# PAST MASTERS 180

Henry James
H. Rider Haggard
Mary Shelley
Mark Twain
H. Bedford-Jones
C. S. Montanye
John Buchan
Morley Roberts
O. Henry

*and more*

# PAST MASTERS 180

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

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## 1: The Velvet Glove

***Henry James***

1843–1916

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HE THOUGHT he had already, poor John Berridge, tasted in their fullness the sweets of success; but nothing yet had been more charming to him than when the young Lord, as he irresistibly and, for greater certitude, quite correctly figured him, fairly sought out, in Paris, the new literary star that had begun to hang, with a fresh red light, over the vast, even though rather confused, Anglo-Saxon horizon; positively approaching that celebrity with a shy and artless appeal. The young Lord invoked on this occasion the celebrity's prized judgement of a special literary case; and Berridge could take the whole manner of it for one of the 'quaintest' little acts displayed to his amused eyes, up to now, on the stage of European society— albeit these eyes were quite aware, in general, of missing everywhere no more of the human scene than possible, and of having of late been particularly awake to the large extensions of it spread before him (since so he could but fondly read his fate) under the omen of his prodigious 'hit'. It was because of his hit that he was having rare opportunities— of which he was so honestly and humbly proposing, as he would have said, to make the most: it was because every one in the world (so far had the thing gone) was reading The Heart of Gold as just a slightly too fat volume, or sitting out the same as just a fifth-act too long play, that he found himself floated on a tide he would scarce have dared to show his favourite hero sustained by, found a hundred agreeable and interesting things happen to him which were all, one way or another, affluents of the golden stream.

The great renewed resonance— renewed by the incredible luck of the play— was always in his ears without so much as a conscious turn of his head to listen; so that the queer world of his fame was not the mere usual field of the Anglo-Saxon boom, but positively the bottom of the *whole* theatric sea, unplumbed source of the wave that had borne him in the course of a year or two over German, French, Italian, Russian, Scandinavian foot-lights. Paris itself really appeared for the hour the centre of his cyclone, with reports and 'returns', to say nothing of agents and emissaries, converging from the minor capitals; though his impatience was scarce the less keen to get back to London, where his work had had no such critical excoriation to survive, no such lesson of anguish to learn, as it had received at the hand of supreme authority, of that French authority which was in such a matter the only one to be artistically reckoned with. If his spirit indeed had had to reckon with it his fourth act

practically hadn't: it continued to make him blush every night for the public more even than the inimitable *feuilleton* had made him blush for himself.

This had figured, however, after all, the one bad drop in his cup; so that, for the rest, his high-water mark might well have been, that evening at Gloriani's studio, the approach of his odd and charming applicant, vaguely introduced at the latter's very own request by their hostess, who, with an honest, helpless, genial gesture, washed her fat begemmed hands of the name and identity of either, but left the fresh, fair, ever so habitually assured, yet ever so easily awkward Englishman with his plea to put forth. There was that in this pleasant personage which could still make Berridge wonder what conception of profit from him might have, all incalculably, taken form in such a head— these being truly the last intrenchments of our hero's modesty. He wondered, the splendid young man, he wondered awfully, he wondered (it was unmistakable) quite nervously, he wondered, to John's ardent and acute imagination, quite beautifully, if the author of The Heart of Gold would mind just looking at a book by a friend of his, a great friend, which he himself believed rather clever, and had in fact found very charming, but as to which— if it really wouldn't bore Mr Berridge— he should so like the verdict of some one who knew. His friend was awfully ambitious, and he thought there was something in it— with all of which might he send the book to any address?

Berridge thought of many things while the young Lord thus charged upon him, and it was odd that no one of them was any question of the possible worth of the offered achievement— which, for that matter, was certain to be of the quality of *all* the books, to say nothing of the plays, and the projects for plays, with which, for some time past, he had seen his daily postbag distended. He had made out, on looking at these things, no difference at all from one to the other. Here, however, was something more— something that made his fellow-guest's overture *independently* interesting and, as he might imagine, important. He smiled, he was friendly and vague; said "A work of fiction, I suppose?" and that he didn't pretend ever to pronounce, that he in fact quite hated, always, to have to, not 'knowing', as he felt, any better than anyone else; but would gladly look at anything, under that demur, if it would give any pleasure. Perhaps the very brightest and most diamond-like twinkle he had yet seen the star of his renown emit was just the light brought into his young Lord's eyes by this so easy consent to oblige. It was easy because the presence before him was from moment to moment referring itself back to some recent observation or memory; something caught somewhere, within a few weeks or months, as he had moved about, and that seemed to flutter forth at this stir of the folded leaves of his recent experience very much as a gathered faded

flower, placed there for 'pressing', might drop from between the pages of a volume opened at hazard.

He had seen him before, this splendid and sympathetic person— whose flattering appeal was by no means *all* that made him sympathetic; he had met him, had noted, had wondered about him, had in fact imaginatively, intellectually, so to speak, quite yearned over him, in some conjunction lately, though ever so fleetingly, apprehended: which circumstance constituted precisely an association as tormenting, for the few minutes, as it was vague, and set him to sounding, intensely and vainly, the face that itself figured everything agreeable except recognition. He couldn't remember, and the young man didn't; distinctly, yes, they had been in presence, during the previous winter, by some chance of travel, through Sicily, through Italy, through the south of France, but his *Seigneurie*— so Berridge liked exotically to phrase it— had then (in ignorance of the present reasons) not noticed *him.* It was positive for the man of established identity, all the while too, and through the perfect lucidity of his sense of achievement in an air 'conducting' nothing but the loudest bang, that this was fundamentally much less remarkable than the fact of his being made up to in such a quarter now. That was the disservice, in a manner, of one's having so much imagination: the mysterious values of other types kept looming larger before you than the doubtless often higher but comparatively familiar ones of your own, and if you had anything of the artist's real feeling for life the attraction and amusement of possibilities so projected were worth more to you, in nineteen moods out of twenty, than the sufficiency, the serenity, the felicity, whatever it might be, of your stale personal certitudes. You were intellectually, you were 'artistically' rather abject, in fine, if your curiosity (in the grand sense of the term) wasn't worth more to you than your dignity. What *was* your dignity, 'anyway', but just the consistency of your curiosity, and what moments were ever so ignoble for you as, under the blighting breath of the false gods, stupid conventions, traditions, examples, your lapses from that consistency? His *Seigneurie,* at all events, delightfully, hadn't the least real idea of what any John Berridge was talking about, and the latter felt that if he had been less beautifully witless, and thereby less true to his right figure, it might scarce have been forgiven him.

His right figure was that of life in irreflective joy and at the highest thinkable level of prepared security and unconscious insolence. What was the pale page of fiction compared with the intimately personal adventure that, in almost any direction, he would have been all so stupidly, all so gallantly, all so instinctively and, by every presumption, so prevailingly ready for? Berridge would have given six months' 'royalties' for even an hour of his looser dormant consciousness— since one was oneself, after all, no worm, but an heir of all the

ages too— and yet without being able to supply chapter and verse for the felt, the huge difference. His *Seigneurie* was tall and straight, but so, thank goodness, was the author of The Heart of Gold, who had no such vulgar 'mug' either; and there was no intrinsic inferiority in being a bit inordinately, and so it might have seemed a bit strikingly, black-browed instead of being fair as the morning. Again while his new friend delivered himself our own tried in vain to place him; he indulged in plenty of pleasant, if rather restlessly headlong sound, the confessed incoherence of a happy mortal who had always many things 'on', and who, while waiting at any moment for connections and consummations, had fallen into the way of talking, as they said, all artlessly, and a trifle more betrayingly, against time. He would always be having appointments, and somehow of a high 'romantic' order, to keep, and the imperfect punctualities of others to wait for— though who would be of a quality to make such a pampered personage wait very much our young analyst could only enjoy asking himself. There were women who might be of a quality— half a dozen of those perhaps, of those alone, about the world; our friend was as sure of this, by the end of four minutes, as if he knew all about it.

After saying he would send him the book the young Lord indeed dropped that subject; he had asked where he might send it, and had had an "Oh, I shall remember!" on John's mention of an hotel; but he had made no further dash into literature, and it was ten to one that this would be the last the distinguished author might hear of the volume. Such again was a note of these high existences— that made one content to ask of them no whit of other consistency than that of carrying off the particular occasion, whatever it might be, in a dazzle of amiability and felicity and leaving *that* as a sufficient trace of their passage. Sought and achieved consistency was but an angular, a secondary motion; compared with the air of complete freedom it might have an effect of deformity. There was no placing this figure of radiant ease, for Berridge, in any relation that didn't appear not good enough— that is among the relations that hadn't been too good for Berridge himself. He was all right where he was; the great Gloriani somehow made that law; his house, with his supreme artistic position, was good enough for anyone, and to-night in especial there were charming people, more charming than our friend could recall from any other scene, as the natural train or circle, as he might say, of such a presence. For an instant he thought he had got the face as a specimen of imperturbability watched, with wonder, across the hushed rattle of roulette at Monte Carlo; but this quickly became as improbable as any question of a vulgar *table d'hôte,* or a steam-boat deck, or a herd of fellow-pilgrims cicerone-led, or even an opera-box serving, during a performance, for frame of a type observed from the stalls. One placed young gods and goddesses only when one

placed them on Olympus, and it met the case, always, that they were of Olympian race, and that they glimmered for one, at the best, through their silver cloud, like the visiting apparitions in an epic.

This was brief and beautiful indeed till something happened that gave it, for Berridge, on the spot, a prodigious extension— an extension really as prodigious, after a little, as if he had suddenly seen the silver clouds multiply and then the whole of Olympus presently open. Music, breaking upon the large air, enjoined immediate attention, and in a moment he was listening, with the rest of the company, to an eminent tenor, who stood by the piano; and was aware, with it, that his Englishman had turned away and that in the vast, rich, tapestried room where, in spite of figures and objects so numerous, clear spaces, wide vistas and, as they might be called, becoming situations abounded, there had been from elsewhere, at the signal of unmistakable song, a rapid accession of guests. At first he but took this in, and the way that several young women, for whom seats had been found, looked charming in the rapt attitude; while even the men, mostly standing and grouped, 'composed', in their stillness, scarce less impressively, under the sway of the divine voice. It ruled the scene, to the last intensity, and yet our young man's fine sense found still a resource in the range of the eyes, without sound or motion, while all the rest of consciousness was held down as by a hand mailed in silver. It was better, in this way, than the opera— John alertly thought of that: the composition sung might be Wagnerian, but no Tristram, no Iseult, no Parsifal and no Kundry of them all could ever show, could ever 'act' to the music, as our friend had thus the power of seeing his dear contemporaries of either sex (armoured *they* so otherwise than in cheap Teutonic tinsel!) just continuously and inscrutably sit to it.

It made, the whole thing together, an enchantment amid which he had in truth, at a given moment, ceased to distinguish parts— so that he was himself certainly at last soaring as high as the singer's voice and forgetting, in a lost gaze at the splendid ceiling, everything of the occasion but what his intelligence poured into it. This, as happened, was a flight so sublime that by the time he had dropped his eyes again a cluster of persons near the main door had just parted to give way to a belated lady who slipped in, through the gap made for her, and stood for some minutes full in his view. It was a proof of the perfect hush that no one stirred to offer her a seat, and her entrance, in her high grace, had yet been so noiseless that she could remain at once immensely exposed and completely unabashed. For Berridge, once more, if the scenic show before him so melted into the music, here precisely might have been the heroine herself advancing to the footlights at her cue. The interest deepened to a thrill, and everything, at the touch of his recognition of this

personage, absolutely the most beautiful woman now present, fell exquisitely together and gave him what he had been wanting from the moment of his taking in his young Englishman.

It was there, the missing connection: her arrival had on the instant lighted it by a flash. Olympian herself, supremely, divinely Olympian, she had arrived, could *only* have arrived, for the one person present of really equal race, our young man's late converser, whose flattering demonstration might now stand for one of the odd extravagant forms taken by nervous impatience. This charming, this dazzling woman had been one member of the couple disturbed, to his intimate conviction, the autumn previous, on his being pushed by the officials, at the last moment, into a compartment of the train that was to take him from Cremona to Mantua— where, failing a stop, he had had to keep his place. The other member, by whose felt but unseized identity he had been haunted, was the unconsciously insolent form of guaranteed happiness he had just been engaged with. The sense of the admirable intimacy that, having taken its precautions, had not reckoned with his irruption— this image had remained with him; to say nothing of the interest of aspect of the associated figures, so stamped somehow with rarity, so beautifully distinct from the common occupants of padded corners, and yet on the subject of whom, for the romantic structure he was immediately to raise, he had not had a scrap of evidence.

If he had imputed to them conditions it was all his own doing: it came from his inveterate habit of abysmal imputation, the snatching of the ell wherever the inch peeped out, without which where would have been the tolerability of life? It didn't matter now what he had imputed— and he always held that his expenses of imputation were, at the worst, a compliment to those inspiring them. It only mattered that each of the pair had been then what he really saw each now— full, that is, of the pride of their youth and beauty and fortune and freedom, though at the same time particularly preoccupied: preoccupied, that is, with the affairs, and above all with the passions, of Olympus. Who had they been, and what? Whence had they come, whither were they bound, what tie united them, what adventure engaged, what felicity, tempered by what peril, magnificently, dramatically attended? These had been his questions, all so inevitable and so impertinent, at the time, and to the exclusion of any scruples over his not postulating an inane honeymoon, his not taking the 'tie', as he should doubtless properly have done, for the mere blest matrimonial; and he now retracted not one of them, flushing as they did before him again with their old momentary life. To feel his two friends renewedly in presence— friends of the fleeting hour though they had but been, and with whom he had exchanged no sign save the vaguest of salutes on

finally relieving them of his company— was only to be conscious that he hadn't, on the spot, done them, so to speak, half justice, and that, for his superior entertainment, there would be ever so much more of them to come.

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IT MIGHT already have been coming indeed, with an immense stride, when, scarce more than ten minutes later, he was aware that the distinguished stranger had brought the Princess straight across the room to speak to him. He had failed in the interval of any glimpse of their closer meeting; for the great tenor had sung another song and then stopped, immediately on which Madame Gloriani had made his pulse quicken to a different, if not to a finer, throb by hovering before him once more with the man in the world he most admired, as it were, looking at him over her shoulder. The man in the world he most admired, the greatest then of contemporary Dramatists— and bearing, independently, the name inscribed if not in deepest incision at least in thickest gilding on the rich recreative roll— this prodigious personage was actually to suffer 'presentation' to him at the good lady's generous but ineffectual hands, and had in fact the next instant, left alone with him, bowed, in formal salutation, the massive, curly, witty head, so 'romantic' yet so modern, so 'artistic' and ironic yet somehow so civic, so Gallic yet somehow so cosmic, his personal vision of which had not hitherto transcended that of the possessor of a signed and framed photograph in a consecrated quarter of a writing-table.

