, and he had a pink evening paper sticking out of his pocket. He fell on the riverside garden like a quiet and well-behaved thunderbolt; but he was a thunderbolt without knowing it.

The first exchange of salutations and introductions was commonplace enough, and consisted indeed of the inevitable repetition of excuses for the eccentric seclusion of the host. He had gone fishing again, of course, and must not be disturbed till the appointed hour, though he sat within a stone's throw of where they stood.

"You see it's his only hobby," observed Harker apologetically, "and after all it's his own house; and he's very hospitable in other ways."

"I'm rather afraid," said Fisher in a lower voice, "that it's becoming more of a mania than a hobby. I know how it is when a man of that age begins to collect things, if it's only collecting those rotten little river fish. You remember Talbot's uncle with his toothpicks, and poor old Buzzy and the waste of cigar ashes. Hook has done a lot of big things in his time— the great deal in the Swedish timber trade and the Peace Conference at Chicago— but I doubt

whether he cares now for any of those big things as he cares for those little fish."

"Oh, come, come," protested the Attorney-General. "You'll make Mr. March think he has come to call on a lunatic. Believe me, Hook only does it for fun like any other sport; only he's of the kind that takes his fun sadly. But I bet if there were big news about fish all or shipping he would drop his fun and his timber right."

"Well, I wonder," said Horne Fisher, looking sleepily at the island in the river.

"By the way, is there any news of anything?" asked Harker of Harold March. "I see you've got an evening paper; one of those enterprising evening papers that come out in the morning."

"The beginning of Lord Merivale's Birmingham speech," replied March, handing him the paper. "It's only a paragraph, but it seems to me rather good."

Harker took the paper, flapped and refolded it, and looked at the stop-press news. It was, as March had said, only a paragraph. But it was a paragraph that had a peculiar effect on Sir John Harker. His lowering brows lifted with a flicker and his eyes blinked, and for a moment his leathery jaw was loosened. He looked in some odd fashion like a very old man. Then, hardening his voice and handing the paper to Fisher without a tremor, he simply said:

"Well, here's a chance for the bet. You've got your big news to disturb the old man's fishing."

Horne Fisher was looking at the paper, and over his more languid and less expressive features a change also seemed to pass. Even that little paragraph had two or three large headlines, and his eye encountered "Sensational Warning to Sweden," and "We Shall Protest."

"What the devil," he said, and his words softened first to a whisper and then a whistle.

"We must tell old Hook at once or he'll never forgive us," said Harker. "He'll probably want to see Number One instantly, though it may be too late now. I'm going across to him at once; I bet I'll make him forget his fish, anyhow." And turning his back he made his way hurriedly along the riverside to the causeway of flat stones.

March was staring at Fisher in amazement at the effect his pink paper had produced.

"What does it all mean?" he cried. "I always supposed we should protest in defence of the Danish ports, for their sakes and our own. What is all this botheration about Sir Isaac and the rest of you? Do you think it bad news?"

"Bad news!" repeated Fisher, with a sort of soft emphasis beyond expression.

"Is it as bad as all that?" asked his friend at last.

"As bad as all that," repeated Fisher. "Why, of course, it's as good as it can be. It's great news. It's glorious news. That's where the devil of it comes in, to knock us all silly. It's admirable. It's inestimable. It is also quite incredible."

He gazed again at the grey and green colours of the island and the river, and his rather dreary eye travelled slowly round to the hedges and the lawns.

"I felt this garden was a sort of dream," he said, "and I suppose I must be dreaming. But there is grass growing and water moving, and something impossible has happened."

Even as he spoke the dark figure with a stoop like a vulture appeared in the gap of the hedge just above him.

"You have won your bet," said Harker in a harsh and almost croaking voice. "The old fool cares for nothing but fishing. He cursed me and told me he would talk no politics."

"I thought it might be so," said Fisher modestly. "What are you going to do next?"

"I shall use the old idiot's telephone, anyhow," replied the lawyer. "I must find out exactly what has happened. I've got to speak for the Government myself to-morrow." And he hurried away towards the house.

In the silence that followed, a very bewildering silence so far as March was concerned, they saw the quaint figure of the Duke of Westmoreland, with his white hat and whiskers, approaching them across the garden. Fisher instantly stepped towards him with the pink paper in his hand, and with a few words pointed out the apocalyptic paragraph. The duke, who had been walking slowly, stood quite still, and for some seconds he looked like a tailor's dummy standing and staring outside some antiquated shop. Then March heard his voice, and it was high and almost hysterical.

"But he must see it, he must be made to understand. It cannot have been put to him properly." Then, with a certain recovery of fullness and even pomposity in the voice: "I shall go and tell him myself."

Among the queer incidents of that afternoon March always remembered something almost comical about the clear picture of the old gentleman in his wonderful white hat carefully stepping from stone to stone across the river, like a figure crossing the traffic in Piccadilly. Then he disappeared behind the trees of the island, and March and Fisher turned to meet the Attorney-General, who was coming out of the house with a visage of grim assurance.

"Everybody is saying," he said, "that the Prime Minister has made the greatest speech of his life. Peroration and loud and prolonged cheers. Corrupt financiers and heroic peasants. We will not desert Denmark again."

Fisher nodded and turned away towards the towing-path, where he saw the duke returning with a rather dazed expression. In answer to questions he said in a husky and confidential voice:

"I really think our poor friend cannot be himself. He refused to listen; he— ah— suggested that I might frighten the fish."

A keen ear might have detected a murmur from Mr. Fisher on the subject of a white hat, but Sir John Harker struck in more decisively.

"Fisher was quite right. I didn't believe it myself; but it's quite clear that the old fellow is fixed on this fishing notion by now. If the house caught fire behind him he would hardly move till sunset."

Fisher had continued his stroll towards the higher embanked ground of the towing-path, and he now swept a long and searching gaze, not towards the island but towards the distant wooded heights that were the walls of the valley. An evening sky as clear as that of the previous day was settling down all over the dim landscape, but towards the west it was now red rather than gold; there was scarcely any sound but the monotonous music of the river. Then came the sound of a half stifled exclamation from Horne Fisher, and Harold March looked up at him in wonder.

"You spoke of bad news," said Fisher. "Well, there is really bad news now. I am afraid this is a bad business."

"What bad news do you mean?" asked his friend, conscious of something strange and sinister in his tone.

"The sun has set," answered Fisher.

He went on with the air of one conscious of having said something fatal: "We must get somebody to go across whom he will really listen to. He may be mad, but there's method in his madness. There nearly always is method in madness. It's what drives men mad, being methodical. And he never goes on sitting there after sunset, with the whole place getting dark. Where's his nephew? I believe he's really fond of his nephew."

"Look," cried March abruptly, "why, he's been across already. There he is coming back."

And looking up the river once more they saw, dark against the sunset reflections, the figure of James Bullen stepping hastily and rather clumsily from stone to stone. Once he slipped on a stone with a slight splash. When he rejoined the group on the bank his olive face was unnaturally pale.

The other four men had already gathered on the same spot and almost simultaneously were calling out to him: "What does he say now?"

"Nothing. He says— nothing."

Fisher looked at the young man steadily for a moment; then he started from his immobility and, making a motion to March to follow him, himself

strode down to the river crossing. In a few moments they were on the little beaten track that ran round the wooded island, to the other side of it where the fisherman sat. Then they stood and looked at him without a word.

Sir Isaac Hook was still sitting propped up against the stump of the tree, and that for the best of reasons. A length of his own infallible fishing-line was twisted and tightened twice round his throat, and then twice round the wooden prop behind him. The leading investigator ran forward and touched the fisherman's hand; and it was as cold as a fish.

"The sun has set," said Horne Fisher in the same terrible tone, "and he will never see it rise again."

Ten minutes afterwards the five men shaken by such a shock were again together in the garden, looking at each other with white but watchful faces. The lawyer seemed the most alert of the group; he was articulate if somewhat abrupt.

"We must leave the body as it is and telephone for the police," he said. "I think my own authority will stretch to examining the servants and the poor fellow's papers, to see if there is anything that concerns them. Of course none of you gentlemen must leave this place."

Perhaps there was something in his rapid and rigorous legality that suggested the closing of a net or trap. Anyhow young Bullen suddenly broke down; or perhaps blew up, for his voice was like an explosion in the silent garden.

"I never touched him," he cried. "I swear I had nothing to do with it!"

"Who said you had?" demanded Harker, with a hard eye. "Why do you cry out before you're hurt?"

"Because you all look at me like that," cried the young man angrily. "Do you think I don't know you're always talking about my damned debts and expectations?"

Rather to March's surprise, Fisher had drawn away from this first collision, leading the duke with him to another part of the garden. When he was out of ear-shot of the others he said with a curious simplicity of manner:

"Westmoreland, I am going straight to the point."

"Well?" said the other, staring at him stolidly.

"You had a motive for killing him," said Fisher.

The duke continued to stare, but he seemed unable to speak.

"I hope you had a motive for killing him," continued Fisher mildly. "You see, it's rather a curious situation. If you had a motive for murdering, you probably didn't murder. But if you hadn't any motive, why, then perhaps you did."

"What on earth are you talking about?" demanded the duke violently.

"It's quite simple," said Fisher. "When you went across he was either alive or dead. If he was alive, it might be you who killed him, or why should you have held your tongue about his death? But if he was dead, and you had a reason for killing him, you might have held your tongue for fear of being accused."

Then after a silence he added abstractedly:

"Cyprus is a beautiful place, I believe. Romantic scenery and romantic people. Very intoxicating for a young man."

The duke suddenly clenched his hands and said thickly: "Well, I had a motive."

"Then you're all right," said Fisher, holding out his hand with an air of huge relief. "I was pretty sure you wouldn't really do it; you had a fright when you saw it done, as was only natural. Like a bad dream come true, wasn't it?"

While this curious conversation was passing Harker had gone into the house, disregarding the demonstrations of the sulky nephew, and came back presently with a new air of animation and a sheaf of papers in his hand.

"I've telephoned for the police," he said, stopping to speak to Fisher, "but I think I've done most of their work for them. I believe I've found out the truth. There's a paper here—"

He stopped, for Fisher was looking at him with a singular expression, and it was Fisher who spoke next:

"Are there any papers that are not there, I wonder. I mean that are not there now."

After a pause he added: "Let us have the cards on the table. When you went through his papers in such a hurry, Harker, weren't you looking for something to— to make sure it shouldn't be found?"

Harker did not turn a red hair on his hard head, but he looked at the other out of the corners of his eyes.

"And I suppose," went on Fisher smoothly, "that is why you told us lies about having found Hook alive. You knew there was something to show that you might have killed him, and you didn't dare tell us he was killed. But believe me, it's much better to be honest now."

Harker's haggard face suddenly lit up as if with infernal flames.

"Honest!" he cried, "it's not so damned fine of you fellows to be honest! You're all born with silver spoons in your mouths, and then you swagger about with everlasting virtue because you haven't got other people's spoons in your pockets. But I was born in a Pimlico lodging-house and I had to make my spoon, and there'd be plenty to say I only spoilt a horn or an honest man. And if a struggling man staggers a bit over the line in his youth in the lower parts of

the law, which are pretty dingy, anyhow, there's always some old vampire to hang on to him all his life for it."

"Guatemalan Golcondas, wasn't it?" said Fisher sympathetically.

Harker suddenly shuddered. Then he said:

"I believe you must know everything, like God Almighty."

"I know too much," said Horne Fisher, "and all the wrong things."

The other three men were drawing nearer to them, but before they came too near Harker said in a voice that had recovered all its firmness:

"Yes, I did destroy a paper, but I really did find a paper, too, and I believe that it clears us all."

"Very well," said Fisher in a louder and more cheerful tone, "let us all have the benefit of it."

"On the very top of Sir Isaac's papers," explained Harker, "there was a threatening letter from a man named Hugo. It threatens to kill our unfortunate friend very much in the way that he was actually killed. It is a wild letter, full of taunts— you can see it for yourselves— but it makes a particular point of poor Hook's habit of fishing from the island. Above all the man professes to be writing from a boat. And since we alone went across to him"— and he smiled in a rather ugly fashion— "the crime must have been committed by a man passing in a boat."

"Why, dear me," cried the duke, with something almost amounting to animation. "Why, I remember the man called Hugo quite well. He was a sort of body-servant and bodyguard of Sir Isaac; you see, Sir Isaac was in some fear of assault. He was— he was not very popular with several people. Hugo was discharged after some row or other; but I remember him well. He was a great big Hungarian fellow with great moustaches that stood out on each side of his face—"

A door opened in the darkness of Harold March's memory, or rather oblivion, and showed a shining landscape like that of a lost dream. It was rather a waterscape than a landscape, a thing of flooded meadows and low trees and the dark archway of a bridge. And for one instant he saw again the man with moustaches like dark horns leap up on to the bridge and disappear.

"Good heavens," he cried, "why, I met the murderer this morning."

Horne Fisher and Harold March had their day on the river after all, for the little group broke up when the police arrived. They declared that the coincidence of March's evidence had cleared the whole company and clinched the case against the flying Hugo. Whether that Hungarian fugitive would ever be caught appeared to Horne Fisher to be highly doubtful nor can it be pretended that he displayed any very demoniac detective energy in the

matter, as he leaned back in the boat cushions smoking and watching the swaying reeds slide past.

"It was a very good notion to hop up on to the bridge," he said. "An empty boat means very little; he hasn't been seen to land on either bank, and he's walked off the bridge without walking on to it, so to speak. He's got twenty-four hours start, his moustaches will disappear, and then he will disappear. I think there is every hope of his escape."

"Hope?" repeated March, and stopped sculling for an instant.

"Yes, hope," repeated the other. "To begin with, I'm not going to be exactly consumed with Corsican revenge because somebody has killed Hook. Perhaps you may guess by this time what Hook was. A damned blood-sucking blackmailer was that simple, strenuous, self-made captain of industry. He had secrets against nearly everybody; one against poor old Westmoreland about an early marriage in Cyprus that might have put the duchess in a queer position, and one against Harker about some flutter with his client's money when he was a young lawyer. That's why they went to pieces when they found him murdered, of course. They felt as if they'd done it in a dream. But I admit I have another reason for not wanting our Hungarian friend actually hanged for the murder."

"And what is that?" asked his friend.

"Only that he didn't commit the murder," answered Fisher.

Harold March laid down the oars and let the boat drift for a moment.

"Do you know, I was half expecting something like that," he said. "It was quite irrational, but it was hanging about in the atmosphere like thunder in the air."

"On the contrary, it's finding Hugo guilty that's irrational," replied Fisher. "Don't you see that they're condemning him for the very reason for which they acquit everybody else? Harker and Westmoreland were silent because they found him murdered, and knew there were papers that made them look like the murderers. Well, so did Hugo find him murdered, and so did Hugo know there was a paper that would make him look like the murderer. He had written it himself the day before."

"But in that case," said March frowning, "at what sort of unearthly hour in the morning was the murder really committed? It was barely daylight when I met him at the bridge, and that's some way above the island."

"The answer is very simple," replied Fisher. "The crime was not committed in the morning. The crime was not committed on the island."

March stared at the shining water without replying, but Fisher resumed like one who had been asked a question.

"Every intelligent murder involves taking advantage of some one uncommon feature in a common situation. The feature here was the fancy of old Hook for being the first man up every morning, his fixed routine as an angler, and his annoyance at being disturbed. The murderer strangled him in his own house after dinner on the night before, carried his corpse, with all his fishing tackle, across the stream in the dead of night, tied him to the tree, and left him there under the stars. It was a dead man who sat fishing there all day. Then the murderer went back to the house, or rather to the garage, and went off in his motor-car. The murderer drove his own motor-car."

Fisher glanced at his friend's face and went on: "You look horrified, and the thing is horrible. But other things are horrible, too. If some obscure man had been hag-ridden by a blackmailer, and had his family life ruined, you wouldn't think the murder of his persecutor the most inexcusable of murders. Is it any worse when a whole great nation is set free as well as a family?

"By this warning to Sweden we shall probably prevent war and not precipitate it, and save many thousand lives rather more valuable than the life of that viper. Oh, I'm not talking sophistry or seriously justifying the thing but the slavery that held him and his country was a thousand times less justifiable. If I'd really been sharp I should have guessed it from his smooth, deadly smiling at dinner that night. Do you remember I told you of that silly talk about how old Isaac could always play his fish? In a pretty hellish sense he was a fisher of men."

Harold March took the oars and began to row again.

"I remember," he said, "and about how a big fish might break the line and get away."

5: The Empty Theatre

J. D. Beresford

1873-1947

Seven Arts, Dec 1916

"LOOKS like dirty weather comin'," remarked my new acquaintance. He shielded his eyes with a stiff, histrionic gesture of his right hand, and stared out over the sea.

I nodded carelessly. I was tired of him. It had amused me for a quarter of an hour to listen to his pretence of familiarity with the place. But I had seen through him before he spoke to me. The new brown brogues, the colours of his blazer, colours that were not reproduced on the band of his straw hat, the scarlet sunburn of his face with its peeling skin, these things among others marked him as the cockney clerk on his fortnight's holiday.

And when he had come and had sat down beside me, his little attempt to assume the air of an habitue had amused me. I had encouraged him, pretended to believe the things that he had approached at first by innuendo. At my encouragement he had grown bolder, had hinted that he was a resident, that he had his own boat on the beach, he had talked of winter storms and shipwrecks, and of how the summer trippers were sometimes rather a nuisance.

A worse actor I never saw; the very gesture with which he shaded his eyes had been obviously learnt in a London theatre. And his ignorance of the technicalities necessary for the part he played was colossal. The porpoises that had come earlier in the week, he referred to as "seals," and he had told me that they were "nearly always there in the winter." He said they "got quite tame then, when there were no trippers." He threw in any word that he fancied would give an air of verisimilitude to his speech. "Smack" and "cutter" were introduced whenever possible, and even such innocent words as "shingle" and "breakwater." But his triumphant phrase was "dirty weather," no doubt he had learnt it from the boatmen. He condescended to explain it for the benefit of my inferential ignorance.

"We call it 'dirty weather' down 'ere," he said, "what you mean by wet weather in London."

I nodded again, I was quite bored with him, and ready to welcome the storm that had been slowly working up from the South.

"Well, I think I'll be gettin' aboard afore it comes," he remarked after a pause. "We get it very 'eavy 'ere sometimes, even in the summer."

I saw that he really intended to go, I wondered if he were afraid that that blazer of his would not stand a wetting, already the chocolate stripe of it was

showing a trifle rusty in places and although he had wearied me, I bore him no ill-will; I meant to send him back happy to his lodgings.

"You really think it's going to rain, then?" I said pleasantly.

He cast one more glance at the horizon. "Certain," he told me, with the air of an expert. "We shall 'ave dirty weather afore noon."

"Of course you get to know the signs of it, living here all the year round," I said.

"We do," he acknowledged, looking plausibly weatherwise.

"I shall stop here to see the beginning of it," I told him. "I am staying at the hotel, so I shall only have to cross the parade."

"Take my advice, and don't stay out too long," he returned.

I SAT on the parade, watching the play of light on the overwhelming masses of cumulus that pushed up so steadily to blot out the sun.

An hour ago the summit of each curve had been white and silver. The clouds had lain then on the distant horizon, a little continent of snow mountains, soft and pretty, explorable land of fairy imagination. Then as the summits rose imperceptibly from the sea, the white of them had been touched with saffron, and the hollows growing blacker showed deeps and abysses of immense vacancy. But saffron toned to copper as the enormous heights towered up towards the zenith and, below, the illusion of solid mountain was lost in a level darkness of slate-black cloud, that showed an unbroken background to the wisps of grey which here and there wonderfully floated across the gloom.

And as I watched and saw the horizon drowned in the impending sky, the shadows came racing towards me across the sea, swift harbingers of the coming storm. I knew that behind that hurrying darkness would come a wall of rain like a white mist that would presently shut me in to a little world bounded by the foam of the breakers that monotonously roared upon the shingle.

Even the thoughtless crowd upon the beach was beginning to move. I heard the shrill call of nursemaids and mothers. The flickering panorama of life on the sands was steadying down to a definable purpose and movement. It seemed to me as if I had been shifted back into the depths of time and seen the unrelated play of individuals absorbed into the broad development of history.

A sense of detachment grew upon me. I felt removed from the minutiae of existence, uplifted and magnificent. I believed that I was one with the storm, and that I could see my own insignificant body still sitting foolishly on the parade, an atom of humanity barely distinguishable from the eager excited people that bustled and clattered past, a dismayed rout flying to sanctuary.

A voice at my side startled and jarred me. I became suddenly conscious of the crash of a wave upon the shingle, of sounds that had been miraculously arrested and that now broke out afresh. I realised also, that my sight of the rout had been a vision of frozen attitudes; now I saw a crowd no longer, but moving individuals. I noticed a little troupe of singers hastily packing their simple properties.

"I too was once an actor," the awakening voice had said. "One of the millions that make up the population of the world."

I did not look up, but some strangeness in the sound of the voice held my attention, some indefinable clearness of utterance that overrode the sullen, reiterant attack of the sea upon the beach, the threat of the advancing squall (I could see a sudden thread of breakers lighting the distance of the shadowed sea), the clatter of hurrying feet upon the parade, the excited cries and interested exchange of comment on the imminence of so remarkable a storm.

A great drop of rain burst on the flags at my feet. Everyone was running. Two of the singers were staggering up the beach carrying their concertinaed harmonium.

"But I acted on the stage as well as off," said the voice.

I turned up my coat collar and sat back. I was determined to see the assault of the storm that first spatter of raindrops had been no more than a broken, warning volley. I could see the coming of the host a mile away, yet, a solid wall that rushed to obliterate the world.

"I was like all the others," the clear, thin voice went on, speaking, I judged, close to my ear. "I was all ambition to present a figment for myself. On the stage, I did not consider the part I played so much as what the audience thought of my acting of it. Off the stage, I hoped no one guessed that I always posed. I lived to create an illusion, a phantasm.

"I was never honest even with myself. Late at night in my cheap lodging, I would recall each foolish success of the day. I posed before the looking-glass. I wondered what my two worlds thought of me, the little world of my circle of acquaintances, the larger world of the public and the critics that saw me act my tiny parts.

"For a time I was almost satisfied. When I received praise from my fellows, I never paused to consider its insincerity; although I knew that I, myself, returned the formula of false compliment with never a thought of sincerity in my own heart.

"But as my small successes became familiar, I longed for wider recognition. In my dreams before the looking-glass, I heard the crowded theatre tumultuous with applause, I saw a host of white faces and gesticulating hands,

I felt the thrill of enormous success. It all seemed so possible to me, so enchantingly possible and near.

"And my chance came almost miraculously. The cards of Fate fell into one of those rare combinations that most of us never see once in our little lives. I found myself promoted over an intermediate understudy and called upon to play the greatest of parts in a great theatre.

"I did not lack confidence. If my heart beat quicker at rehearsal, as I mouthed the wonderful words I was to speak, it was not with fear that I might misinterpret the thought of genius, but with elation at the vision of myself the cynosure of all eyes. I thought only of the effect that I should produce even as we all do throughout life."

For a moment the voice ceased and I heard again the roar of my familiar world, and then the unknown speaker began again, in the same clear tone, without emphasis or any shade of enthusiasm.

"The theatre was packed from floor to ceiling, another consequence of the strange sequence of events that had lifted me to be the centre of that night's performance. I heard the news as I walked proudly to my dressing-room, and took all the credit to myself. I was exalted. The limit of my consciousness was filled with transcending pride. I strutted and posed before my fellow-actors, so full, then, of congratulation and flattery. I condescended unutterably when I spoke to my dresser.

"When I came on to the stage, it seemed to me that the whole world was cheering. I deigned once, prince as I was, to acknowledge their enthusiasm.

"At first I nearly lost myself in my part. But within me I was aware of a little flickering light of consciousness that perpetually prompted me to judge the effect I was producing. And that light grew brighter and more steady until as I stood in the middle of the stage mechanically giving forth the majestic lines I had never understood, I found myself trying to observe individuals in the dimly seen audience.

"And then the strange thing happened.

"I had focussed the bald head of a man who sat in the front row of the pit; a blot of more livid white against the bank of faces that rose behind it. But even as I tried to fix my eyes on that beacon it vanished, and left in its place a black void of emptiness. I shifted my gaze to the next face and that too disappeared. I closed my eyes for an instant and then dropped my regard to the figures in the more clearly lighted stalls. But there also, I could not fix a single face. Wherever I looked I saw an empty seat. And yet there was no movement of people rising and making their way out. I believed that the people were still there, but that I could not see them.

"Indeed, as I glanced in panic over the house, it seemed to me that I was playing to an empty theatre.

"I turned my back to that awful blank and faced the stage, but as it had been with the audience so was it with my fellow-actors. As I gazed at each of them, he or she faded from my sight.

"I found myself declaiming the lines '...makes mouths at the invisible event.'

"Abruptly I fell into silence, for darkness was coming upon me. One by one the lights went out until I was all alone in that great dark place; only in the middle of the stage one little candle flared and guttered in the draught.

"I discovered then that I was naked...."

The voice ceased and I looked up, but at that moment the storm burst upon me. The rain battered my face, and the wind sprang upon me with a wild shout and pinned me to the seat. I crouched there crushed and beaten. The rain pierced me, and sea and wind combined to one terrible shriek of fury so that I trembled in fear of the awful instruments of God. I trembled there eternally, shaken by every gust, shattered by every fresh assault of hail. I thought that it was impossible I could live until the storm abated.

But gradually the horror lessened. The rain drove less cruelly, the wind permitted me a little ease of movement.

"It is passing," I said to myself, and even as I spoke it had almost passed.

And presently I was able to look up, to wipe the water from my face, to open my eyes.

There was no one on the seat beside me; the beach was empty. I was alone in a deserted world.

But on the horizon I saw below the darkness a faint band of yellow light.

Within an hour the curtain of cloud would be lifted and the play begin again.

6: The Former Passengers

B. M. Croker

1849-1920

In:

To Let, London, Chatto & Windus, 1893

To Let, New York, Lippincott, 1906

"Who is whispering and calling through the rain?
Far above the tempest crashing,
And the torrent's ceaseless dashing,
I hear a weary calling, as of pain."

"IF ANY ONE can help you, it will be Captain Blane."

This sentence was uttered by a smart young clerk, in a shipping office in Rangoon, who, clothed in cool white drill, leant his elbows confidentially on the desk, and concluded his speech with a reassuring nod.

I was *en route* from Upper Burmah to Singapore, in order to attend my sister's wedding. Our flat river-boat was late, and when I presented myself at the booking-office of the P. and O., I found to my dismay that the steamer for the Straits had sailed at dawn, and that there would not be another for a week! I was therefore bound to miss the wedding, and waste my precious leave in Rangoon, thanks to the leisurely old tub that had dawdled down from Mandalay.

I turned my eyes expectantly on Captain Blane, a short-necked, weather-beaten sailor, in a blue serge coat with gilt buttons, and a peaked cap. He surveyed me steadily, with a pair of small keen eyes, and evidently did not receive the suggestion with enthusiasm.

"We don't carry passengers," he announced in a gruff voice. "My ship is only a cargo-boat, a tramp; and we have no accommodation whatsoever."

"No accommodation!" echoed the clerk, incredulously. "Oh, I say, come!"

"Why, you know very well that all the cabins are chock-full of cargo; and we have never carried a passenger since I took command."

"If there was any hole or corner where you could stow me, I don't mind how I rough it," I urged; "and I'll pay full first-class fare."

"Oh, there's lots of holes and corners," admitted the captain. "And you'd just get the ship's rations, same as the officers and myself; no soups and *entrées*— plain roast and boiled."

"I'm not particular; I'm ready to eat salt junk and sea biscuit. I'll do anything, short of swimming, to get to Singapore by next Wednesday."

"Is it so *very* important?" demanded Captain Blane.

"A wedding. No— no," in answer to his commiserating stare, "not my own— but I've to give away the bride."

"Well, well, I suppose I must try and stretch a point. Mind! I'll take you at your word about the passage money. 'Never refuse a good offer,' is my motto; so, Mr. —?" and he paused interrogatively.

"Lawrence is my name."

"Mr. Lawrence, if you'll be down at Godwin's Wharf to-morrow, at nine o'clock, with your baggage and bedding and servant, we will lie off a bit, and any sampan will put you aboard in five minutes. Ask for the *Wandering Star*;" and with a nod between the clerk and myself, he turned his back and stumped out.

"He is not very keen about passengers, eh?" remarked the clerk with a laugh. "I wonder why?"

"I suppose because she is a dirty old cargo-boat. But any port in a storm, or rather, any ship, in this crisis, for me!"

"Ah," said the clerk, rubbing his chin reflectively, "I've a sort of idea— though perhaps I dreamt it— that there is something rum, or out of the way, about this *Wandering Star*."

"Well, whatever it is, I'll risk it," I answered with a laugh, as I followed the captain's example, and took my departure.

Punctually at nine o'clock next morning I embarked in a sampan, and was rowed down the swift Irrawaddy.

"That cannot be my steamer," I protested, as the boatman made for a long, low, raking craft, a craft of considerable pretensions! She looked like one of the smaller vessels of the P. and O. fleet.

But sure enough the boatman was right, for as we passed under her stern, I read in yellow letters the name— *Wandering Star*.

A closer inspection showed her to be simply what her commander had stated— a tramp; she was dirty, rusty, and travel-stained. When I clambered aboard, I found no snowy decks, or shining brasses, but piles of cargo, bustling coolies, and busy blue-clad lascars. I was immediately accosted by the captain, who presented me to the chief officer, and to a fellow-traveller, a sallow, lanky youth of nineteen, going to join his friends in the Straits.

"I thought he would be company for you," explained the sailor. "We are off in half an hour," pointing to the Blue Peter at the fore. "And we're loaded to the hatches. Mr. Kelly here will show you your quarters."

As I followed the chief officer, I was astonished at the dimensions of the *Star*; it was a considerable distance from the captain's snug cabin, near the bridge, to the poop. We made our way below, into a long saloon with tables and seats intact, but the aft part piled high with bales. There was a strange,

musty, mouldy smell; it felt damp and vault-like, and afforded a sharp contrast to the blazing sun and cobalt sky on deck.

As my eye became used to the gloom, I noticed the lavish carving, the handsome mahogany and brass fittings, the maple-wood doors and panels— the remains of better days!

My cabin contained two bunks, and in one of these my servant, a Madras butler, called "Sawmy," had already arranged my bedding.

"I wonder you don't carry passengers?" I remarked to Mr. Kelly. "What a fine saloon! I should have thought it would have paid well."

"She carried hundreds in her day," he said complacently. "You see there is where the piano was hitched, and there the swinging lamps, and bookcase; but, all the same, it would never pay *us* to take passengers;" and he laughed— an odd sort of laugh. "We are not a regular liner, you know, trading between two ports. Regular liners look on us as dirt; but lots of 'em would give a good deal for our lines, and our engines. There's some of them I would not send my old boots home in! We pick up cargo as we find it; one time we run to Zanzibar, another to Hong Kong, another to the Cape, or maybe Sydney. I've not been home this three years. I hope you'll find your bunk comfortable; the youngster is opposite, just across the saloon— you know your way back!" and having done the honours, he left me.