It was positive, however, that poor John was afterward to remember of this conjunction nothing whatever but the fact of the great man's looking at him very hard, straight in the eyes, and of his not having himself scrupled to do as much, and with a confessed intensity of appetite. It was improbable, he was to recognise, that they had, for the few minutes, only stared and grimaced, like pitted boxers or wrestlers; but what had abode with him later on, none the less, was just the cherished memory of his not having so lost presence of mind as to fail of feeding on his impression. It was precious and precarious, that was perhaps all there would be of it; and his subsequent consciousness was quite to cherish this queer view of the silence, neither awkward nor empty nor harsh, but on the contrary quite charged and brimming, that represented for him his use, his unforgettable enjoyment in fact, of his opportunity. Had nothing passed in words? Well, no misery of murmured 'homage', thank goodness; though something must have been said, certainly, to lead up, as they put it at the theatre, to John's having asked the head of the profession, before they separated, if he by chance knew who the so radiantly handsome young woman might be, the one who had so lately come in and who wore the

pale yellow dress, of the strange tone, and the magnificent pearls. They must have separated soon, it was further to have been noted; since it was before the advance of the pair, their wonderful dazzling charge upon him, that he had distinctly seen the great man, at a distance again, block out from his sight the harmony of the faded gold and the pearls— to speak only of that— and plant himself there (the mere high Atlas-back of renown to Berridge now) as for communion with them. He had blocked everything out, to this tune, effectually; with nothing of the matter left for our friend meanwhile but that, as he had said, the beautiful lady was the Princess. What Princess, or the Princess of what?— our young man had afterward wondered; his companion's reply having lost itself in the prelude of an outburst by another vocalist who had approached the piano.

It was after these things that she so incredibly came to him, attended by her adorer— since he took it for absolute that the young Lord was her adorer, as who indeed mightn't be?— and scarce waiting, in her bright simplicity, for any form of introduction. It may thus be said in a word that this was the manner in which she made our hero's acquaintance, a satisfaction that she on the spot described to him as really wanting of late to her felicity. "I've read everything, you know, and The Heart of Gold three times": she put it all immediately on that ground, while the young Lord now smiled, beside her, as if it were quite the sort of thing he had done too; and while, further, the author of the work yielded to the consciousness that whereas in general he had come at last scarce to be able to bear the iteration of those words, which affected him as mere vain vocal convulsion, so not a breath of this association now attended them, so such a person as the Princess could make of them what she would. Unless it was to be really what *he* would!— this occurred to him in the very thick of the prodigy, no single shade of possibility of which was less prodigious than any other. It was a declaration, simply, the admirable young woman was treating him to, a profession of 'artistic sympathy'— for she was in a moment to use this very term that made for them a large, clear, common ether, an element all uplifted and rare, of which they could equally partake.

If she was Olympian— as in her rich and regular young beauty, that of some divine Greek mask overpainted say by Titian, she more and more appeared to him— this offered air was that of the gods themselves: she might have been, with her long rustle across the room, Artemis decorated, hung with pearls, for her worshippers, yet disconcerting them by having under an impulse just faintly fierce, snatched the cup of gold from Hebe. It was to him, John Berridge, she thus publicly offered it; and it was his over-topping *confrère* of shortly before who was the worshipper most disconcerted. John had happened to catch, even at its distance, after these friends had joined him, the

momentary deep, grave estimate, in the great Dramatist's salient watching eyes, of the Princess's so singular performance: the touch perhaps this, in the whole business, that made Berridge's sense of it most sharp. The sense of it as *prodigy* didn't in the least entail his feeling abject— any more, that is, than in the due dazzled degree; for surely there would have been supreme wonder in the eagerness of her exchange of mature glory for thin notoriety, hadn't it still exceeded everything that an Olympian of such race should have found herself bothered, as they said, to 'read' at all— and most of all to read three times!

With the turn the matter took as an effect of this meeting, Berridge was more than once to find himself almost ashamed for her— since it seemed never to occur to her to be so for herself; he was jealous of the type where she might have been taken as insolently careless of it; his advantage (unless indeed it had been his ruin) being that he could inordinately reflect upon it, could wander off thereby into kinds of licence of which she was incapable. He hadn't, for himself, waited till now to be sure of what he would do were *he* an Olympian; he would leave his own stuff snugly unread, to begin with; that would be a beautiful start for an Olympian career. He should have been as unable to write those works in short as to make anything else of them; and he should have had no more arithmetic for computing fingers than any perfect-headed marble Apollo mutilated at the wrists. He should have consented to know but the grand personal adventure on the grand personal basis: nothing short of this, no poor cognizance of confusable, pettifogging things, the sphere of earth-grubbing questions and twopenny issues, would begin to be, on any side, Olympian enough.

Even the great Dramatist, with his tempered and tested steel and his immense 'assured' position, even he was not Olympian: the look, full of the torment of earth, with which he had seen the Princess turn her back, and for such a purpose, on the prized privilege of his notice, testified sufficiently to that. Still, comparatively, it was to be said, the question of a personal relation with an authority so eminent on the subject of the passions— to say nothing of the rest of his charm— might have had for an ardent young woman (and the Princess was unmistakably ardent) the absolute attraction of romance: unless, again, prodigy of prodigies, she were looking for her romance very particularly elsewhere. Yet where could she have been looking for it, Berridge was to ask himself with private intensity, in a manner to leave her so at her ease for appearing to offer *him* everything?— so free to be quite divinely gentle with him, to hover there before him in all her mild, bright, smooth sublimity and to say: "I should be so very grateful if you'd come to see me."

There succeeded this a space of time of which he was afterward to lose all account, was never to recover the history; his only coherent view of it being

that an interruption, some incident that kept them a while separate, had then taken place, yet that during their separation, of half an hour or whatever, they had still somehow not lost sight of each other, but had found their eyes meeting, in deep communion, all across the great peopled room; meeting and wanting to meet, wanting— it was the most extraordinary thing in the world for the suppression of stages, for confessed precipitate intensity— to use together every instant of the hour that might be left them. Yet to use it for what?— unless, like beautiful fabulous figures in some old-world legend, for the frankest and almost the crudest avowal of the impression they had made on each other. He couldn't have named, later on, any other person she had during this space been engaged with, any more than he was to remember in the least what he had himself ostensibly done, who had spoken to him, whom he had spoken to, or whether he hadn't just stood and publicly gaped or languished.

Ah, Olympians were unconventional indeed— that was a part of their high bravery and privilege; but what it also appeared to attest in this wondrous manner was that they could communicate to their chosen in three minutes, by the mere light of their eyes, the same shining cynicism. He was to wonder of course, tinglingly enough, whether he had really made an ass of himself, and there was this amount of evidence for it that there certainly *had* been a series of moments each one of which glowed with the lucid sense that, as she couldn't like him as much as *that* either for his acted clap-trap or for his printed verbiage, what it must come to was that she liked him, and to such a tune, just for himself and quite after no other fashion than that in which every goddess in the calendar had, when you came to look, sooner or later liked some prepossessing young shepherd. The question would thus have been, for him, with a still sharper eventual ache, of whether he positively *had,* as an effect of the miracle, been petrified, before fifty pair of eyes, to the posture of a prepossessing shepherd— and would perhaps have left him under the shadow of some such imputable fatuity if his consciousness hadn't, at a given moment, cleared up to still stranger things.

The agent of the change was, as quite congruously happened, none other than the shining youth whom he now seemed to himself to have been thinking of for ever so long, for a much longer time than he had ever in his life spent at an evening party, as the young Lord: which personage suddenly stood before him again, holding him up an odd object and smiling, as if in reference to it, with a gladness that at once struck our friend as almost too absurd for belief. The object was incongruous by reason of its being, to a second and less pre-occupied glance, a book; and what had befallen Berridge within twenty minutes was that they— the Princess and he, that is— had got such millions of

miles, or at least such thousands of years, away from *those* platitudes. The book, he found himself assuming, could only be *his* book (it seemed also to have a tawdry red cover); and there came to him memories, dreadfully false notes sounded so straight again by his new acquaintance, of certain altogether different persons who at certain altogether different parties had flourished volumes before him very much with that insinuating gesture, that arch expression and that fell intention. The meaning of these things— of all possible breaks of the charm at such an hour!— was that he should 'signature' the ugly thing, and with a characteristic quotation or sentiment: that was the way people simpered and squirmed, the way they mouthed and beckoned, when animated by such purposes; and it already, on the spot, almost broke his heart to see such a type as that of the young Lord brought, by the vulgarest of fashions, so low. This state of quick displeasure in Berridge, however, was founded on a deeper question— the question of how in the world he was to remain for himself a prepossessing shepherd if he should consent to come back to these base actualities. It was true that even while this wonderment held him, his aggressor's perfect good conscience had placed the matter in a slightly different light.

"By an extraordinary chance I've found a copy of my friend's novel on one of the tables here— I see by the inscription that she has presented it to Gloriani. So if you'd like to glance at it— !" And the young Lord, in the pride of his association with the eminent thing, held it out to Berridge as artlessly as if it had been a striking natural specimen of some sort, a rosy round apple grown in his own orchard, or an exceptional precious stone, to be admired for its weight and lustre. Berridge accepted the offer mechanically— relieved at the prompt fading of his worst fear, yet feeling in himself a tell-tale facial blankness for the still absolutely anomalous character of his friend's appeal. He was even tempted for a moment to lay the volume down without looking at it— only with some extemporised promise to borrow it of their host and take it home, to give himself to it at an easier moment. Then the very expression of his fellow-guest's own countenance determined in him a different and a still more dreadful view; in fact an immediate collapse of the dream in which he had for the splendid previous space of time been living. The young Lord himself, in his radiant costly barbarism, figured far better than John Berridge could do the prepossessing shepherd, the beautiful mythological mortal 'distinguished' by a goddess; for our hero now saw that his whole manner of dealing with his ridiculous tribute was marked exactly by the grand simplicity, the prehistoric good faith, as one might call it, of far-off romantic and 'plastic' creatures, figures of exquisite Arcadian stamp, glorified rustics like those of the train of peasants in A Winter's Tale, who thought nothing of such treasure-trove, on a

Claude Lorrain sea-strand, as a royal infant wrapped in purple: something in that fabulous style of exhibition appearing exactly what his present demonstration might have been prompted by.

The Top of the Tree, by Amy Evans— scarce credible words floating before Berridge after he had with an anguish of effort dropped his eyes on the importunate title-page— represented an object as alien to the careless grace of goddess-haunted Arcady as a washed-up 'kodak' from a wrecked ship might have been to the appreciation of some islander of wholly unvisited seas. Nothing could have been more in the tone of an islander deplorably diverted from his native interests and dignities than the glibness with which John's own child of nature went on. 'It's her pen-name, Amy Evans'— he couldn't have said it otherwise had he been a blue-chinned penny-a-liner— yet marking it with a disconnectedness of intelligence that kept up all the poetry of his own situation and only crashed into that of other persons. The reference put the author of The Heart of Gold quite into *his* place, but left the speaker absolutely free of Arcady. "Thanks awfully"— Berridge somehow clutched at that, to keep everything from swimming. "Yes, I should like to look at it," he managed, horribly grimacing now, he believed, to say; and there was in fact a strange short interlude after this in which he scarce knew what had become of anyone or of anything; in which he only seemed to himself to stand alone in a desolate place where even its desolation didn't save him from having to stare at the greyest of printed pages. Nothing here helped anything else, since the stamped greyness didn't even in itself make it impossible his eyes should follow such sentences as: 'The loveliness of the face, which was that of the glorious period in which Pheidias reigned supreme, and which owed its most exquisite note to that shell-like curl of the upper lip which always somehow recalls for us the smile with which wind-blown Astarte must have risen from the salt sea to which she owed her birth and her terrible moods'; or 'It was too much for all the passionate woman in her, and she let herself go, over the flowering land that had been, but was no longer, their love, with an effect of blighting desolation that might have proceeded from one of the more physical, though not more awful, convulsions of nature.'

He seemed to know later on that other and much more natural things had occurred; as that, for instance, with now at last a definite intermission of the rare music that for a long time past, save at the briefest intervals, had kept all participants ostensibly attentive and motionless, and that in spite of its high quality and the supposed privilege of listening to it he had allowed himself not to catch a note of, there was a great rustling and shifting and vociferous drop to a lower plane, more marked still with the quick clearance of a way to supper and a lively dispersal of most of the guests. Hadn't he made out, through the

queer glare of appearances, though they yet somehow all came to him as confused and unreal, that the Princess was no longer there, wasn't even only crowded out of his range by the immediate multiplication of her court, the obsequious court that the change of pitch had at once permitted to close round her; that Gloriani had offered her his arm, in a gallant official way, as to the greatest lady present, and that he was left with half a dozen persons more knowing than the others, who had promptly taken, singly or in couples, to a closer inspection of the fine small scattered treasures of the studio?

He himself stood there, rueful and stricken, nursing a silly red-bound book under his arm very much as if he might have been holding on tight to an upright stake, or to the nearest piece of furniture, during some impression of a sharp earthquake-shock or of an attack of dyspeptic dizziness; albeit indeed that he wasn't conscious of this absurd, this instinctive nervous clutch till the thing that was to be more wonderful than any yet suddenly flared up for him— the sight of the Princess again on the threshold of the room, poised there an instant, in her exquisite grace, for recovery of some one or of something, and then, at recognition of him, coming straight to him across the empty place as if he alone, and nobody and nothing else, were what she incredibly wanted. She was there, she was radiantly *at* him, as if she had known and loved him for ten years— ten years during which, however, she had never quite been able, in spite of undiscouraged attempts, to cure him, as goddesses *had* to cure shepherds, of his mere mortal shyness.

"Ah no, not *that* one!" she said at once, with her divine familiarity; for she had in the flash of an eye 'spotted' the particular literary production he seemed so very fondly to have possessed himself of and against which all the Amy Evans in her, as she would doubtless have put it, clearly wished on the spot to discriminate. She pulled it away from him; he let it go; he scarce knew what was happening— only made out that she distinguished the right one, the one that should have been shown him, as blue or green or purple, and intimated that her other friend, her fellow-Olympian, as Berridge had thought of him from the first, really did too clumsily bungle matters, poor dear, with his officiousness over the red one! She went on really as if she had come for that, some such rectification, some such eagerness of reunion with dear Mr Berridge, some talk, after all the tiresome music, of questions really urgent; while, thanks to the supreme strangeness of it, the high tide of golden fable floated him afresh, and her pretext and her plea, the queerness of her offered motive, melted away after the fashion of the enveloping clouds that do their office in epics and idylls.

"You didn't perhaps know I'm Amy Evans," she smiled, "or even perhaps that I write in English— which I love, I assure you, as much as you can yourself

do, and which gives one (doesn't it? for who should know if not you?) the biggest of publics. I 'just love'— don't they say?— your American millions; and all the more that they really *take* me for Amy Evans, as I've just wanted to be taken, to be loved too for myself, don't you know?— that they haven't seemed to try at all to 'go behind' (don't you say?) my poor dear little *nom de guerre.* But it's the new one, my last, The Velvet Glove, that I should like you to judge me by— if such a *corvée* isn't too horrible for you to think of; though I admit it's a move straight in the romantic direction— since after all (for I might as well make a clean breast of it) it's dear old discredited romance that I'm most in sympathy with. I'll send you The Velvet Glove to-morrow, if you *can* find half an hour for it; and then— and *then*— !" She paused as for the positive bright glory of her meaning.

It could only be so extraordinary, her meaning, whatever it was, that the need in him that would— whatever it was again!— meet it most absolutely formed the syllables on his lips as: "Will you be very, *very* kind to me?"

"Ah, 'kind', dear Mr Berridge? 'Kind'," she splendidly laughed, "is nothing to what— !" But she pulled herself up again an instant. "Well, to what I want to be! Just *see,*" she said, "how I want to be!" It was exactly, he felt, what he couldn't *but* see— in spite of books and publics and pen-names, in spite of the really 'decadent' perversity, recalling that of the most irresponsibly insolent of the old Romans and Byzantines, that could lead a creature so formed for living and breathing her Romance, and so committed, up to the eyes, to the constant fact of her personal immersion in it and genius for it, the dreadful amateurish dance of ungrammatically scribbling it, with editions and advertisements and reviews and royalties and every other futile item: since what was more of the deep essence of throbbing intercourse itself than this very act of her having broken away from people, in the other room, to whom he was as nought, of her having, with her *crânerie* of audacity and indifference, just turned her back on them all as soon as she had begun to miss him? What was more of it than her having forbidden them, by a sufficient curt ring of her own supremely silver tone, to attempt to check or criticize her freedom, than her having looked him up, at his distance, under all the noses he had put out of joint, so as to let them think whatever they might— not of herself (much she troubled to care!) but of the new champion to be reckoned with, the invincible young lion of the day? What was more of it in short than her having perhaps even positively snubbed for him the great mystified Sculptor and the great bewildered Dramatist, treated to this queer experience for the first time of their lives?

It all came back again to the really great ease of really great ladies, and to the perfect facility of everything when once they were great enough. *That* might become the delicious thing to him, he more and more felt, as soon as it

should be supremely attested; it was ground he had ventured on, scenically, representationally, in the artistic sphere, but without ever dreaming he should 'realize' it thus in the social. Handsomely, gallantly just now, moreover, he didn't so much as let it occur to him that the social experience would perhaps on some future occasion richly profit further scenic efforts; he only lost himself in the consciousness of all she invited him to believe. It took licence, this consciousness, the next moment, for a tremendous further throb, from what she had gone on to say to him in so many words— though indeed the words were nothing and it was all a matter but of the implication that glimmered through them: "Do you *want* very much your supper here?" And then while he felt himself glare, for charmed response, almost to the point of his tears rising with it: "Because if you don't—!"

"Because if I don't—?" She had paused, not from the faintest shade of timidity, but clearly for the pleasure of making him press.

"Why shouldn't we go together, letting me drive you home?"

"You'll come home with me?" gasped John Berridge, while the perspiration on his brow might have been the morning dew on a high lawn of Mount Ida.

"No— you had better come with *me.* That's what I mean; but I certainly will come to you with pleasure some time if you'll let me."

She made no more than that of the most fatuous of freedoms, as he felt directly he had spoken that it might have seemed to her; and before he had even time to welcome the relief of not having then himself, for beastly contrition, to make more of it, she had simply mentioned, with her affectionate ease, that she wanted to get away, that of the bores there she might easily, after a little, have too much, and that if he'd but say the word they'd nip straight out together by an independent door and be sure to find her motor in the court. What word he had found to say, he was afterward to reflect, must have little enough mattered; for he was to have kept, of what then occurred, but a single other impression, that of her great fragrant rustle beside him over the rest of the ample room and toward their nearest and friendliest resource, the door by which he had come in and which gave directly upon a staircase. This independent image was just that of the only other of his fellow-guests with whom he had been closely concerned; he had thought of him rather indeed, up to that moment, as the Princess's fellow-Olympian— but a new momentary vision of him seemed now to qualify it.

The young Lord had reappeared within a minute on the threshold, that of the passage from the supper-room, lately crossed by the Princess herself, and Berridge felt him there, saw him there, wondered about him there, all, for the first minute, without so much as a straight look at him. He would have come to

learn the reason of his friend's extraordinary public demonstration— having more right to his curiosity, or his anxiety or whatever, than anyone else; he would be taking in the remarkable appearances that thus completed it, and would perhaps be showing quite a different face for them, at the point they had reached, than any that would have hitherto consorted with the beautiful security of his own position. So much, on our own young man's part, for this first flush of a presumption that he might have stirred the germs of ire in a celestial breast; so much for the moment during which nothing would have induced him to betray, to a possibly rueful member of an old aristocracy, a vulgar elation or a tickled, unaccustomed glee. His inevitable second thought was, however, it has to be confessed, another matter, which took a different turn— for, frankly, all the conscious conqueror in him, as Amy Evans would again have said, couldn't forego a probably supreme consecration. He treated himself to no prolonged reach of vision, but there was something he nevertheless fully measured for five seconds— the sharp truth of the fact, namely, of how the interested observer in the doorway must really have felt about him. Rather disconcertingly, hereupon, the sharp truth proved to be that the most amused, quite the most encouraging and the least invidious of smiles graced the young Lord's handsome countenance— forming, in short, his final contribution to a display of high social candour unprecedented in our hero's experience. No, he wasn't jealous, didn't do John Berridge the honour to be, to the extent of the least glimmer of a spark of it, but was so happy to see his immortal mistress do what she liked that he could positively beam at the odd circumstance of her almost lavishing public caresses on a gentleman not, after all, of negligible importance.

iii

WELL, it was all confounding enough, but this indication in particular would have jostled our friend's grasp of the presented cup had he had, during the next ten minutes, more independence of thought. That, however, was out of the question when one positively felt, as with a pang somewhere deep within, as even with a smothered cry for alarm, one's whole sense of proportion shattered at a blow and ceasing to serve. "Not *straight,* and not too fast, shall we?" was the ineffable young woman's appeal to him, a few minutes later, beneath the wide glass porch-cover that sheltered their brief wait for their chariot of fire. It was there even as she spoke; the capped charioteer, with a great clean curve, drew up at the steps of the porch, and the Princess's footman, before rejoining him in front, held open the door of the car. She got in, and Berridge was the next instant beside her; he could only say: "As you

like, Princess— where you will; certainly let us prolong it; let us prolong everything; don't let us have it over— strange and beautiful as it can only be!— a moment sooner than we must." So he spoke, in the security of their intimate English, while the perpendicular imperturbable *valet-de-pied,* white-faced in the electric light, closed them in and then took his place on the box where the rigid liveried backs of the two men, presented through the glass, were like a protecting wall; such a guarantee of privacy as might come— it occurred to Berridge's inexpugnable fancy— from a vision of tall guards erect round Eastern seraglios.

His companion had said something, by the time they started, about their taking a turn, their looking out for a few of the night-views of Paris that were so wonderful; and after that, in spite of his constantly-prized sense of knowing his enchanted city and his way about, he ceased to follow or measure their course, content as he was with the particular exquisite assurance it gave him. *That* was knowing Paris, of a wondrous bland April night; that was hanging over it from vague consecrated lamp-studded heights and taking in, spread below and afar, the great scroll of all its irresistible story, pricked out, across river and bridge and radiant *place,* and along quays and boulevards and avenues, and around monumental circles and squares, in syllables of fire, and sketched and summarized, further and further, in the dim fire-dust of endless avenues; that was all of the essence of fond and thrilled and throbbing recognition, with a thousand things understood and a flood of response conveyed, a whole familiar possessive feeling appealed to and attested.

"From you, you know, it *would* be such a pleasure, and I think— in fact I'm sure— it would do so much for the thing in America." Had she gone on as they went, or had there been pauses of easy and of charmed and of natural silence, breaks and drops from talk, but only into greater confidence and sweetness?— such as her very gesture now seemed a part of; her laying her gloved hand, for emphasis, on the back of his own, which rested on his knee and which took in from the act he scarce knew what melting assurance. The emphasis, it was true— this came to him even while for a minute he held his breath— seemed rather that of Amy Evans; and if her talk, while they rolled, had been in the sense of these words (he had really but felt that they were shut intimately in together, all his consciousness, all his discrimination of meanings and indications being so deeply and so exquisitely merged in that) the case wasn't as surely and sublimely, as extravagantly, as fabulously romantic for him as his excited pulses had been seeming to certify. Her hand was there on his own, in precious living proof, and splendid Paris hung over them, as a consecrating canopy, her purple night embroidered with gold; yet he waited, something stranger still having glimmered for him, waited though she left her hand, which

expressed emphasis and homage and tenderness, and anything else he liked indeed— since it was all then a matter of what he next heard and what he slowly grew cold as he took from her.

"You know they do it here so charmingly— it's a compliment a clever man is always so glad to pay a literary friend, and sometimes, in the case of a great name like yours, it renders such a service to a poor little book like mine!" She spoke ever so humbly and yet ever so gaily— and still more than before with this confidence of the sincere admirer and the comrade. That, yes, through his sudden sharpening chill, was what first became distinct for him; she was mentioning somehow her explanation and her conditions— her motive, in fine, disconcerting, deplorable, dreadful, in respect to the experience, otherwise so boundless, that he had taken her as having opened to him; and she was doing it, above all, with the clearest coolness of her general privilege. What in particular she was talking about he as yet, still holding his breath, wondered; it was something she wanted him to do for her— which was exactly what he had hoped, but something of what trivial and, heaven forgive them both, of what dismal order? Most of all, meanwhile, he felt the dire penetration of two or three of the words she had used; so that after a painful minute the quaver with which he repeated them resembled his drawing, slowly, carefully, timidly, some barbed dart out of his flesh.

"A 'literary friend'?" he echoed as he turned his face more to her; so that, as they sat, the whites of her eyes, near to his own, gleamed in the dusk like some silver setting of deep sapphires.

It made her smile— which in their relation now was like the breaking of a cool air-wave over the conscious sore flush that maintained itself through his general chill. "Ah, of course you don't allow that I *am* literary— and of course if you're awfully cruel and critical and incorruptible you won't let it say for me what I so want it should!"

'Where are we, where, in the name of all that's damnably, of all that's grotesquely delusive, are we?' he said, without a sign, to himself; which was the form of his really being quite at sea as to what she was talking about. That uncertainty indeed he could but frankly betray by taking her up, as he cast about him, on the particular ambiguity that his voice perhaps already showed him to find most irritating. "Let *it* show? 'It', dear Princess— ?"

"Why, my dear man, let your Preface show, the lovely, friendly, irresistible log-rolling Preface that I've been asking you if you wouldn't be an angel and write for me."

He took it in with a deep long gulp— he had never, it seemed to him, had to swallow anything so bitter. "You've been asking me if I wouldn't write you a Preface?"

"To The Velvet Glove— after I've sent it to you and you've judged if you really can. Of course I don't want you to perjure yourself; but"— and she fairly brushed him again, at their close quarters, with her fresh fragrant smile— "I do want you so to like me, and to say it all out beautifully and publicly."

"You want me to like you, Princess?"

"But, heaven help us, haven't you understood?"

Nothing stranger could conceivably have been, it struck him— if he was right now— than this exquisite intimacy of her manner of setting him down on the other side of an abyss. It was as if she had lifted him first in her beautiful arms, had raised him up high, high, high, to do it, pressing him to her immortal young breast while he let himself go, and then, by some extraordinary effort of her native force and her alien quality, setting him down exactly where she wanted him to be— which was a thousand miles away from her. Once more, so preposterously face to face with her for these base issues, he took it all in; after which he felt his eyes close, for amazement, despair and shame, and his head, which he had some time before, baring his brow to the mild night, eased of its crush-hat, sink to confounded rest on the upholstered back of the seat. The act, the ceasing to see, and if possible to hear, was for the moment a retreat, an escape from a state that he felt himself fairly flatter by thinking of it as 'awkward'; the state of really wishing that his humiliation might end, and of wondering in fact if the most decent course open to him mightn't be to ask her to stop the motor and let him down.

He spoke no word for a long minute, or for considerably more than that; during which time the motor went and went, now even somewhat faster, and he knew, through his closed eyes, that the outer lights had begun to multiply and that they were getting back somewhere into the spacious and decorative quarters. He knew this, and also that his retreat, for all his attitude as of accommodating thought, his air— *that* presently and quickly came to him— of having perhaps gathered himself in, for an instant, at her behest, to turn over, in his high ingenuity, some humbugging 'rotten' phrase or formula that he might place at her service and make the note of such an effort; he became aware, I say, that his lapse was but a half-retreat, with her strenuous presence and her earnest pressure and the close, cool respiration of her good faith absolutely timing the moments of his stillness and the progress of the car. Yes, it was wondrous well, he had all but made the biggest of all fools of himself, almost as big a one as *she* was still, to every appearance, in her perfect serenity, trying to make of him, and the one straight answer to it *would* be that he should reach forward and touch the footman's shoulder and demand that the vehicle itself should make an end.

That would be an answer, however, he continued intensely to see, only to inanely importunate, to utterly superfluous Amy Evans— not a bit to his at last exquisitely patient companion, who was clearly now quite taking it from him that what kept him in his attitude was the spring of the quick desire to oblige her, the charming loyal impulse to consider a little what he could do for her, say 'handsomely yet conscientiously' (oh, the loveliness!) before he should commit himself. She was enchanted— *that* seemed to breathe upon him; she waited, she hung there, she quite bent over him, as Diana over the sleeping Endymion, while all the conscientious man of letters in him, as she might so supremely have phrased it, struggled with the more peccable, the more muddled and 'squared', though, for her own ideal, the so much more *banal* comrade. Yes, he could keep it up now— that is he could hold out for his real reply, could meet the rather marked tension of the rest of their passage as well as she; he should be able somehow or other to make his wordless detachment, the tribute of his ostensibly deep consideration of her request, a retreat in good order. She *was,* for herself, to the last point of her guileless fatuity, Amy Evans and an asker for 'lifts', a conceiver of twaddle both in herself and in him; or at least, so far as she fell short of all this platitude, it was no fault of the really affecting folly of her attempt to become a mere magazine mortal after the only fashion she had made out, to the intensification of her self-complacency, that she might.