Certainly, the *Star* was much above her present business, and bore the remains of having seen better days. Even my marble washstand was not in keeping with a cargo-steamer. I opened the next cabin; it was crammed to the door with freight— bird-cages in this instance. Every cabin was no doubt similarly packed. I was not sorry to exchange the earthy, chill atmosphere below for the bright sunshine on deck. Soon we had weighed anchor, and were moving smoothly down the rapid Irrawaddy, between high banks of tawny grass, gradually losing sight of the shipping, then of the golden Pagoda, then of Elephant Point; finally the *Star* put her nose straight out, to cross the Gulf of Martaban. The sea was calm, we were well fed and found, and made a pleasant party of six; the captain, first and second officers, the chief engineer, and two passengers. I slept like a top that night, and awoke next morning, and found we were anchored off Moulmein, with its hills covered with pagodas and palms. From Moulmein we put to sea, and still the weather once more favoured us. The captain was a capital companion, full of anecdotes and sea-stories; the chief engineer was a first-rate chess-player, and I began to think I had done rather a smart thing in securing a passage in this stray steamer. As the captain concluded a thrilling yarn apropos of a former ship, in which he had been third officer, I suddenly recalled the shipping clerk's hint, and asked—

"Are there no stories about this one? has she no history?"

Captain Blane looked at the chief officer with a knowing grin, and then replied—

"History?— of course she has. What do you call the log-book? That's her history. I suppose that chap at the office told you she was considered an unlucky ship? Eh? Come, now, own up!"

"No; but he said he had an idea that there was something queer about her— he could not remember what it was."

"Well, I've been in command of her now four years, and I've seen nothing to complain of. What do you say, Kelly?" appealing to the first officer.

"I say that I never wish to put foot on a better sea-boat, and there's nothing wrong with her, as far as *I* know."

But Sawmy, my Madras boy, entertained a totally different opinion of the *Star*. When I asked him why he did not sleep outside my door in the saloon, he frankly replied—

"Because plenty devil in this ship; the chief Serang" (head of the Lascars) "telling me that saloon plenty bad place."

WE WERE now within forty-eight hours of Singapore, when the weather suddenly changed, as it frequently does in those treacherous seas. The awning was taken down— sure presage of a bad time coming. The ports were closed, and all was made ready for a blow; and we were not disappointed— it came. We had a rough night, but I was not in the least inconvenienced; I slept like a dormouse rocked in the cradle of the deep.

In the morning my fellow-passenger (whose name, by the way, was Mellish, and who had evidently "suffered," to judge by his ghastly appearance) accosted me timidly and said—

"Did you get up and walk about last night?"

"No."

"Do you ever walk in your sleep?" he continued.

"Not to my knowledge— why?"

"Because last night some one came and hammered on my cabin door, and shouted, 'The ship's aground.' What do you think it can have been?" he asked with a frightful face.

"I think there is no doubt that it was the hot tinned lobster you had for supper," I answered promptly.

"No, no, no, it was not a dream— it woke me," he returned. "I thought it was *you*. Then I tried to think it was a nightmare, and had almost brought myself to believe it, and was dropping off to sleep, when a cold, cold wet hand was passed slowly across my face;" and he shuddered violently.

"Lobster!" I repeated emphatically.

"No, no. Oh, Mr. Lawrence, I heard moaning and whispering and praying. I'm afraid to sleep in that cabin alone; may I come and share yours?"

"There is no room," I answered, rather shortly. "The top berth is crammed full of my things."

At breakfast there was a good deal of movement, and now and then a loud splash upon the deck. The captain, who had been tapping the barometer, looked unusually solemn, and said—

"We are in for a bit of dirty weather; unless I'm mistaken, there's a cyclone somewhere about. I don't think we shall do more than touch the edge of it, and this is a stout craft, so you need not be uneasy."

This was vastly reassuring, when the sky to the west changed from a lowering grey to an inky black. The wind rose with a whimper, that increased to a shriek; it lashed the sea with fury, lashed it into enormous waves, and, laden as we were, we began to roll, at first majestically, then heavily, then helplessly. We took in great green seas over the bows, tons of water discharged themselves amidships, and made us stagger and groan, but still through it all the engines thumped doggedly on.

We seized our dinner anyhow; sitting, standing, kneeling, adapting ourselves to the momentary angle of the vessel. It was a miserable evening, wet and cold, and Mellish and I went to bed early. The dead-lights were down, the hatchway closed behind us; we were entirely cut off from the rest of our shipmates for the night, and the saloon smelt more vault-like than ever. I turned away from Mellish's grey frightened face, and stammering, piteous importunities, shut myself into my cabin, bolted the door, went to bed, and fell asleep. Meanwhile the storm increased to a hurricane, the motion was tremendous. I was flung violently out on the floor, as the *Star* made one awful plunge, and then righted herself. I was, needless to state, now thoroughly awake, and scrambling back into my berth, and clinging to the woodwork with both hands, lay listening to the roaring of the tempest, which rose now and then to a shrill shriek, that had a terribly human sound; my heart beat fast, as my ears assured it that I was not merely listening to the raving of the gale, but actually to the piercing screams of women, and the hoarse shouts of men! Just as I had arrived at this amazing conclusion, the door of the cabin was burst open, and an elderly man, in his shirt-sleeves, was hurled in.

"She's going down," he bawled excitedly, "and the hatches are fast."

I sprang up, and the next lurch shot us both out into the saloon. And what a scene did I behold by three lamps that swung violently to and fro! Their fitful light showed me a large number of half-dressed strangers, in the last extremity of mortal fear; there was the horrible, selfish pushing and struggling of a panic-stricken crowd, fighting their way towards the companion-ladder; the wild

frenzied distraction people exhibit when striving to escape from some deadly peril; the tumult, the cries and shrieks of frightened women making frantic appeals for rescue— cries heart-rending to hear.

Besides the dense struggling block at one end of the cabin, battling fiercely for escape, there were various groups, apparently resigned to their impending fate. A family at prayer; two men drinking raw brandy out of tumblers; an ayah beating her head upon the floor, and calling on "Ramasawmy;" an old lady, with a shawl over her head, and a Bible on her knee; a young man and a girl, hand locked in hand, whispering last words; a pale woman, with a sleeping child in her arms. I saw them all. I saw Mellish clinging to the saloon hand-rail, his eyes glazed with horror, and gibbering like an idiot.

The crash of broken crockery, the shrieks of despair, the roaring of the wind, the sullen thundering of the seas overhead, combined to make up the most frightful scene that could possibly be imagined.

Then all at once, a beautiful girl, with long dark hair, streaming over a white gown, rushed out of a cabin, and threw herself upon me, flinging her arms round my neck; she sobbed—

"Oh, save me— save me! Don't let me die— don't let me die!"

Her wild agonized face was pressed closely to mine; her frantic clasp round my neck tightened like a band of steel— closer, closer, *closer*. I was choking. I could not move or breathe. She was strangling me, as she shrieked in my ear—

"It is coming now! *This is death!*"

There was one awful lurch, a grinding crash, a sinking sensation, a vice-like grip about my throat— and outer darkness.

I WAS AROUSED in broad daylight by Sawmy, who had brought my tea and shaving-water. I was lying on the floor of the saloon, and he was stooping over me, with a frightened expression on his broad, brown countenance.

"At first I thinking master dead!" was his candid announcement. "Me plenty fraiding. Why master lying here and no in bed?" Why indeed!

A plunge of my head into cool water, and a cup of tea, brought me to myself, and then I flung on my dressing-gown, and hurried across the saloon to see what had become of the miserable Mellish.

He was stretched in his berth, with a life-belt beside him, rigid and cold, and in a sort of fit.

With brandy, burnt brown paper, and great difficulty, Sawmy and I brought him round. As soon as he had come to his senses, and realized that he was still in the land of the living, he sat up and turned on me quite ferociously, and said—

"And that's what you call *lobster*!"

THE WEATHER had moderated considerably, and though I had no great appetite, I was able to appear at breakfast. Mellish was too shattered to join us, and lay in a long chair in the deck-house, sipping beef-tea, and hysterically assuring all inquirers that "he would never again set foot in the saloon— no, he would *much* rather die!"

"I suppose you got knocked about a bit last night?" inquired the captain, with a searching glance.

"Not exactly knocked about; I did not mind *that* so much, but—" and I hesitated.

"But you were disturbed?" he added significantly.

"Yes, very much so; I hope I shall never be disturbed in such a way again."

"Then I take it you've seen them— the former passengers? They are generally aboard, they say, in dirty weather."

"Whatever they were, I trust in God I may never witness such another scene."

"You don't wonder now that we are not free of offering cabin accommodation, eh? Not that I ever saw anything myself."

"But you admit that there *is* something."

"So they say"— nodding his head with a jaunty air.

"And what is the explanation? *What* do they say?" I asked impatiently.

"Just this. The *Wandering Star* was once the *Atalanta*, a fine passenger steamer, and, coming out her last trip, she fell in for the tail of a cyclone, and came to grief off the Laccadives; blown out of her course, engine-fires put out, went on a rock, and sank in ten fathoms; every soul on board went down, except a steward and a fireman, who got off on a hen-coop. It was an awful business— sixty-nine passengers, besides officers and crew. She sank like a stone, no time to get battered to pieces, and so she was right well worth her salvage. A company bought her cheap; she was but little damaged— they raised and sold her. She was intended for the pilgrim traffic, from Bombay to Mecca, and in fact she did make a couple of trips; but somehow she got a bad name; the pilgrims said she was possessed of devils— ha! ha!— and so the owners put her into the wheat and rice and general cargo trade, and we have no complaints. She has been at it these five years, and is, as I take you to witness, a grand sea-boat, and has fine accommodation between-decks as well as aft; it's only in real dirty weather that there is anything amiss, and that in the saloon. They say," lowering his voice to a hoarse whisper, "they kept the passengers below, battened down; they got no chance for their lives. It was a mistake; they were all drowned like rats in their holes. Mind you, *I*'ve seen nothing, and I'm not a superstitious man."

"Would you sleep in the saloon?" I sternly demanded.

"No; for in a blow *my* place is on the bridge. But I'll not deny that a second officer, who has left us, tried a bunk down there once, out of curiosity, and did not repeat the experiment; he was properly scared;" and the captain chuckled at the recollection.

"I suppose we shall get in to-night?" I remarked, as we paced the deck together.

"Yes, about eleven o'clock. We are doing our twelve knots, dirty-looking old hooker as we are!"

"So much the better," I answered, "for you will not be surprised to hear that I'm not anxious to occupy my berth again."

I am thankful to relate that I slept on land that same night, and was not "disturbed."

I OFTEN GLANCE at the shipping lists, to see if there is any news of the *Wandering Star*. I note that she is still tramping the ocean from China to Peru, and I have not the smallest doubt but that, on stormy nights, the saloon is still crowded with the distracted spectres of her former passengers.

7: "Freddy & Cie"

Richard Dehan

Clotilde Graves, 1863-1932

The Saturday Evening Post, 13 June 1914

IT IS ALWAYS a perplexing question how to provide for younger sons, and the immediate relatives of the Honorable Freddy Foulkes had forfeited a considerable amount of beauty sleep in connection with the problem.

"My poor darling!" the Marchioness of Glanmire sighed one day, more in sorrow than in anger, when the Honorable Freddy brought his charming smile and his graceful but unemployed person into her morning-room. "If you could only find some congenial and at the same time lucrative post that would take up your time and absorb your spare energy, how grateful I should be!"

"I have found it," said the Honorable Freddy, with his cherubic smile. He possessed the blonde curling hair and artless expression that may be symbolical of guilelessness or the admirable mask of guile.

"Thank Heaven!" breathed his mother. Then, with a sense that the thanksgiving might, after all, be premature, she inquired: "But of what nature is this post? Before it can be seriously considered, one must be certain that it entails no loss of caste, demands nothing derogatory in the nature of service from one who— I need not remind you of your position, or of the fact that your family must be considered."

She smoothed her darling's silky hair, which exhaled the choicest perfume of Bond Street, and kissed his brow, as pure and shadowless as a slice of cream cheese, as the young man replied:

"Dearest mother, you certainly need not."

"Then tell me of this post. Is it anything," the Marchioness asked, "in the Diplomatic line?"

"Without a good deal of diplomacy a man would be no good for the shop," admitted Freddy; "but otherwise, your guess is out."

Doubt darkened his mother's eyes.

"Don't say," she exclaimed, "that you have accepted a Club Secretaryship? To me it seems the last resource of the unsuccessful man."

"It will never be mine," said Freddy, "because I can't keep accounts, and they wouldn't have me. Try again."

"I trust it has nothing to do with Art," breathed the Marchioness, who loathed the children of canvas and palette with an unreasonable loathing.

"In a way it has," replied her son, "and in another way it hasn't. Come! I'll give you a lead. There is a good deal of straw in the business for one thing."

"You cannot contemplate casting in your lot with the agricultural classes? No! I knew the example of your unhappy cousin Reginald would prevent you from adopting so wild a course... but you spoke of straw."

"Of straw. And flowers. And tulles."

"Flowers and tools! Gardening is a craze which has become fashionable of late. But I cannot calmly see you in an apron, potting plants."

"It is not a question of potting plants, but of potting customers," said Freddy, showing his white teeth in a charming smile.

A shudder convulsed Freddy's mother. Freddy went on, filially patting her handsome hand:

"You see, I have decided, and gone into trade. If I were a wealthy cad, I should keep a bucket-shop. Being a poor gentleman, I am going to make a bonnet-shop keep me. And, what is more— I intend to trim all the bonnets myself!"

There was no heart disease upon the maternal side of the house. The Marchioness did not become pale blue, and sink backwards, clutching at her corsage. She rose to her feet and boxed her son's right ear. He calmly offered the left one for similar treatment.

"Don't send me out looking uneven," he said simply. "If I pride myself upon anything, it is a well-balanced appearance. And I have to put in an hour or so at the shop by-and-by." He glanced in the mantel-mirror as he spoke, and observing with gratification that his immaculate necktie had escaped disarrangement, he twisted his little mustache, smiled, and knew himself irresistible.

"The shop! Degenerate boy!" cried his mother. "Who is your partner in this— this enterprise?"

"You know her by sight, I think," returned the cherub coolly. "Mrs. Vivianson, widow of the man who led the Doncaster Fusiliers to the top of Mealie Kop and got shot there. Awfully fetching, and as clever as they make them!"

"That woman one sees everywhere with a positive *procession* of young men at her heels!"

"That woman, and no other."

"She is hardly—"

"She is awfully *chic*, especially in mourning."

"I will admit she has some style."

"*Admit*, when you and all the other women have copied the color of her hair and the cut of her sleeves for three seasons past! I like that!"

Freddy was growing warm.

"When you accuse me of imitating the appearance of a person of that kind," said Lady Glanmire, in a cold fury, "you insult your mother. And when you ally yourself with her in the face of Society, as you are about to do, you are going too far. As to this millinery establishment, it shall not open."

"My dear mother," said Freddy, "it has been open for a week."

He drew a card from an exquisite case mounted in gold. On the pasteboard appeared the following inscription in neat characters of copperplate:—

FREDDY & C^{IE}
Court Milliners,
11, Condover Street, W.

"Freddy and Company!" murmured the stricken parent, as she perused the announcement.

"Mrs. V. is company," observed the son, with a spice of vulgarity; "and uncommonly good company, too. As for myself, my talents have at last found scope, and millinery is my *métier*. How often haven't you said that no one has such exquisite taste in the arrangement of flowers—"

"As you, Freddy! It is true! But—"

"Haven't you declared, over and over again, that you have never had a maid who could put on a mantle, adjust a fold of lace, or pin on a toque as skillfully as your own son?"

"My boy, I own it. Still, millinery as a profession? Can you call it *quite* manly for a man?"

"To spend one's life in arranging combinations to set off other women's complexions. Can you call that womanly for a woman? To my mind," pursued Freddy, "it is the only occupation for a man of real refinement. To crown Beauty with beauty! To dream exquisite confections, which shall add the one touch wanting to exquisite youth or magnificent middle-age! To build up with deft touches a creation which shall betray in every detail, in every effect, the hand of a genius united to the soul of a lover, and reap not only gold, but glory! Would this not be Fame?"

"Ah! I no longer recognize you. You do not talk like your dear old self!" cried the Marchioness.

"I am glad of it," replied Freddy, "for, frankly, I was beginning to find my dear old self a bore." He drew out a watch, and his monogram and crest in diamonds scintillated upon the case. His eye gleamed with proud triumph as he said: "Ten to twelve. At twelve I am due at Condover Street. Come, not as my mother, if you are ashamed of my profession, but as a customer ashamed of that bonnet" (Lady Glanmire was dressed for walking), "which you ought to

have given to your cook long ago. Unless you would prefer your own brougham, mine is at the door."

The vehicle in question bore the smartest appearance. The Marchioness entered it without a murmur, and was whirled to Condover Street. The name of Freddy & Cie. appeared in a delicate flourish of golden letters above the chastely-decorated portals of the establishment, and the plate-glass window contained nothing but an assortment of plumes, ribbons, chiffons, and shapes of the latest mode, but not a single completed article of head apparel.

The street was already blocked with carriages, the vestibule packed, the shop thronged with a vast and ever-increasing assemblage of women, amongst whom Lady Glanmire recognized several of her dearest friends. She wished she had not come, and looked for Freddy. Freddy had vanished. His partner, Mrs. Vivianson, a vividly-tinted, elegant brunette of some thirty summers, assisted by three or four charming girls, modestly attired and elegantly *coiffée*, was busily engaged with those would-be customers, not a few, who sought admission to the inner room, whose pale green *portière* bore in gold letters of embroidery the word *atelier*.

"You see," she was saying, "to the outer shop admission is *quite* free. We are charmed to see everybody who likes to come, don't you know? and show them the latest shades and shapes and things. But consultation with Monsieur Freddy— we charge five shillings for that. Unusual? Perhaps. But Monsieur Freddy is Monsieur Freddy!" And her shrug was worthy of a Parisienne. "Why do you ask? 'Is it true that he is the younger son of the Duke of Deershire?' Dear Madame, to *us* he is Monsieur Freddy; and we seek no more."

"A born tradeswoman!" thought Lady Glanmire, as the silver coins were exchanged for little colored silk tickets bearing mystic numbers. She moved forward and tendered two half-crowns; and Freddy's partner and Freddy's mother looked one another in the face. But Mrs. Vivianson maintained an admirable composure.

And then the curtains of the *atelier* parted, and a young and pretty woman came out quickly. She was charmingly dressed, and wore the most exquisite of hats, and a murmur went up at sight of it. She stretched out her hands to a friend who rushed impulsively to meet her, and her voice broke in a sob of rapture.

"Did you ever see anything so *sweet*? And he did it like magic— one scarcely saw his fingers move!" she cried; and her friend burst into exclamations of delight, and a chorus rose up about them.

"*Wonderful!*"

"*Extraordinary!*"

"*He does it while you wait!*"

"*Just for curiosity, I really must!*"

And a wave of eager women surged towards the green *portière*. Three went in, being previously deprived of their headgear by the respectful attendants, who averred that it put Monsieur Freddy's taste out of gear for the day to be compelled to gaze upon any creation other than his own. And then it came to the turn of Lady Glanmire.

She, disbonneted, entered the sanctum. A pale, clear, golden light illumined it from above; the walls were hung with draperies of delicate pink, the carpet was moss-green. In the center of the apartment, upon a broad, low divan, reclined the figure of a slender young man. He wore a black satin mask, concealing the upper part of his face, a loose, lounging suit of black velvet, and slippers of the same with the embroidered initial "F." Round him stood, mute and attentive as slaves, some half-dozen pretty young women, bearing trays of trimmings of every conceivable kind. In the background rose a grove of stands supporting hat-shapes, bonnet-shapes, toque-foundations, the skeletons of every conceivable kind of headgear.

Silent, the Marchioness stood before her disguised son.

He gently put up his eyeglass, to accommodate which aid to vision his mask had been specially designed, and motioned her to the sitter's chair, so constructed that with a touch of Monsieur Freddy's foot upon a lever it would revolve, presenting the customer from every point of view. He touched the lever now, and chair and Marchioness spun slowly around. But for the presence of the young ladies with their trays of flowers, plumes, gauzes, and ribbons, Freddy's mother could have screamed. All the while Freddy remained silent, absorbed in contemplation, as though trying to fix upon his memory features seen for the first time. At last he spoke.

"Tall," he said, "and inclined to a becoming *embonpoint*. The eyes blue-gray, the hair of auburn touched with silver, the features, of the Anglo-Roman type, somewhat severe in outline, the chin— A hat to suit this client"— he spoke in a sad, sweet, mournful voice— "would cost five guineas. A Marquise shape, of broadtail"— one of the young lady attendants placed the shape required in the artist's hands— "the brim lined with a rich drapery of chenille and silk.... Needle and thread, Miss Banks. Thank you...." His fingers moved like white lightning as he deftly wielded the feminine implement and snatched his materials from the boxes proffered in succession by the girls. "Black and white tips of ostrich falling over one side from a ring of cut steel," he continued in the same dreamy tone. "A knot of point d'Irlande, with a heart of Neapolitan violets, and"— he rose from the divan and lightly placed the beautiful completed fabric upon the Marchioness's head— "here is your hat, Madame. Five guineas. Good-morning. Next, please!"

Emotion choked his mother's utterance. At the same moment she saw herself in the glass silently swung towards her by one of the attendants, and knew that she was suited to a marvel. She made her exit, paid her five guineas, and returned home, embarrassed by the discovery that there was an artist in the family.

One thing was clear, no more was to be said. The *Maison Freddy* became the morning resort of the smart world; it was considered the thing to have hats made while Society waited. True, they came to pieces easily, not being copper-nailed and riveted, so to speak; but what poems they were! The charming conversation of Monsieur Freddy, the half-mystery that veiled his identity, as his semi-mask partially concealed his fair and smiling countenance, added to the attractions of the Condover Street *atelier*.

Money rolled in; the banking account of the partners grew plethoric; and then Mrs. Vivianson, in spite of the claims of the business upon her time, in spite of the Platonic standpoint she had up to the present maintained in her relations with Freddy, began to be jealous.

"Or— no! I will not admit that such a thing is possible!" she said, as she looked through some recent entries in the day-book of the firm. "But that American millionairess girl comes too often. She has bought a hat every day for three weeks past. Good for business in one way, but bad for it in another. If he should marry, what becomes of the *Maison Freddy*?"

She sighed and passed between the curtains. It was the slack time after luncheon, and Freddy was enjoying a moment's interval. Stretched on his divan, his embroidered slippers elevated in the air, he smoked a perfumed cigarette surrounded by the materials of his craft. He smiled at Mrs. Vivianson as she entered, and then raised his aristocratic eyebrows in surprise.

"Has anything gone wrong? You swept in as tragically as my mother when she comes to disown me. She does it regularly every week, and as regularly takes me on again." He exhaled a scented cloud, and smiled once more.

"Freddy," said Mrs. Vivianson, going direct to the point, "this little speculation of ours has turned out very well, hasn't it?"

"Beyond dreams!" acquiesced Freddy. She went on:

"You came to me a penniless detrimental, with a talent of which nobody guessed that anything could be made. I gave this gift a chance to develop. I set you on your legs, and—"

"*Me voici!* You don't want me to rise up and bless you, do you?" said Freddy, with half-closed eyes. "Thanks awfully, you know, all the same!"

"I don't know that I want thanks, quite," said Mrs. Vivianson. "I've had back every penny that I invested, and pulled off a bouncing profit. Your share amounts to a handsome sum. In a little while you'll be able to pay your debts."

"I shall never do that!" said Freddy, with feeling.

"Marry, and leave me— perhaps," went on Mrs. Vivianson. A shade swept over her face, her dark eyes glowed somberly, the lines of her mouth hardened.

"Keep as you are!" cried Freddy, rebounding to a sitting position on the divan.

"Where's that new Medici shape in gold rice-straw and the amber *crêpe chiffon*, and the orange roses with crimson hearts?" His nimble fingers darted hither and thither, his eyes shone, and his cheeks were flushed with the enthusiasm of the artist. "A tuft of black and yellow cock's feathers, *à la Mephistophele*," he cried, "a topaz buckle, and it is finished. You must wear with it a *jabot* of yellow *point d'Alençon*. It is the hat of hats for a jealous woman!"

"How dare you!" cried Mrs. Vivianson. But Freddy did not seem to hear her— he was rapt in the contemplation of the new masterpiece; and as he rose and gracefully placed it on his partner's head, Miss Cornelia Vanderdecken was ushered in. She was superbly beautiful in the ivory-skinned, jetty-locked, slender American style, and she wore a hat that Freddy had made the day before, which set off her charms to admiration.

She occupied the sitter's chair as Mrs. Vivianson glided from the room, and Freddy's blue eyes dwelt upon her worshipingly. To do him justice, he had lost his heart before he learned that Cornelia was an heiress. Now words escaped him that brought a faint pink stain to her ivory cheek.

"Ah!" he cried impulsively, "you are ruining my business."

"Oh, why, Monsieur Freddy? Please tell me!" asked Miss Vanderdecken, with naïve curiosity.

"Because," said Freddy, while a bright blush showed beyond the limits of his black satin mask, "you are so beautiful that it is torture to make hats for other women— since I have seen you."

There was a pause. Then Miss Cornelia's silk foundations rustled as she turned resolutely toward the divan.

"I can't return the compliment," she said, "by telling you that it is torture to me to wear hats made by any other man since I have seen you, for other men don't make hats, and I can't really see you through that thing you wear over your face. But—"

Her voice faltered, and Freddy, with a gesture, dismissed his lady assistants. Then he removed his mask. Their eyes met, and Cornelia uttered a faint exclamation.

"Oh my! You're just like him!"

"Who is he?" asked Freddy.

"I can't quite say, because I don't know," returned Cornelia; "but all girls have their ideals, from the time they wear Swiss pinafores to the time they wear forty-eight inch corsets; and I won't deny"— her voice trembled— "but what you fill the bill. My! What *are* you doing?"

For Freddy had grasped his materials and was making a hat. It was of palest blush tulle, with a crown of pink roses, and an aigrette of flamingo plumes was fastened with a Cupid's bow in pink topaz.

"Love's first confession," the young man murmured as he bit off the last thread, "should be whispered beneath a hat like this." And he gracefully placed it on Cornelia's raven hair.

Mrs. Vivianson, her ear to the keyhole of a side door, quivered from head to foot with rage and jealousy. Time was when he, a penniless, high-bred boy, had implored her to marry him. Now— her blood boiled at the remembrance of the half hint, the veiled suggestion she had made, that they should unite in a more intimate partnership than that already consolidated. With her jealousy was mingled despair. As long as Freddy and his hats remained the fashion, the shop would pay, and pay royally. There had as yet occurred no abatement in the onflow of aristocratic patronage. To avow his identity— never really doubted— to become an engaged man, meant ruin to the business. The blood hummed in her head. She clung to the door-handle and entered, as Freddy, with real grace and eloquence, pleaded his suit.

"And you are really a Marquis's second son, though you make hats for money?" she heard Cornelia say. "I always guessed you had real old English blood in you, from the tone of your voice and the shape of your finger-nails, even when you wore a mask. And it seemed as though I couldn't do anything but buy hats. I surmised it was vanity at the time, but now I guess it was— love!"

"My dearest!" said Freddy, bending his blonde head over her jeweled hands. "My Cornelia! I will make you a hat every day when you are married. Ah! I have it! You shall wear one of mine to go away in upon the day we are wed, the inspiration of a bridegroom, thought out and achieved between the church door and the chancel. What an idea for a lover! What an advertisement for the shop!" His blue eyes beamed at the thought.

But Cornelia's face fell.

"I don't know how to say it, dear, but we shall never be married. Poppa is perfectly rocky on one point, and that is that the man I hitch up with shall never have dabbled as much as his little finger in trade. 'You have dollars enough to buy one of the real high-toned sort,' he keeps saying, 'and if blood royal is to be got for money, Silas P. Vanderdecken is the man to get it. So run

along and play, little girl, till the right man comes along.' And I know he'll say you're the wrong one!"

Freddy's complexion, grown transparent from excess of emotion and lack of exercise, paled to an ivory hue. His sedentary life had softened his condition and unstrung his nerves. He adored Cornelia, and had looked forward to a lifetime spent in adorning her beauty with bonnets of the most becoming shapes and designs. Now that a coarse Transatlantic millionaire with soft shirt-fronts and broad-leaved felt hats might step in and shatter for ever his beautiful dream of union, bitter revulsion seized him. He feared his fate. What was he? The second son of a poor Marquis, with a particularly healthy elder brother. He looked upon the chiffons, the flowers and the feathers that surrounded him, and felt that the hopes of a heart reared upon so frail a basis were insecure indeed. Then his old blood rallied to his heart, and he rose from the divan and clasped the now tearful Cornelia to his breast.

"Go, my dearest," he said, "tell all to your father— plead for me. Do not write or wire— bring me his verdict to-morrow. Meanwhile I will compose two hats. Each shall be a masterpiece— a swan-song of my Art. One is to be worn if"— his voice broke— "if I am to be happy; the other if I am fated to despair. Go now, for I must be alone to carry out my inspiration."

And Cornelia went. Then Freddy, sternly refusing to receive any more customers that day, set himself to the completion of his task. Before very long both hats were actualities. Hat Number One was an Empire shape of dead-leaf beaver, the crown draped with dove-colored silk, a spray of sere oak-leaves and rue in front, a fine scarf of black lace, partly to veil the face of the wearer, thrown back over one side of the brim and caught with a clasp of black pearls set in oxidized silver. It breathed of chastened woe and temperate sadness, and was to be worn if Papa Vanderdecken persisted in refusing to accept Freddy as a suitor.

But Hat Number Two! It was of the palest blue guipure straw, draped with coral silk and Cluny lace. In front was a spray of moss rosebuds and forget-me-nots, dove's wings of burnished hues were set at either side. It was the very hat to be worn by a bringer of joyful news, the ideal hat under which might be appropriately exchanged the first kiss of plighted passion. Upon it Freddy pinned a fairy-like card, white and gold-edged.

"If I am to be happy, wear this," was written upon it; and upon a buff card attached to the hat of rejection he inscribed: "Wear this, if I am to be unhappy." Then he closed the large double bandbox in which he had packed the hats, breathed a kiss into the folds of the silver paper, and, ringing the bell, bade a messenger carry the box to the hotel at which Cornelia Vanderdecken was staying, and where, millionairess though she was, she was still content to

dress with the help of a deft maid and the adoration of a devoted companion. Then the exhausted artist fell back on the divan. Cornelia was to come at twelve upon the morrow.

"Then I shall learn my fate," said Freddy. He drove home in his brougham, and passed a sleepless night. The fateful hour found him again upon his divan, surrounded by the materials of his craft, waiting feverishly for Cornelia.