Nothing might thus have touched him more— if to be touched, beyond a certain point, hadn't been to be squared— than the way she failed to divine the bearing of his thoughts; so that she had probably at no one small crisis of her life felt so much a promise in the flutter of her own as on the occasion of the beautiful act she indulged in at the very moment, he was afterward to recognise, of their sweeping into her great smooth empty, costly street— a desert, at that hour, of lavish lamplight and sculptured stone. She raised to her lips the hand she had never yet released and kept it there a moment pressed close against them; he himself closing his eyes to the deepest detachment he was capable of while he took in with a smothered sound of pain that this was the conferred bounty by which Amy Evans sought most expressively to encourage, to sustain and to reward. The motor had slackened and in a moment would stop; and meanwhile even after lowering his hand again she hadn't let it go. This enabled it, while he after a further moment roused himself to a more confessed consciousness, to form with his friend's a more active relation, to possess him of hers, in turn, and with an intention the straighter that her glove had by this time somehow come off. Bending over it without hindrance, he returned as firmly and fully as the application of all his recovered wholeness of feeling, under his moustache, might express, the consecration

the bareness of his own knuckles had received; only after which it was that, still thus drawing out his grasp of her, and having let down their front glass by his free hand, he signified to the footman his view of their stopping short.

They had arrived; the high, closed *porte-cochère,* in its crested stretch of wall, awaited their approach; but his gesture took effect, the car pulled up at the edge of the pavement, the man, in an instant, was at the door and had opened it; quickly moving across the walk, the next moment, to press the bell at the gate. Berridge, as his hand now broke away, felt he had cut his cable; with which, after he had stepped out, he raised again the glass he had lowered and closed, its own being already down, the door that had released him. During these motions he had the sense of his companion, still radiant and splendid, but somehow momentarily suppressed, suspended, silvered over and celestially blurred, even as a summer moon by the loose veil of a cloud. So it was he saw her while he leaned for farewell on the open window-ledge; he took her in as her visible intensity of bright vagueness filled the circle that the interior of the car made for her. It was such a state as she would have been reduced to— he felt this, was certain of it— for the first time in her life; and it was he, poor John Berridge, after all, who would have created the condition.

"Good-night, Princess. I shan't see you again."

Vague was indeed no word for it— shine though she might, in her screened narrow niche, as with the liquefaction of her pearls, the glimmer of her tears, the freshness of her surprise. "You won't come in— when you've had no supper?"

He smiled at her with a purpose of kindness that could never in his life have been greater; and at first but smiled without a word. He presently shook his head, however— doubtless also with as great a sadness. "I seem to have supped to my fill, Princess. Thank you, I won't come in."

It drew from her, while she looked at him, a long, low, anxious wail. "And you won't do my Preface?"

"No, Princess, I won't do your Preface. Nothing would induce me to say a word in print about you. I'm in fact not sure I shall ever mention you in any manner at all as long as ever I live."

He had felt for an instant as if he were speaking to some miraculously humanised idol, all sacred, all jewelled, all votively hung about, but made mysterious, in the recess of its shrine, by the very thickness of the accumulated lustre. And "Then you don't like me—?" was the marvellous sound from the image.

"Princess," was in response the sound of the worshipper, "Princess, I adore you. But I'm ashamed for you."

"Ashamed—?"

"You *are* Romance— as everything, and by what I make out every one, about you is; so what more do you want? Your Preface— the only one worth speaking of— was written long ages ago by the most beautiful imagination of man."

Humanised at least for these moments, she could understand enough to declare that she didn't. "I don't, I don't!"

"You don't need to understand. Don't attempt such base things. Leave those to us. Only live. Only be. *We'll* do the rest."

She moved over— she had come close to the window. "Ah, but, Mr Berridge—!"

He raised both hands; he shook them at her gently, in deep and soft deprecation. "Don't sound my dreadful name. Fortunately, however, you can't help yourself"

"Ah, *voyons!* I so want—!"

He repeated his gesture, and when he brought down his hands they closed together on both of hers, which now quite convulsively grasped the window-ledge. "Don't speak, because when you speak you really say things— ! You *are* Romance," he pronounced afresh and with the last intensity of conviction and persuasion. "That's all you have to do with it," he continued while his hands, for emphasis, pressed hard on her own.

Their faces, in this way, were nearer together than ever, but with the effect of only adding to the vividness of that dire non-intelligence from which, all perversely and incalculably, her very beauty now appeared to gain relief. This made for him a pang and almost an anguish; the fear of her saying something yet again that would wretchedly prove how little he moved her perception. So his eyes, of remonstrant, of suppliant intention, met hers close, at the same time that these, so far from shrinking, but with their quite other swimming plea all bedimmed now, seemed almost to wash him with the tears of her failure. He soothed, he stroked, he reassured her hands, for tender conveyance of his meaning, quite as she had just before dealt with his own for brave demonstration of hers. It was during these instants as if the question had been which of them *could* most candidly and fraternally plead. Full but of that she kept it up. "Ah, if you'd only think, if you'd only try—!"

He couldn't stand it— she was capable of believing he had edged away, excusing himself and trumping up a factitious theory, because he hadn't the wit, hadn't the hand, to knock off the few pleasant pages she asked him for and that any proper Frenchman, master of the *métier,* would so easily and gallantly have promised. Should she so begin to commit herself he'd, by the immortal gods, anticipate it in the manner most admirably effective— in fact he'd even thus make her further derogation impossible. Their faces were so

close that he could practise any rich freedom— even though for an instant, while the back of the chauffeur guarded them on that side and his own presented breadth, amplified by his loose mantle, filled the whole window-space, leaving him no observation from any quarter to heed, he uttered, in a deep-drawn final groan, an irrepressible echo of his pang for what might have been, the muffled cry of his insistence. "You *are* Romance!"— he drove it intimately, inordinately home, his lips, for a long moment, sealing it, with the fullest force of authority, on her own; after which, as he broke away and the car, starting again, turned powerfully across the pavement, he had no further sound from her than if, all divinely indulgent but all humanly defeated, she had given the question up, falling back to infinite wonder. He too fell back, but could still wave his hat for her as she passed to disappearance in the great floridly-framed aperture whose wings at once came together behind her.

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## 2: The Unfinished Game

***Barry Pain***

1864-1928

*The Windsor Magazine*, Sep 1909

AT TANSLOWE, which is on the Thames, I found just the place that I wanted. I had been born in the hotel business, brought up in it, and made my living at it for thirty years. For the last twenty I had been both proprietor and manager, and had worked uncommonly hard, for it is personal attention and plenty of it which makes a hotel pay. I might have retired altogether, for I was a bachelor with no claims on me and had made more money than enough; but that was not what I wanted. I wanted a nice, old-fashioned house, not too big, in a nice place with a longish slack season. I cared very little whether I made it pay or not. The Regency Hotel at Tanslowe was just the thing for me. It would give me a little to do and not too much. Tanslowe was a village, and though there were two or three public-houses, there was no other hotel in the place, nor was any competition likely to come along. I was particular about that, because my nature is such that competition always sets me fighting, and I cannot rest until the other shop goes down. I had reached a time of life when I did want to rest and did not want any more fighting. It was a free house, and I have always had a partiality for being my own master. It had just the class of trade that I liked—principally gentlefolk taking their pleasure in a holiday on the river. It was very cheap, and I like value for money. The house was comfortable, and had a beautiful garden sloping down to the river. I meant to put in some time in that garden— I have a taste that way.

The place was so cheap that I had my doubts. I wondered if it was flooded when the river rose, if it was dropping to pieces with dry-rot, if the drainage had been condemned, if they were going to start a lunatic asylum next door, or what it was. I went into all these points and a hundred more. I found one or two trifling drawbacks, and one expects them in any house; however good—especially when it is an old place like the Regency. I found nothing whatever to stop me from taking the place.

I bought the whole thing, furniture and all, lock, stock, and barrel, and moved in. I brought with me my own head-waiter and my man-cook, Englishmen both of them. I knew they would set the thing in the right key. The head-waiter, Silas Goodheart, was just over sixty, with grey hair and a wrinkled face. He was worth more to me than two younger men would have been. He was very precise and rather slow in his movements. He liked bright silver, clean

table-linen, and polished glass. Artificial flowers in the vases on his tables would have given him a fit. He handled a decanter of old port as if he loved it—which, as a matter of fact, he did. His manner to visitors was a perfect mixture of dignity, respect, and friendliness. If a man did not quite know what he wanted for dinner, Silas had sympathetic and very useful suggestions. He took, I am sure, a real pleasure in seeing people enjoy their luncheon or dinner. Americans loved him, and tipped him out of all proportion. I let him have his own way, even when he gave the thing away.

"Is the coffee all right here?" a customer asked after a good dinner.

"I cannot recommend it," said Silas. "If I might suggest, sir, we have the Chartreuse of the old French shipping."

I overheard that, but I said nothing. The coffee was extract, for there was more work than profit in making it good. As it was, that customer went away pleased, and came back again and again, and brought his friends too. Silas was really the only permanent waiter. When we were busy, I got one or two foreigners from London temporarily. Silas soon educated them.

My cook, Timbs, was an honest chap, and understood English fare. He seemed hardly ever to eat, and never sat down to a meal; he lived principally on beer, drank enough of it to frighten you, and was apparently never the worse for it. And a butcher who tried to send him second-quality meat was certain of finding out his mistake.

The only other man I brought with me was young Harry Bryden. He always called me uncle, but as a matter of fact he was no relation of mine. He was the son of an old friend. His parents died when he was seven years old and left him to me .It was about all they had to leave. At this time he was twenty-two, and was making himself useful. There was nothing which he was not willing to do, and he could do most things. He would mark at billiards, and played a good game himself. He had run the kitchen when the cook was away on his holiday. He had driven the station-omnibus when the driver was drunk one night. He understood book-keeping, and when I got a clerk who was a wrong 'un, he was on to him at once, and saved me money. It was my intention to make him take his proper place more when I got to the Regency; for he was to succeed me when I died. He was clever, and not bad-looking in a gipsy-faced kind of way. Nobody is perfect, and Harry was a cigarette-maniac. He began when he was a boy, and I didn't spare the stick when I caught him at it. But nothing I could say or do made any difference; at twenty-two he was old enough and big enough to have his own way, and his way was to smoke cigarettes eternally. He was a bundle of nerves, and got so jumpy sometimes that some people thought he drank, though he had never in his life tasted liquor. He inherited his nerves from his mother, but I dare say the cigarettes made them worse.

I took Harry down with me when I first thought of taking the place. He went over it with me and made a lot of useful suggestions. The old proprietor had died eighteen months before, and the widow had tried to run it for herself and made a mess of it. She had just sense enough to clear out before things got any worse. She was very anxious to go, and I thought that might have been the reason why the price was so low.

The billiard-room was an annexe to the house, with no rooms over it. We were told that it wasn't used once in a twelvemonth, but we took a look at it— we took a look at everything. The room had got a very neglected look about it. I sat down on the platform— tired with so much walking and standing— and Harry whipped the cover off the table. "This was the one they had in the Ark," he said.

There was not a straight cue in the rack, the balls were worn and untrue, the jigger was broken. Harry pointed to the board. "Look at that, uncle," he said. "Noah had made forty-eight; Ham was doing nicely at sixty-six; and then the Flood came and they never finished." From neatness and force of habit he moved over and turned the score back. "You'll have to spend some money here. My word, if they put the whole lot in at a florin, we're swindled."

As we came out Harry gave a shiver. "I wouldn't spend a night in there," he said, "not for a five-pound note."

His nerves always made me angry. "That's a very silly thing to say," I told him. "Who's going to ask you to sleep in a billiard-room?"

Then he got a bit more practical, and began to calculate how much I should have to spend to make a bright, up-to-date billiard-room of it. But I was still angry.

"You needn't waste your time on that," I said, "because the place will stop as it is. You heard what Mrs. Parker said— that it wasn't used once in a twelvemonth. I don't want to attract all the loafers in Tanslowe into my house. Their custom's worth nothing, and I'd sooner be without it. Time enough to put that room right if I find my staying visitors want it, and people who've been on the river all day are mostly too tired for a game after dinner."

Harry pointed out that it sometimes rained, and there was the winter to think about. He had always got plenty to say, and what he said now had sense in it. But I never go chopping and changing about, and I had made my mind up. So I told him he had got to learn how to manage the house, and not to waste half his time over the billiard-table. I had a good deal done to the rest of the house in the way of redecorating and improvements, but I never touched the annexe.

The next time I saw the room was the day after we moved in. I was alone, and I thought it certainly did look a dingy hole as compared with the rest of the

house. Then my eye happened to fall on the board, and it still showed sixty-six— forty-eight, as it had done when I entered the room with Harry three months before. I altered the board myself this time. To me it was only a funny coincidence; another game had been played there and had stopped exactly at the same point. But I was glad Harry was not with me, for it was the kind of thing that would have made him jumpier than ever.

It was the summertime, and we soon had something to do. I had been told that motorcars had cut into the river trade a good deal; so I laid myself out for the motorist. Tanslowe was just a nice distance for a run from town before lunch. It was all in the old-fashioned style, but there was plenty of choice and the stuff was good; and my wine-list was worth consideration. Prices were high, but people will pay when they are pleased with the way they are treated. Motorists who had been once came again and sent their friends. Saturday to Monday we had as much as ever we could do, and more than I had ever meant to do. But I am built like that— once I am in a shop, I have got to run it for all it's worth.

I had been there about a month, and it was about the height of our season, when one night, for no reason that I could make out, I couldn't get to sleep. I had turned in, tired enough, at half-past ten, leaving Harry to shut up and see the lights out, and at a quarter-past twelve I was still awake. I thought to myself that a pint of stout and a biscuit might be the cure for that. So I lit my candle and went down to the bar. The gas was out on the staircase and in the passages, and all was quiet. The door into the bar was locked, but I had thought to bring my passkey with me. I had just drawn my tankard of stout when I heard a sound that made me put the tankard down and listen again.

The billiard-room door was just outside in the passage, and there could not be the least doubt that a game was going on. I could hear the click-click of the balls as plainly as possible. It surprised me a little, but it did not startle me. We had several staying in the house, and I supposed two of them had fancied a game. At the time that I was drinking the stout and munching my biscuit the game went on— click, click-click, click. Everybody has heard the sound hundreds of times standing outside the glass-panelled door of a billiard-room and waiting for the stroke before entering. No other sound is quite like it.

Suddenly the sound ceased. The game was over. I had nothing on but my pyjamas and a pair of slippers, and I thought I would get upstairs again before the players came out. I did not want to stand there shivering and listening to complaints about the table. I locked the bar, and took a glance at the billiard-room door as I was about to pass it. What I saw made me stop short.

The glass panels of the door were as black as my Sunday hat, except where they reflected the light of my candle. The room, then, was not lit up, and

people do not play billiards in the dark. After a second or two I tried the handle. The door was locked. It was the only door to the room.

I said to myself: "I'll go on back to bed. It must have been my fancy, and there was nobody playing billiards at all."

I moved a step away, and then I said to myself again: "I know perfectly well that a game *was* being played. I'm only making excuses because I'm in a funk."

That settled it. Having driven myself to it, I moved pretty quickly. I shoved in my passkey, opened the door, and said: "Anybody there?" in a moderately loud voice that sounded somehow like another man's. I am very much afraid that I should have jumped if there had come any answer to my challenge, but all was silent. I took a look round. The cover was on the table. An old screen was leaning against it; it had been put there to be out of the way. As I moved my candle, the shadows of things slithered across the floor and crept up the walls. I noticed that the windows were properly fastened, and then, as I held my candle high, the marking-board seemed to jump out of the darkness. The score recorded was sixty-six— forty-eight.

I shut the door, locked it again, and went up to my room. I did these things slowly and deliberately, but I was frightened and I was puzzled. One is not at one's best in the small hours.

The next morning I tackled Silas.

"Silas," I said, "what do you do when gentlemen ask for the billiard-room?"

"Well, sir," said Silas, "I put them off if I can. Mr. Harry directed me to, the place being so much out of order."

"Quite so," I said. "And when you can't put them off?"

"Then they just try it, sir, and the table puts them off. It's very bad. There's been no game played there since we came."

"Curious," I said. "I thought I heard a game going on last night."

"I've heard it myself, sir, several times. There being no light in the room, I've put it down to a loose ventilator. The wind moves it and it clicks."

"That'll be it," I said. Five minutes later I had made sure that there was no loose ventilator in the billiard-room. Besides, the sound of one ball striking another is not quite like any other sound. I also went up to the board and turned the score back, which I had omitted to do the night before. Just then Harry passed the door on his way from the bar, with a cigarette in his mouth as usual. I called him in.

"Harry," I said, "give me thirty, and I'll play you a hundred up for a sovereign. You can tell one of the girls to fetch our cues from upstairs."

Harry took his cigarette out of his mouth and whistled. "What, uncle!" he said. "Well, you're going it, I don't think. What would you have said to me if I'd asked you for a game at ten in the morning?"

"Ah!" I said, "but this is all in the way of business. I can't see much wrong with the table, and if I can play on it, then other people may. There's a chance to make a sovereign for you, anyhow. You've given me forty-five and a beating before now."

"No, uncle," he said, "I wouldn't give you thirty. I wouldn't give you one. The table's not playable. Luck would win against Roberts on it."

He showed me the faults of the thing and said he was busy. So I told him if he liked to lose the chance of making a sovereign, he could.

"I hate that room," he said, as we came out. "It's not too clean, and its smells like a vault."

"It smells a lot better than your cigarettes," I said.

For the next six weeks we were all busy, and I gave little thought to the billiard-room. Once or twice I heard old Silas telling a customer that he could not recommend the table, and that the whole room was to be redecorated and refitted as soon as we got the estimates. "You see, sir, we've only been here a little while, and there hasn't been time to get everything as we should like it quite yet."

One day, Mrs. Parker, the woman who had the Regency before me, came down from town to see how we were getting on. I showed the old lady round, pointed out my improvements, and gave her a bit of lunch in my office.

"Well, now," I said, as she sipped her glass of port afterwards, "I'm not complaining of my bargain, but isn't the billiard-room a bit queer?"

"It surprises me," she said, "that you've left it as it is. Especially with everything else going ahead, and the yard half full of motors. I should have taken it all down myself if I'd stopped. That iron roof's nothing but an eyesore, and you might have a couple of beds of geraniums there and improve the look of your front."

"Let's see," I said. "What was the story about that billiard-room?"

"What story do you mean?" she said, looking at me suspiciously.

"The same one you're thinking of," I said.

"About that man, Josiah Ham?"

"That's it."

"Well, I shouldn't worry about that, if I were you. That was all thirty years ago, and I doubt if there's a soul in Tanslowe knows it now. Best forgotten, I say. Talk of that kind doesn't do a hotel any good. Why, how did you come to hear of it?"

"That's just it," I said. "The man who told me was none too clear. He gave me a hint of it. He was an old commercial passing through, and had known the place in the old days. Let's hear your story, and see if it agrees with his."

But I had told my fibs to no purpose. The old lady seemed a bit flustered. "If you don't mind, Mr. Sanderson, I'd rather not speak of it."

I thought I knew what was troubling her. I filled her glass and my own. "Look here," I said. "When you sold the place to me, it was a fair deal. You weren't called upon to go thirty years back, and no reasonable man would expect it. I'm satisfied. Here I am, and here I mean to stop, and twenty billiard-rooms wouldn't drive me away. I'm not complaining. But just as a matter of curiosity, I'd like to hear your story."

"What's your trouble with the room?"

"Nothing to signify. But there's a game played there and marked there—and I can't find the players, and it's never finished. It stops always at sixty-six—forty-eight."

She gave a glance over her shoulder.

"Pull the place down," she said. "You can afford to do it, and I couldn't." She finished her port. "I must be going, Mr. Sanderson. There's rain coming on, and I don't want to sit in the train in my wet things. I thought I would just run down to see how you were getting on, and I'm sure I'm glad to see the old place looking up again."

I tried again to get the story out of her, but she ran away from it. She had not got the time, and it was better not to speak of such things. I did not worry her about it much, as she seemed upset over it.

I saw her across to the station, and just got back in time. The rain came down in torrents. I stood there and watched it, and thought it would do my garden a bit of good. I heard a step behind me and looked round. A fat chap with a surly face stood there, as if he had just come out of the coffee-room. He was the sort that might be a gentleman and might not.

"Afternoon, sir," I said. "Nasty weather for motoring."

"It is," he said. "Not that I came in a motor. You the proprietor, Mr. Sanderson?"

"I am," I said. "Came here recently."

"I wonder if there's any chance of a game of billiards."

"I'm afraid not," I said. "Table's shocking. I'm having it all done up afresh, and then—"

"What's it matter?" said he. "I don't care. It's something to do, and one can't go out."

"Well," I said, "if that's the case, I'll give you a game, sir. But I'm no flyer at it at the best of times, and I'm all out of practice now."

"I'm no good, myself. No good at all. And I'd be glad of the game."

At the billiard-room door I told him I'd fetch a couple of decent cues. He nodded and went in.

When I came back with my cue and Harry's, I found the gas lit and the blinds drawn, and he was already knocking the balls about.

"You've been quick, sir," I said, and offered him Harry's cue. But he refused and said he would keep the one he had taken from the rack. Harry would have sworn if he had found that I had lent his cue to a stranger, so I thought that was just as well. Still, it seemed to me that a man who took a twisted cue by preference was not likely to be an expert.

The table was bad, but not so bad as Harry had made out. The luck was all my side. I was fairly ashamed of the flukes I made, one after the other. He said nothing, but gave a short, loud laugh once or twice— it was a nasty-sounding laugh. I was at thirty-seven when he was nine, and I put on eleven more at my next visit and thought I had left him nothing.

Then the fat man woke up. He got out of his first difficulty, and after that the balls ran right for him. He was a player, too, with plenty of variety and resource, and I could see that I was going to take a licking. When he had reached fifty-one, an unlucky kiss left him an impossible position. But I miscued,and he got going again. He played very, very carefully now, taking a lot more time for consideration than he had done in his previous break. He seemed to have got excited over it, and breathed hard, as fat men do when they are worked up. He had kept his coat on, and his face shone with perspiration.

At sixty-six he was in trouble again; he walked round to see the exact position, and chalked his cue. I watched him rather eagerly, for I did not like the score. I hoped he would go on.

His cue slid back to strike, and then dropped with a clatter from his hand. The fat man was gone— gone, as I looked at him, like a flame blown out, vanished into nothing.

I staggered away from the table. I began to back slowly towards the door, meaning to make a bolt for it. There was a click from the scoring-board, and I saw the thing marked up. And then— I am thankful to say— the billiard-room door opened, and I saw Harry standing there. He was very white and shaky. Somehow, the fact that he was frightened helped to steady me.

"Good Heavens, uncle!" he gasped. "I've been standing outside. What's the matter? What's happened?"

"Nothing's the matter," I said sharply. "What are you shivering about?" I swished backed the curtain, and sent up the blind with a snap. The rain was over now, and the sun shone in through the wet glass— I was glad of it.

"I thought I heard voices— laughing— somebody called the score."

I turned out the gas. "Well," I said, "this table's enough to make any man laugh, when it don't make him swear. I've been trying your game of one hand

against another, and I dare say I called the score out loud. It's no catch— not even for a wet afternoon. I'm not both-handed, like the apes and Harry Bryden."

Harry is as good with the left hand as the right, and a bit proud of it. I slid my own cue back into its case. Then whistling a bit of a tune, I picked up the stranger's cue, which I did not like to touch. I nearly dropped it again when I saw the initials "J. H." on the butt. "Been trying the cues," I said, as I put it in the rack.

He looked at me as if he were going to ask more questions. So I put him on to something else. "We've not got enough cover for those motorcars," I said. "Lucky we hadn't got many here in this rain. There's plenty of room for another shed, and it needn't cost much. Go and see what you can make of it. I'll come out directly, but I've got to talk to that girl in the bar first."

He went off, looking rather ashamed of his tremors.

I had not really very much to say to Miss Hesketh in the bar. I put three fingers of whisky in a glass and told her to put a dash of soda on the top of it. That was all. It was a full-sized drink and did me good.

Then I found Harry in the yard. He was figuring with pencil on the back of an envelope. He was always pretty smart where there was anything practical to deal with. He had spotted where the shed was to go, and he was finding what it would cost at a rough estimate.

"Well," I said, "if I went on with that idea of mine about the flower-beds, it needn't cost much beyond the labour."

"What idea?"

"You've got a head like a sieve. Why, carrying on the flower-beds round the front where the billiard-room now stands. If we pulled that down, it would give us all the materials we want for the new motor-shed. The roofing's sound enough, for I was up yesterday looking into it."

"Well, I don't think you mentioned it to me, but it's a rare good idea."

"I'll think about it," I said.

That evening, my cook, Timbs, told me he'd be sorry to leave me, but he was afraid he'd find the place too slow for him— not enough doing. Then old Silas informed me that he hadn't meant to retire so early, but he wasn't sure— the place was livelier than he had expected, and there would be more work than he could get through.

I asked no questions. I knew the billiard-room was somehow or other at the bottom of it, and so it turned out. In three days' time the workmen were in the house and bricking up the billiard-room door; and after that Timbs and old Silas found the Regency suited them very well, after all. And it was not just to oblige Harry, or Timbs, or Silas, that I had the alteration made. That unfinished

game was in my mind; I had played it, and wanted never to play it again. It was of no use for me to tell myself that it had all been a delusion, for I knew better. My health was good, and I had no delusions. I had played it with Josiah Ham— with the lost soul of Josiah Ham— and that thought filled me not with fear, but with a feeling of sickness and disgust.

It was two years later that I heard the story of Josiah Ham, and it was not from old Mrs. Parker. An old tramp came into the saloon bar begging, and Miss Hesketh was giving him the rough side of her tongue.

"Nice treatment!" said the old chap. "Thirty years ago I worked here, and made good money, and was respected, and now it's insults."

And then I struck in. "What did you do here?" I asked.

"Waited at table and marked at billiards."

"Till you took to drink?" I said.

"Till I resigned from a strange circumstance."

I sent him out of the bar, and took him down the garden, saying I'd find him an hour or two's work. "Now, then," I said, as soon as I had got him alone, "what made you leave?"

He looked at me curiously. "I expect you know, sir," he said. "Sixty-six. Unfinished."

And then he told me of a game played in that old billiard-room on a wet summer afternoon thirty years before. He, the marker, was one of the players. The other man was a commercial traveller, who used the house pretty regularly. "A fat man, ugly-looking, with a nasty laugh. Josiah Ham, his name was. He was at sixty-six when he got himself into a tight place. He moved his ball— did it when he thought I wasn't looking. But I saw it in the glass, and I told him of it. He got very angry. He said he wished he might be struck dead if he ever touched the ball."

The old tramp stopped. "I see," I said.

"They said it was apoplexy. It's known to be dangerous for fat men to get very angry. But I'd had enough of it before long. I cleared out, and so did the rest of the servants."

"Well," I said, "we're not so superstitious nowadays. And what brought you down in the world?"

"It would have driven any man to it," he said. "And once the habit is formed— well, it's there."

"If you keep off it, I can give you a job weeding for three days."

He did not want the work. He wanted a shilling, and he got it; and I saw to it that he did not spend it in my house.

We have got a very nice billiard-room upstairs now. Two new tables and everything shipshape. You may find Harry there most evenings. It is all right. But I have never taken to billiards again myself.

And where the old billiard-room was, there are flower-beds. The pansies that grow there have got funny markings— like figures.

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## 3: The Rubaiyat of a Scotch Highball

***O. Henry***

1862-1910

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THIS DOCUMENT is intended to strike somewhere between, a temperance lecture and the "Bartender's Guide." Relative to the latter, drink shall swell the theme and be set forth in abundance. Agreeably to the former, not an elbow shall be crooked.

Bob Babbitt was "off the stuff." Which means— as you will discover by referring to the unabridged dictionary of Bohemia— that he had "cut out the booze"; that he Was "on the water wagon."

The reason for Bob's sudden attitude of hostility towards the "demon rum"— as the white rib-boners miscall whisky (see the "Bartender's Guide"), should be of interest to reformers and saloon keepers. There is always hope for a man who. when sober, will not concede or acknowledge that be was ever drunk. But when a man will say (in the apt words of the phrase-distiller),"I had a beautiful skate on last night," you will have to put stuff in his coffee as well as pray for him.

One evening on his way home Babbitt dropped in at the Broadway bar that he liked best.. Always there were three or four fellows there from the downtown offices whom he knew. And then there would be high-balls and stories, and he would hurry home to dinner a little late but feeling good, and a little sorry for the poor Standard Oil Company.

On this evening as he entered he heard someone say: "Babbitt was in last night as full as a boiled owl."