The curtains parted. He started up at the rustling of her gown and the jingling of her bangles. Horror! she wore the somber hat of sorrow, though under its shadow her face was curiously bright.

She advanced toward Freddy. He reeled and staggered backward, raised his white hand to his delicate throat, and fell fainting amongst his cushions. Cornelia screamed. Mrs. Vivianson and her young ladies came hurrying in. As the stylish widow noted Cornelia's headgear, her eyes flashed and joy was in her face. Then it clouded over, for she knew that Papa Vanderdecken had been coaxed over, and Freddy was an accepted man. My reader, being exceptionally acute, will realize that the jealous woman had changed the tickets on the hats.

"Not that it was much use," she avowed to herself, as she entered with smelling-salts and burnt feathers to restore Freddy's consciousness. "When he revives, she will tell him the truth." But Freddy only regained consciousness to lose it in the ravings of delirium. He had an attack of brain fever, in which he wandered through groves of bonnet shops, looking unavailingly for Cornelia. And then came the crisis, and he woke up with an ice-bandage on, to find himself in his bedroom at Glanmire House, with the Marchioness leaning over him.

"Mother, my heart is broken," said the boy— he was really little more. "The world exists no more for me. Let me make my last hat— and leave it."

"Oh, Freddy, don't you know me?" gasped Cornelia in the background; but the repentant woman who had brought about all this trouble drew the girl away.

"Even good news broken suddenly to him in his weak state," said Mrs. Vivianson in a rapid whisper, "may prove fatal. I have a plan which may gradually enlighten him."

"I trust you," said Cornelia. "You have saved his life with your nursing. Now give him back to me!"

"Hush!" said Mrs. Vivianson.

She had rapidly dispatched a messenger to Condover Street, and now, as Freddy again opened his eyes and repeated his piteous request, the messenger returned. Then all present gathered about the bed, whose inmate had been raised upon supporting pillows. It was a queer scene as the shaded electric light above the bed played upon Freddy's pallid features, showing the ravages

of sickness there. "Now!" said Mrs. Vivianson. She placed the milliner's box upon the bed, and Freddy's feeble fingers, diving into it, drew forth a spray of orange blossoms and a diaphanous cloud of filmy lace.

"Black— not white!" Freddy gasped brokenly. "It is a mourning toque that I must make. Let Cornelia wear it at my funeral."

"Cornelia will not wear it at your funeral, Freddy," said Mrs. Vivianson, bending over him; "for she is going to marry you, not to bury you." And, drawing the tearful girl to Freddy's side, she flung over her beautiful head the bridal veil, and crowned her with a wreath of orange blossoms. And as, with a feeble cry, Freddy opened his wasted arms and Cornelia fell into them, Mrs. Vivianson, her work of atonement completed, pressed the offered hand of Freddy's mother, and hurried out of the room and out of the story. Which ends, as stories ought, happily for the lovers, who are now honeymooning in the Riviera.

8: Footfalls in the Desert

Roderic Quinn

1867-1949

Sunday Times (Sydney) 18 Dec 1898

Mostly remembered, if at all, as a poet, Roderic Quinn wrote a number of short stories in a literary style.

WEST of the men, Orion filled the sky; the blue blazed with stars and stardust, and the Milky Way streamed out like a white road. Sandon followed it from horizon to horizon with fretted, feverish eyes. Thirst chained back his eyelids, and the stars suggested cool relief. All night frustrate bodies plunged through space. Their red quest for a green planet and its traceless failure brought home to him his own hopes.

Towards dawn Wilson breathed heavily, and awoke with a cry.

'Awake?' asked Sandon.

'I have not slept.'

'Ah, it was a dream, then,' said Wilson, in tones of deep relief.

'A dream! What dream! Tell it to me, Wilson?'

Wilson raised himself on his elbow, resting his forehead on a hand. In this wise he faced Sandon.'It was not of home to-night, nor of wife and baby— but of gold.'

'Waking or asleep?' said Sandon, drearily. 'It is always of gold.'

'I dreamt this cursed desert had an end, Sandon. I came to granite gates, and entered a land that was green with grasses. There was water everywhere.'

'In creeks or rivers, Wilson?'

'Rivers— clear rivers and lakes.'

'Good!' exclaimed Sandon, in a thick, greedy voice, 'pass me my waterbag—'

'No,' remonstrated Wilson, 'there is scarce enough to last you another day— and God knows what will help you then.'

Sandon lay back silent, and Wilson continued. 'There was a peak in the distance topped with a ball of gold.'

'That was good, too, Wilson, but nothing to the water.'

'Nothing,' repeated Wilson, falling into the other's train of thought, 'God, Sandon, how it did flow!'

'Clear, blue water, I suppose.'

'Yes, and I could see the white stones underneath.'

Then for many minutes Sandon so lost himself in Wilson's dream that he did not hear him talking; but Wilson talked on nevertheless, glad to waste with

idle words the time had hung on him heavy as lead. 'The gold shone in the sun— you must have heard the shout I gave when I saw it?'

'What, was I there, Wilson?' Sandon's interest had re-awakened.

'Not at first— but you came suddenly. I pushed you down between the granite gates, and ran on and took the gold from the peak. Then I hid it here in my shirt.'

'And where was I?'

'You were dead!'

'Worse luck,' said Sandon, 'that dreams aren't true.'

Wilson shivered at the words, and the silence gathered in. The loneliness had such intensity that it would haye been unbearable but for the good stars overhead.

'The gold warmed me like a woman's kiss. I laughed and said, "She will be rich now, and the child shall have pretty dresses." I came to the granite pillars to pass again into the desert, but they had drawn together, and you were in the gateway, with no room on either side. I stepped on your body. I tried to avoid you, but something caught my feet and laid them on you. Then I went into the desert, but my joy was at end. The gold had grown as hot as a live coal, and was burning a way to my heart.'

'That was a bad dream,' said Sandon.

'It was, but worse followed. I thought of you lying in the red gateway with the sun on your face. Then suddenly I heard your footfalls in the desert. You had risen from the dead and were in pursuit of me.'

'Hush!' whispered Sandon, raising a white finger in the dim dawn-light. 'How strange! I thought I heard my own footfalls in your dream.'

'And then?'

'Hush! hush!— again I heard them.'

'Where?' whispered Wilson.

'Beyond there to the east— where the spinifex is thick.'

Wilson raised himself on hands and knees, and leaned over listening intently. 'I hear them now,' he said at length. 'Shall I hail?'

'No; it may be natives.'

They listened for a while yet, and then Sandon stood upright.

'Shod feet!' he said, 'it is a white man'— and then moving a few steps forward he cried aloud, 'Hullo, there!'

There was a pause in the moving feet, and an answer mo az'.ed along the wind.

'What did he say, Sandon?'

'Water— what shall we do?'

'Lie down flat and he may pass us. Quick, quick! "No" would be a terrible word to say.'

'Too late, Wilson, look!'

Twenty paces from them a bulk loomed up and staggered into human shape. Wilson snatched his water bag from the ground and put it behind him. Sandon did likewise.

Meanwhile the man approached and paused in front of them.

'Water!' he gasped.

The men made no answer, but each tightened his grip on the waterbag.

Then the stranger appealed to them again, begging relief for the love of God.

'You might as well ask for the blood of our bodies,' answered Wilson gloomily.

'Even that,' said the stranger, and the two men shuddered at the terrible suggestion.

'Have you been thirsting long?' asked Sandon.

'Two days.'

'If. I had no wife and child,' said Wilson, 'I might'— he paused, and looked at Sandon.

'I have neither,' remarked Sandon, 'but life is sweet, and the sun is very fierce, and the desert dust cakes in the mouth.'

Then the stranger guessed what each intended, and drooped hiss head disconsolately.

'If you save my life,' he said, 'I will make you rich.'

Sandon and Wilson turned their faces away, not towards each other, but one to the north, and the other to the south. This was how the red sunlight found the group.

'Sandon,' said Wilson, in silent tones, 'this man is a cheat.'

'How so?' the question came from the stranger.

'Your bag is full, and you would rob us of the little that is ours; '

The stranger laughed harshly.

'Look!' he replied. Then a low, pleased cry wheeled Sandon round, and brought him to his friend's side. Wilson was peering into the stranger's bag, and his face glowed with sunshine, gold-light, and wonder.

'Look, Sandon,' said he, ' 'tis almost pure'— and it might have been God's name, he was so reverent.

'Yes, almost,' whispered Sandon; 'the quartz is no more than sprinkled salt.'

When his ecstasy had paled a little, Wilson said: 'I will give you my water for your gold.' The stranger drew back a pace, and shook his head twice or thrice.

'You will be dead before night,' insisted Wilson. 'Take the water and give me the gold.'

'No,' said the other, 'I may die, but gold is better than life.'

'Then go,' cried Wilson, savagely, and; he pointed towards the west. The man turned wearily away, and took some steps, but paused with the touch of a hand on his shoulder.

'Here!' said Sandon, 'drink!'

'But you do not want the gold?'

The stranger waited for an answer with the waterbag at his lips.

'No,' said Sandon, flushing, Wilson thought, with shame.

Then the stranger oranlc deeply, and Sandon half sickened at heart with '. tha shameful hurry he displayed.

'Stop,' he said, 'you will drink it all.'

'I scarcely wet my mouth.'

'You will die of thirst.'

'You are worse than that man,' said the stranger, bitterly, 'cheating my dry lips with a sip.'

'You do not understand,' Sandon answered; 'the next native well is a day off, and you must hoard it.'

'Ah, do you mean that? But what will you do?'

'Go— go away quickly,' said Sandon, 'or I may repent.'

The flush still stained his cheeks, burning hotly, and Wilson knew now that it was caused by another hand than shame's.

The stranger moved away a few yards, paused again, and returned:

'I will do you a good deed,' he said to Wilson, 'because he has done me one,' and he pointed to Sandon.

Wilson asked: 'What is it ?'

'Due east from here, and two days' journey, lies an outcrop of quartz. It is full of gold. There is a native well near it.'

Then, when Wilson had plied him with many questions, the stranger looked up at Sandon, who stood silent, with his hands buried in his belt, and his eyes sunk earthward.

'The desert makes rich men,' he said, 'and dead men.'

Then, moving closer to Sandon, he whispered something about a hero, and trudged away. Sandon did not notice the words, nor raise his head, nor look after him. He stood silent as a shadow, and uninterested as one who has known life and waits for death, and does not care for life any more.

When the stranger was a dark spot on the red plain, Wilson touched Sandon on the shoulder, and whispered in great joy:o

'Two days' journey; did you hear? Let us go at once.'

'As you like,' said Sandon.

ii

AT STARING NOON the two men were miles distant from their point of departure. It was a silent journey. Wilson forbearing to talk because Sandon would not answer. Once only, when a little whirlwind came along and filled his, eyes with sand did he break the silence.

'This is hell!', said Wilson.

'Hell is everywhere,' Sandon answered. And a long while after: 'Inside as well as out.'

Fever had assailed him, and red things were creeping in his brain. Thrills and waves of cold and heat ranged round and round his nerves, making him start and shudder and dimming his dry eyes with pain. At intervals Wilson consulted a compass to mark how they moved and to correct their course. At other intervals he glancea sidelong at Sandon to see how he fared. His flushed face and heavy eyes made Wilson ill at ease. Wilson thought of his wife and child and the gold he would win if the water only lasted. This thought banished the thirst from his throat and the tiredness out of his limbs. Still, when he looked at Sandon he thought also of the friend he would lose if he tried to make the water last. Then the thirst would be redoubled and the tiredness weigh like lead.

Late in the day a fierce temptation assailed Wilson. He dropped behind and raised the waterbag to his mouth. Sandon meanwhile plunged steadily forward with a drooped and dogged bearing that -suggested callous indifference to all the ills of earth. He seemed so utterly alone that Wilson put aside the temptation while yet his lips were dry, and hurried to him, and now he resolved on a sacrifice, and there began a strange fellowship of suffering.

Agony shared might be agony lessened. While Sandon thirsted he would keep him company in drought; and so there would be no need for either to complain, and the water would be saved. This was the beginning of a nobler mood in Wilson, and an hour after the sacrifice drifted from its moorings.

'Drink, Sandon!' said he.

'I will not rob you,' Sandon sullenly replied. 'You have a wife and child.'

iii

THE pitiless West Australian sun went down at last, and the men sank to earth. Sandon stretched himself flat, and Wilson lay down near his feet. They. were silent wljue day lasted. When night came, however, Sandon began to

mutter and moan and break into silly little laughs. As time went on Wilson realised that just beside him a deadly struggle was eventuating, the deadliest that a man can know. In the dark Sandon grappled with madness. Wilson drew away, and looked up at the sky.

The 'Cross' was shining steadily, and it told him a story in stars. He thought of his wife and child, and of the gold. Then he looked at Sandon and made a resolve. He rose; and taking his waterbag; went out into the darkness. Sandon heard him going, and felt that he was deserted. He did not blame Wilson—only it might have been otherwise. He would have sung out a 'God-speed' to him only his throat was very dry. He put his face in the sand, but drought was in his eyes also.

A while after he heard Wilson returning. He must have forgotten something, thought Sandon.

'Drink this, ' said Wilson. And when Sandon, through set teeth, refused: 'Quick, I want to refill, it. I've found a native well!'

Sandon drank, and Wilson dangling the bag in his hand went away singing.

When he stole back a second time Sandon was at peace and sleeping. But Wilson's bag was empty still, and his throat sore with thirst.

IT was a ecod lie that he had told, and it had worked famously. He stretched himself full length and looked up at Orion, that lay like a god among the stars.

Many hours passed, and then a, stupor crept across his brain, and a cloud across the sky.

A while after he felt a kiss on his hand and kisses on his cheeks and forehead. What sweetness was this? He opened his eyes. Sandon knelt above him, the empty waterbag in his hand.

But better than Sandon was the velvet touch of rain falling in the dark.

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9: The Biter Bit

Peter Cheyney

1896-1951

Sunday Times (Perth, W. Aust) 19 May 1929

Before he hit the big time in the late 30s, with private eye Slim Callaghan, US Government agent Lemmy Caution, and the "Dark" series of secret agent novels which appeared during WW2, Cheyney produced large numbers of short stories featuring series characters such as Alonzo MacTavish and Etienne MacGregor. MacTavish was something of a Simon Templar style gentleman crook, the Leslie Charteris series character who appeared at about the same time. An e-book 32 of of McTavish's adventures can be found in ***MobileRead****'s Patricia Clark Memorial Library: The Alonza MacTavish Omnibus.*

ALONZO MacTavish, standing in the doorway of his recently-acquired house in Regent's Park, looked a trifle suspiciously at the broken key chain which dangled from his fingers, and wondered.

Someone had certainly pushed against him rather forcibly as he had left the Cinema Theatre in which he had spent the earlier part of the evening. Had the key chain been broken deliberately, or was it an ordinary accident which might happen to a very slender and not amazingly strong chain?

And supposing it had been an accident. Then, surely the key ring with the keys should have been in his trouser pocket, even if the chain were broken, and not missing. Also, to Alonzo, it was obvious that someone should be after that key ring, for on it hung the key of the Regent's Park house, and in that house were certain articles of great value in which quite a lot of people might be interested at the moment.

Alonzo MacTavish had many enemies. One of the cleverest swell cracksmen in the world, and one on whom the police up to the present had sot laid hands, he had, during his adventurous career made many enemies, people who, knowing or guessing what was in the house at the moment would not scruple to gain an entrance by any means.

Alonzo took from his pocket a small steel instrument, and with a smile at the idea of forcing his own front door proceeded to pick the lock. He did this with great care, and having effected an entrance, closed the door carefully behind him, mounted the stairs to his first floor sitting room, and threw himself into a chair, gave himself up to thought.

Who, of the many crooks in London would be the most likely person to have stolen the key ring? Dr. Theodor Klaat, that enterprising blackmailer, was in prison, so he could be counted out. Marney, another enemy of Alonzo's, was in London, but was engaged on other business at the moment. Suddenly the name shot into Alonzo's mind— Largasso. That was the man!

MacTavish lit a cigarette and thought rapidly. In the sitting room downstairs were two steel safes. In one of them lay a collection of uncut stones of great value which Alonzo had "removed" from their rightful resting place some three weeks before and which, pending negotiation, were kept in the safe. In the other safe, in a sealed envelope, were certain documents which had two nights before been stolen from the Andarian Embassy— documents which were of the utmost value to certain political gentlemen who, through various other people, had commissioned Alonzo to steal them. It seemed to Alonzo that there was no possibility of Largasso knowing anything about the Andaria documents, and if he were the person who had actually stolen the key ring the thing he would be after would be the case of uncut stones.

At the same time Largasso was no fool. Surely he did not imagine for one moment that Alonzo, missing the key ring, would not take steps to ensure the safety of the gems. Or did he guess that at the time Alonzo made the discovery that it would not be possible for him to take measures to remove the booty, if Largasso intended to move immediately then he had struck at the right time. Lon Ferrers, MacTavish's trusted henchman, was away and would not be returning till the early morning, and there was no one else of MacTavish's little band of trusted associates who could be secured immediately in order to remove the gems.

One thing was entirely obvious. Somebody had the key to the front door and the keys which opened the two safes downstairs, for all the keys were on the same key-ring. Therefore, it seemed to Alonzo that the only thing he could do was mount guard all night, and in the morning clear the two safes and have a new key fitted to the front door.

He walked across to his bedroom, which was on the other side of the first floor passage, opposite the sitting room, slipped on a dressing-gown, and taking an automatic pistol from a drawer, placed it, fully loaded, in the right hand pocket of his gown. Then he placed an easy chair at the top of the curving stairway, from which position he could hear the slightest noise on the floor below. Returning to the bedroom he snapped off the electric light, walked over to the sitting room and repeated the same process, and then sat down in the easy chair at the stair-top to await developments.

One o'clock struck, but nothing happened. The minutes lengthened into hours. Alonzo's head was beginning to nod, when, just after three o'clock a slight noise came to his ears from the floor below. He rose noiselessly from the chair, descended a stair or two. and stood in the darkness listening intently. He was not mistaken. Someone was moving quietly in the hallway downstairs!

The footsteps moved cautiously in the direction of the dining room. Alonzo grinned to himself. In his brain there was not the slightest doubt that the

marauder was the enterprising Largasso. Now he could hear the sound of the dining-room door knob being turned quietly and cautiously; the door opened, and then as quietly closed. Alonzo gave the interloper time to find and open the safe in the dining room, then he ran swiftly and' silently down the stairs, flung open the door, switched on the light and received the surprise of his life.

He stood there, his pistol in his hand, and an amazed smile breaking over his handsome face, for instead of gazing at the foreign and beetle browed features of that old jail-bird Largasso, he found himself regarding a beautiful woman, who stood, looking thoroughly frightened, before the left hand safe, with Alonzo's key ring and its attendant broken chain dangling from her slim fingers.

Alonzo returned the automatic pistol to his pocket, took out his cigarette case, and with the same amused smile found a match and lit his cigarette.

"Good evening, or perhaps I should; say good morning," he said. "By the way, you've opened the wrong safe. The gems for which you are looking are in the other safe— the one on the; right hand side of the room. Incidentally, you must be rather tired of standing. Won't you sit down?"

She gave a little gesture of dismay, drew her evening cloak closer about her and threw the key ring on to the table.

"I suppose you will telephone for the police," she said, tearfully. "But it was not the gems that I came for. I didn't even know that you had any precious stones in the house."

Alonzo drew up a chair and motioned her to be seated.

"If you are not interested in the stones," he said with a smile, "may I ask what it is you really do want? Incidentally, I suppose It was you who stole my key ring tonight at the cinema?"

She nodded. "I didn't actually steal it myself," she said, "but I paid a man to do so."

Alonzo nodded. He was beginning to feel really interested. "It seems to me," he said, "that if you did not know of the existence of the precious stones which are in the other safe, that there is only one thing which you did want

"Exactly," she interrupted "I wanted the papers which you stole from the Andarian Embassy." She raised her head and looked at him, and Alonzo realised how beautiful she was.

"Listen, Mr. MacTavish," she continued. "I am not a thief, but it was necessary that those papers should be returned. My first thought on hearing that you were the most likely person I to have stolen them was to have come to you and put my story before you. I have heard that you are kind hearted, that there isn't any crook in the world who is exactly like you, and that you very often steal things more for the fun of the game than the actual profit

derived. But afterwards I thought that you might refuse, and after making inquiries. I found out the name of a man, who, I was told would help me."

"Tony Largasso, I except," murmured Alonzo.

She nodded. "Yes, that was the chap. He told me that the papers were probably concealed in this house, and suggested that he should steal your key ring, and that I might come and try to get them. He said that in any event, even if yon discovered me that you were very soft hearted where women were concerned, and that if I told you my story you would probably tell me where the papers were, supposing that you had already parted with them."

"So there is a story, is there?" smiled Alonzo. "May I hear it?"

"I WANT you to hear it," she said. "You don't look like a man who would hurt a woman, and the return of those papers to the Andarian Embassy means more to me than life itself. I am engaged to the man in whose charge they were, and unless they are returned within forty-eight hours it means absolute ruin for him. When the theft was discovered, the Andarian Ambassador, knowing that a foreign country was most desirous of getting those papers at any cost, suspected that my fiancé had been bribed to hand them over. Denials were of no avail, but eventually the Ambassador agreed that if the papers were returned within forty-eight hours from this morning that he would be prepared to let the matter rest and give my fiancé the benefit of the doubt.

"Since this morning, neither of us have rested one moment. Separately, we have been all over London making Inquiries, trying to get some clue which would tell us where the papers were. It was by chance that I was put in touch with the man Largasso. who said that the most likely person to have them was you, as it was the sort of job which you specialised in. Largasso followed you this evening when you went to the cinema, and it was easy for him, mixing with the crowd after the performance was over, to cut your chain and take the keys. He gave them to me and I paid him for his services. The rest of the story you know."

Alonzo nodded. "I'm not surprised that Largasso would not actually do the job himself," he grinned. "He probably guessed that he would get a warm reception from me if I caught him here. As for my being soft hearted where women are concerned, I suppose that is true, and in any event," he continued with a charming smile, "I would be very unhappy to think that any act of mine had jeopardised your happiness."

He rose to his feet, took the keys from the table, and walking over to the safe on the right hand side of the room, opened it, and took out the bulky packet of documents. He returned to her, and with a bow, handed the package to her.

She got up. Alonzo thought that her smile was the most wonderful thing he had ever seen in his life.

"You're very good," she said. "But I'm going to ask you to do one thing more. I'm going to ask you to go round to the Andarian Embassy and hand these documents over to the Ambassador, and to tell him that my fiancé was absolutely guiltless in the matter. Needless to say, no action will be taken against you. The papers are of much too great an importance to have any publicity attached to them. Will you do this for me?" She smiled up a him, and Alonzo, looking down at her marvelled at the beauty of her eyes He smiled back. "Yes," he said. "I'll do that "

"Good," she sparkled. "My car I waiting round the corner. I'll drop you at the Embassy, and, please, will you take this as a memento of your great kindness?"

She unpinned a small diamond brooch which fastened her cloak, and held it out to Alonzo. He took it.

"This is of much more value to me than an the diplomatic documents In the world," he said.

TEN MINUTES later she dropped him at the doors of the Andarian Embassy and with a smile drove off Alonzo sighed as he watched the rear lights of her car disappear down the street. Then he mounted the Embassy steps and rang the bell.

The Andarian Ambassador, somewhat surprised at being told of an urgent caller at three o'clock in the morning, received Alonzo in a dressing-gown. MacTavish, who knew that, in any event, he was safe as there was not the slightest possibility of any police action being taken by the Ambassador, and wishing to make absolutely certain that no blame attached to the betrothed of the charming lady, told the Ambassador fully and completely the whole story of the theft of the documents. It was twenty minutes afterwards, when, having finished his tale, he took the package from under his arm, and handed it to the white haired Ambassador.

"I am greatly indebted to you, Mr MacTavish," he said. "But there is one thing which I do not understand. I do not know who this charming lady is, and I have certainly never heard of her fiancé, who, I can tell you definitely, has never had charge of these papers. Candidly I did not even know that they were stolen, as I have had no need to go to our safe for the last three days!"

"What!" exclaimed Alonzo. "You did not even know that the papers were stolen?"

The Ambassador shook his head. "I had no idea," he said.

Alonzo said goodnight hurriedly, and made for the street There was not a taxi cab in sight and it took him five minutes to procure one. Then, telling the man to drive like the devil, he sat back in the cab, a slight smile playing about his mouth.

Five minutes later they arrived at Alonzo's house. He paid off the man quickly and turned to the door. It was open. He walked in, turned into the dining room, and snapped on the lights. The right hand safe was open.

Alonzo walked over to it. As he had thought, the case of gems was gone. In its place propped up on the shelf was a note addressed to "Alonzo MacTavish, Esq., Knight Errant."

With a rueful smile Alonzo opened the note and read:

My dear Alonzo,

You did fall for it beautifully didn't you? I've often heard of your wonderful cleverness and made up my mind to try conclusions with you. Largasso told me that you kept the jewels in the right hand safe. He also told me about the Andarian papers. More importantly, he told me that you were always nice to a pretty woman. I got him to steal your key ring and immediately had duplicates of the keys made. I intended that you should discover me at the safe. I thought that little fairy tale I told you about my imaginary fiancé and the Andarian papers rather good didn't you? Then, all I had to do was to get you out of the house, drive back immediately, open the door and the safe with my duplicate keys and get away with the goods.

Anyhow, I did give you my brooch and I did smile prettily at you, didn't I? By the way, if ever you come to USA, come and see me.

Your very grateful.

Philadelphia Kitty.

Alonzo, his sense of humour coming to his rescue, sat down and laughed heartily. He turned over the brooch in his fingers and the tiny diamond sparkled at him, rather like Philadelphia Kitty's eyes had sparkled.

He got up, and mounted the stairs slowly.

"The biter bit," murmured M Alonzo MacTavish, and went to bed.

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10: The Gallowsmith

Irvin S. Cobb

1876-1944

All-Story Weekly, 9 Feb 1918

THIS MAN that I have it in mind to write about was, at the time of which I write, an elderly man, getting well along toward sixty-five. He was tall and slightly stooped, with long arms, and big, gnarled, competent-looking hands, which smelled of yellow laundry soap, and had huge, tarnished nails on the fingers. He had mild, pale eyes, a light blue as to color, with heavy sacs under them, and whitish whiskers, spindly and thin, like some sort of second-growth, which were so cut as to enclose his lower face in a nappy fringe, extending from ear to ear under his chin. He suffered from a chronic heart affection, and this gave to his skin a pronounced and unhealthy pallor. He was neat and prim in his personal habits, kind to dumb animals, and tolerant of small children. He was inclined to be miserly; certainly in money matters he was most prudent and saving. He had the air about him of being lonely. His name was Tobias Dramm. In the town where he lived he was commonly known as Uncle Tobe Dramm. By profession he was a public hangman. You might call him a gallowsmith. He hanged men for hire.

So far as the available records show, this Tobias Dramm was the only man of his calling on this continent. In himself he constituted a specialty and a monopoly. The fact that he had no competition did not make him careless in the pursuit of his calling. On the contrary, it made him precise and painstaking. As one occupying a unique position, he realized that he had a reputation to sustain, and capably he sustained it. In the Western Hemisphere he was, in the trade he followed, the nearest modern approach to the paid executioners of olden times in France who went, each of them, by the name of the city or province wherein he was stationed, to do torturing and maiming and killing in the gracious name of the king.

A generous government, committed to a belief in the efficacy of capital punishment, paid Tobias Dramm at the rate of seventy-five dollars a head for hanging offenders convicted of the hanging crime, which was murder. He averaged about four hangings every three months or, say, about nine hundred dollars a year— all clear money.

The manner of Mr. Dramm's having entered upon the practise of this somewhat grisly trade makes in itself a little tale. He was a lifelong citizen of the town of Chickaloosa, down in the Southwest, where there stood a State penitentiary, and where, during the period of which I am speaking, the Federal authorities sent for confinement and punishment the criminal sweepings of half a score of States and Territories. This was before the government put up

prisons of its own, and while still it parceled out its human liabilities among State-owned institutions, paying so much apiece for their keep. When the government first began shipping a share of its felons to Chickaloosa, there came along, in one clanking caravan of shackled malefactors, a half-breed, part Mexican and the rest of him Indian, who had robbed a territorial post-office and incidentally murdered the postmaster thereof. Wherefore this half-breed was under sentence to expiate his greater misdeed on a given date, between the hours of sunrise and sunset, and after a duly prescribed manner, namely: by being hanged by the neck until he was dead.

At once a difficulty and a complication arose. The warden of the penitentiary at Chickaloosa was perfectly agreeable to the idea of keeping and caring for those felonious wards of the government who were put in his custody to serve terms of imprisonment, holding that such disciplinary measures fell within the scope of his sworn duty. But when it came to the issue of hanging any one of them, he drew the line most firmly. As he pointed out, he was not a government agent. He derived his authority and drew his salary not from Washington, D. C., but from a State capital several hundreds of miles removed from Washington. Moreover, he was a zealous believer in the principle of State sovereignty. As a soldier of the late Southern Confederacy, he had fought four years to establish that doctrine. Conceded, that the cause for which he fought had been defeated; nevertheless his views upon the subject remained fixed and permanent. He had plenty of disagreeable jobs to do without stringing up bad men for Uncle Sam; such was the attitude the warden took. The sheriff of the county of which Chickaloosa was the county-seat, likewise refused to have a hand in the impending affair, holding it — and perhaps very properly— to be no direct concern of his, either officially or personally.

Now the government very much wanted the hybrid hanged. The government had been put to considerable trouble and no small expense to catch him and try him and convict him and transport him to the place where he was at present confined. Day and date for the execution of the law's judgment having been fixed, a scandal and possibly a legal tangle would ensue were there delay in the premises. It was reported that a full pardon had been offered to a long-term convict on condition that he carry out the court's mandate upon the body of the condemned mongrel, and that he had refused, even though the price were freedom for himself.

In this serious emergency, a volunteer in the person of Tobias Dramm came forward. Until then he had been an inconspicuous unit in the life of the community. He was a live-stock dealer on a small scale, making his headquarters at one of the town livery stables. He was a person of steady

habits, with a reputation for sobriety and frugality among his neighbors. The government, so to speak, jumped at the chance. Without delay, his offer was accepted. There was no prolonged haggling over terms, either. He himself fixed the cost of the job at seventy-five dollars; this figure to include supervision of the erection of the gallows, testing of the apparatus, and the actual operation itself.

So, on the appointed day, at a certain hour, to wit, a quarter past six o'clock in the morning, just outside the prison walls, and in the presence of the proper and ordained number of witnesses, Uncle Tobe, with a grave, untroubled face, and hands which neither fumbled nor trembled, tied up the doomed felon and hooded his head in a black-cloth bag, and fitted a noose about his neck. The drop fell at eighteen minutes past the hour. Fourteen minutes later, following brief tests of heart and pulse, the two attending physicians agreed that the half-breed was quite satisfactorily defunct. They likewise coincided in the opinion that the hanging had been conducted with neatness, and with swiftness, and with the least possible amount of physical suffering for the deceased. One of the doctors went so far as to congratulate Mr. Dramm upon the tidiness of his handicraft. He told him that in all his experience he had never seen a hanging pass off more smoothly, and that for an amateur, Dramm had done splendidly. To this compliment Uncle Tobe replied, in his quiet and drawling mode of speech, that he had studied the whole thing out in advance.