Babbitt walked to the bar, and saw in the mirror that his face was as white as chalk. For the first time he had looked Truth in the eyes. Others had lied to him; he had dissembled with himself. He was a drunkard, and had not known it. What he had fondly imagined was a pleasant exhilaration had been maudlin intoxication. His fancied wit had been drivel; his gay humours nothing but the noisy vagaries of a sot. But, never again!

"A glass of seltzer," he said to the bar-tender. A little silence fell upon the group of his cronies, who had been expecting him to join them.

"Going off the stuff, Bob?" one of them asked politely, and with more formality than the highballs ever called forth.

"Yes," said Babbitt.

Some one of the group took up the unwashed thread of a story he had been telling; the bartender shoved over a dime and a nickel change from the quarter, ungarnished with his customary smile; and Babbitt walked out.

Now, Babbitt had a home and a wife— but that is another story. And I will tell you that story, which will show you a better habit and a worse story than you could find in the man who invented the phrase. It began away up in Sullivan County, where so many rivers and so much trouble begins— or begin; how would you say that? It was July, and Jessie was a summer boarder at the Mountain Squint Hotel, and Bob, who was just out of college, saw her one day— and they were married in September. That's the tabloid novel— one swallow of water, and it's gone.

But those July days!

Let the exclamation point expound it, for I shall not. For particulars you might read up on "Romeo and Juliet," and Abraham Lincoln's thrilling sonnet about "You can fool some of the people," etc., and Darwin's works.

But one thing I must tell you about. Both of them were mad over Omar's *Rubaiyat*. They knew every verse of the old bluffer by heart— not consecutively, but picking 'em out here and there as you fork the mushrooms in a 50 cent steak a la Bordelaise. Sullivan County is full of rocks and trees; and Jessie used to sit on them, and— please be good— used to sit on the rocks; and Bob had a way of standing behind her with his hands over her shoulders holding her hands, and his face close to hers, and they would repeat over and over their favourite verses of the old tent-maker. They saw only the poetry and philosophy of the lines then— indeed, they agreed that the Wine was only an image, and that, what was meant to be celebrated was some divinity, or maybe Love or Life. However, at that time neither of them had tasted the stuff that goes with a 60 cent *table d'hôte*.

Where was I? Oh, they married and came to New York. Bob showed his college diploma, and accepted a position filling inkstands at a lawyer's office at 15 dollars a week. At the end of two years he had worked up to 50 dollars, and gotten his first taste of Bohemia— the kind that won't stand the borax and formaldehyde tests.

They had two furnished rooms and a little kitchen. To Jess, accustomed to the mild but beautiful savour of a country town, the dreggy Bohemia was sugar and spice. She hung fish seines on the walls of her rooms, and bought a rakish-looking sideboard, and learned to play the banjo. Twice or thrice a week they dined at French or Italian *tables d'hôte* in a cloud of smoke, and brag and unshorn hair. Jess learned to drink a cocktail in order to get the cherry. At home she smoked a cigarette after dinner. She learned to pronounce Chianti, and leave her olive stones for the waiter to pick up. Once she essayed to say *la,*

*la, la!* in a crowd; but got only as far as the second one. They met one or two couples while dining out and became friendly with them. The sideboard was stocked with Scotch and rye and a liqueur. They had their new friends in to dinner and all were laughing at nothing by 1 a.m. Some plastering fell in the room below them, for which Bob had to pay 4 dollars 50 cents. Thus they footed it merrily on the ragged frontiers of the country that has no boundary lines or government.

Add soon Bob fell in with his cronies and learned to keep his foot on the little rail six inches above the floor for an hour or so every afternoon before he went home, Drink always rubbed him the right way, and he would reach his rooms as jolly as a sandboy. Jessie would meet him at the door, and generally they would dance some insane kind of a rigadoon about the floor by way of greeting. Once when Bob's feet became confused and he tumbled headlong over a footstool, Jessie laughed so heartily and long that he had to throw all the couch pillows at her to make her bush.

In such wise life was speeding for them on the day when Bob Babbitt first felt the power that the giftie geed him.

But let us get back to our lamb and mint sauce.

When Bob got home that evening he found Jessie in a long apron cutting up a lobster for the Newburg. Usually when Bob came in mellow from his hour at the bar his welcome was hilarious. though somewhat tinctured with Scotch smoke.

By screams and snatches of song and certain audible testimonials to domestic felicity was his advent proclaimed. When she heard his foot on the stairs the old. maid in the ballroom always stuffed cotton into her ears. At first Jessie had shrunk from the rudeness and flavour of these spiritual greetings, but as the fog of the false Bohemia gradually encompassed her she came to accept them as love's true and proper greeting. Bob came in without a word, smiled, kissed her neatly but noiselessly, took up a paper and sat down. In the hall room the old maid held her two plugs of cotton poised, filled with anxiety. Jessie dropped lobster and knife and ran to him with frightened eyes.

"What's the matter. Bob, are you ill?"

"Not at all, dear."

"Then what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

Hearken, brethren. When She-who- has a-right -to-ask interrogates you concerning a change she finds in your mood, answer her thus: Tell her that you, in a sudden rage, have murdered your grandmother: tell her that you have robbed orphans and that remorse has stricken you; tell her your fortune is swept away; that you are beset by enemies, by bunions, by any kind of

malevolent fate; but do not, if peace and happiness are worth as much as a grain of mustard seed to you— do not answer her "Nothing."

Jessie went back to the lobster in silence. She cast looks of darkest suspicion at Bob. He had never acted that way before. When dinner was on the table she set, out the bottle of Scotch and the glasses. Bob declined.

"Tell you the truth. Jess." he said, "I've cut out the drink. Help yourself, of course. If you don't mind I'll try some of the seltzer straight."

"You've stopped drinking?" she said, looking at him steadily and unsmilingly. "What for?"

"It wasn't doing me any good," said Bob. "Don't you approve of the idea?"

Jessie raised her eyebrows and one boulder slightly.

"Entirely," she said, with a sculptured mile. "I could not conscientiously advise anyone to drink or smoke, or whistle on Sunday."

The meal was finished almost in silence. Bob tried to make talk, but his efforts lacked the stimulus of previous evenings. He felt miserable, and once or twice his eye wandered toward the bottle, but each time the scathing words of his bibulous friend sounded in his ear, and his mouth set with determination.

Jessie felt the change deeply. The essence of their lives seemed to have departed suddenly. The restless fever, the false gaiety, the unnatural excitement of the shoddy Bohemia in which they had lived had dropped away in the space of the popping of a cork. She stole curious and forlorn glances at the dejected Bob, who bore the guilty look of at least a wife-beater or a family tyrant.

After dinner the coloured maid who came in daily to perform such chore cleared away the things. Jessie, with an unreadable countenance, brought back the bottle of Scotch and the glasses and a bowl of cracked ice. and set them on the table.

"May I ask," she said, with some of the ice in her tones, "whether I am to be included in your sudden spasm of goodness? If not, I'll make one for myself It's rather chilly this evening, for some reason."

"Oh. come now, Jess," said Bob good-naturedly. "don't be too rough on me. Help yourself, by all means. There's no danger of you overdoing it. But I thought there was with me; and that's why I quit. Have yours, and then let's get out the banjo and try over that new quick-step."

"I've heard," said Jessie in the tones of the oracle, "that drinking alone is a pernicious habit. No. I don't think I feel like playing this evening. If we are going to reform we may as well abandon the evil habit of banjo-playing, too."

She took up a book and sat in her little willow rocker on the other side of the table. Neither of them spoke for half an hour. And then Bob laid down his paper and got up with a strange, absent look on his face and went behind her

chair and reached over her shoulders, taking her hands in his, and laid his face close to hers.

In a moment to Jessie the walls of the seine-hung room vanished, and she saw the Sullivan County hills and rills. Bob felt her hands quiver in his as he began the verse from old Omar: 'Come, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of Spring The Winter Garment of Repentance fling; The Bird of Time has but a little way To fly— and Lo! the Bird is on the Wing!' And then he walked to the table and poured a stiff drink of Scotch into a glass. But in that moment a mountain breeze bad somehow found its way in and blown away the mist of the false Bohemia.

Jessie leaped and with one fierce sweep of her hand sent the bottle and glasses crashing to the floor. The same motion of her arm carried it around Bob's neck, where it met its mate and fastened tight.

"Oh, my God. Bobbie— not that verse— I see now. I wasn't always such a fool, was I? The other one boy— the one that says: 'Remould it to the Heart's Desire. Say that one— 'to the Heart's Desire."

"I know that one," said Bob. "It goes 'Ah! Love, could you and I with Him conspire To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire Would not. we— "

"Let me finish it," said Jessie. "Would not we shatter it to bits— and then Remould it nearer to the. Heart's Desire! "

"It's shattered all right," said Bob, crunching some glass under his heel.

In some dungeon below the accurate ear of Mrs. Pickens, the landlady, located the smash.

"It's that wild Mr. Babbit coming home soused again," she said. "And he's got such a nice little wife, too!"

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## 4: The Scarecrow

***Anonymous***

*Sun* (Kalgoorlie) 29 Dec 1907

*There is an amazing number of short stories by this name, and I couldn't identify the clearly American author of this one. It also appeared in* The Sunday Times *(Perth), 5 Jan 1908, and* Table Talk *(Melbourne) 16 Jan 1908. It may well be one of the early anonymous syndicated stories.*

THE painter crossed the field, breaking a path through wild carrot and clover, thick, dew-wet and rose-tinged by the rising sun. He settled himself on his camp-stool with his back to a mass of blackberry vines, where a snake-fence divided field from road, and took his palette and brush from the ground, where they had been flung apparently in a hurry.

A rough and rocky road it was which wound at the painter's back sharply uphill and down again reaching along a short, dense stretch of woods, thence past the clover-field which was the hill-top, and perilously down a stony steep to a little run which dashed into a ravine below, with the frolicsome abandon of Nature's babyhood.

The painter proceeded to sketch in a soft line of horizon far before him, against which leaned russet stacks of corn, each in its human posture stooping like the wraith of a Redskin who had stolen out of the woods to reap where perchance he once had sown. These were at the edge of Daddy Mudge's field and orchard, guarded by the figure of a dilapidated scarecrow, propped against the tallest corn-stack.

Heavy footsteps sounded coming up tho hill at the painter's back, and the figure of a man reached the summit past, the woods, and paused. The painter's lazy blue eyes swept from the horizon line back to his canvas, and he painted, apparently oblivious that the man had drawn near and was leaning upon ' the fence looking curiously over the painter's shoulder.

"I might ha' knowed you'd be the first one up around these parts, Mr. Carr," he remarked.

"I recognise the gentle tones of Mr. Blogg," said the painter, without turning his head. "All hail, High Sheriff of Pocomicah County!"

"That's me all right," said the sheriff, pushing his broad-brimmed hat back from his rubicund face, "an' that's why I ain't been to bed since this time yesterday an' won't get thar tell this time to-morrow, lest I bring down what I'm huntin'. Then it'll pay me; you bet!"

The painter squeezed some cobalt on his palette, and then spoke deliberately.

"The game laws are out, but why is my friend, the Sheriff of Pocomicah, hunting alone and unprotected by his usual retinue? Where is the doughty Hawk Collins; and where, oh where, is Hughy Culp?"

"Gone to git breakfast. Somebody had ter stay up here," said the sheriff stooping for a sprig of sorrel.

"And where is my moth-eaten and resigned intimate, Beans?"

"Huh! Beans knows too much, ef he is a dog, to git outer his bed this time o' day!"

"And, finally, what uneasy qualm of conscience incites the sheriff of Pocomicah to hunt at five a.m.?"

"Look a-here! You painter people don't know a thing, do you?" said the sheriff, in evident enjoyment of the anticipated chaffing.

"I've painter people know everything," returned the artist, with a sweep of the brush which implied omniscience and an ownership of the universe, "everything; even that the Sheriff of Pocomicah is out on a more important errand than to hear the little birds awaken each  in its downy nest."

"Wisht I was thar," said the sheriff, as he drew a pistol from his hip-pocket and balanced it on the fence, while he examined it in leisurely fashion. "But bein' up early just now is worth fifty dollars to me mebby, sir."

"I should g hunting at five a.m. daily," said the painter, "even if I brought down nothing more animated than Daddy Mudge's old scarecrow— which I proceed to paint."

The sheriff laughed wheezily, as if the inner sounds ran the gamut of sundry rolls of flesh before they reached his vocal tubes. He pushed his hat further from his round face and leaned against the fence now, peering curiously at the painter's rapid strokes, with the tolerant contemplation which the complacent ox bestows upon the unutilitarian butterfly.

"Reckon you 'would, sir; reckon you would. But I aint' huntin' usual game and tain't the season fur jack-rabbits neither. Fifty dollars is fifty dollars, too. Say, sir, I'll put that thar fifty, ef I get it, agin the pictur you're paintin', that you can't guess what I'm out huntin' this side o' them woods yonder fur," with a gesture toward the dark brush of woodland to the left of the field, "an' I bet it'll be the first time ye ever got fifty dollars fur the of a gol-darned scarecrow!"

"The very first," said the painter gravely. "I think you're out hunting a poem upon Love's Rising Sun, to dedicate to Miss Posy Robbins, of Yarrow Farm."

The sheriff slapped his trousers leg delightedly and the chuckles broke into a roar.

"Not on your life, sir! But Miss Posy's a beauty now, ain't she?"

Then, Mr. Blogg"— the painter looked around the field before them, as if in search if the coin of thought to cast upon the imagination's roulette wheel—"

and pointed with his brush to the scarecrow behind the distant stack— "then I'll wager Daddy's Mudge's scarecrow against your dog Beans that I can guess."

"Done!" said the sheriff, "though I don't want to lose Beans; he ain't a fancy dog, but he's got good stayin' powers. You tell him to stay thar an' thar he stays tell the earth cracks in' with him."

" And I don't want, to lose the scarecrow till I've finished with him as a model," said the painter, " and I think, too much of Beans to own him, therefore I straightway swap Beans for the scarecrow. You're after the young chap who shot young Curtain dead last night down at Upshur's Tavern."

The sheriff's chin dropped.

"Now don't you beat Buck!" he uttered. " How'd you know ?"

"I told you I knew 'everything. The scarecrow is mine," said the" painter contentedly.

"You kin have him an' welcome. He give me a turn when I come up the hill an' see him standin' thar. Hadn't seen a figger till I come upon him an' you. Mebby I better go and disturb him while I shake them stacks loose an' look in 'em. Only that feller hasn't had a chance ter git outer the woods. He's in thar all right."

"You can't," said the painter easily. "I've had first go. I fixed my landscape and my scarecrow and the stacks, and I won't have them upset. Besides, there is nothing in the stacks because I've been over there. Hands off!"

" All right— ef you've seen 'em, said the sheriff, resting his pistol on the fence rail. "He can't git away when we beat them woods after the boys come. Then—" he paused significantly.