"Ef I should keep on with this way of makin' a livin' I don't 'low ever to let no slip-ups occur," he added with simple directness. There was no suggestion of the morbid in his voice or manner as he said this, but instead merely a deep personal satisfaction.

Others present, having been made sick and faint by the shock of seeing a human being summarily jerked into the hereafter, went away hurriedly without saying anything at all. But afterward thinking it over when they were more composed, they decided among themselves that Uncle Tobe had carried it off with an assurance and a skill which qualified him most aptly for future undertakings along the same line; that he was a born hangman, if ever there was one.

This was the common verdict. So, thereafter, by a tacit understanding, the ex-cattle-buyer became the regular government hangman. He had no official title nor any warrant in writing for the place he filled. He worked by the piece, as one might say, and not by the week or month. Some years he hanged more men than in other years, but the average per annum was about twelve. He had been hanging them now for going on ten years.

It was as though he had been designed and created for the work. He hanged villainous men singly, sometimes by pairs, and rarely in groups of threes, always without a fumble or a hitch. Once, on a single morning, he hanged an even half-dozen, these being the chief fruitage of a busy term of the Federal court down in the Indian country where the combination of a crowded docket, an energetic young district attorney with political ambitions, and a businesslike presiding judge had produced what all unprejudiced and fair-minded persons agreed were marvelous results, highly beneficial to the moral atmosphere of the territory and calculated to make potential evil-doers stop and think. Four of the six had been members of an especially desperate gang of train and bank robbers. The remaining two had forfeited their right to keep on living by slaying deputy marshals. Each, with malice aforethought and with his own hands, had actually killed some one or had aided and abetted in killing some one.

This sextuple hanging made a lot of talk, naturally. The size of it alone commanded the popular interest. Besides, the personnel of the group of villains was such as to lend an aspect of picturesqueness to the final proceedings. The sextet included a full-blooded Cherokee; a consumptive ex-dentist out of Kansas, who from killing nerves in teeth had progressed to killing men in cold premeditation; a lank West Virginia mountaineer whose family name was the name of a clan prominent in one of the long-drawn-out hill-feuds of his native State; a plain bad man, whose chief claim to distinction was that he hailed originally from the Bowery in New York City; and one, the worst of them all, who was said to be the son of a pastor in a New England town. One by one, unerringly and swiftly, Uncle Tobe launched them through his scaffold floor to get whatever desserts await those who violate the laws of God and man by the violent shedding of innocent blood. When the sixth and last gunman came out of the prison proper into the prison enclosure— it was the former dentist, and being set, as the phrase runs, upon dying game, he wore a twisted grin upon his bleached face— there were six black boxes under the platform, five of them occupied, with their lids all in place, and one of them yet empty and open. In the act of mounting the steps the condemned craned his head sidewise, and at the sight of those coffins stretching along six in a row on the graveled courtyard, he made a cheap and sorry gibe. But when he stood beneath the cross-arm to be pinioned, his legs played him traitor. Those craven knees of his gave way under him, so that trusties had to hold the weakening ruffian upright while the executioner snugged the halter about his throat.

On this occasion Uncle Tobe elucidated the creed and the code of his profession for a reporter who had come all the way down from St. Louis to report the big hanging for his paper. Having covered the hanging at length, the

reporter stayed over one more day at the Palace Hotel in Chickaloosa to do a special article, which would be in part a character sketch and in part a straight interview, on the subject of the hangman. The article made a full page spread in the Sunday edition of the young man's paper, and thereby a reputation, which until this time had been more or less local, was given what approximated a national notoriety. Through a somewhat general reprinting of what the young man had written, and what his paper had published, the country at large eventually became acquainted with an ethical view-point which was already fairly familiar to nearly every resident in and about Chickaloosa. Reading the narrative, one living at a distance got an accurate picture of a personality elevated above the commonplace solely by the role which its owner filled; a picture of an old man thoroughly sincere and thoroughly conscientious; a man dull, earnest, and capable to his limits; a man who was neither morbid nor imaginative, but filled with rather a stupid gravity; a man canny about the pennies and affectionately inclined toward the dollars; a man honestly imbued with the idea that he was a public servant performing a necessary public service; a man without nerves, but in all other essentials a small-town man with a small-town mind; in short, saw Uncle Tobe as he really was. The reporter did something else which marked him as a craftsman. Without stating the fact in words, he nevertheless contrived to create in the lines which he wrote an atmosphere of self-defense enveloping the old man — or perhaps the better phrase would be self-extenuation. The reader was made to perceive that Dramm, being cognizant and mildly resentful of the attitude in which his own little world held him, by reason of the fatal work of his hands, sought after a semi apologetic fashion to offer a plea in abatement of public judgment, to set up a weight of moral evidence in his own behalf, and behind this in turn, and showing through it, might be sensed the shy pride of a shy man for labor undertaken with good motives and creditably performed. With no more than a pardonable broadening and exaggeration of the other's mode of speech, the reporter succeeded likewise in reproducing not only the language, but the wistful intent of what Uncle Tobe said to him. From this interview I propose now to quote to the extent of a few paragraphs. This is Uncle Tobe addressing the visiting correspondent:

"It stands to reason— don't it?— that these here sinful men have got to be hung, an' that somebody has got to hang 'em. The Good Book says an eye fur an eye an' a tooth fur a tooth an' a life fur a life. That's perzactly whut it says, an' I'm one whut believes the Bible frum kiver to kiver. These here boys that they bring in here have broke the law of Gawd an' the law of the land, an' they jest natchelly got to pay fur their devilment. That's so, ain't it? Well, then, that bein' so, I step forward an' do the job. Ef they was free men, walkin' around

like you an' me, I wouldn't lay the weight of my little finger on 'em to harm a single hair in their haids. Ef they hadn't done nothin' ag'in' the law, I'd be the last one to do 'em a hurt. I wisht you could make that p'int plain in the piece you aim to write, so's folks would understand jest how I feel — so's they'd understand that I don't bear no gredge ag'inst any livin' creature.

"Ef the job was left to some greenhawn he'd mebbe botch it up an' make them boys suffer more'n there's any call fur. Sech things have happened, a plenty times before now ez you yourself doubtless know full well. But I don't botch it up. I ain't braggin' none whilst I'm sayin' this to you; I'm jest tellin' you. I kin take an oath that I ain't never botched up one of these jobs yit, not frum the very fust. The warden or Dr. Slattery, the prison physician, or anybody round this town that knows the full circumstances kin tell you the same, ef you ast 'em. You see, son, I ain't never nervoused up like some men would be in my place. I'm always jest ez ca'm like ez whut you are this minute. The way I look at it, I'm jest a chosen instrument of the law. I regard it ez a trust that I'm called on to perform, on account of me havin' a natchel knack in that 'special direction. Some men have gifts fur one thing an' some men have gifts fur another thing. It would seem this is the perticular thing— hangin' men— that I've got a gift fur. So, sech bein' the case, I don't worry none about it beforehand, nor I don't worry none after it's all over with, neither. With me handlin' the details the whole thing is over an' done with accordin' to the law an' the statutes an' the jedgment of the high court in less time than some people would take fussin' round, gittin' ready. The way I look at it, it's a mercy an' a blessin' to all concerned to have somebody in charge that knows how to hang a man.

"Why, it's come to sech a pass that when there's a hangin' comin' off anywhere in this part of the country they send fur me to be present ez a kind of an expert. I've been to hangin's all over this State, an' down into Louisiana, an' wunst over into Texas in order to give the sheriffs the benefit of my experience an' my advice. I make it a rule not never to take no money fur doin' sech ez that— only my travelin' expenses an' my tavern bills; that's all I ever charge 'em. But here in Chickaloosa the conditions is different, an' the gover'mint pays me seventy-five dollars a hangin'. I figger that it's wuth it, too. The Bible says the laborer is worthy of his hire. I try to be worthy of the hire I git. I certainly aim to earn it— an' I reckin I do earn it, takin' everything into consideration— the responsibility an' all. Ef there's any folks that think I earn my money easy— seventy-five dollars fur whut looks like jest a few minutes' work— I'd like fur 'em to stop an' think ef they'd consider themselves qualified to hang ez many men ez I have without never botchin' up a single job."

That was his chief boast, if boasting it might be called— that he never botched the job. It is the common history of common hangmen, so I've been told, that they come after a while to be possessed of the devils of cruelty, and to take pleasure in the exercise of their most grim calling. If this be true, then surely Uncle Tobe was to all outward appearances an exception to the rule. Never by word or look or act was he caught gloating over his victims; always he exhibited a merciful swiftness in the dread preliminaries and in the act of execution itself. At the outset he had shown deftness. With frequent practice he grew defter still. He contrived various devices for expediting the proceeding. For instance, after prolonged experiments, conducted in privacy, he evolved a harness-like arrangement of leather belts and straps, made all in one piece, and fitted with buckles and snaffles. With this, in a marvelously brief space, he could bind his man at elbows and wrists, at knees and ankles, so that in less time almost than it would take to describe the process, the latter stood upon the trap, as a shape deprived of motion, fully caparisoned for the end. He fitted the inner side of the crosspiece of the gallows with pegs upon which the rope rested, entirely out of sight of him upon whom it was presently to be used, until the moment when Uncle Tobe, stretching a long arm upward, brought it down, all reeved and ready. He hit upon the expedient of slickening the noose parts with yellow bar soap so that it would run smoothly in the loop and tighten smartly, without undue tugging. He might have used grease or lard, but soap was tidier, and Uncle Tobe, as has been set forth, was a tidy man.

After the first few hangings his system began to follow a regular routine. From somewhere to the west or southwest of Chickaloosa the deputy marshals would bring in a man consigned to die. The prison people, taking their charge over from them, would house him in a cell of a row of cells made doubly tight and doubly strong for such as he; in due season the warden would notify Uncle Tobe of the date fixed for the inflicting of the penalty. Four or five days preceding the day, Uncle Tobe would pay a visit to the prison, timing his arrival so that he reached there just before the exercise hour for the inmates of a certain cell-tier. Being admitted, he would climb sundry flights of narrow iron stairs and pause just outside a crisscrossed door of iron slats while a turnkey, entering that door and locking it behind him, would open a smaller door set flat in the wall of damp-looking grey stones and invite the man caged up inside to come forth for his daily walk. Then, while the captive paced the length and breadth of the narrow corridor back and across, to and fro, up and down, with the futile restlessness of a cat animal in a zoo, his feet clumping on the flagged flooring, and the watchful turnkey standing by, Uncle Tobe, having flattened his lean form in a niche behind the outer lattice, with an appraising eye would

consider the shifting figure through a convenient cranny of the wattled metal strips. He took care to keep himself well back out of view, but since he stood in shadow while the one he marked so keenly moved in a flood of daylight filtering down through a skylight in the ceiling of the cell block, the chances were the prisoner could not have made out the indistinct form of the stranger anyhow. Five or ten minutes of such scrutiny of his man was all Uncle Tobe ever desired. In his earlier days before he took up this present employment, he had been an adept at guessing the hoof-weight of the beeves and swine in which he dealt. That early experience stood him in good stead now; he took no credit to himself for his accuracy in estimating the bulk of a living human being.

Downstairs, on the way out of the place, if by chance he encountered the warden in his office, the warden, in all likelihood, would say: "Well, how about it this time, Uncle Tobe?"

And Uncle Tobe would make some such answer as this:

"Well, suh, accordin' to my reckonin' this here one will heft about a hund'ed an' sixty-five pound, ez he stands now. How's he takin' it, warden?"

"Oh, so-so."

"He looks to me like he was broodin' a right smart," the expert might say. "I jedge he ain't relishin' his vittles much, neither. Likely he'll worry three or four pound more off'n his bones 'twixt now an' Friday mornin'. He oughter run about one hund'ed an' sixty or mebbe one-sixty-one by then."

"How much drop do you allow to give him?"

"Don't worry about that, suh," would be the answer given with a contemplative squint of the placid, pale eye. "I reckin my calculations won't be very fur out of the way, ef any."

They never were, either.

On the day before the day, he would be a busy man, what with superintending the fitting together and setting up of the painted lumber pieces upon which tomorrow's capital tragedy would be played; and, when this was done to his liking, trying the drop to see that the boards had not warped, and trying the rope for possible flaws in its fabric or weave, and proving to his own satisfaction that the mechanism of the wooden lever which operated to spring the trap worked with an instantaneous smoothness. To every detail he gave a painstaking supervision, guarding against all possible contingencies. Regarding the trustworthiness of the rope he was especially careful. When this particular hanging was concluded, the scaffold would be taken apart and stored away for subsequent use, but for each hanging the government furnished a brand new rope, especially made at a factory in New Orleans at a cost of eight dollars. The spectators generally cut the rope up into short lengths after it had fulfilled its ordained purpose, and carried the pieces away for souvenirs. So always there

was a new rope provided, and its dependability must be ascertained by prolonged and exhaustive tests before Uncle Tobe would approve of it. Seeing him at his task, with his coat and waistcoat off, his sleeves rolled back, and his intent mien, one realized why, as a hangman, he had been a success. He left absolutely nothing to chance. When he was through with his experimenting, the possibility of an exhibition of the proneness of inanimate objects to misbehave in emergencies had been reduced to a minimum.

Before daylight next morning Uncle Tobe, dressed in sober black, like a country undertaker, and with his mid-Victorian whiskers all cleansed and combed, would present himself at his post of duty. He would linger in the background, an unobtrusive bystander, until the condemned sinner had gone through the mockery of eating his last breakfast; and, still making himself inconspicuous during the march to the gallows, would trail at the very tail of the line, while the short, straggling procession was winding out through gas-lit murky hallways into the pale dawn-light slanting over the walls of the gravel-paved, high-fenced compound built against the outer side of the prison close. He would wait on, always holding himself discreetly aloof from the middle breadth of the picture, until the officiating clergyman had done with his sacred offices; would wait until the white-faced wretch on whose account the government was making all this pother and taking all this trouble, had mumbled his farewell words this side of eternity; would continue to wait, very patiently, indeed, until the warden nodded to him. Then, with his trussing harness tucked under his arm, and the black cap neatly folded and bestowed in a handy side-pocket of his coat, Uncle Tobe would advance forward, and laying a kindly, almost a paternal hand upon the shoulder of the man who must die, would steer him to a certain spot in the centre of the platform, just beneath a heavy cross-beam. There would follow a quick shifting of the big, gnarled hands over the unresisting body of the doomed man, and almost instantly, so it seemed to those who watched, all was in order: the arms of the murderer drawn rearward and pressed in close against his ribs by a broad girth encircling his trunk at the elbows, his wrists caught together in buckled leather cuffs behind his back; his knees and his ankles fast in leathern loops which joined to the rest of the apparatus by means of a transverse strap drawn tautly down the length of his legs, at the back; the black-cloth head-bag with its peaked crown in place; the noose fitted; the hobbled and hooded shape perhaps swaying a trifle this way and that; and Uncle Tobe on his tiptoes stepping swiftly over to a tilted wooden lever which projected out and upward through the planked floor, like the handle of a steering oar.

It was at this point that the timorous-hearted among the witnesses turned their heads away. Those who were more resolute— or as the case might be,

more morbid— and who continued to look, were made aware of a freak of physics which in accord, I suppose, with the laws of horizontals and parallels decrees that a man cut off short from life by quick and violent means and fallen prone upon the earth, seems to shrink up within himself and to grow shorter in body and in sprawling limb, whereas one hanged with a rope by the neck has the semblance of stretching out to unseemly and unhuman lengths all the while that he dangles.

Having repossessed himself of his leather cinches, Uncle Tobe would presently depart for his home, stopping en route at the Chickaloosa National Bank to deposit the greater part of the seventy-five dollars which the warden, as representative of a satisfied Federal government, had paid him, cash down on the spot. To his credit in the bank the old man had a considerable sum, all earned after this mode, and all drawing interest at the legal rate. On his arrival at his home, Mr. Dramm would first of all have his breakfast. This over, he would open the second drawer of an old black-walnut bureau, and from under a carefully folded pile of spare undergarments would withdraw a small, cheap book, bound in imitation red leather, and bearing the word "Accounts" in faded script upon the cover. On a clean, blue-lined page of the book, in a cramped handwriting, he would write in ink, the name, age, height, and weight of the man he had just despatched out of life; also the hour and minute when the drop fell, the time elapsing before the surgeons pronounced the man dead; the disposition which had been made of the body, and any other data which seemed to him pertinent to the record. Invariably he concluded the entry thus: "Neck was broke by the fall. Everything passed off smooth." From his first time of service he had never failed to make such notations following a hanging, he being in this, as in all things, methodical and exact.

The rest of the day, in all probabilities, would be given to small devices of his own. If the season suited he might work in his little truck garden at the back of the house, or if it were the fall of the year he might go rabbit hunting; then again he might go for a walk. When the evening paper came— Chickaloosa had two papers, a morning paper and an evening paper— he would read through the account given of the event at the prison, and would pencil any material errors which had crept into the reporter's story, and then he would clip out the article and file it away with a sheaf of similar clippings in the same bureau drawer where he kept his account-book and his underclothing. This done he would eat his supper, afterward washing and wiping the supper dishes and, presently bedtime for him having arrived, he would go to bed and sleep very soundly and very peacefully all night. Sometimes his heart trouble brought on smothering spells which woke him up. He rarely had dreams, and never any dreams unpleasantly associated with his avocation. Probably never was there a

man blessed with less of an imagination than this same Tobias Dramm. It seemed almost providential, considering the calling he followed, that he altogether lacked the faculty of introspection, so that neither his memory nor his conscience ever troubled him.

Thus far I have made no mention of his household, and for the very good reason that he had none. In his youth he had not married. The forked tongue of town slander had it that he was too stingy to support a wife, and on top of that expense, to run the risk of having children to rear. He had no close kindred excepting a distant cousin or two in Chickaloosa. He kept no servant, and for this there was a double cause. First, his parsimonious instincts; second, the fact that for love or money no negro would minister to him, and in this community negroes were the only household servants to be had. Among the darkies there was current a belief that at dead of night he dug up the bodies of those he had hanged and peddled the cadavers to the "student doctors." They said he was in active partnership with the devil; they said the devil took over the souls of his victims, paying therefor in red-hot dollars, after the hangman was done with their bodies. The belief of the negroes that this unholy traffic existed amounted with them to a profound conviction. They held Mr. Dramm in an awesome and horrified veneration, bowing to him most respectfully when they met him, and then sidling off hurriedly. It would have taken strong horses to drag any black-skinned resident of Chickaloosa to the portals of the little three-roomed frame cottage in the outskirts of the town which Uncle Tobe tenanted. Therefore he lived by himself, doing his own skimpy marketing and his own simple housekeeping. Loneliness was a part of the penalty he paid for following the calling of a gallowsmith.

Among members of his own race he had no close friends. For the most part the white people did not exactly shun him, but, as the saying goes in the Southwest, they let him be. They were well content to enshrine him as a local celebrity, and ready enough to point him out to visitors, but by an unwritten communal law the line was drawn there. He was as one set apart for certain necessary undertakings, and yet denied the intimacy of his kind because he performed them acceptably. If his aloof and solitary state ever distressed him, at least he gave no outward sign of it, but went his uncomplaining way, bearing himself with a homely, silent dignity, and enveloped in those invisible garments of superstition which local prejudice and local ignorance had conjured up.

Ready as he was when occasion suited, to justify his avocation in the terms of that same explanation which he had given to the young reporter from St. Louis that time, and greatly though he may have craved to gain the good-will of his fellow citizens, he was never known openly to rebel against his lot. The

nearest he ever came to doing this was once when he met upon the street a woman of his acquaintance who had suffered a recent bereavement in the death of her only daughter. He approached her, offering awkward condolences, and at once was moved to a further expression of his sympathy for her in her great loss by trying to shake her hand. At the touch of his fingers to hers the woman, already in a mood of grief bordering on hysteria, shrank back screaming out that his hand smelled of the soap with which he coated his gallows-nooses. She ran away from him, crying out as she ran that he was accursed; that he was marked with that awful smell and could not rid himself of it. To those who had witnessed this scene the hangman, with rather an injured and bewildered air, made explanation. The poor woman, he said, was wrong; although in a way of speaking she was right, too. He did, indeed, use the same yellow bar soap for washing his hands that he used for anointing his ropes. It was a good soap, and cheap; he had used the same brand regularly for years in cleansing his hands. Since it answered the first purpose so well, what possible harm could there be in slicking the noose of the rope with it when he was called upon to conduct one of his jobs over up at the prison? Apparently he was at a loss to fathom the looks they cast at him when he had finished with this statement and had asked this question. He began a protest, but broke off quickly and went away shaking his head as though puzzled that ordinarily sane folks should be so squeamish and so unreasonable. But he kept on using the soap as before.

Until now this narrative has been largely preamble. The real story follows. It concerns itself with the birth of an imagination.

In his day Uncle Tobe hanged all sorts and conditions of men— men who kept on vainly hoping against hope for an eleventh-hour reprieve long after the last chance of reprieve had vanished, and who on the gallows begged piteously for five minutes, for two minutes, for one minute more of precious grace; negroes gone drunk on religious exhortation who died in a frenzy, sure of salvation, and shouting out halleluiahs; Indians upborne and stayed by a racial stoicism; Chinamen casting stolid, slant-eyed glances over the rim of the void before them and filled with the calmness of the fatalist who believes that whatever is to be, is to be; white men upon whom at the last, when all prospect of intervention was gone, a mental numbness mercifully descended with the result that they came to the rope's embrace like men in a walking coma, with glazed, unseeing eyes, and dragging feet; other white men who summoned up a mockery of bravado and uttered poor jests from between lips drawn back in defiant sneering as they gave themselves over to the hangman, so that only Uncle Tobe, feeling their flesh crawling under their grave-clothes as he tied them up, knew a hideous terror berode their bodies. At length, in

the tenth year of his career as a paid executioner he was called upon to visit his professional attentions upon a man different from any of those who had gone down the same dread chute.

The man in question was a train-bandit popularly known as the Lone-Hand Kid, because always he conducted his nefarious operations without confederates. He was a squat, dark ruffian, as malignant as a moccasin snake, and as dangerous as one. He was filthy in speech and vile in habit, being in his person most unpicturesque and most unwholesome, and altogether seemed a creature more viper than he was man. The sheriffs of two border States and the officials of a contiguous reservation sought for him many times, long and diligently, before a posse overcame him in the hills by over-powering odds and took him alive at the cost of two of its members killed outright and a third badly crippled. So soon as surgeons plugged up the holes in his hide which members of the vengeful posse shot into him after they had him surrounded and before his ammunition gave out, he was brought to bar to answer for the unprovoked murder of a postal clerk on a transcontinental limited. No time was wasted in hurrying his trial through to its conclusion; it was felt that there was crying need to make an example of this red-handed desperado. Having been convicted with commendable celerity, the Lone-Hand Kid was transferred to Chickaloosa and strongly confined there against the day of Uncle Tobe's ministrations upon him.

From the very hour that the prosecution was started, the Lone-Hand Kid, whose real name was the prosaic name of Smith, objected strongly to this procedure which in certain circles is known as "railroading." He insisted that he was being legally expedited out of life on his record and not on the evidence. There were plenty of killings for any one of which he might have been tried and very probably found guilty, but he reckoned it a profound injustice that he should be indicted, tried, and condemned for a killing he had not committed. By his code he would not have rebelled strongly against being punished for the evil things he himself had done; he did dislike, though, being hanged for something some rival hold-up man had done. Such was his contention, and he reiterated it with a persistence which went far toward convincing some people that after all there might be something in what he said, although among honest men there was no doubt whatsoever that the world would be a sweeter and a healthier place to live in with the Lone-Hand Kid entirely translated out of it.

Having been dealt with, as he viewed the matter, most unfairly, the condemned killer sullenly refused to make submission to his appointed destiny. On the car journey up to Chickaloosa, although still weak from his wounds and securely ironed besides, he made two separate efforts to assault

his guards. In his cell, a few days later, he attacked a turnkey in pure wantonness seemingly, since even with the turnkey eliminated, there still was no earthly prospect for him to escape from the steel strong-box which enclosed him. That was what it truly was, too, a strong-box, for the storing of many living pledges held as surety for the peace and good order of the land. Of all these human collaterals who were penned up there with him, he, for the time being, was most precious in the eyes of the law. Therefore the law took no chance of losing him, and this he must have known when he maimed his keeper.

After this outbreak he was treated as a vicious wild beast, which, undoubtedly, was exactly what he was. He was chained by his ankles to his bed, and his food was shoved in to him through the bars by a man who kept himself at all times well out of reach of the tethered prisoner. Having been rendered helpless, he swore then that when finally they unbarred his cell door and sought to fetch him forth to garb him for his journey to the gallows, he would fight them with his teeth and his bare hands for so long as he had left an ounce of strength with which to fight. Bodily force would then be the only argument remaining to him by means of which he might express his protest, and he told all who cared to listen that most certainly he meant to invoke it.

There was a code of decorum which governed the hangings at Chickaloosa, and the resident authorities dreaded mightily the prospect of having it profaned by spiteful and unmannerly behavior on the part of the Lone-Hand Kid. There was said to be in all the world just one living creature for whom the rebellious captive entertained love and respect, and this person was his half-sister. With the good name of his prison at heart, the warden put up the money that paid her fare from her home down in the Indian Territory. Two days before the execution she arrived, a slab-sided, shabby drudge of a woman. Having first been primed and prompted for her part, she was sent to him, and in his cell she wept over the fettered prisoner, and with him she pleaded until he promised her, reluctantly, he would make no physical struggle on being led out to die.

He kept his word, too; but it was to develop that the pledge of non-resistance, making his body passive to the will of his jailers, did not, according to the Lone-Hand Kid's sense of honor, include the muscles of his tongue. His hour came at sunup of a clear, crisp, October morning, when a rime of frost made a silver carpet upon the boarded floor of the scaffold, and in the east the heavens glowed an irate red, like the reflections of a distant bale-fire. From his cell door before the head warder summoned him forth, he drove away with terrible oaths the clergyman who had come to offer him religious consolation. At daylight, when the first beams of young sunlight were stealing in at the

slitted windows to streak the whitewashed wall behind him with a barred pattern of red, like brush strokes of fresh paint, he ate his last breakfast with foul words between bites, and outside, a little later, in the shadow of the crosstree from which shortly he would dangle in the article of death, a stark offence before the sight of mortal eyes, he halted and stood reviling all who had a hand in furthering and compassing his condemnation. Profaning the name of his Maker with every breath, he cursed the President of the United States who had declined to reprieve him, the justices of the high court who had denied his appeal from the verdict of the lower, the judge who had tried him, the district attorney who had prosecuted him, the grand jurors who had indicted him, the petit jurors who had voted to convict him, the witnesses who had testified against him, the posse men who had trapped him, consigning them all and singly to everlasting damnation. Before this pouring flood of blasphemy the minister, who had followed him up the gallows steps in the vain hope that when the end came some faint sign of contrition might be vouchsafed by this poor lost soul, hid his face in his hands as though fearing an offended Deity would send a bolt from on high to blast all who had been witnesses to such impiety and such impenitence.

The indignant warden moved to cut short this lamentable spectacle. He signed with his hand for Uncle Tobe to make haste, and Uncle Tobe, obeying, stepped forward from where he had been waiting in the rear rank of the shocked spectators. Upon him the defiant ruffian turned the forces of his sulphurous hate, full-gush. First over one shoulder and then over the other as the executioner worked with swift fingers to bind him into a rigid parcel of a man, he uttered what was both a dreadful threat and a yet more dreadful promise.

"I ain't blamin' these other folks here," he proclaimed. "Some of 'em are here because it's their duty to be here, an' ef these others kin git pleasure out of seein' a man croaked that ain't afeared of bein' croaked, they're welcome to enjoy the free show, so fur ez I'm concerned. But you— you stingy, white-whiskered old snake!— you're doin' this fur the little piece of dirty money that's in it fur you.

"Listen to me, you dog: I know I'm headin' straight fur hell, an' I ain't skeered to go, neither. But I ain't goin' to stay there. I'm comin' back fur you! I'm comin' back this very night to git you an' take your old, withered, black soul back down to hell with me. No need fur you to try to hide. Wharever you hide I'll seek you out. You can't git away frum me. You kin lock your door an' you kin lock your winder, an' you kin hide your head under the bedclothes, but I'll find you wharever you are, remember that! An' you're goin' back down there with me!

"Now go ahead an' hang me— I'm all set fur it ef you are!"

Through this harangue Uncle Tobe worked on, outwardly composed. Whatever his innermost emotions may have been, his expression gave no hint that the mouthings of the Lone-Hand Kid had sunk in. He drew the peaked black sack down across the swollen face, hiding the glaring eyes and the lips that snarled. He brought the rope forward over the cloaked head and drew the noose in tautly, with the knot adjusted to fit snugly just under the left ear, so that the hood took on the semblance of a well-filled, inverted bag with its puckered end fluting out in the effect of a dark ruff upon the hunched shoulders of its wearer. Stepping back, he gripped the handle of the lever-bar, and with all his strength jerked it toward him. A square in the floor opened as the trap was flapped back upon its hinges, and through the opening the haltered form shot straight downward to bring up with a great jerk, and after that to dangle like a plumb-bob on a string. Under the quick strain the gallows-arm creaked and whined; in the silence which followed the hangman was heard to exhale his breath in a vast puff of relief. His hand went up to his forehead to wipe beads of sweat which, for all that the morning was cool almost to coldness, had suddenly popped out through his skin. He for one was mighty glad the thing was done, and, as he in this moment figured, well done.

But for once and once only as those saw who had the hardihood to look, Uncle Tobe had botched up a job. Perhaps it was because of his great haste to make an end of a scandalous scene; perhaps because the tirade of the bound malefactor had discomfited him and made his fingers fumble this one time at their familiar task. Whatever the cause, it was plainly enough to be seen that the heavy knot had not cracked the Lone-Hand Kid's spine. The noose, as was ascertained later, had caught on the edge of the broad jawbone, and the man, instead of dying instantly, was strangling to death by degrees and with much struggling.

In the next half minute a thing even more grievous befell. The broad strap which girthed the murderer's trunk just above the bend of the elbows, held fast, but the rest of the harness, having been improperly snaffled on, loosened and fell away from the twitching limbs so that as the elongated body twisted to and fro in half circles, the lower arms winnowed the air in foreshortened and contorted flappings, and the freed legs drew up and down convulsively.

Very naturally, Uncle Tobe was chagrined; perhaps he had hidden within him emotions deeper than those bred of a personal mortification. At any rate, after a quick, distressed glance through the trap at the writhing shape of agony below, he turned his eyes from it and looked steadfastly at the high wall facing him. It chanced to be the western wall, which was bathed in a ruddy glare where the shafts of the upcoming sun, lifting over the panels at the opposite

side of the fenced enclosure, began to fall diagonally upon the whitewashed surface just across. And now, against that glowing plane of background opposite him, there appeared as he looked the slanted shadow of a swaying rope framed in at right and at left by two broader, deeper lines which were the shadows marking the timber uprights that supported the scaffold at its nearer corners; and also there appeared, midway between the framing shadows, down at the lower end of the slender line of the cord, an exaggerated, wriggling manifestation like the reflection of a huge and misshapen jumping-jack, which first would lengthen itself grotesquely, and then abruptly would shorten up, as the tremors running through the dying man's frame altered the silhouette cast by the oblique sunbeams; and along with this stenciled vision, as a part of it, occurred shifting shadow movements of two legs dancing busily on nothing, and of two foreshortened arms, flapping up and down. It was no pretty picture to look upon, yet Uncle Tobe, plucking with a tremulous hand at the ends of his beard, continued to stare at the apparition, daunted and fascinated. To him it must have seemed as though the Lone-Hand Kid, with a malignant pertinacity which lingered on in him after by rights the last breath should have been squeezed out of his wretched carcass, was painting upon those tall planks the picture and the presentiment of his farewell threat.

Nearly half an hour passed before the surgeons consented that the body should be taken down and boxed. His harness which had failed him having been returned to its owner, he made it up into a compact bundle and collected his regular fee and went away very quietly. Ordinarily, following his habitual routine, he would have gone across town to his little house; would have washed his hands with a bar of the yellow laundry soap; would have cooked and eaten his breakfast, and then, after tidying up the kitchen, would have made the customary entry in his red-backed account-book. But this morning he seemed to have no appetite, and besides, he felt an unaccountable distaste for his home, with its silence and its emptiness. Somehow he much preferred the open air, with the skies over him and wide reaches of space about him; which was doubly strange, seeing that he was no lover of nature, but always theretofore had accepted sky and grass and trees as matters of course — things as inevitable and commonplace as the weathers and the winds.

Throughout the day and until well on toward night he was beset by a curious, uncommon restlessness which made it hard for him to linger long in any one spot. He idled about the streets of the town; twice he wandered aimlessly miles out along roads beyond the town. All the while, without cessation, there was a tugging and nagging at his nerve-ends, a constant inward irritation which laid a hold on his thoughts, twitching them off into unpleasant channels. It kept him from centering his interest upon the casual

things about him; inevitably it turned his mind back to inner contemplations. The sensation was mental largely, but it seemed so nearly akin to the physical that to himself Uncle Tobe diagnosed it as the after-result of a wrench for his weak heart. You see, never before having experienced the reactions of a suddenly quickened imagination, he, naturally, was at a loss to account for it on any other ground.

Also he was weighted down by an intense depression that his clean record of ten years should have been marred by a mishap; this regret, constantly recurring in his thoughts, served to make him unduly sensitive. He had a feeling that people stared hard at him as they passed and, after he had gone by, that they turned to stare at him some more. Under this scrutiny he gave no sign of displeasure, but inwardly he resented it. Of course these folks had heard of what had happened up at the prison, and no doubt among themselves would be commenting upon the tragedy and gossiping about it. Well, any man was liable to make a slip once; nobody was perfect. It would never happen again; he was sure of that much.

All day he mooned about, a brooding, uneasy figure, speaking to scarcely any one at all, but followed wherever he went by curious eyes. It was late in the afternoon before it occurred to him that he had eaten nothing all day, and that he had failed to deposit the money he had earned that morning. It would be too late now to get into the bank; the bank, which opened early, closed at three o'clock. To-morrow would do as well. Although he had no zest for food despite his fast, he figured maybe it was the long abstinence which was filling his head with such flighty notions, so he entered a small, smelly lunch-room near the railroad station, and made a pretence of eating an order of ham and eggs. He tried not to notice that the black waiter who served him shrank away from his proximity, shying off like a breechy colt, from the table where Uncle Tobe sat, whenever his business brought him into that part of the place. What difference did a fool darky's fears make, anyway?

Dusk impended when he found himself approaching his three-room house, looming up as a black oblong, where it stood aloof from its neighbors, with vacant lands about it. The house faced north and south. On the nearer edge of the unfenced common, which extended up to it on the eastern side, he noted as he drew close that somebody— perhaps a boy, or more probably a group of boys— had made a bonfire of fallen autumn leaves and brushwood. Going away as evening came, they had left their bonfire to burn itself out. The smoldering pile was almost under his bedroom window. He regretted rather that the boys had gone; an urgent longing for human companionship of some sort, however remote— a yearning he had never before felt with such acuteness— was upon him. Tormented, as he still was, by strange vagaries, he

had almost to force himself to unlock the front door and cross the threshold into the gloomy interior of his cottage. But before entering, and while he yet wrestled with a vague desire to retrace his steps and go back down the street, he stooped and picked up his copy of the afternoon paper which the carrier, with true carrier-like accuracy, had flung upon the narrow front porch.

Inside the house, the floor gave off sharp little sounds, the warped floor squeaking and wheezing under the weight of his tread. Subconsciously, this irritated him; a lot of causes were combining to harass him, it seemed; there was a general conspiracy on the part of objects animate and inanimate to make him— well, suspicious. And Uncle Tobe was not given to nervousness, which made it worse. He was ashamed of himself that he should be in such state. Glancing about him in a furtive, almost in an apprehensive way, he crossed the front room to the middle room, which was his bed chamber, the kitchen being the room at the rear. In the middle room he lit a coal-oil lamp which stood upon a small centre table. Alongside the table he opened out the paper and glanced at a caption running half-way across the top of the front page; then, fretfully he crumpled up the printed sheet in his hand and let it fall upon the floor. He had no desire to read the account of his one failure. Why should the editor dwell at such length and with so prodigal a display of black head-line type upon this one bungled job when every other job of all the jobs that had gone before, had been successful in every detail? Let's see, now, how many men had he hanged with precision and with speed and with never an accident to mar the proceedings? A long, martialed array of names came trooping into his brain, and along with the names the memories of the faces of all those dead men to whom the names had belonged. The faces began to pass before him in a mental procession. This wouldn't do. Since there were no such things as ghosts or haunts; since, as all sensible men agreed, the dead never came back from the grave, it was a foolish thing for him to be creating those unpleasant images in his mind. He shook his head to clear it of recollections which were the better forgotten. He shook it again and again.

He would get to bed; a good night's rest would make him feel better and more natural. It was an excellent idea— this idea of sleep. So he raised the bottommost half of the curtain-less side window for air, drew down the shade by the string suspended from its lower cross breadth, until the lower edge of the shade came even with the window sash, and undressed himself to his undergarments. He was about to blow out the light when he remembered he had left the money that was the price of his morning's work in his trousers which hung, neatly folded, across the back of a chair by the centre table. He was in the act of withdrawing the bills from the bottom of one of the trouser-pockets when right at his feet there was a quick, queer sound of rustling. As he

glared down, startled, out from under the crumpled newspaper came timorously creeping a half-grown, sickly looking rat, minus its tail, having lost its tail in a trap, perhaps, or possibly in a battle with other rats.

At best a rat is no pleasant bedroom companion, and besides, Uncle Tobe had been seriously annoyed. He kicked out with one of his bare feet, taking the rat squarely in its side as it scurried for its hole in the wainscoting. He hurt it badly. It landed with a thump ten feet away and sprawled out on the floor kicking and squealing feebly. Holding the wad of bills in his left hand, with his right Uncle Tobe deftly plucked up the crushed vermin by the loose fold of skin at the nape of its neck, and with a quick flirt of his arm tossed it sidewise from him to cast it out of the half-opened window. He returned to the table and bent over and blew down the lamp chimney, and in the darkness felt his way across the room to his bed. He stretched himself full length upon it, drew the cotton comforter up to cover him, and shoved the money under the pillow.

His fingers were relaxing their grip on the bills when he saw something — something which instantly turned him stiff and rigid and deathly cold all over, leaving him without will-power or strength to move his head or shift his gaze. Over the white, plastered wall alongside his bed an unearthly red glow sprang up, turning a deeper, angrier red as it spread and widened. Against this background next stood out two perpendicular masses like the broad shadows of uprights— like the supporting uprights of a gallows, say— and in the squared space of brightness thus marked off, depending midway from the shadow crossing it at right angles at the top, appeared a filmy, fine line, which undoubtedly was the shadow of a cord, and at the end of the cord dangled a veritable jumping-jack of a silhouette, turning and writhing and jerking, with a shape which in one breath grotesquely lengthened and in the next shrank up to half its former dimensions, which kicked out with indistinct movements of its lower extremities, which flapped with foreshortened strokes of the shadowy upper limbs, which altogether so contorted itself as to form the likeness of a thing all out of perspective, all out of proportion, and all most horribly reminiscent.

A heart with valves already weakened by a chronic affection can stand just so many shocks in a given time and no more.

A short time later in this same night, at about eight-forty-five o'clock, to be exact, a man who lived on the opposite side of the unfenced common gave the alarm of fire over the telephone. The Chickaloosa fire engine and hose reels came at once, and with the machines numerous citizens.

In a way of speaking, it turned out to be a false alarm. A bonfire of leaves and brush, abandoned at dusk by the boys who kindled it, had, after

smoldering a while, sprung up briskly and, flaming high, was now scorching the clap-boarded side of the Dramm house.

There was no need for the firemen to uncouple a line of hose from the reel. While two of them made shift to get retorts of a patent extinguisher from the truck, two more, wondering why Uncle Tobe, even if in bed and asleep at so early an hour, had not been aroused by the noise of the crowd's coming, knocked at his front door. There being no response from within at once, they suspected something must be amiss. With heaves of their shoulders they forced the door off its hinges, and entering in company, they groped their passage through the empty front room into the bedroom behind it, which was lighted after a fashion by the reflection from the mounting flames without.

The tenant was in bed; he lay on his side with his face turned to the wall; he made no answer to their hails. When they bent over him they knew why. No need to touch him, then, with that look on his face and that stare out of his popped eyes. He was dead, all right enough; but plainly had not been dead long; not more than a few minutes, apparently. One of his hands was shoved up under his pillow with the fingers touching a small roll containing seven ten-dollar bills and one five-dollar bill; the other hand still gripped a fold of the coverlet as though the fatal stroke had come upon the old man as he lifted the bedclothing to draw it up over his face. These incidental facts were noted down later after the coroner had been called to take charge; they were the subject of considerable comment next day when the inquest took place. The coroner was of the opinion that the old man had been killed by a heart seizure, and that he had died on the instant the attack came.

However, this speculation had no part in the thoughts of the two startled firemen at the moment of the finding of the body. What most interested them, next only to the discovery of the presence of the dead man there in the same room with them, was a queer combination of shadows which played up and down against the wall beyond the bed, it being plainly visible in the glare of the small conflagration just outside.

With one accord they turned about, and then they saw the cause of the phenomenon, and realized that it was not very much of a phenomenon after all, although unusual enough to constitute a rather curious circumstance. A crippled, tail-less rat had somehow entangled its neck in a loop at the end of the dangling cord of the half-drawn shade at the side window on the opposite side of the room and, being too weak to wriggle free, was still hanging there, jerking and kicking, midway of the window opening. The glow of the pile of burning leaves and brush behind and beyond it, brought out its black outlines with remarkable clearness.

The patterned shadow upon the wall, though, disappeared in the same instant that the men outside began spraying their chemical compound from the two extinguishers upon the ambitious bonfire to douse it out, and one of the firemen slapped the rat down to the floor and killed it with a stamp of his foot.

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11: The Greater Sin

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 22 Jan 1937

TWO short stories with this same title, both by Mark Hellinger, were published in the Sydney Daily Telegraph. Just for interest's sake, they both appear here. This 1937 story does not appear in my collection "Mark Hellinger's Broadway: 1930s", while the 1941 story does appear in "Mark Hellinger's Broadway: 1940s". Both these collections are available free at MobileRead's Patricia Clark memorial Library.

SONNY RYAN crushed the newspaper he had been reading. His lips worked nervously.

"The rat," he breathed aloud. "The dirty, double-crossin' rat!"

It grieves me, gentle reader, to tell you that Mr. Ryan was talking of his wife when he mentioned rodents. He felt that he had genuine reason to be angry. And I, for one, am not going to argue with him. For Sonny was— and is— one of the very toughest gentlemen it has ever been your good fortune not to meet. The police in a certain West Side station house will bear out my statement. For years, whenever anything went wrong in that precinct, it was the habit of the boys in blue to pick up Mr. Ryan, and ask him what he knew about the crime. And Mr. Ryan never told. It was his proudest boast that he had never squealed on a pal, and that, no matter what happened, he never would.

And why, you will ask, should such a sterling gentleman now be pacing his room, and referring to the sweet woman as a "rat"?

Sonny had always believed in the little woman. Why, there wasn't a girl in town who wore better clothing or had better imitation jewels. He had married her, and he had been very happy with her.

Many of his friends knew that Mrs. Ryan wasn't as lily-white as her husband thought her to be. There wasn't a mug in the neighborhood who wasn't aware of the fact that she and Tony Maginto were giving Sonny Ryan plenty of run-around. But, as always, the husband was the last one to learn about it.

So time had gone by peacefully enough, with Mrs. Ryan leaving her house every now and then to visit her sick mother. Even though she sometimes failed to return for two or three days, Mr. Ryan didn't mind that, just so long as she didn't ask him to visit any sick mother-in-law, everything was all right with him.

Then, suddenly, came the great shock. Tony Maginto was arrested on a charge of murder— and his alibi was Mrs. Sonny Ryan!

He couldn't have committed the murder, he claimed, because he was with Mrs. Ryan when the crime occurred. All this information was known to Mr. Maginto's attorneys and to Mrs. Ryan— but to no one else. She was to be the surprise witness during the trial; and she was to be the instrument by which Tony would be freed.

Several times during the weeks that followed, the lady attempted to tell her husband about it. But she couldn't bring herself to do it. And now the entire thing was out. The whole story was told completely— and smeared over the front page— in the paper that Sonny Ryan had crushed in a wad and tossed against the wall.

Small wonder that the man was in a rage, and that he mouthed violent oaths, sometimes to himself, but more often aloud. For his wife had taken the stand, and confessed everything. It was all in the paper. Sonny could almost repeat it word for word.

"I begged you not to put me on the stand," she had cried to Maginto's attorney, "but now that you've done it, I'm goin' to tell everything. And I can't help who I hurt. I'm tellin' the whole truth, and nothin' but the truth.

"You want to prove that Tony Maginto was my sweetheart. You want to prove that him and me were together plenty of times. Well, it's all true. When I told my husband that I was visitin' my sick mother, I was really seein' Tony." By this time she had stiffened in her chair. She then tossed a bigger bombshell into the courtroom. "But there's another thing I'm tellin' you right here and now. You put me on this stand, and Tony Maginto is takin' the consequences. On the night that the murder was committed, I was not with Tony Maginto. I was home with my own husband, and I'm thankin' God for it.

"I don't know where Tony Maginto was that night, and I can't prove an alibi for him. That's my story, and that's all there is to it."

That was the end of Tony Maginto's case. The prosecuting attorney had shaken her hand warmly as she stepped from the stand. And with plenty of reason. In a few words, she had won an important case for him. Slowly the door opened.

In stepped Mrs. Ryan. Her lips were trembling, and there was a deep apology in her eyes. She stretched out her arms.

"Sonny," she breathed. "Oh, Sonny."

The man wheeled. He looked at her, contempt and anger mingled in his expression.

"You?" he growled. "You had the nerve to come back here after what's happened? Get your clothes and get out. Get out, I say!" Mr. Ryan trembled with emotion. "If you don't go," he almost screamed, "I'll kill you. Get your

clothes, I say, and beat it. Get out! Scram!" he yelled, moving towards her. "What'll the mob say? Me, Sonny Ryan, livin' with a dame what's a squealer!"

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12: The Greater Sin

Mark Hellinger

The Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 28 Sep 1941

THE starchy nurse went through the ward, propping pillows, taking temps, jotting notes on charts that hung over the foot of all beds, listening to complaints, confiscating cigarettes, administering, medicines. examining wet dressings and tersely asking one and all how they were.

She was Mary Casey, short, broad beamed, and in charge of the ward, Under her authority were two probationers who had not vet achieved a starched apron.

When Mary Casey finished her chores she went to the porch she always reserved Josiah Porter for the final morning duty. Josiah was an ancient sack of yellow skin, eternally sitting on the ward porch in a wheel chair. No one, except Miss Casey and Dr. Marberg, knew exactly how long he had been in the hospital, or even what ailed him. He was a sad, lonely character who sat and brooded on the porch all day, moving only when he was wheeled inside for meals.

Miss Casey flashed him a smile on this particular morning. She propped his pillow and asked him how he felt. For Josiah Porter was her favorite patient. She liked the old man in the affectionate way that some young people grope for a father after they have lost their own.

He leaned against the porch rail. "I've got some news for you," she said. He looked at her. He didn't smile. He just looked. She waited for him to coax her about the news, But he didn't.

"It's wonderful news," she declared. "Dr. Marberg says you can go home in a week."

She waited for the full import to dawn on him. He blinked his eyes in the sun and his bony hands grasped the rubber wheels. "My goodness. Mr Porter," the nurse cried, "doesn't that give you a thrill? Didn't you hear me? Dr. Marberg says you can go home in a week!"

The old man nodded.

"I heard you," he said softly. Then he put a weary hand over his eyes. "I don't want to go. Oh, please. Miss Casey. I appreciate it so much, but I don't want to go,"

Miss Casey stared at him.

"Now look, Mr Porter," she asserted patiently, "you're almost well again. You're a nice guy and you're positively my best boy friend. I like you— but you can't stay here. No one in his right mind wants to stay in a hospital."

But Mr Porter was very evidently not in the mood for Miss Casey's bright dialogue. As she talked, he kept shaking his head vigorously. And now he looked up at her, and there was tragedy in his eyes.

"Home," he said, bitterly. "What is home to me? A cheap little furnished room, that's what it is. Sitting alone, wishing I could die and get it all over with.

"No one to talk to. Drinking a bottle of milk. Going to bed. Trying to read an old newspaper until my eyes get tired. That's home to me, Miss Casey."

The Nurse looked hastily away at the other hospital buildings. She cleared throat and then turned back to him.

"No children?" she asked.

He said no.

"Wife die?"

He said no. And then suddenly, as she kept prodding him with questions, lie started to talk. It came out of him easily and softly, as though it were a story none could tell so well as he.

"We were married over thirty years," he said. "Myra and I were very happy. Oh, we had our spats now and then, but we always made up.

"I was a man of habit. Myra used to make fun of me. She said I always combed my hair the same way, and that I always shaved exactly the same way, and that I'd even wear the same shoes forever, unless she bought me a new pair now and then.

"Well, Miss Casey, that marriage ended on the rocks after one terrible night. I made the mistake of going out and getting drunk."

The nurse was startled.

"And she left you after all those years?"

The old man nodded.

"You see, Miss Casey, I don't drink. I mean, I don't ever drink." He seemed to grow a little fearful now as he went on with his story. It was as if the memory of that one frightful night had haunted him silently ever since.

"I'm very much a creature of habit," he continued. "I was born that way and I stayed that way. Whatever came over me on the awful day I'm speaking of, I don't know. I'll never be able to explain, but I suddenly tired of being a creature of habit.

"And do you know what I did, Miss Casey? When I got my pay that day, instead of bringing it right home to Myra, I opened the envelope!" He paused to permit the enormity of his action to seep into Miss Casey's brain.

"Yes, I opened it," he said, "and I counted the money myself for the first time. Then I took a cab— a cab, mind you— and I went downtown and bought me the swellest dinner you ever heard of. Then I went to a cafe and I drank highballs.

"Well, I got to talking with some of the men, and I bought them highballs. They were young and they started calling me Pop. I think maybe I liked that 'cause Myra and me never had chick nor child. Pretty soon they said they knew a cabaret where I'd have at lot of fun. No, not a cabaret. They call it something else. A night club. That's it. A night club. So we went there, and I knew all the time they were only sticking me with the bill."

He covered his eyes again. "One of them had a car," he went on, "and when we left the night club, I was drunk. Yes, Miss Casey, I was drunk. We rode through the night through woods and towns, and you could hear the tyres scream when the car turned.

"Then a siren sounded behind me and the fellows said 'step on it,' and the driver did. And soon there were shots, and they all fell on the car floor, and they pulled me down, too.

"Was I scared? Miss Casey, I really said my prayers on that car floor. Then I passed out. I don't know what happened, but the next thing I remember it was morning and I was walking to my house, and my coat was torn, and one cheek was bleeding.

"When l went into my house, Myra was gone. Forever."

Miss Casey's face held a puzzled frown.

"I just don't understand it, Mr Porter," she said. "After all, it was only one silly escapade in thirty years. It teems a shame she left you for that."

The old man looked at her.

"Oh, it wasn't for that," he returned. "No, indeed. Her note said I could never break any habits— and she was sick and tired of me leaving wet towels on the bathroom floor!"

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13: The Painter's Bargain

William Makepeace Thackeray

1811-1863

Fraser's Magazine Dec 1838

SIMON GAMBOUGE was the son of Solomon Gambouge; and as all the world knows, both father and son were astonishingly clever fellows at their profession. Solomon painted landscapes, which nobody bought; and Simon took a higher line, and painted portraits to admiration, only nobody came to sit to him.

As he was not gaining five pounds a year by his profession, and had arrived at the age of twenty, at least, Simon determined to better himself by taking a wife— a plan which a number of other wise men adopt, in similar years and circumstances. So Simon prevailed upon a butcher's daughter (to whom he owed considerable for cutlets) to quit the meat-shop and follow him. Griskinissa— such was the fair creature's name— "was as lovely a bit of mutton," her father said, "as ever a man would wish to stick a knife into." She had sat to the painter for all sorts of characters; and the curious who possess any of Gambouge's pictures will see her as Venus, Minerva, Madonna, and in numberless other characters: Portrait of a lady— Griskinissa; Sleeping Nymph— Griskinissa, without a rag of clothes, lying in a forest; Maternal Solicitude— Griskinissa again, with young Master Gambouge, who was by this time the offspring of their affections.

The lady brought the painter a handsome little fortune of a couple of hundred pounds; and as long as this sum lasted no woman could be more lovely or loving. But want began speedily to attack their little household; baker's bills were unpaid; rent was due, and the reckless landlord gave no quarter; and, to crown the whole, her father, unnatural butcher! suddenly stopped the supplies of mutton-chops; and swore that his daughter, and the dauber, her husband, should have no more of his wares. At first they embraced tenderly, and, kissing and crying over their little infant, vowed to heaven that they would do without: but in the course of the evening Griskinissa grew peckish, and poor Simon pawned his best coat.

When this habit of pawning is discovered, it appears to the poor a kind of Eldorado. Gambouge and his wife were so delighted, that they, in course of a month, made away with her gold chain, her great warming-pan, his best crimson plush inexpressibles, two wigs, a washhand basin and ewer, fire-irons, window-curtains, crockery, and arm-chairs. Griskinissa said, smiling, that she had found a second father in *her uncle*— a base pun, which showed that her mind was corrupted, and that she was no longer the tender, simple Griskinissa of other days.

I am sorry to say that she had taken to drinking; she swallowed the warming-pan in the course of three days, and fuddled herself one whole evening with the crimson plush breeches.

Drinking is the devil— the father, that is to say, of all vices. Griskinissa's face and her mind grew ugly together; her good humour changed to bilious, bitter discontent; her pretty, fond epithets, to foul abuse and swearing; her tender blue eyes grew watery and blear, and the peach-colour on her cheeks fled from its old habitation, and crowded up into her nose, where, with a number of pimples, it stuck fast. Add to this a dirty, draggle-tailed chintz; long, matted hair, wandering into her eyes, and over her lean shoulders, which were once so snowy, and you have the picture of drunkenness and Mrs. Simon Gambouge.

Poor Simon, who had been a gay, lively fellow enough in the days of his better fortune, was completely cast down by his present ill luck, and cowed by the ferocity of his wife. From morning till night the neighbours could hear this woman's tongue, and understand her doings; bellows went skimming across the room, chairs were flumped down on the floor, and poor Gambouge's oil and varnish pots went clattering through the windows, or down the stairs. The baby roared all day; and Simon sat pale and idle in a corner, taking a small sup at the brandy-bottle, when Mrs. Gambouge was out of the way.

One day, as he sat disconsolately at his easel, furbishing up a picture of his wife, in the character of Peace, which he had commenced a year before, he was more than ordinarily desperate, and cursed and swore in the most pathetic manner. "O miserable fate of genius!" cried he, "was I, a man of such commanding talents, born for this? to be bullied by a fiend of a wife; to have my masterpieces neglected by the world, or sold only for a few pieces? Cursed be the love which has misled me; cursed be the art which is unworthy of me! Let me dig or steal, let me sell myself as a soldier, or sell myself to the Devil, I should not be more wretched than I am now!"

"Quite the contrary," cried a small, cheery voice.

"What!" exclaimed Gambouge, trembling and surprised. "Who's there?— where are you?— who are you?"

"You were just speaking of me," said the voice.

Gambouge held, in his left hand, his palette; in his right, a bladder of crimson lake, which he was about to squeeze out upon the mahogany. "Where are you?" cried he again.

"S-q-u-e-e-z-e!" exclaimed the little voice.

Gambouge picked out the nail from the bladder, and gave a squeeze; when, as sure as I'm living, a little imp spurted out from the hole upon the palette, and began laughing in the most singular and oily manner.

When first born he was little bigger than a tadpole; then he grew to be as big as a mouse; then he arrived at the size of a cat; and then he jumped off the palette, and, turning head over heels, asked the poor painter what he wanted with him.

THE STRANGE little animal twisted head over heels, and fixed himself at last upon the top of Gambouge's easel— smearing out, with his heels, all the white and vermilion which had just been laid on the allegoric portrait of Mrs. Gambouge.

"What!" exclaimed Simon, "is it the—"

"Exactly so; talk of me, you know, and I am always at hand: besides, I am not half so black as I am painted, as you will see when you know me a little better."

"Upon my word," said the painter, "it is a very singular surprise which you have given me. To tell truth, I did not even believe in your existence."

The little imp put on a theatrical air, and with one of Mr. Macready's best looks, said—

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Gambogio,
Than are dreamed of in your philosophy."

Gambouge, being a Frenchman, did not understand the quotation, but felt somehow strangely and singularly interested in the conversation of his new friend.

Diabolus continued: "You are a man of merit, and want money; you will starve on your merit; you can only get money from me. Come, my friend, how much is it? I ask the easiest interest in the world: old Mordecai, the usurer, has made you pay twice as heavily before now: nothing but the signature of a bond, which is a mere ceremony, and the transfer of an article which, in itself, is a supposition— a valueless, windy, uncertain property of yours, called by some poet of your own, I think, an *animula*, *vagula*, *blandula*— bah! there is no use beating about the bush— I mean *a soul*. Come, let me have it; you know you will sell it some other way, and not get such good pay for your bargain!"— and, having made this speech, the Devil pulled out from his fob a sheet as big as a double *Times*, only there was a different *stamp* in the corner.

It is useless and tedious to describe law documents: lawyers only love to read them; and they have as good in Chitty as any that are to be found in the Devil's own; so nobly have the apprentices emulated the skill of the master. Suffice it to say, that poor Gambouge read over the paper, and signed it. He was to have all he wished for seven years, and at the end of that time was to become the property of the ——; *provided* that during the course of the seven

years, every single wish which he might form should be gratified by the other of the contracting parties; otherwise the deed became null and nonavenue, and Gambouge should be left "to go to the —— his own way."

"You will never see me again," said Diabolus, in shaking hands with poor Simon, on whose fingers he left such a mark as is to be seen at this day— "never, at least, unless you want me; for everything you ask will be performed in the most quiet and every-day manner: believe me, it is the best and most gentlemanlike, and avoids anything like scandal. But if you set me about anything which is extraordinary, and out of the course of nature, as it were, come I must, you know; and of this you are the best judge." So saying, Diabolus disappeared; but whether up the chimney, through the keyhole, or by any other aperture or contrivance, nobody knows. Simon Gambouge was left in a fever of delight, as, heaven forgive me! I believe many a worthy man would be, if he were allowed an opportunity to make a similar bargain.

"Heigho!" said Simon. "I wonder whether this be a reality or a dream— I am sober, I know; for who will give me credit for the means to be drunk? and as for sleeping, I'm too hungry for that. I wish I could see a capon and a bottle of white wine."

"Monsieur Simon!" cried a voice on the landing-place.

"*C'est ici*," quoth Gambouge, hastening to open the door. He did so; and lo! there was a *restaurateur's* boy at the door, supporting a tray, a tin-covered dish, and plates on the same; and, by its side, a tall amber-coloured flask of Sauterne.

"I am the new boy, sir," exclaimed this youth, on entering; "but I believe this is the right door, and you asked for these things."

Simon grinned, and said, "Certainly, I did *ask for* these things." But such was the effect which his interview with the demon had had on his innocent mind, that he took them, although he knew they were for old Simon, the Jew dandy, who was mad after an opera girl, and lived on the floor beneath.

"Go, my boy," he said; "it is good: call in a couple of hours, and remove the plates and glasses."

The little waiter trotted down stairs, and Simon sat greedily down to discuss the capon and the white wine. He bolted the legs, he devoured the wings, he cut every morsel of flesh from the breast;— seasoning his repast with pleasant draughts of wine, and caring nothing for the inevitable bill which was to follow all.

"Ye gods!" said he, as he scraped away at the back-bone, "what a dinner! what wine!— and how gaily served up too!" There were silver forks and spoons, and the remnants of the fowl were upon a silver dish. "Why the money for this dish and these spoons," cried Simon, "would keep me and Mrs. G. for a

month! I wish"— and here Simon whistled, and turned round to see that no one was peeping— "I wish the plate were mine."

Oh, the horrid progress of the Devil! "Here they are," thought Simon to himself; "why should not I *take them*?" and take them he did. "Detection," said he, "is not so bad as starvation; and I would as soon live at the galleys as live with Madame Gambouge."

So Gambouge shovelled dish and spoons into the flap of his surtout, and ran down stairs as if the Devil were behind him— as, indeed, he was.

He immediately made for the house of his old friend the pawnbroker— that establishment which is called in France the Mont de Piété. "I am obliged to come to you again, my old friend," said Simon, "with some family plate, of which I beseech you to take care."

The pawnbroker smiled as he examined the goods. "I can give you nothing upon them," said he.

"What!" cried Simon; "not even the worth of the silver?"

"No; I could buy them at that price at the 'Café Morisot,' Rue de la Verrerie, where, I suppose, you got them a little cheaper." And, so saying, he showed to the guilt-stricken Gambouge how the name of that coffee-house was inscribed upon every one of the articles which he wished to pawn.

The effects of conscience are dreadful indeed. Oh! how fearful is retribution, how deep is despair, how bitter is remorse for crime— *when crime is found out!*— otherwise, conscience takes matters much more easily. Gambouge cursed his fate, and swore henceforth to be virtuous.