"And then— said the painter, balancing his brush.

"There ain't nothin' left fur that chap but a piece' o' hemp. Hawk Gulp, he's sightin' the other side," said the sheriff significantly.

"Poor chap," said the painter ; but he did not mean Hawk Gulp.

"Naw, he ain't. What you sayin' that fur, Mr. Carr? It's poor Sam Curtain what he shot. Sam was a low-down drunkard all right, but this here college feller didn't have no right to come round here an' play cards with him and drink an' shoot him afterwards. Well, he'll git him all right. He'll do well to poke his head outer them woods before the place gets awake, 'cause I'd rather hustle him back to Pocomicah Jail then to hev a care of him afore I git thar."

"Surely, they wouldn't—" began the painter, his brush stopping abruptly.

"Sure they would, then. They'd stop him at the first big tree. Well, he'll get hungry and look out after a while."

"By the way, Mr. Blogg, you've had no breakfast," said the painter suddenly. He pointed with his brush down the steep road behind them, toward the ravine in the shadow.

"You know where my shack is. Step down and get some, coffee off the stove. There's ham and bread there, too— the coffee ought to be good about this time. I'll do your patrol for a few minutes. You can search the shack while you re there. You're bound to do that, aren't you?"

"Sure," grinned the sheriff. "Thar ain't nothin' else on that side. I'd do more 'n that fur a cup o' your coffee, about now. I reckon it'll be all right to step down yonder, 'cause you tin shout ef anybody shows out o' the woods, an' I'd, be here afore he could git acrost the field."

"Undoubtedly," said the painter. "I'll shout if only an owl hoots."

"They don't hoot in the day," chuckled the sheriff enjoyingly. "You better keep this here, sir." He held the pistol out, and the painter dropped it on the ground beside him.

"Thanks. I like firearms for ornament mainly," he said.

The sheriff was still chuckling as his heavy frame lurched down the steep road and disappeared at its turn below.

It was a full minute before the painter rose and scanned the road behind him, then he vaulted quickly across the field to the corn-stacks against which, the scarecrow, leaned. He leaped upon the tallest stack.

"Drop!" he said peremptorily to the scarecrow, and the scarecrow fell in a shaking heap to the ground.

"Gosh!" it exclaimed, "if I'd kept that position another minute I'd ha' dropped dead! What did you keep him talking for? Where shall I go? He'll come back, I tell you!"

It was the white, horrible panic of a soul brought to bay. The painter looked down sternly into the ashen working face at his feet; the scarred face of youth it was, masked by terror.

"You've just about a minute, my boy," he said, "and if you hadn't broken out of the woods while he was climbing the hill you wouldn't have that. The posse is coming up now. I never saw you before in my life, until you came down on me, and I may be all wrong. God knows why I want to help you! Do you hear me—" his hand suddenly caught the youth's arm sternly— "God knows, I don't! You are only a boy and you need a chance. Get up quick."

"Where— where?" panted the scarecrow, struggling to his feet.

"Help me to get away from them! They'll kill me, don't you know they'll kill me?"

"Yes, they'll kill you if they get you, said the painter, "but there's no one up here yet except myself. Cut across the field while the sheriff's in my shack. It shelves along the ravine road. "Lie low down there until you hear him come up here, then slip down to my shack and drink some coffee, and hide yourself there till I come."

"God bless you," muttered the scarecrow.

"Well, just bear in mind that He's a jealous God, and prefers to do His own manslaughter," said the painter.

The scarecrow dashed suddenly across the field and disappeared over its crest. The painter drew a sigh of relief and settled his cornstalk.

Three minutes later he sat calmly painting. Stroke after stroke the blossoming day grew flower-like and fine under his brush.

The sheriff climbed the hill panting and wiping his round face upon his shirt-sleeve. Again he leaned or the fence behind the painter, and now lighted his pipe comfortably.

"That was prime coffee, sir," he said, "and I've taken the liberty o' searchin' the shack jest to say 'twas done. Now I reckon I'll be collectin' my fifty dollars from that there bunch o' trees over yonder. I hear the boys a-comin."

"And I'll go. down and have some breakfast," said the painter, wiping his brushes. "Drop in some day, sheriff, and let me show you how I can cook a dinner."

" I'll do it Mr. Carr. Hello!" he added suddenly, "where's your scarecrow gone to?"

"Pulled him down. He marred the landscape," said the painter.

"Well, I reckon ' you kin put him up again after a bit," said the sheriff; "anyhow, he was yourn all right!"

Voices and heavy footsteps sounded on the road. The posse was approaching and the raucous tones of Hawk Culp rose upward. The painter folded his camp-stool and gathered up his implements.

"Yes, he seemed to be mine, but this problem is what to do with a scarecrow after you've got him." he said.

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## 5: Come Back to Aaron

***C. S. Montanye***

1892-1948

*Top-Notch* 1 Dec 1927

FOR more time than Oscar Doolittle, one of the bell hops at the gilded Hotel Ritzbilt, cared to think about, tips had been as scarce as prickly heat in the arctic circle. And the worst part of it was that Doolittle, running Eddie Elton ragged for favor in the blue eyes of Hazel, the orange-topped switchboard Venus, needed ten dollars just the same way a race horse needed a track, a plumber a leaky pipe, a bootlegger a dark night, and a tardy schoolboy a good excuse.

Thinking it over in leisure moments, Doolittle decided that nine dollars or even eight might possibly suffice. The tragedy of it was there was little chance of getting as much as one tenth of one per cent of the required amount from either Nick McBride, the dapper night clerk, or any of his companions in livery. The whole works awaited pay day and appeared as clean as a package of laundry.

Still, there were a few grains of sunshine in the dark morass of disappointment. The ten iron gentlemen were necessary if Hazel was to be taken to the annual outing of the Hotel Workers' Association. They would cover the price of the tickets to Treasure Island on the Sound— they would buy innumerable broiled canines smeared with what the French call moutard and they would cover the bus ride to and from the rendezvous.

Likewise, with what change left Doolittle decided he could purchase a sprig of violets for Hazel or a box of candy and treat her to a few of the amusement devices the island had to offer to its patrons.

The outing was scheduled for Saturday and on Tuesday Doolittle was like a sailor lost in the middle of the Pacific without a single sail in sight.

"I hear them tell how you're chirping about dragging Hazel to the big blowout this week-end," Eddie Elton sneered that same evening. "What happened— wealthy uncle shuffle off to do a piece of harp strumming and willed you a couple of dollars? Come on, tell me all about it!"

Doolittle, who loved Elton in exactly the same manner an ordinary moth was enamored of a roll of tar paper, grinned witlessly.

"My business," he mumbled, moving a couple of feet that might have won cup races if equipped with masts and rudders, "ain't nobody else's business."

Elton curled a lip.

"Yeah? You can bull frogs and you can kid gloves but you can't buffalo this baby. I'm broke and so are you. You've been scouting around trying to make a

touch so you can treat Hazel— the same as I've been doing. And you haven't had the luck of a woodpecker on a tiled roof. Isn't that so?"

Whatever answer Doolittle would have made was never to be known for exactly at the same minute the bell hop's signal buzzed and the elegant Mr. McBride raised a finger in a request for both service and action.

"You can have her—I don't want her!" Eddie Elton murmured, after one glance in the direction of the black onyx desk where a newly arrived feminine guest of the Ritzbilt was in the act of registering. "There's your gold mine, Oscar. Grab your pick and shovel, and go to it!"

The lady whose three bags and hat box Doolittle picked up was anything save prepossessing or one who gave any hint of lucrative gratuities. She was thin, she was elderly, she possessed a countenance that would have caused consternation in any clock factory and she wore a blond wig decorated with coy corkscrew curls. Yet she had been assigned to one of the best suites on the third floor and Doolittle, struggling manfully with the luggage, felt a flicker of hope.

Possibly this woman was a millionairess, eccentric to the point of starvation, with enough money to buy up New Jersey and close it for good. He set the bags down in her rooms and waited patiently. Nothing was forthcoming save words.

"What is your name, boy? How long have you been employed here? Are you honest and ambitious? Do you live home with your parents? Do you go to Sunday school and can you repeat the Ten Commandments?"

So rapidly did she speak that Doolittle blinked.

"Yes, ma'am," he mumbled. "No, ma'am."

The woman transfixed him with a pair of singularly keen eyes.

"Which is it?"

Doolittle rubbed his ears and fingered the brass buttons on his jacket.

"Both," he answered stupidly.

"The reason I ask," the woman went on, "is because I will have an errand for you in a day or two that will pay you ten dollars. You look like a bright, respectable little chap, who could be relied on. Are you?"

"I had a good one last winter," Doolittle returned politely. "Chap, what I mean. Don't forget me when you want that errand done, ma'am. I've been hunting for ten dollars for the last week and a half."

The woman said she wouldn't and Doolittle returned to the lobby walking on clouds of air. It was the work of a minute only to discover she had registered as Mrs. Brighton Early, from Chicago.

"One of those big-hearted, rich Western women," Nick McBride ventured carelessly. "If you had more sense you could get the dollars, Oscar. Most of

these exiles from that section of the country where a bird in the hand is worth two on the plate are prodigals when it comes to soothing the itching palm. Too bad you're so thick!"

Back on the bench Eddie Elton grinned sarcastically.

"What did you get, fellar? Come on, open up the mitt and let's pipe the plunder."

Settling back on the bench, Oscar Doolittle stared dreamily across the lobby. He was just able to glimpse the gleaming crown of Hazel's blond head. One of her slenderly arched brows he glimpsed and a portion of her cheek that was as white as sun-washed ivory. His imagination glowed fancifully with a picture of Treasure Island, sizzling fox terriers done up in crisp rolls and a scenic railway that was a first aid to erratic digestion.

"I didn't get any money— yet," he replied truthfully, "but I did receive a promise— and, oh, Eddie, what a promise !"

Elton snickered and tossed a wink at a couple of his other companions in toil. They returned the wink.

"A promise, eh? Try and spend that up at Treasure Island next Saturday and see how far it goes!"

ii

THERE was no word forthcoming from Mrs. Brighton Early who stayed closer to her expensive suite than a moth to a fur coat, until that Friday noon. Then she sent for Doolittle and let a razorlike glance pass slowly over him.

"I'm going to send you down to John Street," she began, "with a pearl necklace. It is a very valuable pearly necklace worth possibly fifty or sixty thousand dollars. You are to take it to the firm of Ford & Rattle, the large jewelers. I have just telephoned and they are expecting the necklace which I am sending to have its catch repaired. Do you suppose you can deliver it safely?"

"Do birds fly?" Doolittle answered succinctly.

The woman opened her desk and lifted out a long leather box. She opened it, glanced briefly at the coil of pearls it contained before wrapping the box in brown paper and securing it stoutly with heavy twine.

"Here is your carfare. When you return with the receipt from the jewelers I will reimburse you with the ten dollars as I promised. Let me caution you again to be careful. You will?"

"Well," Doolittle replied diplomatically, "I haven't ridden" in an ambulance yet!"

John Street, as information divulged, was in the lower regions of the city, a short distance from the financial district. The subways were still doing business, so Doolittle, some fifteen minutes later, shot a nickel into the noisy turnstile and boarded a southbound train.

The train was jammed and he was too small to reach the beautiful overhead straps. So he compromised by seizing the coat tails of a middle-aged gentleman with eyebrows that looked like question marks and a nose that jutted out over the waterfall of a mustache. There was another man close to him that resembled a minister. This second individual had a long, lean, melancholy visage and a chin so pointed that it could have opened any bottle of olives. He appeared to have his hands folded in prayer and Doolittle, shoving Mrs. Early's package into his hip pocket, favored him with only a solitary glance.

All the way down to his destination, thoughts of Treasure Island and the big outing kept pace with the speed of the train. Hot dogs, scenic railways, and the delicious Hazel. A king could ask no more!

Doolittle snapped out of his trance when he reached the proper station. He alighted and headed for the stairs, but before he had placed his foot on the second step that led up to open daylight above, he made a discovery so terrifying and unnerving that he nearly fainted.

Quite by chance his hand automatically sought his back pocket. He half expected the comforting feel of Mrs. Early's package, but instead his fingers brushed nothing except the material of his suit. With a wild cry Doolittle fumbled madly for the missing package until, in another round of dizzy seconds, he terrible truth dawned significantly and fully upon him.

Either some crook had used agile fingers or— he had lost the valuable pearls!

## iii

FOR a confused minute Doolittle thought of two things. One was police headquarters and the other the lost-and-found bureau of the underground cannery. Mature reflection, painfully agonizing, made him decide that it was better to go to Mrs. Early with the horrible news and allow her to act.

"After all," he told himself, "the pearls belonged to her. She'd better call the cops!"

Back at the Hotel Ritzbilt, Doolittle made a miserable way into the lobby. He broke the sad news to the exquisite Mr. McBride who shook his head and he told Eddie Elton who failed to display any degree of sympathy in Doolittle's trouble.

"So you let some dip get you for sixty thousand dollars' worth of neckbeads?" Elton said. "Really, it's a wonder a dumb Bennie like you gets home at night without having your elbows picked off or your eyes crooked or something. Well, you must pardon me while I guffaw. This just about bakes your outing with Hazel to a fricassee. Still, it's only what might be expected from you."

Doolittle turned sadly away and used an elevator. McBride had evidently phoned the news up to Mrs. Brighton Early. The woman was pacing the floor with the air of a lioness suffering from insomnia when Doolittle plucked up sufficient courage to enter.

"And I thought you could be trusted!" she snapped. "I thought you were alert. I was certain that you could be relied upon."

"How about the police?" he stammered thickly. "Honest, we got some swell bulls in this town. I know a party who lost a valise with a pair of pajamas in it and when the flat feet got it back to him it was filled with sterling silver. I know—"

"I've already communicated with the law," the woman said. "I suppose you realize I have no intention of paying you for your errand. Those pearls were worth-"

A knock on the door interrupted her. She crossed to it rather slowly and opened it. Two men entered, one briskly and one reluctantly. Doolittle, with a stab of surprise recognized the brisk one as being the same gentleman with the question-mark eyebrows whose coat tails he had clung to in the subway. And the other was the same melancholyfaced, ministerial appearing person who had stood beside him in a solemn and prayerful attitude.

"Mrs. Early?" the brisk one began, removing a familiar package from his inner pocket. "Your pearls. I might suggest that you take better care of them in the future. I just stopped in on my way to headquarters with my friend Aaron Hawks, whom you probably know."

"You bet she knows me," Hawks growled. "And believe me, if they are going to job me I'll blow like an electric fan."

The unprepossessing countenance of Mrs. Early grew pallid.