"But, hark ye, my friend," continued the honest broker, "there is no reason why, because I cannot lend upon these things, I should not buy them: they will do to melt, if for no other purpose. Will you have half the money?— speak, or I peach."

Simon's resolves about virtue were dissipated instantaneously. "Give me half," he said, "and let me go.— What scoundrels are these pawnbrokers!" ejaculated he, as he passed out of the accursed shop, "seeking every wicked pretext to rob the poor man of his hard-won gain."

When he had marched forwards for a street or two, Gambouge counted the money which he had received, and found that he was in possession of no less than a hundred francs. It was night, as he reckoned out his equivocal gains, and he counted them at the light of a lamp. He looked up at the lamp, in doubt as to the course he should next pursue: upon it was inscribed the simple number, 152. "A gambling-house," thought Gambouge. "I wish I had half the money that is now on the table, up stairs."

He mounted, as many a rogue has done before him, and found half a hundred persons busy at a table of *rouge et noir*. Gambouge's five napoleons

looked insignificant by the side of the heaps which were around him; but the effects of the wine, of the theft, and of the detection by the pawnbroker, were upon him, and he threw down his capital stoutly upon the 0 0.

It is a dangerous spot that 0 0, or double zero; but to Simon it was more lucky than to the rest of the world. The ball went spinning round— in "its predestined circle rolled," as Shelley has it, after Goethe— and plumped down at last in the double zero. One hundred and thirty-five gold napoleons (louis they were then) were counted out to the delighted painter. "Oh, Diabolus!" cried he, "now it is that I begin to believe in thee! Don't talk about merit," he cried; "talk about fortune. Tell me not about heroes for the future— tell me of *zeroes*." And down went twenty napoleons more upon the 0.

The Devil was certainly in the ball: round it twirled, and dropped into zero as naturally as a duck pops its head into a pond. Our friend received five hundred pounds for his stake; and the croupiers and lookers-on began to stare at him.

There were twelve thousand pounds upon the table. Suffice it to say, that Simon won half, and retired from the Palais Royal with a thick bundle of bank-notes crammed into his dirty three-cornered hat. He had been but half an hour in the place, and he had won the revenues of a prince for half a year!

Gambouge, as soon as he felt that he was a capitalist, and that he had a stake in the country, discovered that he was an altered man. He repented of his foul deed, and his base purloining of the *restaurateur's* plate. "O honesty!" he cried, "how unworthy is an action like this of a man who has a property like mine!" So he went back to the pawnbroker with the gloomiest face imaginable. "My friend," said he, "I have sinned against all that I hold most sacred: I have forgotten my family and my religion. Here is thy money. In the name of heaven, restore me the plate which I have wrongfully sold thee!"

But the pawnbroker grinned, and said, "Nay, Mr. Gambouge, I will sell that plate for a thousand francs to you, or I will never sell it at all."

"Well," cried Gambouge, "thou art an inexorable ruffian, Troisboules; but I will give thee all I am worth." And here he produced a billet of five hundred francs. "Look," said he, "this money is all I own; it is the payment of two years' lodging. To raise it, I have toiled for many months; and, failing, I have been a criminal. O heaven! I *stole* that plate that I might pay my debt, and keep my dear wife from wandering houseless. But I cannot bear this load of ignominy— I cannot suffer the thought of this crime. I will go to the person to whom I did wrong. I will starve, I will confess; but I will, I *will* do right!"

The broker was alarmed. "Give me thy note," he cried; "here is the plate."

"Give me an acquittal first," cried Simon, almost broken-hearted; "sign me a paper, and the money is yours." So Troisboules wrote according to

Gambouge's dictation: "Received, for thirteen ounces of plate, twenty pounds."

"Monster of iniquity!" cried the painter, "fiend of wickedness! thou art caught in thine own snares. Hast thou not sold me five pounds' worth of plate for twenty? Have I it not in my pocket? Art thou not a convicted dealer in stolen goods? Yield, scoundrel, yield thy money, or I will bring thee to justice!"

The frightened pawnbroker bullied and battled for a while; but he gave up his money at last, and the dispute ended. Thus it will be seen that Diabolus had rather a hard bargain in the wily Gambouge. He had taken a victim prisoner, but he had assuredly caught a Tartar. Simon now returned home, and, to do him justice, paid the bill for his dinner, and restored the plate.

AND NOW I may add (and the reader should ponder upon this, as a profound picture of human life), that Gambouge, since he had grown rich, grew likewise abundantly moral. He was a most exemplary father. He fed the poor, and was loved by them. He scorned a base action. And I have no doubt that Mr. Thurtell, or the late lamented Mr. Greenacre, in similar circumstances, would have acted like the worthy Simon Gambouge.

There was but one blot upon his character— he hated Mrs. Gam. worse than ever. As he grew more benevolent, she grew more virulent: when he went to plays, she went to Bible societies, and *vice versâ*: in fact, she led him such a life as Xantippe led Socrates, or as a dog leads a cat in the same kitchen. With all his fortune— for, as may be supposed, Simon prospered in all worldly things— he was the most miserable dog in the whole city of Paris. Only in the point of drinking did he and Mrs. Simon agree; and for many years, and during a considerable number of hours in each day, he thus dissipated, partially, his domestic chagrin. O philosophy! we may talk of thee: but, except at the bottom of the wine-cup, where thou liest like truth in a well, where shall we find thee?

He lived so long, and in his worldly matters prospered so much, there was so little sign of devilment in the accomplishment of his wishes, and the increase of his prosperity, that Simon, at the end of six years, began to doubt whether he had made any such bargain at all, as that which we have described at the commencement of this history. He had grown, as we said, very pious and moral. He went regularly to mass, and had a confessor into the bargain. He resolved, therefore, to consult that reverend gentleman, and to lay before him the whole matter.

"I am inclined to think, holy sir," said Gambouge, after he had concluded his history, and shown how, in some miraculous way, all his desires were accomplished, "that, after all, this demon was no other than the creation of my

own brain, heated by the effects of that bottle of wine, the cause of my crime and my prosperity."

The confessor agreed with him, and they walked out of church comfortably together, and entered afterwards a *café*, where they sat down to refresh themselves after the fatigues of their devotion.

A respectable old gentleman, with a number of orders at his button-hole, presently entered the room, and sauntered up to the marble table, before which reposed Simon and his clerical friend. "Excuse me, gentlemen," he said, as he took a place opposite them, and began reading the papers of the day.

"Bah!" said he, at last,— "*sont-ils grands ces journaux anglais*? Look, sir," he said, handing over an immense sheet of *The Times* to Mr. Gambouge, "was ever anything so monstrous?"

Gambouge smiled, politely, and examined the proffered page. "It is enormous," he said; "but I do not read English."

"Nay," said the man with the orders, "look closer at it, Signor Gambouge; it is astonishing how easy the language is."

Wondering, Simon took the sheet of paper. He turned pale as he looked at it, and began to curse the ices and the waiter. "Come, M. l'Abbé," he said; "the heat and glare of this place are intolerable."

THE STRANGER rose with them. "*Au plaisir de vous revoir, mon cher monsieur*," said he; "I do not mind speaking before the Abbé here, who will be my very good friend one of these days; but I thought it necessary to refresh your memory, concerning our little business transaction six years since; and could not exactly talk of it *at church*, as you may fancy."

Simon Gambouge had seen, in the double-sheeted *Times*, the paper signed by himself, which the little Devil had pulled out of his fob.

THERE WAS no doubt on the subject; and Simon, who had but a year to live, grew more pious, and more careful than ever. He had consultations with all the doctors of the Sorbonne and all the lawyers of the Palais. But his magnificence grew as wearisome to him as his poverty had been before; and not one of the doctors whom he consulted could give him a pennyworth of consolation.

Then he grew outrageous in his demands upon the Devil, and put him to all sorts of absurd and ridiculous tasks; but they were all punctually performed, until Simon could invent no new ones, and the Devil sat all day with his hands in his pockets doing nothing.

One day, Simon's confessor came bounding into the room, with the greatest glee. "My friend," said he, "I have it! Eureka!— I have found it. Send

the Pope a hundred thousand crowns, build a new Jesuit college at Rome, give a hundred gold candlesticks to St. Peter's; and tell his Holiness you will double all if he will give you absolution!"

Gambouge caught at the notion, and hurried off a courier to Rome *ventre à terre*. His Holiness agreed to the request of the petition, and sent him an absolution, written out with his own fist, and all in due form.

"Now," said he, "foul fiend, I defy you! arise. Diabolus! your contract is not worth a jot: the Pope has absolved me, and I am safe on the road to salvation." In a fervour of gratitude he clasped the hand of his confessor, and embraced him: tears of joy ran down the cheeks of these good men.

They heard an inordinate roar of laughter, and there was Diabolus sitting opposite to them holding his sides, and lashing his tail about, as if he would have gone mad with glee.

"Why," said he, "what nonsense is this! do you suppose I care about *that*?" and he tossed the Pope's missive into a corner. "M. l'Abbé knows," he said, bowing and grinning, "that though the Pope's paper may pass current *here*, it is not worth twopence in our country. What do I care about the Pope's absolution? You might just as well be absolved by your under butler."

"Egad," said the Abbé, "the rogue is right— I quite forgot the fact, which he points out clearly enough."

"No, no, Gambouge," continued Diabolus, with horrid familiarity, "go thy ways, old fellow, that *cock won't fight*." And he retired up the chimney, chuckling at his wit and his triumph. Gambouge heard his tail scuttling all the way up, as if he had been a sweeper by profession.

Simon was left in that condition of grief in which, according to the newspapers, cities and nations are found when a murder is committed, or a lord ill of the gout— a situation, we say, more easy to imagine than to describe.

To add to his woes, Mrs. Gambouge, who was now first made acquainted with his compact, and its probable consequences, raised such a storm about his ears, as made him wish almost that his seven years were expired. She screamed, she scolded, she swore, she wept, she went into such fits of hysterics, that poor Gambouge, who had completely knocked under to her, was worn out of his life. He was allowed no rest, night or day: he moped about his fine house, solitary and wretched, and cursed his stars that he ever had married the butcher's daughter.

It wanted six months of the time.

A sudden and desperate resolution seemed all at once to have taken possession of Simon Gambouge. He called his family and his friends together— he gave one of the greatest feasts that ever was known in the city of Paris— he

gaily presided at one end of his table, while Mrs. Gam., splendidly arrayed, gave herself airs at the other extremity.

After dinner, using the customary formula, he called upon Diabolus to appear. The old ladies screamed and hoped he would not appear naked; the young ones tittered, and longed to see the monster: everybody was pale with expectation and affright.

A very quiet, gentlemanly man, neatly dressed in black, made his appearance, to the surprise of all present, and bowed all round to the company. "I will not show my *credentials*," he said, blushing, and pointing to his hoofs, which were cleverly hidden by his pumps and shoe-buckles, "unless the ladies absolutely wish it; but I am the person you want, Mr. Gambouge; pray tell me what is your will."

"You know," said that gentleman, in a stately and determined voice, "that you are bound to me, according to our agreement, for six months to come."

"I am," replied the newcomer.

"You are to do all that I ask, whatsoever it may be, or you forfeit the bond which I gave you?"

"It is true."

"You declare this before the present company?"

"Upon my honour, as a gentleman," said Diabolus, bowing, and laying his hand upon his waistcoat.

A whisper of applause ran round the room: all were charmed with the bland manners of the fascinating stranger.

"My love," continued Gambouge, mildly addressing his lady, "will you be so polite as to step this way? You know I must go soon, and I am anxious, before this noble company, to make a provision for one who, in sickness as in health, in poverty as in riches, has been my truest and fondest companion."

Gambouge mopped his eyes with his handkerchief— all the company did likewise. Diabolus sobbed audibly, and Mrs. Gambouge sidled up to her husband's side, and took him tenderly by the hand. "Simon!" said she, "is it true? and do you really love your Griskinissa?"

Simon continued solemnly: "Come hither, Diabolus; you are bound to obey me in all things for the six months during which our contract has to run; take, then, Griskinissa Gambouge, live alone with her for half a year, never leave her from morning till night, obey all her caprices, follow all her whims, and listen to all the abuse which falls from her infernal tongue. Do this, and I ask no more of you; I will deliver myself up at the appointed time."

Not Lord G——, when flogged by Lord B——, in the House— not Mr. Cartlitch, of Astley's Amphitheatre, in his most pathetic passages, could look more crestfallen, and howl more hideously, than Diabolus did now. "Take

another year, Gambouge," screamed he; "two more— ten more— a century; roast me on Lawrence's gridiron, boil me in holy water, but don't ask that: don't, don't bid me live with Mrs. Gambouge!"

Simon smiled sternly. "I have said it," he cried; "do this, or our contract is at an end."

The Devil, at this, grinned so horribly that every drop of beer in the house turned sour: he gnashed his teeth so frightfully that every person in the company wellnigh fainted with the cholic. He slapped down the great parchment upon the floor, trampled upon it madly, and lashed it with his hoofs and his tail: at last, spreading out a mighty pair of wings as wide as from here to Regent Street, he slapped Gambouge with his tail over one eye, and vanished, abruptly, through the keyhole.

GAMBOUGE screamed with pain and started up. "You drunken, lazy scoundrel!" cried a shrill and well-known voice, "you have been asleep these two hours:" and here he received another terrific box on the ear.

It was too true, he had fallen asleep at his work; and the beautiful vision had been dispelled by the thumps of the tipsy Griskinissa. Nothing remained to corroborate his story, except the bladder of lake, and this was spurted all over his waistcoat and breeches.

"I wish," said the poor fellow, rubbing his tingling cheeks, "that dreams were true;" and he went to work again at his portrait.

MY LAST accounts of Gambouge are, that he has left the arts, and is footman in a small family. Mrs. Gam. takes in washing; and it is said that her continual dealings with soap-suds and hot water have been the only things in life which have kept her from spontaneous combustion.

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14: The Fortune-Teller's Sign

Valentine Fredericks

Fl 1910

The Cavalier, Sep 1910

This is the only story I can find by this otherwise unknown author.

"BROWN, I've no further use for you. You may leave now!"

The clerk stared at his employer in amazement, unable fully to realize that he had been discharged.

"You mean—" he gasped.

"That you are no longer needed here," Masterson interrupted.

"But why—" Brown faltered. "Why am I discharged?"

"You know my rule about my clerks speculating," the broker retorted in an impatient manner.

"But I never—"

"Perhaps not," the other broke in sarcastically. " But that doesn't prove you never will." Then he added angrily, as he swung about to his desk, "I'll not argue the matter further."

But Brown was not one to he put off so easily, and the flash of ftre in his eyes as he advanced a step nearer his employer proved it,

"Mr. Masterson," he began in a voice that shook witlt suppressed indignation, "vou have discharged me, and I have a right to know why you have done so."

"Very well, I'll tell you," the other announced. as he swung about angrily. "Then you'll get out, and get out quickly."

"I will, sir," Brown assured him.

"You bet you will," the other declared. "Last evening I was going through Forty-Third Street in my car, and saw you enter a house in the front windows of which was displayed the sign of a clairvoyant." He paused a second, and searched the other's face as he added: "You went to this person, I suppose, to find out about the future of the market. What stock are you playing?"

So sudden was the question that it took Brown completely by surprise, and he stammered: "I— I didn't—"

"I say I saw you!" Masterson affirmed. "And now that I've told you, get out. I'll have no one in my employ who speculates."

"But I want to tell you—"

"And I want to tell you to leave this office!" the broker burst in, now thoroughly enraged. "Go, I say!"

For a second Brown hesitated; then he turned toward the door, his head poised high with indignation.

The very fact that he had been so unjustly accused of breaking one of his employer's strict rules was enough to arouse his anger. His call at the clairvoyant's had been merely to see his old friend, Ned Hastings, out of a job, and who, to economize, had taken one of the cheap rooms the fortune-teller rented.

"What's the use?" Brown mumbled. "Masterson was too mad to let me explain. But he'll get over it in a day or two, and then I'll go back and show him his mistake." His voice softened as he added: "And I need that job, all right."

Determined to get what consolation he could from his friend, he wended his way to the house in Forty-Third Street, in the front window of which hung the glaring sign that had been his undoing. An unkempt woman opened the door, and, in reply to his question, informed him that "Mr. Hastings ain't in."

"Then I'll go to his room and wait," Brown told her.

He ascended the four flights to the little chamber under the roof, and threw himself into the one chair, murmuring: " Confound fortune-tellers, Masterson, and Hastings anyway!"

Some minutes later he was brought out of his reverie by the sound of hurried foot-steps. Hastings dashed into the room excitedly, to stop abruptly as his eyes rested upon Brown.

"Why, for Heaven's sake—" he began.

"No, for your sake," the other interrupted bitterly. ''That's why I'm here."

"What do you mean?" Hastings asked blankly.

Brown quietly recited his troubles.

"Well," said Hastings, "I'm sorry I was the cause of getting you in bad; but—"

He paused, and his face lighted up.

"But I've got a job, though," he added. "Just landed it."

"Have you?" Brown retorted listlessly.

"Yes, and, I wish I'd known you wanted one. The broker who hired me said he needed another clerk, and asked me if I knew of any one I could recommend."

"He did?" Brown exclaimed, now all excited. "Why, I—"

"It pays thirty dollars a week—-"

"Five more than I got with Masterson."

"But I'm afraid it's filled," Hastings added quickly. "A man came in as I went out, and I think he was after it."

Brown's hopes sank with each word, and, as his friend ended his speech, he faced him with: "Why couldn't you have known I was out of a job?"

"It may not be too late,' Hastings ventured, but his tone brought no hope with it. "You might find out, anyway."

"I'll do it!" Brown declared, and, hurriedly making a note of the name and address, he started off.

He entered the office of the brokerage firm in question a short time later, and, upon inquiring for the man Hastings had mentioned, he was conducted into his office, which was separated from the large customers' room by a thin wooden and glass partition.

Brown stated the object of his call, and the broker shook his head as he replied: "I'm sorry, but that position was filled soon after I engaged Hastings."

The applicant's face plainly showed his disappointment, and, with a bow and a mumbled, "I'm sorry I disturbed you," he shambled from the room and to the street, very much dejected.

For a moment Brown stood on the curb, undecided what to do or where to go next; and, while revolving the matter in his mind, his thoughts unconsciously reverted to the stock-market, and he wondered how a certain stock he had been watching for some time was going.

Then with the thought came a strange desire to learn whether it had gone up or down that morning; and, recalling the customers' room of the firm he had just left, with its ticker and quotation board, he retraced his steps, and soon stood with the tape in his hand, studying it intently.

The sudden ringing of a telephone-bell on the other side of the thin partition caused him to glance quickly in that direction, and to realize that the sound came from the private office in which he had been only a few minutes before.

Brown had already turned to the tape again, when the words that came audibly from the other room made him listen breathlessly.

"That's too bad," he heard the broker say. "I'm sorry: you can't take it, after all, and particularly so because a man was just here in regard to the position, and I told him it was filled."

Brown waited to hear no more. With one leap he was at the door of the private office, and, throwing it open, he entered just as the broker hung up the receiver.

"I happened to hear—" he began breathlessly— " I was out there, studying the ticker, and thought—"

"I'm glad you were," the other interrupted. "I just received a phone from the fellow I engaged for the vacancy about which you called. He has received a telegram offering him a better position in the West, and he's going to take it."

"Then, won't you take me?" Brown asked eagerly.

The details were quickly gone over and arranged, with the result that Brown was to start in the following morning at five dollars more a week than he had received from Masterson. He hurried back to acquaint Hastings with the good news.

"Isn't it queer?" he mused, as he strode up the street. "An alleged interest in stocks lost me one job, while a real interest in them got me another."

15: Lord Arthur Savile's Crime

Oscar Wilde

1854-1900

Court and Society Review 11 May 1887

Unusual novelette which has been reprinted in such disparate magazines as "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" and "The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction".

IT WAS Lady Windermere's last reception before Easter, and Bentinck House was even more crowded than usual. Six Cabinet Ministers had come on from the Speaker's Levée in their stars and ribands, all the pretty women wore their smartest dresses, and at the end of the picture-gallery stood the Princess Sophia of Carlsrühe, a heavy Tartar-looking lady, with tiny black eyes and wonderful emeralds, talking bad French at the top of her voice, and laughing immoderately at everything that was said to her. It was certainly a wonderful medley of people. Gorgeous peeresses chatted affably to violent Radicals, popular preachers brushed coat-tails with eminent sceptics, a perfect bevy of bishops kept following a stout prima-donna from room to room, on the staircase stood several Royal Academicians, disguised as artists, and it was said that at one time the supper-room was absolutely crammed with geniuses. In fact, it was one of the Lady Windermere's best nights, and the Princess stayed till nearly half-past eleven.

As soon as she had gone, Lady Windermere returned to the picture-gallery, where a celebrated political economist was solemnly explaining the scientific theory of music to an indignant virtuoso from Hungary, and began to talk to the Duchess of Paisley. She looked wonderfully beautiful with her grand ivory throat, her large forget-me-not eyes, and her heavy coils of golden hair. Or pur they were— not that pale straw colour that nowadays usurps the gracious name of gold, but such gold as is woven into sunbeams or hidden in strange amber; and they gave to her face something of the frame of a saint, with not a little of the fascination of a sinner. She was a curious psychological study. Early in life she had discovered the important truth that nothing looks so like innocence as an indiscretion; and by a series of reckless escapades, half of them quite harmless, she had acquired all the privileges of a personality. She had more than once changed her husband; indeed, Debrett credits her with three marriages; but as she had never changed her lover, the world had long ceased to talk scandal about her. She was now forty years of age, childless, and with that inordinate passion for pleasure which is the secret of remaining young.

Suddenly she looked eagerly round the room, and said, in her clear contralto voice, "Where is my cheiromantist?"

"Your what, Gladys?" exclaimed the Duchess, giving an involuntary start.

"My cheiromantist, Duchess; I can't live without him at present."

"Dear Gladys! you are always so original," murmured the Duchess, trying to remember what a cheiromantist really was, and hoping it was not the same as a cheiropodist.

"He comes to see my hand twice a week regularly," continued Lady Windermere, "and is most interesting about it."

"Good heavens!" said the Duchess to herself, "he is a sort of cheiropodist after all. How very dreadful. I hope he is a foreigner at any rate. It wouldn't be quite so bad then."

"I must certainly introduce him to you."

"Introduce him!" cried the Duchess; "you don't mean to say he is here?" and she began looking about for a small tortoise-shell fan and a very tattered lace shawl, so as to be ready to go at a moment's notice.

"Of course he is here, I would not dream of giving a party without him. He tells me I have a pure psychic hand, and that if my thumb had been the least little bit shorter, I should have been a confirmed pessimist, and gone into a convent."

"Oh! I see!" said the Duchess, feeling very much relieved; "he tells fortunes, I suppose?"

"And misfortunes, too," answered Lady Windermere, "any amount of them. Next year, for instance, I am in great danger, both by land and sea, so I am going to live in a balloon, and draw up my dinner in a basket every evening. It is all written down on my little finger, or on the palm of my hand, I forget which."

"But surely that is tempting Providence, Gladys."

"My dear Duchess, surely Providence can resist temptation by this time. I think every one should have their hands told once a month, so as to know what not to do. Of course, one does it all the same, but it is so pleasant to be warned. Now, if some one doesn't go and fetch Mr. Podgers at once, I shall have to go myself."

"Let me go, Lady Windermere," said a tall handsome young man, who was standing by, listening to the conversation with an amused smile.

"Thanks so much, Lord Arthur; but I am afraid you wouldn't recognise him."

"If he is as wonderful as you say, Lady Windermere, I couldn't well miss him. Tell me what he is like, and I'll bring him to you at once."

"Well, he is not a bit like a cheiromantist. I mean he is not mysterious, or esoteric, or romantic-looking. He is a little, stout man, with a funny, bald head, and great gold-rimmed spectacles; something between a family doctor and a country attorney. I'm really very sorry, but it is not my fault. People are so

annoying. All my pianists look exactly like poets, and all my poets look exactly like pianists; and I remember last season asking a most dreadful conspirator to dinner, a man who had blown up ever so many people, and always wore a coat of mail, and carried a dagger up his shirt-sleeve; and do you know that when he came he looked just like a nice old clergyman, and cracked jokes all the evening? Of course, he was very amusing, and all that, but I was awfully disappointed; and when I asked him about the coat of mail, he only laughed, and said it was far too cold to wear in England. Ah, here is Mr. Podgers! Now, Mr. Podgers, I want you to tell the Duchess of Paisley's hand. Duchess, you must take your glove off. No, not the left hand, the other."

"Dear Gladys, I really don't think it is quite right," said the Duchess, feebly unbuttoning a rather soiled kid glove.

"Nothing interesting ever is," said Lady Windermere: "on a fait le monde ainsi. But I must introduce you. Duchess, this is Mr. Podgers, my pet cheiromantist. Mr. Podgers, this is the Duchess of Paisley, and if you say that she has a larger mountain of the moon than I have, I will never believe in you again."

"I am sure, Gladys, there is nothing of the kind in my hand," said the Duchess gravely.

"Your Grace is quite right," said Mr. Podgers, glancing at the little fat hand with its short square fingers, "the mountain of the moon is not developed. The line of life, however, is excellent. Kindly bend the wrist. Thank you. Three distinct lines on the rascette! You will live to a great age, Duchess, and be extremely happy. Ambition— very moderate, line of intellect not exaggerated, line of heart—"

"Now, do be indiscreet, Mr. Podgers," cried Lady Windermere.

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," said Mr. Podgers, bowing, "if the Duchess ever had been, but I am sorry to say that I see great permanence of affection, combined with a strong sense of duty."

"Pray go on, Mr. Podgers," said the Duchess, looking quite pleased.

"Economy is not the least of your Grace's virtues," continued Mr. Podgers, and Lady Windermere went off into fits of laughter.

"Economy is a very good thing," remarked the Duchess complacently; "when I married Paisley he had eleven castles, and not a single house fit to live in."

"And now he has twelve houses, and not a single castle," cried Lady Windermere.

"Well, my dear," said the Duchess, "I like—"

"Comfort," said Mr. Podgers, "and modern improvements, and hot water laid on in every bedroom. Your Grace is quite right. Comfort is the only thing our civilisation can give us."

"You have told the Duchess's character admirably, Mr. Podgers, and now you must tell Lady Flora's"; and in answer to a nod from the smiling hostess, a tall girl, with sandy Scotch hair, and high shoulder-blades, stepped awkwardly from behind the sofa, and held out a long, bony hand with spatulate fingers.

"Ah, a pianist! I see," said Mr. Podgers, "an excellent pianist, but perhaps hardly a musician. Very reserved, very honest, and with a great love of animals."

"Quite true!" exclaimed the Duchess, turning to Lady Windermere, "absolutely true! Flora keeps two dozen collie dogs at Macloskie, and would turn our town house into a menagerie if her father would let her."

"Well, that is just what I do with my house every Thursday evening," cried Lady Windermere, laughing, "only I like lions better than collie dogs."

"Your one mistake, Lady Windermere," said Mr. Podgers, with a pompous bow.

"If a woman can't make her mistakes charming, she is only a female," was the answer. "But you must read some more hands for us. Come, Sir Thomas, show Mr. Podgers yours"; and a genial-looking old gentleman, in a white waistcoat, came forward, and held out a thick rugged hand, with a very long third finger.

"An adventurous nature; four long voyages in the past, and one to come. Been shipwrecked three times. No, only twice, but in danger of a shipwreck your next journey. A strong Conservative, very punctual, and with a passion for collecting curiosities. Had a severe illness between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. Was left a fortune when about thirty. Great aversion to cats and Radicals."

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed Sir Thomas; "you must really tell my wife's hand, too."

"Your second wife's," said Mr. Podgers quietly, still keeping Sir Thomas's hand in his. "Your second wife's. I shall be charmed"; but Lady Marvel, a melancholy-looking woman, with brown hair and sentimental eyelashes, entirely declined to have her past or her future exposed; and nothing that Lady Windermere could do would induce Monsieur de Koloff, the Russian Ambassador, even to take his gloves off. In fact, many people seemed afraid to face the odd little man with his stereotyped smile, his gold spectacles, and his bright, beady eyes; and when he told poor Lady Fermor, right out before every one, that she did not care a bit for music, but was extremely fond of musicians,

it was generally felt that cheiromancy was a most dangerous science, and one that ought not to be encouraged, except in a tête-à-tête.

Lord Arthur Savile, however, who did not know anything about Lady Fermor's unfortunate story, and who had been watching Mr. Podgers with a great deal of interest, was filled with an immense curiosity to have his own hand read, and feeling somewhat shy about putting himself forward, crossed over the room to where Lady Windermere was sitting, and, with a charming blush, asked her if she thought Mr. Podgers would mind.

"Of course, he won't mind," said Lady Windermere, "that is what he is here for. All my lions, Lord Arthur, are performing lions, and jump through hoops whenever I ask them. But I must warn you beforehand that I shall tell Sybil everything. She is coming to lunch with me to-morrow, to talk about bonnets, and if Mr. Podgers finds out that you have a bad temper, or a tendency to gout, or a wife living in Bayswater, I shall certainly let her know all about it."

Lord Arthur smiled, and shook his head. "I am not afraid," he answered. "Sybil knows me as well as I know her."

"Ah! I am a little sorry to hear you say that. The proper basis for marriage is a mutual misunderstanding. No, I am not at all cynical, I have merely got experience, which, however, is very much the same thing. Mr. Podgers, Lord Arthur Savile is dying to have his hand read. Don't tell him that he is engaged to one of the most beautiful girls in London, because that appeared in the Morning Post a month ago.

"Dear Lady Windermere," cried the Marchioness of Jedburgh, "do let Mr. Podgers stay here a little longer. He has just told me I should go on the stage, and I am so interested."

"If he has told you that, Lady Jedburgh, I shall certainly take him away. Come over at once, Mr. Podgers, and read Lord Arthur's hand."

"Well," said Lady Jedburgh, making a little moue as she rose from the sofa, "if I am not to be allowed to go on the stage, I must be allowed to be part of the audience at any rate."

"Of course; we are all going to be part of the audience," said Lady Windermere; "and now, Mr. Podgers, be sure and tell us something nice. Lord Arthur is one of my special favourites."

But when Mr. Podgers saw Lord Arthur's hand he grew curiously pale, and said nothing. A shudder seemed to pass through him, and his great gushy eyebrows twitched convulsively, in an odd, irritating way they had when he was puzzled. Then some huge beads of perspiration broke out on his yellow forehead, like a poisonous dew, and his fat fingers grew cold and clammy.

Lord Arthur did not fail to notice these strange signs of agitation, and, for the first time in his life, he himself felt fear. His impulse was to rush from the

room, but he restrained himself. It was better to know the worst, whatever it was, than to be left in this hideous uncertainty.

"I am waiting, Mr. Podgers," he said.

"We are all waiting," cried Lady Windermere, in her quick, impatient manner, but the cheiromantist made no reply.

"I believe Arthur is going on the stage," said Lady Jedburgh, "and that, after your scolding, Mr. Podgers is afraid to tell him so."

Suddenly Mr. Podgers dropped Lord Arthur's right hand, and seized hold of his left, bending down so low to examine it that the gold rims of his spectacles seemed almost to touch the palm. For a moment his face became a white mask of horror, but he soon recovered his sang-froid, and looking up at Lady Windermere, said with a forced smile, "It is the hand of a charming young man."

"Of course it is!" answered Lady Windermere, "but will he be a charming husband? That is what I want to know."

"All charming young men are," said Mr. Podgers.

"I don't think a husband should be too fascinating," murmured Lady Jedburgh pensively, "it is so dangerous."

"My dear child, they never are too fascinating," cried Lady Windermere. "But what I want are details. Details are the only things that interest. What is going to happen to Lord Arthur?"

"Well, within the next few months Lord Arthur will go on a voyage—"

"Oh yes, his honeymoon, of course!"

"And lose a relative."

"Not his sister, I hope," said Lady Jedburgh, in a piteous tone of voice.

"Certainly not his sister," answered Mr. Podgers, with a deprecating wave of his hand, "a distant relative merely."

"Well, I am dreadfully disappointed," said Lady Windermere. "I have absolutely nothing to tell Sybil to-morrow. No one cares about distant relatives nowadays. They went out of fashion years ago. However, I suppose she had better have a black silk by her; it always does for church, you know. And now let us go to supper. They are sure to have eaten everything up, but we may find some hot soup. François used to make excellent soup once, but he is so agitated about politics at present, that I never feel quite certain about him. I do wish General Boulanger would keep quiet. Duchess, I am sure you are tired?"

"Not at all, dear Gladys," answered the Duchess, waddling towards the door. "I have enjoyed myself immensely, and the cheiropodist, I mean the cheiromantist, is most interesting. Flora, where can my tortoise-shell fan be? Oh, thank you, Sir Thomas, so much. And my lace shawl, Flora? Oh, thank you,

Sir Thomas, very kind, I'm sure"; and the worthy creature finally managed to get downstairs without dropping her scent-bottle more than twice.

All this time Lord Arthur Savile had remained standing by the fireplace, with the same feeling of dread over him, the same sickening sense of coming evil. He smiled sadly at his sister, as she swept past him on Lord Plymdale's arm, looking lovely in her pink brocade and pearls, and he hardly heard Lady Windermere when she called to him to follow her. He thought of Sybil Merton, and the idea that anything could come between them made his eyes dim with tears.

Looking at him, one would have said that Nemesis had stolen the shield of Pallas, and shown him the Gorgon's head. He seemed turned to stone, and his face was like marble in its melancholy. He had lived the delicate and luxurious life of a young man of birth and fortune, a life exquisite in its freedom from sordid care, its beautiful boyish insouciance; and now for the first time he became conscious of the terrible mystery of Destiny, of the awful meaning of Doom.

How mad and monstrous it all seemed! Could it be that written on his hand, in characters that he could not read himself, but that another could decipher, was some fearful secret of sin, some blood-red sign of crime? Was there no escape possible? Were we no better than chessmen, moved by an unseen power, vessels the potter fashions at his fancy, for honour or for shame? His reason revolted against it, and yet he felt that some tragedy was hanging over him, and that he had been suddenly called upon to bear an intolerable burden. Actors are so fortunate. They can choose whether they will appear in tragedy or in comedy, whether they will suffer or make merry, laugh or shed tears. But in real life it is different. Most men and women are forced to perform parts for which they have no qualifications. Our Guildensterns play Hamlet for us, and our Hamlets have to jest like Prince Hal. The world is a stage, but the play is badly cast.

Suddenly Mr. Podgers entered the room. When he saw Lord Arthur he started, and his coarse, fat face became a sort of greenish-yellow colour. The two men's eyes met, and for a moment there was silence.

"The Duchess has left one of her gloves here, Lord Arthur, and has asked me to bring it to her," said Mr. Podgers finally. "Ah, I see it on the sofa! Good evening."

"Mr. Podgers, I must insist on your giving me a straightforward answer to a question I am going to put to you."

"Another time, Lord Arthur, but the Duchess is anxious. I am afraid I must go."

"You shall not go. The Duchess is in no hurry."

"Ladies should not be kept waiting, Lord Arthur," said Mr. Podgers, with his sickly smile.

"The fair sex is apt to be impatient."

Lord Arthur's finely-chiselled lips curled in petulant disdain. The poor Duchess seemed to him of very little importance at that moment. He walked across the room to where Mr. Podgers was standing, and held his hand out.

"Tell me what you saw there," he said. "Tell me the truth. I must know it. I am not a child."

Mr. Podgers's eyes blinked behind his gold-rimmed spectacles, and he moved uneasily from one foot to the other, while his fingers played nervously with a flash watch-chain.

"What makes you think that I saw anything in your hand, Lord Arthur, more than I told you?"

"I know you did, and I insist on your telling me what it was. I will pay you. I will give you a cheque for a hundred pounds."

The green eyes flashed for a moment, and then became dull again.

"Guineas?" said Mr. Podgers at last, in a low voice.

"Certainly. I will send you a cheque to-morrow. What is your club?"

"I have no club. That is to say, not just at present. My address is—, but allow me to give you my card"; and producing a bit of gilt-edged pasteboard from his waistcoat pocket, Mr. Podgers handed it, with a low bow, to Lord Arthur, who read on it,

MR. SEPTIMUS R. PODGERS
Professional Cheiromantist
103a West Moon Street

"My hours are from ten to four," murmured Mr. Podgers mechanically, "and I make a reduction for families."

"Be quick," cried Lord Arthur, looking very pale, and holding his hand out.

Mr. Podgers glanced nervously round, and drew the heavy portière across the door.

"It will take a little time, Lord Arthur, you had better sit down."

"Be quick, sir," cried Lord Arthur again, stamping his foot angrily on the polished floor.

Mr. Podgers smiled, drew from his breast-pocket a small magnifying glass, and wiped it carefully with his handkerchief.

"I am quite ready," he said.

TEN MINUTES later, with face blanched by terror, and eyes wild with grief, Lord Arthur Savile rushed from Bentinck House, crushing his way through the crowd of fur-coated footmen that stood round the large striped awning, and seeming not to see or hear anything. The night was bitter cold, and the gas-lamps round the square flared and flickered in the keen wind; but his hands were hot with fever, and his forehead burned like fire. On and on he went, almost with the gait of a drunken man. A policeman looked curiously at him as he passed, and a beggar, who slouched from an archway to ask for alms, grew frightened, seeing misery greater than his own. Once he stopped under a lamp, and looked at his hands. He thought he could detect the stain of blood already upon them, and a faint cry broke from his trembling lips.

Murder! that is what the cheiromantist had seen there. Murder! The very night seemed to know it, and the desolate wind to howl it in his ear. The dark corners of the streets were full of it. It grinned at him from the roofs of the houses.

First he came to the Park, whose sombre woodland seemed to fascinate him. He leaned wearily up against the railings, cooling his brow against the wet metal, and listening to the tremulous silence of the trees. "Murder! murder!" he kept repeating, as though iteration could dim the horror of the word. The sound of his own voice made him shudder, yet he almost hoped that Echo might hear him, and wake the slumbering city from its dreams. He felt a mad desire to stop the casual passer-by, and tell him everything.

Then he wandered across Oxford Street into narrow, shameful alleys. Two women with painted faces mocked at him as he went by. From a dark courtyard came a sound of oaths and blows, followed by shrill screams, and, huddled upon a damp doorstep, he saw the crook-backed forms of poverty and eld. A strange pity came over him. Were these children of sin and misery predestined to their end, as he to his? Were they, like him, merely the puppets of a monstrous show?

And yet it was not the mystery, but the comedy of suffering that struck him; its absolute uselessness, its grotesque want of meaning. How incoherent everything seemed! How lacking in all harmony! He was amazed at the discord between the shallow optimism of the day, and the real facts of existence. He was still very young.

After a time he found himself in front of Marylebone Church. The silent roadway looked like a long riband of polished silver, flecked here and there by the dark arabesques of waving shadows. Far into the distance curved the line of flickering gas-lamps, and outside a little walled-in house stood a solitary hansom, the driver asleep inside. He walked hastily in the direction of Portland Place, now and then looking round, as though he feared that he was being

followed. At the corner of Rich Street stood two men, reading a small bill upon a hoarding. An odd feeling of curiosity stirred him, and he crossed over. As he came near, the word "Murder," printed in black letters, met his eye. He started, and a deep flush came into his cheek. It was an advertisement offering a reward for any information leading to the arrest of a man of medium height, between thirty and forty years of age, wearing a billy-cock hat, a black coat, and check trousers, and with a scar upon his right cheek. He read it over and over again, and wondered if the wretched man would be caught, and how he had been scarred. Perhaps, some day, his own name might be placarded on the walls of London. Some day, perhaps, a price would be set on his head also.

The thought made him sick with horror. He turned on his heel, and hurried on into the night.

Where he went he hardly knew. He had a dim memory if wandering through a labyrinth of sordid houses, of being lost in a giant web of sombre streets, and it was bright dawn when he found himself at last in Piccadilly Circus. As he strolled home towards Belgrave Square, he met the great waggons on their way to Covent Garden. The white-smocked carters, with their pleasant sunburnt faces and coarse curly hair, strode sturdily on, cracking their whips, and calling out now and then to each other; on the back of a huge grey horse, the leader of a jangling team, sat a chubby boy, with a bunch of primroses in his battered hat, keeping tight hold of the mane with his little hands, and laughing; and the great piles of vegetables looked like masses of jade against the morning sky, like masses of green jade against the pink petals of some marvellous rose. Lord Arthur felt curiously affected, he could not tell why. There was something in the dawn's delicate loveliness that seemed to him inexpressibly pathetic, and he thought of all the days that break in beauty, and that set in storm. These rustics, too, with their rough, good-humoured voices, and their nonchalant ways, what a strange London they saw! A London free from the sin of night and the smoke of day, a pallid, ghost-like city, a desolate town of tombs! He wondered what they thought of it, and whether they knew anything of its splendour and its shame, of its fierce, fiery-coloured joys, and its horrible hunger, of all it makes and mars from morn to eve. Probably it was to them merely a mart where they brought their fruits to sell, and where they tarried for a few hours at most, leaving the streets still silent, the houses still asleep. It gave him pleasure to watch them as they went by. Rude as they were, with their heavy, nobnailed shoes, and their awkward gait, they brought a little of Arcady with them. He felt that they had lived with Nature, and that she had taught them peace. He envied them all that they did not know.

By the time he had reached Belgrave Square the sky was a faint blue, and the birds were beginning to twitter in the gardens.

iii

WHEN LORD ARTHUR woke it was twelve o'clock, and the mid-day sun was streaming through the ivory-silk curtains of his room. He got up and looked out of the window. A dim haze of heat was hanging over the great city, and the roofs of the houses were like dull silver. In the flickering green of the square below some children were flitting about like white butterflies, and the pavement was crowded with people on their way to the Park. Never had life seemed lovelier to him, never had the things of evil seemed more remote.

Then his valet brought him a cup of chocolate on a tray. After he had drunk it, he drew aside a heavy portière of peach-coloured plush, and passed into the bathroom. The light stole softly from above, through thin slabs of transparent onyx, and the water in the marble tank glimmered like a moonstone. He plunged hastily in, till the cool ripples touched throat and hair, and then dipped his head right under, as though he would have wiped away the stain of some shameful memory. When he stepped out he felt almost at peace. The exquisite physical conditions of the moment had dominated him, as indeed often happens in the case of very finely-wrought natures, for the senses, like fire, can purify as well as destroy.

After breakfast, he flung himself down on a divan, and lit a cigarette. On the mantel-shelf, framed in dainty old brocade, stood a large photograph of Sybil Merton, as he had seen her first at Lady Noel's ball. The small, exquisitely-shaped head drooped slightly to one side, as though the thin, reed-like throat could hardly bear the burden of so much beauty; the lips were slightly parted, and seemed made for sweet music; and all the tender purity of girlhood looked out in wonder from the dreaming eyes. With her soft, clinging dress of crêpe-de-chine, and her large leaf-shaped fan, she looked like one of those delicate little figures men find in the olive-woods near Tanagra; and there was a touch of Greek grace in her pose and attitude. Yet she was not petite. She was simply perfectly proportioned— a rare thing in an age when so many women are either over life-size or insignificant.

Now as Lord Arthur looked at her, he was filled with the terrible pity that is born of love. He felt that to marry her, with the doom of murder hanging over his head, would be a betrayal like that of Judas, a sin worse than any the Borgia had ever dreamed of. What happiness could there be for them, when at any moment he might be called upon to carry out the awful prophecy written in his hand? What manner of life would be theirs while Fate still held this fearful

fortune in the scales? The marriage must be postponed, at all costs. Of this he was quite resolved. Ardently though he loved the girl, and the mere touch of her fingers, when they sat together, made each nerve of his body thrill with exquisite joy, he recognised none the less clearly where his duty lay, and was fully conscious of the fact that he had no right to marry until he had committed the murder. This done, he could take her to his arms, knowing that she would never have to blush for him, never have to hang her head in shame. But done it must be first; and the sooner the better for both.

Many men in his position would have preferred the primrose path of dalliance to the steep heights of duty; but Lord Arthur was too conscientious to set pleasure above principle. There was more than mere passion in his love; and Sybil was to him a symbol of all that is good and noble. For a moment he had a natural repugnance against what he was asked to do, but it soon passed away. His heart told him that it was not a sin, but a sacrifice; his reason reminded him that there was no other course open. He had to choose between living for himself and living for others, and terrible though the task laid upon him undoubtedly was, yet he knew that he must not suffer selfishness to triumph over love. Sooner or later we are all called upon to decide on the same issue— of us all, the same question is asked. To Lord Arthur it came early in life— before his nature had been spoiled by the calculating cynicism of middle-age, or his heart corroded by the shallow, fashionable egotism of our day, and he felt no hesitation about doing his duty. Fortunately also, for him, he was no mere dreamer, or idle dilettante. Had he been so, he would have hesitated, like Hamlet, and let irresolution mar his purpose. But he was essentially practical. Life to him meant action, rather than thought. He had that rarest of all things, common sense.

The wild, turbid feelings of the previous night had by this time completely passed away, and it was almost with a sense of shame that he looked back upon his mad wanderings from street to street, his fierce emotional agony. The very sincerity of his sufferings made them seem unreal to him now. He wondered how he could have been so foolish as to rant and rave about the inevitable. The only question that seemed to trouble him was, whom to make away with; for he was not blind to the fact that murder, like the religions of the Pagan world, requires a victim as well as a priest. Not being a genius, he had no enemies, and indeed he felt that this was not the time for the gratification of any personal pique or dislike, the mission in which he was engaged being one of great and grave solemnity. He accordingly made out a list of his friends and relatives on a sheet of notepaper, and after careful consideration, decided in favour of Lady Clementina Beauchamp, a dear old lady who lived in Curzon Street, and was his own second cousin by his mother's side. He had always

been very fond of Lady Clem, as every one called her, and as he was very wealthy himself, having come into all Lord Rugby's property when he came of age, there was no possibility of his deriving any vulgar monetary advantage by her death. In fact, the more he thought over the matter, the more she seemed to him to be just the right person, and, feeling that any delay would be unfair to Sybil, he determined to make his arrangements at once.

The first thing to be done was, of course, to settle with the cheiromantist; so he sat down at a small Sheraton writing-table that stood near the window, drew a cheque for £105, payable to the order of Mr. Septimus Podgers, and, enclosing it in an envelope, told his valet to take it to West Moon Street. He then telephoned to the stables for his hansom, and dressed to go out. As he was leaving the room, he looked back at Sybil Merton's photograph, and swore that, come what may, he would keep the secret of his self-sacrifice hidden always in his heart.

On his way to the Buckingham, he stopped at a florist's, and sent Sybil a beautiful basket of narcissi, with lovely white petals and staring pheasants' eyes, and on arriving at the club, went straight to the library, rang the bell, and ordered the waiter to bring him a lemon-and-soda, and a book on Toxicology. He had fully decided that poison was the best means to adopt in this troublesome business. Anything like personal violence was extremely distasteful to him, and besides, he was very anxious not to murder Lady Clementina in any way that might attract public attention, as he hated the idea of being lionised at Lady Windermere's, or seeing his name figuring in the paragraphs of vulgar society-newspapers. He had also to think of Sybil's father and mother, who were rather old-fashioned people, and might possibly object to the marriage if there was anything like a scandal, though he felt certain that if he told them the whole facts of the case they would be the very first to appreciate the motives that had actuated him. He had every reason, then, to decide in favour of poison. It was safe, sure, and quiet, and did away with any necessity for painful scenes, to which, like most Englishmen, he had a rooted objection.

Of the science of poisons, however, he knew absolutely nothing, and as the waiter seemed quite unable to find anything in the library but Ruff 's Guide and Bailey's Magazine, he examined the book-shelves himself, and finally came across a handsomely-bound edition of the Pharmacopoeia, and a copy of Erskine's Toxicology, edited by Sir Mathew Reid, the President of the Royal College of Physicians, and one of the oldest members of the Buckingham, having been elected in mistake for somebody else; a contretemps that so enraged the Committee, that when the real man came up they black-balled him unanimously. Lord Arthur was a good deal puzzled at the technical terms

used in both books,and had begun to regret that he had not paid more attention to his classics at Oxford, when in the second volume of Erskine, he found a very interesting and complete account of the properties of aconitine, written in fairly clear English. It seemed to him to be exactly the poison he wanted. It was swift— indeed, almost immediate, in its effect— perfectly painless, and when taken in the form of a gelatine capsule, the mode recommended by Sir Mathew, not by any means unpalatable. He accordingly made a note, upon his shirt-cuff, of the amount necessary for a fatal dose, put the books back to their places, and strolled up St. James's Street, to Pestle and Humbey's, the great chemists. Mr. Pestle, who always attended personally on the aristocracy, was a good deal surprised at the order, and in a very deferential manner murmured something about a medical certificate being necessary. However, as soon as Lord Arthur explained to him that it was for a large Norwegian mastiff that he was obliged to get rid of, as it showed signs of incipient rabies, and had already bitten the coachman twice in the calf of the leg, he expressed himself as being perfectly satisfied, complimented Lord Arthur on his wonderful knowledge of Toxicology, and had the prescription made up immediately.

Lord Arthur put the capsule into a pretty little silver bonbonnière that he saw in a shop-window in Bond Street, threw away Pestle and Humbey's ugly pill-box, and drove off at once to Lady Clementina's.

"Well, *monsieur le mauvais sujet*," cried the old lady, as he entered the room, "why haven't you been to see me all this time?"

"My dear Lady Clem, I never have a moment to myself," said Lord Arthur, smiling.

"I suppose you mean that you go about all day long with Miss Sybil Merton, buying chiffons and talking nonsense? I cannot understand why people make such a fuss about being married. In my day we never dreamed of billing and cooing in public, or in private for that matter."

"I assure you I have not seen Sybil for twenty-four hours, Lady Clem. As far as I can make out, she belongs entirely to her milliners."

"Of course; that is the only reason you come to see an ugly old woman like myself. I wonder you men don't take warning. On a fait des folies pour moi, and here I am, a poor, rheumatic creature, with a false front and a bad temper. Why, if it were not for dear Lady Jansen, who sends me all the worst French novels she can find, I don't think I could get through the day. Doctors are no use at all, except to get fees out of one. They can't even cure my heartburn."

"I have brought you a cure for that, Lady Clem," said Lord Arthur gravely. "It is a wonderful thing, invented by an American."

"I don't think I like American inventions, Arthur. I am quite sure I don't. I read some American novels lately, and they were quite nonsensical."

"Oh, but there is no nonsense at all about this, Lady Clem! I assure you it is a perfect cure. You must promise to try it"; and Lord Arthur brought the little box out of his pocket, and handed it to her.

"Well, the box is charming, Arthur. Is it really a present? That is very sweet of you. And is this the wonderful medicine? It looks like a bonbon. I'll take it at once."

"Good heavens! Lady Clem," cried Lord Arthur, catching hold of her hand, "you mustn't do anything of the kind. It is a homeopathic medicine, and if you take it without having heartburn, it might do you no end of harm. Wait till you have an attack, and take it then. You will be astonished at the result."

"I should like to take it now," said Lady Clementina, holding up to the light the little transparent capsule, with its floating bubble of liquid aconitine. "I am sure it is delicious. The fact is that, though I hate doctors, I love medicines. However, I'll keep it till my next attack."

"And when will that be?" asked Lord Arthur eagerly. "Will it be soon?"

"I hope not for a week. I had a very bad time yesterday morning with it. But one never knows."

"You are sure to have one before the end of the month then, Lady Clem?"

"I am afraid so. But how sympathetic you are to-day, Arthur! Really, Sybil has done you a great deal of good. And now you must run away, for I am dining with some very dull people, who won't talk scandal, and I know that if I don't get my sleep now I shall never be able to keep awake during dinner. Good-bye, Arthur, give my love to Sybil, and thank you so much for the American medicine."

"You won't forget to take it, Lady Clem, will you?" said Lord Arthur, rising from his seat.

"Of course I won't, you silly boy. I think it is most kind of you to think of me, and I shall write and tell you if I want any more."

Lord Arthur left the house in high spirits, and with a feeling of immense relief.

That night he had an interview with Sybil Merton. He told her how he had been suddenly placed in a position of terrible difficulty, from which neither honour nor duty would allow him to recede. He told her that the marriage must be put off for the present, as until he had got rid of his fearful entanglements, he was not a free man. He implored her to trust him, and not to have any doubts about the future. Everything would come right, but patience was necessary.

The scene took place in the conservatory of Mr. Merton's house, in Park Lane, where Lord Arthur had dined as usual. Sybil had never seemed more happy, and for a moment Lord Arthur had been tempted to play the coward's part, to write to Lady Clementina for the pill, and to let the marriage go on as if there was no such person as Mr. Podgers in the world. His better nature, however, soon asserted itself, and even when Sybil flung herself weeping into his arms, he did not falter. The beauty that stirred his senses had touched his conscience also. He felt that to wreck so fair a life for the sake of a few months' pleasure would be a wrong thing to do.

He stayed with Sybil till nearly midnight, comforting her and being comforted in turn, and early the next morning he left for Venice, after writing a manly, firm letter to Mr. Merton about the necessary postponement of the marriage.

iv

IN VENICE he met his brother, Lord Surbiton, who happened to have come over from Corfu in his yacht. The two young men spent a delightful fortnight together. In the morning they rode on the Lido, or glided up and down the green canals in their long black gondola; in the afternoon they usually entertained visitors on the yacht; and in the evening they dined at Florian's, and smoked innumerable cigarettes on the Piazza. Yet somehow Lord Arthur was not happy. Every day he studied the obituary column in the *Times*, expecting to see a notice of Lady Clementina's death, but every day he was disappointed. He began to be afraid that some accident had happened to her, and often regretted that he had prevented her taking the aconitine when she had been so anxious to try its effect. Sybil's letters, too, though full of love, and trust, and tenderness, were often very sad in their tone, and sometimes he used to think that he was parted from her for ever.

After a fortnight Lord Surbiton got bored with Venice, and determined to run down the coast to Ravenna, as he heard that there was some capital cock-shooting in the Pinetum. Lord Arthur, at first, refused absolutely to come, but Surbiton, of whom he was extremely fond, finally persuaded him that if he stayed at Danielli's by himself he would be moped to death, and on the morning of the 15th they started, with a strong nor'-east wind blowing, and a rather sloppy sea. The sport was excellent, and the free, open-air life brought the colour back to Lord Arthur's cheeks, but about the 22nd he became anxious about Lady Clementina, and, in spite of Surbiton's remonstrances, came back to Venice by train.

As he stepped out of his gondola on to the hotel steps, the proprietor came forward to meet him with a sheaf of telegrams. Lord Arthur snatched them out of his hand, and tore them open. Everything had been successful. Lady Clementina had died quite suddenly on the night of the 17th!

His first thought was for Sybil, and he sent her off a telegram announcing his immediate return to London. He then ordered his valet to pack his things for the night mail, sent his gondoliers about five times their proper fare, and ran up to his sitting-room with a light step and a buoyant heart. There he found three letters waiting for him. One was from Sybil herself, full of sympathy and condolence. The others were from his mother, and from Lady Clementina's solicitor. It seemed that the old lady had dined with the Duchess that very night, had delighted every one by her wit and esprit, but had gone home somewhat early, complaining of heartburn. In the morning she was found dead in her bed, having apparently suffered no pain. Sir Mathew Reid had been sent for at once, but, of course, there was nothing to be done, and she was to be buried on the 22nd at Beauchamp Chalcote. A few days before she died she had made her will, and left Lord Arthur her little house in Curzon Street, and all her furniture, personal effects, and pictures, with the exception of her collection of miniatures, which was to go to her sister, Lady Margaret Rufford, and her amethyst necklace, which Sybil Merton was to have. The property was not of much value; but Mr. Mansfield the solicitor was extremely anxious for Lord Arthur to return at once, if possible, as there were a great many bills to be paid, and Lady Clementina had never kept any regular accounts.

Lord Arthur was very much touched by Lady Clementina's kind remembrance of him, and felt that Mr. Podgers had a great deal to answer for. His love of Sybil, however, dominated every other emotion, and the consciousness that he had done his duty gave him peace and comfort. When he arrived at Charing Cross, he felt perfectly happy.

The Mertons received him very kindly, Sybil made him promise that he would never again allow anything to come between them, and the marriage was fixed for the 7th June. Life seemed to him once more bright and beautiful, and all his old gladness came back to him again.

One day, however, as he was going over the house in Curzon Street, in company with Lady Clementina's solicitor and Sybil herself, burning packages of faded letters, and turning out drawers of odd rubbish, the young girl suddenly gave a little cry of delight.

"What have you found, Sybil?" said Lord Arthur, looking up from his work, and smiling.

"This lovely little silver *bonbonnière*, Arthur. Isn't it quaint and Dutch? Do give it to me! I know amethysts won't become me till I am over eighty."

It was the box that had held the aconitine.

Lord Arthur started, and a faint blush came into his cheek. He had almost entirely forgotten what he had done, and it seemed to him a curious coincidence that Sybil, for whose sake he had gone through all that terrible anxiety, should have been the first to remind him of it.

"Of course you can have it, Sybil. I gave it to poor Lady Clem myself."

"Oh! thank you, Arthur; and may I have the bonbon too? I had no notion that Lady Clementina liked sweets. I thought she was far too intellectual."

Lord Arthur grew deadly pale, and a horrible idea crossed his mind.

"Bonbon, Sybil? What do you mean?" he said, in a slow, hoarse voice.

"There is one in it, that is all. It looks quite old and dusty, and I have not the slightest intention of eating it. What is the matter, Arthur? How white you look!"

Lord Arthur rushed across the room, and seized the box. Inside it was the amber-coloured capsule, with its poison-bubble. Lady Clementina had died a natural death after all!

The shock of the discovery was almost too much for him. He flung the capsule into the fire, and sank on the sofa with a cry of despair.

v

MR. MERTON was a good deal distressed at the second postponement of the marriage, and Lady Julia, who had already ordered her dress for the wedding, did all in her power to make Sybil break off the match. Dearly, however, as Sybil loved her mother, she had given her whole life into Lord Arthur's hands, and nothing that Lady Julia could say could make her waver in her faith. As for Lord Arthur himself, it took him days to get over his terrible disappointment, and for a time his nerves were completely unstrung. His excellent common sense, however, soon asserted itself, and his sound, practical mind did not leave him long in doubt about what to do. Poison having proved a complete failure, dynamite, or some other form of explosive, was obviously the proper thing to try.

He accordingly looked again over the list of his friends and relatives, and, after careful consideration, determined to blow up his uncle, the Dean of Chichester. The Dean, who was a man of great culture and learning, was extremely fond of clocks, and had a wonderful collection of timepieces, ranging from the fifteenth century to the present day, and it seemed to Lord Arthur that this hobby of the good Dean's offered him an excellent opportunity for

carrying out his scheme. Where to procure an explosive machine was, of course, quite another matter. The London Directory gave him no information on the point, and he felt that there was very little use in going to Scotland Yard about it, as they never seemed to know anything about the movements of the dynamite faction till after an explosion had taken place, and not much even then.

Suddenly he thought of his friend Rouvaloff, a young Russian of very revolutionary tendencies, whom he had met at Lady Windermere's in the winter. Count Rouvaloff was supposed to be writing a life of Peter the Great, and to have come over to England for the purpose of studying the documents relating to that Tsar's residence in this country as a ship carpenter; but it was generally suspected that he was a Nihilist agent, and there was no doubt that the Russian Embassy did not look with any favour upon his presence in London. Lord Arthur felt that he was just the man for his purpose, and drove down one morning to his lodgings in Bloomsbury, to ask his advice and assistance.

"So you are taking up politics seriously?" said Count Rouvaloff, when Lord Arthur, who hated swagger of any kind, felt bound to admit to him that he had not the slightest interest in social questions, and simply wanted the explosive machine for a purely family matter, in which no one was concerned but himself.

Count Rouvaloff looked at him for some moments in amazement, and then seeing that he was quite serious, wrote an address on a piece of paper, initialled it, and handed it to him across the table.

"Scotland Yard would give a good deal to know this address, my dear fellow."

"They shan't have it," cried Lord Arthur, laughing; and after shaking the young Russian warmly by the hand he ran downstairs, examined the paper, and told the coachman to drive to Soho Square.

There he dismissed him, and strolled down Greek Street, till he came to a place called Bayle's Court. He passed under the archway, and found himself in a curious cul-de-sac, that was apparently occupied by a French Laundry, as a perfect network of clothes-lines was stretched across from house to house, and there was a flutter of white linen in the morning air. He walked right to the end, and knocked at a little green house. After some delay, during which every window in the court became a blurred mass of peering faces, the door was opened by a rather rough-looking foreigner, who asked him in very bad English what his business was. Lord Arthur handed him the paper Count Rouvaloff had given him. When the man saw it he bowed, and invited Lord Arthur into a very shabby front parlour on the ground-floor, and in a few moments Herr

Winckelkopf, as he was called in England, bustled into the room, with a very wine-stained napkin round his neck, and a fork in his left hand.

"Count Rouvaloff has given me an introduction to you," said Lord Arthur, bowing, "and I am anxious to have a short interview with you on a matter of business. My name is Smith, Mr. Robert Smith, and I want you to supply me with an explosive clock."

"Charmed to meet you, Lord Arthur," said the genial little German, laughing. "Don't look so alarmed, it is my duty to know everybody, and I remember seeing you one evening at Lady Windermere's. I hope her ladyship is quite well. Do you mind sitting with me while I finish my breakfast? There is an excellent pâté, and my friends are kind enough to say that my Rhine wine is better than any they get at the German Embassy," and before Lord Arthur had got over his surprise at being recognised, he found himself seated in the back-room, sipping the most delicious Marcobrünner out of a pale yellow hock-glass marked with the Imperial monogram, and chatting in the friendliest manner possible to the famous conspirator.

"Explosive clocks," said Herr Winckelkopf, "are not very good things for foreign exportation, as, even if they succeed in passing the Custom House, the train service is so irregular, that they usually go off before they have reached their proper destination. If, however, you want one for home use, I can supply you with an excellent article, and guarantee that you will be satisfied with the result. May I ask for whom it is intended? If it is for the police, or for any one connected with Scotland Yard, I'm afraid I cannot do anything for you. The English detectives are really our best friends, and I have always found that by relying on their stupidity, we can do exactly what we like. I could not spare one of them."

"I assure you," said Lord Arthur, "that it has nothing to do with the police at all. In fact, the clock is intended for the Dean of Chichester."

"Dear me! I had no idea that you felt so strongly about religion, Lord Arthur. Few young men do nowadays."

"I am afraid you overrate me, Herr Winckelkopf," said Lord Arthur, blushing. "The fact is, I really know nothing about theology."

"It is a purely private matter then?"

"Purely private."

Herr Winckelkopf shrugged his shoulders, and left the room, returning in a few minutes with a round cake of dynamite about the size of a penny, and a pretty little French clock, surmounted by an ormolu figure of Liberty trampling on the hydra of Despotism.

Lord Arthur's face brightened up when he saw it. "That is just what I want," he cried, "and now tell me how it goes off."

"Ah! there is my secret," answered Herr Winckelkopf, contemplating his invention with a justifiable look of pride; "let me know when you wish it to explode, and I will set the machine to the moment."

"Well, to-day is Tuesday, and if you could send it off at once—"

"That is impossible; I have a great deal of important work on hand for some friends of mine in Moscow. Still, I might send it off to-morrow."

"Oh, it will be quite time enough!" said Lord Arthur politely, "if it is delivered to-morrow night or Thursday morning. For the moment of the explosion, say Friday at noon exactly. The Dean is always at home at that hour."

"Friday, at noon," repeated Herr Winckelkopf, and he made a note to that effect in a large ledger that was lying on a bureau near the fireplace.

"And now," said Lord Arthur, rising from his seat, "pray let me know how much I am in your debt."

"It is such a small matter, Lord Arthur, that I do not care to make any charge. The dynamite comes to seven and sixpence, the clock will be three pounds ten, and the carriage about five shillings. I am only too pleased to oblige any friend of Count Rouvaloff 's."

"But your trouble, Herr Winckelkopf?"

"Oh, that is nothing! It is a pleasure to me. I do not work for money; I live entirely for my art."

Lord Arthur laid down £4:2:6 on the table, thanked the little German for his kindness, and, having succeeded in declining an invitation to meet some Anarchists at a meat-tea on the following Saturday, left the house and went off to the Park.

For the next two days he was in a state of the greatest excitement, and on Friday at twelve o'clock he drove down to the Buckingham to wait for news. All the afternoon the stolid hall-porter kept posting up telegrams from various parts of the country giving the results of horse-races, the verdicts in divorce suits, the state of the weather, and the like, while the tape ticked out wearisome details about an all-night sitting of the House of Commons, and a small panic on the Stock Exchange. At four o'clock the evening papers came in, and Lord Arthur disappeared into the library with the Pall Mall, the St. James's, the Globe, and the Echo, to the immense indignation of Colonel Goodchild, who wanted to read the reports of a speech he had delivered that morning at the Mansion House, on the subject of South African Missions, and the advisability of having black Bishops in every province, and for some reason or other had a strong prejudice against the Evening News. None of the papers, however, contained even the slightest allusion to Chichester, and Lord Arthur felt that the attempt must have failed. It was a terrible blow to him, and for a

time he was quite unnerved. Herr Winckelkopf, whom he went to see the next day, was full of elaborate apologies, and offered to supply him with another clock free of charge, or with a case of nitroglycerine bombs at cost price. But he had lost all faith in explosives, and Herr Winckelkopf himself acknowledged that everything is so adulterated nowadays, that even dynamite can hardly be got in a pure condition. The little German, however, while admitting that something must have gone wrong with the machinery, was not without hope that the clock might still go off, and instanced the case of a barometer that he had once sent to the military Governor at Odessa, which, though timed to explode in ten days, had not done so for something like three months. It was quite true that when it did go off, it merely succeeded in blowing a housemaid to atoms, the Governor having gone out of town six weeks before, but at least it showed that dynamite, as a destructive force, was, when under the control of machinery, a powerful, though a somewhat unpunctual agent. Lord Arthur was a little consoled by this reflection, but even here he was destined to disappointment, for two days afterwards, as he was going upstairs, the Duchess called him into her boudoir, and showed him a letter she had just received from the Deanery.

"Jane writes charming letters," said the Duchess; "you must really read her last. It is quite as good as the novels Mudie sends us."

Lord Arthur seized the letter from her hand. It ran as follows:—

"The Deanery, Chichester,

"27th May.

"My Dearest Aunt,

"Thank you so much for the flannel for the Dorcas Society, and also for the gingham. I quite agree with you that it is nonsense their wanting to wear pretty things, but everybody is so Radical and irreligious nowadays, that it is difficult to make them see that they should not try and dress like the upper classes. As papa has often said in his sermons, we live in an age of unbelief.

"We have had great fun over a clock that an unknown admirer sent papa last Thursday. It arrived in a wooden box from London, carriage paid; and papa feels it must have been sent by some one who had read his remarkable sermon, 'Is Licence Liberty?' for on the top of the clock was a figure of a woman, with what papa said was the cap of Liberty on her head. I didn't think it very becoming myself, but papa said it was historical, so I suppose it is all right. Parker unpacked it, and papa put it on the mantelpiece in the library, and we were all sitting there on Friday morning, when just as the clock struck twelve, we heard a whirring noise, a little puff of smoke came from the pedestal of the figure, and the goddess of Liberty fell off, and broke her nose on the fender! Maria was quite alarmed, but it looked so ridiculous, that James and I went off into fits of laughter, and even papa was amused. When we examined it, we found it was a sort of alarum clock, and that, if you set it to a particular hour, and put some gunpowder and a cap under a little hammer, it went off whenever you wanted. Papa said it must not remain in the library, as it made a noise, so Reggie carried it

away to the schoolroom, and does nothing but have small explosions all day long. Do you think Arthur would like one for a wedding present? I suppose they are quite fashionable in London. Papa says they should do a great deal of good, as they show that Liberty can't last, but must fall down. Papa says Liberty was invented at the time of the French Revolution. How awful it seems!

"I have now to go to the Dorcas, where I will read them your most instructive letter. How true, dear aunt, your idea is, that in their rank of life they should wear what is unbecoming. I must say it is absurd, their anxiety about dress, when there are so many more important things in this world, and in the next. I am so glad your flowered poplin turned out so well, and that your lace was not torn. I am wearing my yellow satin, that you so kindly gave me, at the Bishop's on Wednesday, and think it will look all right. Would you have bows or not? Jennings says that every one wears bows now, and that the underskirt should be frilled. Reggie has just had another explosion, and papa has ordered the clock to be sent to the stables. I don't think papa likes it so much as he did at first, though he is very flattered at being sent such a pretty and ingenious toy. It shows that people read his sermons, and profit by them.

"Papa sends his love, in which James, and Reggie, and Maria all unite, and, hoping that Uncle Cecil's gout is better, believe me, dear aunt, ever your affectionate niece,

"Jane Percy

"P.S.—Do tell me about the bows. Jennings insists they are the fashion."

Lord Arthur looked so serious and unhappy over the letter, that the Duchess went into fits of laughter.

"My dear Arthur," she cried, "I shall never show you a young lady's letter again! But what shall I say about the clock? I think it is a capital invention, and I should like to have one myself."

"I don't think much of them," said Lord Arthur, with a sad smile, and, after kissing his mother, he left the room.

When he got upstairs, he flung himself on the sofa, and his eyes filled with tears. He had done his best to commit this murder, but on both occasions he had failed, and through no fault of his own. He had tried to do his duty, but it seemed as if Destiny herself had turned traitor. He was oppressed with the sense of the barrenness of good intentions, of the futility of trying to be fine. Perhaps, it would be better to break off the marriage altogether. Sybil would suffer, it is true, but suffering could not really mar a nature so noble as hers. As for himself, what did it matter? There is always some war in which a man can die, some cause to which a man can give his life, and as life had no pleasure for him, so death had no terror. Let Destiny work out his doom. He would not stir to help her.

At half-past seven he dressed, and went down to the club. Surbiton was there with a party of young men, and he was obliged to dine with them. Their trivial conversation and idle jests did not interest him, and as soon as coffee was brought he left them, inventing some engagement in order to get away. As

he was going out of the club, the hall porter handed him a letter. It was from Herr Winckelkopf, asking him to call down the next evening, and look at an explosive umbrella, that went off as soon as it was opened. It was the very latest invention, and had just arrived from Geneva. He tore the letter up into fragments. He had made up his mind not to try any more experiments. Then he wandered down to the Thames Embankment, and sat for hours by the river. The moon peered through a mane of tawny clouds, as if it were a lion's eye, and innumerable stars spangled the hollow vault, like gold dust powdered on a purple dome. Now and then a barge swung out into the turbid stream, and floated away with the tide, and the railway signals changed from green to scarlet as the trains ran shrieking across the bridge. After some time, twelve o'clock boomed from the tall tower at Westminster, and at each stroke of the sonorous bell the night seemed to tremble. Then the railway lights went out, one solitary lamp left gleaming like a large ruby on a giant mast, and the roar of the city became fainter.

At two o'clock he got up, and strolled towards Blackfriars. How unreal everything looked! How like a strange dream! The houses on the other side of the river seemed built out of darkness. One would have said that silver and shadow had fashioned the world anew. The huge dome of St. Paul's loomed like a bubble through the dusky air.

As he approached Cleopatra's Needle he saw a man leaning over the parapet, and as he came nearer the man looked up, the gas-light falling full upon his face.

It was Mr. Podgers, the cheiromantist! No one could mistake the fat, flabby face, the gold-rimmed spectacles, the sickly feeble smile, the sensual mouth.

Lord Arthur stopped. A brilliant idea flashed across him, and he stole softly up behind. In a moment he had seized Mr. Podgers by the legs, and flung him into the Thames. There was a coarse oath, a heavy splash, and all was still. Lord Arthur looked anxiously over, but could see nothing of the cheiromantist but a tall hat, pirouetting in an eddy of moonlit water. After a time it also sank, and no trace of Mr. Podgers was visible. Once he thought that he caught sight of the bulky misshapen figure striking out for the staircase by the bridge, and a horrible feeling of failure came over him, but it turned out to be merely a reflection, and when the moon shone out from behind a cloud it passed away. At last he seemed to have realised the decree of destiny. He heaved a deep sigh of relief, and Sybil's name came to his lips.

"Have you dropped anything, sir?" said a voice behind him suddenly.

He turned round, and saw a policeman with a bull's-eye lantern.

"Nothing of importance, sergeant," he answered, smiling, and hailing a passing hansom, he jumped in, and told the man to drive to Belgrave Square.

For the next few days he alternated between hope and fear. There were moments when he almost expected Mr. Podgers to walk into the room, and yet at other times he felt that Fate could not be so unjust to him. Twice he went to the cheiromantist's address in West Moon Street, but he could not bring himself to ring the bell. He longed for certainty, and was afraid of it.

Finally it came. He was sitting in the smoking-room of the club having tea, and listening rather wearily to Surbiton's account of the last comic song at the Gaiety, when the waiter came in with the evening papers. He took up the St. James's, and was listlessly turning over its pages, when this strange heading caught his eye:

SUICIDE OF A CHEIROMANTIST.

He turned pale with excitement, and began to read. The paragraph ran as follows:—

Yesterday morning, at seven o'clock, the body of Mr. Septimus R. Podgers, the eminent cheiromantist, was washed on shore at Greenwich, just in front of the Ship Hotel. The unfortunate gentleman had been missing for some days, and considerable anxiety for his safety had been felt in cheiromantic circles. It is supposed that he committed suicide under the influence of a temporary mental derangement, caused by overwork, and a verdict to that effect was returned this afternoon by the coroner's jury. Mr. Podgers had just completed an elaborate treatise on the subject of the Human Hand, that will shortly be published, when it will no doubt attract much attention. The deceased was sixty-five years of age, and does not seem to have left any relations.

Lord Arthur rushed out of the club with the paper still in his hand, to the immense amazement of the hall-porter, who tried in vain to stop him, and drove at once to Park Lane. Sybil saw him from the window, and something told her that he was the bearer of good news. She ran down to meet him, and, when she saw his face, she knew that all was well.

"My dear Sybil," cried Lord Arthur, "let us be married to-morrow!"

"You foolish boy! Why the cake is not even ordered!" said Sybil, laughing through her tears.

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WHEN the wedding took place, some three weeks later, St. Peter's was crowded with a perfect mob of smart people. The service was read in a most impressive manner by the Dean of Chichester, and everybody agreed that they had never seen a handsomer couple than the bride and bridegroom. They were more than handsome, however— they were happy. Never for a single

moment did Lord Arthur regret all that he had suffered for Sybil's sake, while she, on her side, gave him the best things a woman can give to any man—worship, tenderness, and love. For them romance was not killed by reality. They always felt young.

Some years afterwards, when two beautiful children had been born to them, Lady Windermere came down on a visit to Alton Priory, a lovely old place, that had been the Duke's wedding present to his son; and one afternoon as she was sitting with Lady Arthur under a lime-tree in the garden, watching the little boy and girl as they played up and down the rose-walk, like fitful sunbeams, she suddenly took her hostess's hand in hers, and said, "Are you happy, Sybil?"

"Dear Lady Windermere, of course I am happy. Aren't you?"

"I have no time to be happy, Sybil. I always like the last person who is introduced to me; but, as a rule, as soon as I know people I get tired of them."

"Don't your lions satisfy you, Lady Windermere?"

"Oh dear, no! lions are only good for one season. As soon as their manes are cut, they are the dullest creatures going. Besides, they behave very badly, if you are really nice to them. Do you remember that horrid Mr. Podgers? He was a dreadful impostor. Of course, I didn't mind that at all, and even when he wanted to borrow money I forgave him, but I could not stand his making love to me. He has really made me hate cheiromancy. I go in for telepathy now. It is much more amusing."

"You mustn't say anything against cheiromancy here, Lady Windermere; it is the only subject that Arthur does not like people to chaff about. I assure you he is quite serious over it."

"You don't mean to say that he believes in it, Sybil?"

"Ask him, Lady Windermere, here he is"; and Lord Arthur came up the garden with a large bunch of yellow roses in his hand, and his two children dancing round him.

"Lord Arthur?"

"Yes, Lady Windermere."

"You don't mean to say that you believe in cheiromancy?"

"Of course I do," said the young man, smiling.

"But why?"

"Because I owe to it all the happiness of my life," he murmured, throwing himself into a wicker chair.

"My dear Lord Arthur, what do you owe to it?"

"Sybil," he answered, handing his wife the roses, and looking into her violent eyes.

"What nonsense!" cried Lady Windermere. "I never heard such nonsense in all my life."

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16: The House of the Nightmare

Edward Lucas White

1866-1934

Smith's Magazine Sep 1906

Collected in: *Lukundoo and other stories*, NY, 1927

I FIRST caught sight of the house from the brow of the mountain as I cleared the woods and looked across the broad valley several hundred feet below me, to the low sun sinking toward the far blue hills. From that momentary viewpoint I had an exaggerated sense of looking almost vertically down. I seemed to be hanging over the checker-board of roads and fields, dotted with farm buildings, and felt the familiar deception that I could almost throw a stone upon the house. I barely glimpsed its slate roof.

What caught my eyes was the bit of road in front of it, between the mass of dark-green trees about the house and the orchard opposite. Perfectly straight it was, bordered by an even row of trees, through which I made out a cinder side path and a low stone wall.

Conspicuous on the orchard side between two of the flanking trees was a white object, which I took to be a tall stone, a vertical splinter of one of the tilted lime-stone reefs with which the fields of the region are scarred.

The road itself I saw plain as a box-wood ruler on a green baize table. It gave me a pleasurable anticipation of a chance for a burst of speed. I had been painfully traversing closely forested, semi-mountainous hills. Not a farmhouse had I passed, only wretched cabins by the road, more than twenty miles of which I had found very bad and hindering. Now, when I was not many miles from my expected stopping-place, I looked forward to better going, and to that straight, level bit in particular.

As I sped cautiously down the sharp beginning of the long descent the trees engulfed me again, and I lost sight of the valley. I dipped into a hollow, rose on the crest of the next hill, and again saw the house, nearer, and not so far below.

The tall stone caught my eye with a shock of surprise. Had I not thought it was opposite the house next the orchard? Clearly it was on the left-hand side of the road toward the house. My self-questioning lasted only the moment as I passed the crest. Then the outlook was cut off again; but I found myself gazing ahead, watching for the next chance at the same view.

At the end of the second hill I only saw the bit of road obliquely and could not be sure, but, as at first, the tall stone seemed on the right of the road.

At the top of the third and last hill I looked down the stretch of road under the over-arching trees, almost as one would look through a tube. There was a line of whiteness which I took for the tall stone. It was on the right.

I dipped into the last hollow. As I mounted the farther slope I kept my eyes on the top of the road ahead of me. When my line of sight surmounted the rise I marked the tall stone on my right hand among the serried maples. I leaned over, first on one side, then on the other, to inspect my tyres, then I threw the lever.

As I flew forward, I looked ahead. There was the tall stone—on the left of the road! I was really scared and almost dazed. I meant to stop dead, take a good look at the stone, and make up my mind beyond peradventure whether it was on the right or the left—if not, indeed, in the middle of the road.

In my bewilderment I put on the highest speed. The machine leaped forward; everything I touched went wrong; I steered wildly, slewed to the left, and crashed into a big maple.

When I came to my senses, I was flat on my back in the dry ditch. The last rays of the sun sent shafts of golden-green light through the maple boughs overhead. My first thought was an odd mixture of appreciation of the beauties of nature and disapproval of my own conduct in touring without a companion—a fad I had regretted more than once. Then my mind cleared and I sat up. I felt myself from the head down. I was not bleeding; no bones were broken; and, while much shaken, I had suffered no serious bruises.

Then I saw the boy. He was standing at the edge of the cinderpath, near the ditch. He was so stocky and solidly built; barefoot, with his trousers rolled up to his knees; wore a sort of butternut shirt, open at the throat; and was coatless and hatless. He was tow-headed, with a shock of tousled hair; was much freckled, and had a hideous harelip. He shifted from one foot to the other, twiddled his toes, and said nothing whatever, though he stared at me intently.

I scrambled to my feet and proceeded to survey the wreck. It seemed distressingly complete. It had not blown up, nor even caught fire; but otherwise the ruin appeared hopelessly thorough. Everything I examined seemed worse smashed than the rest. My two hampers, alone, by one of those cynical jokes of chance, had escaped—both had pitched clear of the wreckage and were unhurt, not even a bottle broken.

During my investigations the boy's faded eyes followed me continuously, but he uttered no word. When I had convinced myself of my helplessness I straightened up and addressed him:

"How far is it to a blacksmith's shop?"

"Eight mile," he answered. He had a distressing case of cleft palate and was scarcely intelligible.

"Can you drive me there?" I inquired.

"Nary team on the place," he replied; "nary horse, nary cow."

"How far to the next house?" I continued.

"Six mile," he responded.

I glanced at the sky. The sun had set already. I looked at my watch: it was going—seven thirty- six.

"May I sleep in your house tonight?" I asked.

"You can come in if you want to," he said, "and sleep if you can. House all messy; ma's been dead three year, and dad's away. Nothin' to eat but buckwheat flour and rusty bacon."

"I've plenty to eat," I answered, picking up a hamper. "Just take that hamper, will you?"

"You can come in if you've a mind to," he said, "but you got to carry your own stuff." He did not speak gruffly or rudely, but appeared mildly stating an inoffensive fact.

"All right," I said, picking up the other hamper; "lead the way."

The yard in front of the house was dark under a dozen or more immense ailanthus trees. Below them many smaller trees had grown up, and beneath these a dank underwood of tall, rank suckers Out of the deep, shaggy, matted grass. What had once been, apparently, a carriage-drive, left a narrow, curved track, disused and grass-grown, leading to the house. Even here were some shoots of the ailanthus, and the air was unpleasant with the vile smell of the roots and suckers and the insistent odour of their flowers.

The house was of grey stone, with green shutters faded almost as grey as the stone. Along its front was a veranda, not much raised from the ground, and with no balustrade or railing. On it were several hickory splint rockers. There were eight shuttered windows toward the porch, and midway of them a wide door, with small violet panes on either side of it and a fanlight above.

"Open the door," I said to the boy.

"Open it yourself," he replied, not unpleasantly nor disagreeably, but in such a tone that one could not but take the suggestion as a matter of course.

I put down the two hampers and tried the door. It was latched but not locked, and opened with a rusty grind of its hinges, on which it sagged crazily, scraping the floor as it turned. The passage smelt mouldy and damp. There were several doors on either side; the boy pointed to the first on the right.

"You can have that room," he said.

I opened the door. What with the dusk, he interlacing trees outside, the piazza roof, and the closed shutters, I could make out little.

"Better get a lamp," I said to the boy.

"Nary lamp," he declared cheerfully. "Nary candle. Mostly I get abed before dark."

I returned to the remains of my conveyance. All four of my lamps were merely scrap metal and splintered glass. My lantern was mashed flat. I always, however, carried candles in my valise. This I found split and crushed, but still holding together. I carried it to the porch, opened it, and took out three candles.

Entering the room, where I found the boy standing just where I had left him. I lit the candle. The walls were white-washed, the floor bare. There was a mildewed, chilly smell, but the bed looked freshly made up and clean, although it felt clammy.

With a few drops of its own grease I stuck the candle on the corner of a mean, rickety little bureau. There was nothing else in the room save two rush-bottomed chairs and a small table. I went out on the porch, brought in my valise, and put it on the bed. I raised the sash of each window and pushed open the shutter. Then I asked the boy, who had not moved or spoken, to show me the way to the kitchen. He led me straight through the hail to the back of the house. The kitchen was large, and had no furniture save some pine chairs, a pine bench, and a pine table.

I stuck two candles on opposite corners of the table. There was no stove or range in the kitchen, only a big hearth, the ashes in which smelt and looked a month old. The wood in the woodshed was dry enough, but even it had a cellary, stale smell. The axe and hatchet were both rusty and dull, but usable, and I quickly made a big fire. To my amazement, for the mid-June evening was hot and still, the boy, a wry smile on his ugly face, almost leaned over the flame, hands and arms spread out, and fairly roasted himself.

"Are you cold?" I inquired.

"I'm allus cold," he replied, hugging the fire closer than ever, till I thought he must scorch. I left him toasting himself while I went in search of water. I discovered the pump, which was in working order and not dry on the valves; but I had a furious struggle to fill the two leaky pails I had found. When I had put water to boil I fetched my hampers from the porch.

I brushed the table and set out my meal—cold fowl, cold ham, white and brown bread, olives, jam, and cake. When the can of soup was hot and the coffee made I drew up two chairs to the table and invited the boy to join me.

"I ain't hungry," he said; "I've had supper."

He was a new sort of boy to me; all the boys I knew were hearty eaters and always ready. I had felt hungry myself, but somehow when I came to eat I had little appetite and hardly relished the food. I soon made an end of my meal, covered the fire, blew out the candles, and returned to the porch, where I dropped into one of the hickory rockers to smoke. The boy followed me

silently and seated himself on the porch floor, leaning against a pillar, his feet on the grass outside.

"What do you do," I asked, "when your father is away?"

"Just loaf 'round," he said. "Just fool 'round."

"How far off are your nearest neighbours?" I asked.

"Don't no neighbours never come here," he stated. "Say they're afeared of the ghosts."

I was not at all startled; the place had all those aspects which lead to a house being called haunted. I was struck by his odd matter-of-fact way of speaking—it was as if he had said they were afraid of a cross dog.

"Do you ever see any ghosts around here?" I continued.

"Never see 'em," he answered, as if I had mentioned tramps or partridges. "Never hear 'em. Sort o' feel 'em 'round sometimes."

"Are you afraid of them?" I asked.

"Nope," he declared. "I ain't skeered o' ghosts; I'm skeered o' nightmares. Ever have nightmares?"

"Very seldom," I replied.

"I do," he returned. "Allus have the same nightmare—big sow, big as a steer, trying to eat me up. Wake up so skeered I could run to never. Nowheres to run to. Go to sleep, and have it again. Wake up worse skeered than ever. Dad says it's buckwheat cakes in summer."

"You must have teased a sow some time," I said.

"Yep," he answered. "Teased a big sow wunst, holding up one of her pigs by the hind leg. Teased her too long. Fell in the pen and got bit up some. Wisht I hadn't a' teased her. Have that nightmare three times a week sometimes. Worse'n being burnt out. Worse'n ghosts. Say, I sorter feel ghosts around now."

He was not trying to frighten me. He was as simply stating an opinion as if he had spoken of bats or mosquitoes. I made no reply, and found myself listening involuntarily. My pipe went out. I did not really want another, but felt disinclined for bed as yet, and was comfortable where I was, while the smell of the ailanthus blossoms was very disagreeable. I filled my pipe again, lit it, and then, as I puffed, somehow dozed off for a moment.

I awoke with a sensation of some light fabric trailed across my face. The boy's position was unchanged.

"Did you do that?" I asked sharply.

"Ain't done nary thing," he rejoined. "What was it?"

"It was like a piece of mosquito-netting brushed over my face."

"That ain't netting," he asserted; "that's a veil. That's one of the ghosts. Some blow on you; some touch you with their long, cold fingers. That one with the veil she drags acrosst your face—well, mostly I think it's ma."

He spoke with the unassailable conviction of the child in We Are Seven. I found no words to reply, and rose to go to bed.

"Good night," I said.

"Good night," he echoed. "I'll sit out here a spell yet." I lit a match, found the candle I had stuck on the corner of the shabby little bureau, and undressed. The bed had a comfortable husk mattress, and I was soon asleep.

I had the sensation of having slept some time when I had a nightmare—the very nightmare the boy had described. A huge sow, big as a dray horse, was reared up with her forelegs over the foot-board of the bed, trying to scramble over to me. She grunted and puffed, and I felt I was the food she craved. I knew in the dream that it was only a dream, and strove to wake up.

Then the gigantic dream-beast floundered over the foot-board, fell across my shins, and I awoke.

I was in darkness as absolute as if I were sealed in a jet vault, yet the shudder of the nightmare instantly subsided, my nerves quieted; I realised where I was, and felt not the least panic. I turned over and was asleep again almost at once. Then I had a real nightmare, not recognisable as a dream, but appallingly real—an unutterable agony of reasonless horror.

There was a Thing in the room; not a sow, nor any other nameable creature, but a Thing. It was as big as an elephant, filled the room to the ceiling, was shaped like a wild boar, seated on its haunches, with its forelegs braced stiffly in front of it. It had a hot, slobbering, red mouth, full of big tusks, and its jaws worked hungrily. It shuffled and hunched itself forward, inch by inch, till its vast forelegs straddled the bed.

The bed crushed up like wet blotting-paper, and I felt the weight of the Thing on my feet, on my legs, on my body, on my chest. It was hungry, and I was what it was hungry for, and it meant to begin on my face. Its dripping mouth was nearer and nearer.

Then the dream-helplessness that made me unable to call or move suddenly gave way, and I yelled and awoke. This time my ten-or was positive and not to be shaken off.

It was near dawn: I could descry dimly the cracked, dirty window-panes. I got up, lit the stump of my candle and two fresh ones, dressed hastily, strapped my ruined valise, and put it on the porch against the wall near the door. Then I called the boy. I realised quite suddenly that I had not told him my name or asked his.

1 shouted. "Hello!" a few times, but won no answer. I had had enough of that house. I was still permeated with the panic of the nightmare. I desisted from shouting, made no search, but with two candles went out to the kitchen. I took a swallow of cold coffee and munched a biscuit as I hustled my belongings into my hampers. Then, leaving a silver dollar on the table, I carried the hampers out on the porch and dumped them by my valise.

It was now light enough to see the walk, and I went out to the road. Already the night-dew had rusted much of the wreck, making it look more hopeless than before. It was, however, entirely undisturbed. There was not so much as a wheel-track or a hoof-print on the road. The tall, white stone, uncertainty about which had caused my disaster, stood like a sentinel opposite where I had upset.

I set out to find that blacksmith shop. Before I had gone far the sun rose clear from the horizon, and was almost at once scorching. As I footed it along I grew very much heated, and it seemed more like ten miles than six before I reached the first house. It was a new frame house, neatly painted and close to the road, with a whitewashed fence along its garden front.

I was about to open the gate when a big black dog with a curly tail bounded out of the bushes. He did not bark but stood inside the gate wagging his tail and regarding me with a friendly eye; yet I hesitated with my hand on the latch and considered. The dog might not be as friendly as he looked, and the sight of him made me realise that except for the boy I had seen no creature about the house where I had spent the night; no dog or cat; not even a toad or bird. While I was ruminating upon this a man came from behind the house.

"Will your dog bite?" I asked.

"Naw," he answered; "he don't bite. Come in."

I told him I had had an accident to my automobile, and asked if he could drive me to the blacksmith shop and back to my wreckage.

"Cert," he said. "Happy to help you. I'll hitch up foreshortly. Wher'd you smash?"

"In front of the grey house about six miles back," I answered.

"That big stone-built house?" he queried.

"The same," I assented.

"Did you go a-past here?" he inquired astonished. "I didn't hear ye."

"No," I said; "I came from the other direction."

"Why," he meditated, "you must'a' smashed about sun-up. Did you come over them mountains in the dark?"

"No," I replied; "I came over them yesterday evening. I smashed up about sunset."

"Sundown!" he exclaimed. "Where in thunder've ye been all night?"

"I slept in the house where I broke down."

"In that big stone-built house in the trees?" he demanded.

"Yes," I agreed.

"Why," he answered excitedly, "that there house is haunted! They say if you have to drive past it after dark, you can't tell which side of the road the big white stone is on."

"I couldn't tell even before sunset," I said.

"There!" he exclaimed. "Look at that, now! And you slep' in that house! Did you sleep, honest?"

"I slept pretty well," I said. "Except for a nightmare, I slept all night."

"Well," he commented, "I wouldn't go in that there house for a farm, nor sleep in it for my salvation. And you slep'! How in thunder did you get in?"

"The boy took me in," I said.

"What sort of boy?" he queried, his eyes fixed on me with a queer, countrified look of absorbed interest.

"A thick-set, freckle-faced boy with a harelip," I said.

"Talk like his mouth was full of mush?" he demanded.

"Yes," I said; "bad case of cleft palate."

"Well!" he exclaimed. "I never did believe in ghosts, and I never did half believe that house was haunted, but I know it now. And you slep'!"

"I didn't see any ghosts," I retorted irritably.

"You seen a ghost for sure," he rejoined solemnly. "That there harelip boy's been dead six months."

End