"I— I don't know a thing about all this," she began. "Does this person infer—"

"I happen to be Algernon Wells," the first speaker interrupted. "I represent the insurance company writing the policy on those pearls. In a word, we're been rather suspicious of you, Mrs. Early. I came on from Chicago to sort of keep an eye on the jewels. I got the conversation you had over the wire this morning with Hawks here from the remarkably pretty operator downstairs. Hawks, one of the cleverest pickpockets in the business, is very familiar to me."

"And you think—"

Wells lifted a polite hand.

"I would not want to think that you had employed Hawks to trail your messenged and relieve him of the necklace so that you might collect the insurance. I wouldn't want to believe that, so I'm merely suggesting that you take better care of the necklace until the policy expires. Good afternoon."

Having nothing better on hand, Doolittle followed Wells and the sharp-chinned individual into one of the lifts that was going down. He fingered an ear, shuffled his feet hopelessly and drew a breath when the car reached the lobby level.

There, in the act of alighting, the representative of the insurance company appeared to remember something.

"Oh, by the way," he said to Doolittle, "I hope you don't lose anything on this. Here. I owe you ten bucks. Take it and hide it in your shoe."

He pressed a bank note into the bell hop's nerveless hand and added a dash of explanation.

"Never mind the thanks. If you hadn't been so— ah— easy, Hawks would have never picked the pearls and they wouldn't have— ah— come back to Aaron, as it were. Get the point?"

Doolittle slipped the bill up his sleeve, glanced across at the switch board and found a smile.

"No, sir," he answered. "Yes, sir."

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## 6: A Wolf in Wolf's Clothing

***H. Bedford-Jones***

1887-1949

*Short Stories* 10 May 1943

BENEATH the blazing morning sun of Tunis, the Honorable David Morton flushed with annoyance as his companion began to sing softly. They had alighted from the tram at the Avenue Jules Ferry. Although he was rumpled and unshaven and dirty from three days of prison, Dick Ravenal could sing.

His words, however, were impudent; he wanted to be rid of the Englishman at his side.

*"Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief,*
*Taffy came to my house and stole a piece of beef!"*

Morton halted. "See here, Hobbs, I've had enough of this!" he barked.

"Well, David's the same name as Taffy," said Ravenal. "You certainly came to my prison house, and you got me set at liberty, and took your piece of beef!"

"And paid for it," snapped Morton. "Have you no gratitude?"

"None. I just don't like you. Because you're in the British consular service, should I worship you? Far from it. I've informed you on troop dispositions and the exact number of planes at the Bizerte base and the air fields here outside Tunis—"

"I helped you because you're a British subject, Hobbs!" began Morton. Ravenal grinned.

"I'm no such thing. The passport I showed you isn't mine; it was stolen. As though I'd have a name like Hobbs! That's what the Arabs call bread— hobbs! My friend, I'm an American citizen. You got me free; now run along with your information. You did a good job telling the police they had made a mistake, and you're paid for it— so what? I have business ahead. Here's your pocketbook; don't be so careless with it, or some thief will grab it. I've no use for it. Good-by."

He pressed into the hand of the astounded Britisher a fat leather pocketbook, then slipped away and was gone in the passing throng, leaving Morton all astare; and this was the last he saw, or wanted to see, of the Honorable David Morton.

Doubling back the way they had come, Ravenal slipped around the corner and walked into the Transatlantique Hotel, by no means the largest or finest in Tunis. It was convenient because it stood on a corner and had two entrances. He went to the desk and demanded his key.

"M'sieu has been away?" said the clerk, handing it over.

"Yes," replied Ravenal. "For three days I have been sitting mourning among the ruins of Carthage, my friend. No letters? Good. Send me some luncheon, and a bottle of that Monfiore Chianti."

"Ah, M'sieu! There is a trifling matter of accounts—"

"Apply this; I've had no time to get it changed." Ravenal laid down an English five-pound note, and departed to his room, anxious for a bath and a change. The Honorable David had paid in cash as well as in service for the information he got. Ravenal wondered why the devil he had been so keen to get it.

Dick Ravenal, at present soldier of fortune, was one of those not uncommon men whom most women think in need of mothering, and whom other men usually like on sight,

He was not so much a rascal as merely amoral; he had no reverence for money, his own or another's; he knew his way around in a dozen countries, and he had an air of pleasant, kindly intimacy and sympathy which was natural to him. This deceived enemies and bound friends more closely.

He was not a bird of prey; such birds prey on victims, and Ravenal had no victims. He could rook a blackguard with pleasure, he could live by his wits, he could even kill without a qualm if life were at stake; but he had a certain code which he never transgressed. For years he had been knocking about north Africa—after losing a fortune in Egypt, at cards and tables and women. He was no angel, understand; hear the worst and get it over.

THAT plunge into the fleshpots of Egypt had swept away his money and his past. His young wife, back in Baltimore, divorced him, his business associates chucked him out. He could not go home, so stayed where he was, in Africa, and wandered. He slipped into easy ways of living, collecting tribute where it offered, giving generously where there was need. Because he was speaking fluent Italian with a poor devil of a runaway Italian soldier, and giving him cigarettes and money, the police here clapped him in jail as an Axis spy, until Morton convinced them he was only a mad Englishman. And in return— why the devil, he asked himself again, had the consular chap been so frantic after that information?

He reached his own corridor, started for his own room, and paused. Beside him, a room door swung open; a man appeared, clutching, at the jamb, speaking to him.

"So here you are, species of canaille! I've been ringing for half an hour. Inside, inside! Abominable service in this rathole, abominable! Quick, damn you— help me!"

His first thought was that the man was drunk; then he dismissed it as the man caught his arm, Not drunk, but ill—frightfully, horribly ill, doubled up with agony. He had been mistaken for the garcon. This was not a tourist hotel with telephone luxuries; here one used the bell, French fashion, and sometimes it worked and sometimes not.

Ravenal helped the man to the bed, helped him stretch out, half-conscious. A hard, lean man, who muttered to himself in German. Ravenal pricked up his ears. A Nazi? No lack of Nazi spies hereabouts by all accounts. He looked around swiftly.

Evidently the man had arrived very recently, perhaps within the hour. A handbag was open, a grip strapped and locked, still fresh with the chalk-mark of the customs inspector. A coat and vest lying on a chair. Ravenal swooped on them, delved in the pockets, found a passport and two letters. The passport was French and told that this man was Eric Horn, a Frenchman. The letters gave it the lie. They said Eric Horn was a Nazi, outfitted in Paris with French identity; in reality, Ober-lieutenant Horn of Breslau.

Ravenal pocketed the lot. He came back to the bed. Horn's eyes wavered open in a lucid interval. Ravenal spoke to him in German.

"Shall I call a doctor? Tell me what I can do for you."

The man was clutching at his side, in a sweat of anguish, but joy darted into his face at hearing the German speech. He fell into a babble of fevered words.

"Yes, yes! The doctor, yes. But first— the summer-house in the Belvedere— at five this afternoon! Meet Hesse there. The report on that damned American agent— important. He must be— must be removed —the Americans— fleet from England to Algiers— sh!" A groan wrenched at him and he twisted in convulsive pain. "Meet Hesse— meet Hesse—"

The man straightened out, unconscious.

Ravenal was deeply startled by those words. He swiftly examined the Nazi agent; there was no sign of injury. The truth hit him suddenly— the appendix, of course! He searched clothes and handbag again, replacing the passport on the dresser in full sight. A wallet, fat with paper money, rewarded his search. In it was a note, addressed to Eric Horn at the Transat Hotel, written two days previously; a brief but illuminating note. It was brief and curt, but indicated that the writer did not know Herr Horn:

*Five o'clock, the Belvedere summethouse, on the 4th. Bring this to serve as your identification.*

*Hesse.*

Ravenal chuckled. Then he left the room and made his way back to the downstairs desk, and spoke to the clerk.

"There's a man in Room 39 who's vety ill. He asked me to have a doctor sent. It looks like an emergency case, too."

This done, he sought his own room and lost no time in getting a bath and shave and a change of clothes. He left his door open and kept an eye on the hall. When he had dressed, he went to Horn's room and found a physician there, at work. He explained his interest and- the doctor nodded.

"Good thing you called me; apparently a ruptured appendix; the fool had taken a physic. He's not recovered consciousness. I've given him a hypodermic and am rushing him to the military hospital, It's a toss-up whether he'll live."

Ravenal withdrew. In his own room, he applied himself to a hearty lunch; and then, in the expressive native phrase, sat knuckling the drum of thought. He was faced with a decision which, no matter the choice, was unpleasant.

HE HAD no desire to mix in the North African game of politics, which in Tunis was particularly hot and vicious. The French feared and hated the Italians in nearby Tripoli, and in Tunis itself the Italians outnumbered them. Between Nazi agents, Italians, Allied agents, Vichy agents and occasional Fighting French sympathizers, Tunisia was a hotbed of undercovet action. And life was cheap here.

But two things stuck in Ravenal's craw. First, that consular chap's overweening interest in the dispositions at the airports; second, the words of Horn. "The Americans— fleet from England to Algiers—" and then about the removal of some American agent. This struck Ravenal as not only ominous, but directly keyed by destiny to pluck at his own affairs. Cards had been dealt him. If he refused to play them, he was a rat.

The choice was, in a way, a bit hard because he had a deal on with a Tunisian grain broker that would net him a cool ten thousand francs provided he put it through at once. If he did not get down the coast to Sfax this afternoon and see his man, the deal was off. If he stayed here and played the cards given him, he must chuck the other completely.

"Be damned to it!" he thought. "These Nazis are out to get some American; my job is to step in. I've been given the chance, maybe, to make up for my sorry wasted opportunities. If I refuse it, goodby to all self-respect. So I must lose a cool ten thousand francs' for the sake of some chap from home I never set eyes on! Well, I'd be a hell of an American if I passed up the chance."

So he reached a decision, then found himself rewarded upon dipping into Horn's wallet. The money in it was French and Algerian, and the total was close to seven thousand francs— sweet consolation for his lost brokerage deal! This cheered him up amazingly, and clinched his decision.

There is simply no use in affirming that Dick Ravenal was a heroic figure burning to match wits with the masters of espionage; he was not. He knew too much about that grim game, and was afraid of it. He had a bad record, and from some standpoints was an arrant rogue. And yet— well, even those wretches in prison had liked him. One of them had given him a couple of racing tips, too.

With his borrowed English papers in his pocket and a few other things besides, Ravenal walked down the Avenue de Paris, bought himself a spotless sun-helmet and a swagger new white jacket of the finest material, and in its buttonhole carefully adjusted the ribbon of the Legion of Honor, which he had no earthly right to sport. He then turned in at a boutique half French, half Arab, and made some heavy bets on the afternoon's races at the Kassar Said hippodrome.

By this time the afternoon was wearing along, so he hopped a northbound tram, taking a ticket to the Belvedere. He got off at the entrance avenue of palms. This enormous park, with its theatre and casino, was entirely French but was always thronged with the white-robed natives, particularly as the evening prayer-hour approached, for your Arab is a sensuous soul and loves beauty. And this was the most beautiful spot in Tunis, at the day's end. Ravenal felt himself thrill to it now, as always, as he climbed.

From the open loggia of the summerhouse, he stood looking across the trees and the city beyond to the Kasbah and the tagged peaks of the Bou-Cornein. The soft richness of the view, the vast expanse of white houses and roofs, spotless with distance, was enchanting. Ravenal, however, kept his eye on the figures around. He had not come here for the view. No German was in sight. A few soldiers, a number of Arabs as usual, a little group of Italians with a guide—and a woman, close by, who stood looking dreamily out across the park.

A young woman, dark, gowned in the simplest and most notable Parisian style; svelte, slim, with incisive profile and the eyes of an artist. She drew a deep breath, turned, caught Ravenal's look, and colored slightly. 'Then she returned his gaze.

"It is very beautiful," she said in French.

He bowed slightly, as in apology for answering. "It is called the Burnouse of the Prophet," he said. "That is the native name for the city. See, how it flows from the Kasbah, where lies the hood of the burnouse, toward the port and La Goulette! A burnouse of purest white, pricked out with the green tiles on the domes of saints' tombs and mosques; streets so narrow as to be invisible, windows all on the inside of the houses— secrecy everywhere, sanctity everywhere, a city of holiness! That is, from a distance."

As he spoke, he was wondering what such a woman was doing here, alone.

"What an odd conceit!" she exclaimed, gazing out again at the city, neither rebuking him nor showing too much interest in him. "It is more beautiful than any other city in French Africa! Why is that?"

"Beauty gravitates to beauty," said Ravenal. "These people love beautiful things, as they love perfume! the perfume bazars here ate unique, you know. Have you seen them?"

She nodded. "I've been here several days. One goes first to the perfume bazaars."

Her tone bespoke dismissal; she was through with him. Perhaps, he thought, she had come here to meet someone. This recalled his own errand. He bowed slightly to her and turned away. Still no one in sight who looked at all like his man; or, he reflected, the Nazi agent might even be in Arab guise.

Ah, the letter which was to serve as identification— of course! He moved closer to the square opening in the exquisitely tiled walls which gave view of the city. He took out the letter, unfolded it, held it as though perusing it, and then in leisurely fashion struck a match for his cigarette. Surely, he thought, if the man Hesse were anywhere here, he must catch sight of this significant poised figure!

Then he caught a startled breath from behind, and turned to find the woman staring at him. She spoke softly, but in German.

"Where did you get my letter?"

"Your letter?" For an instant, Ravenal was thunderstruck, as he realized the truth. A smile came to his lips. "But it is mine, since it is addressed to me! And don't speak German here. So you are Hesse!"

"Of course," she said. "Hesse Dubois. But you— well, I would never have taken you to be Eric Horn, after what I've heard of you!"

"Neither would less friendly persons, which is my object." Ravenal forced himself to accept the situation. He concealed his astonishment and nodded at her, offering his arm. "We can't talk here. Come along. Let's take a tram and find a café and be comfortable. Did you have any trouble getting here?"

Not for nothing was Ravenal a crafty fellow. As they left the buildings and headed for the tram entrance, he got what he most needed to know; information.

"Leaving Egypt was not easy," she said. "However, I got a boat from Alexandria. And I have frightful news. The British have amassed incredible forces. American planes and tanks and men are pouring in. Already the offensive is under way and Rommel is crumbling; he cannot hope to stand up against it. What word from Paris and Algiers?"

"Nothing of moment," said Ravenal. "The most important thing at present is the matter of that American who must be removed,"

"Yes, yes, that is urgent!" she replied. "I have learned everything. I got it straight from an American consular agent in Alex-andria—the fool! The information must be sent on at once from here; have you any means of sending it?"

"Of course," said Ravenal calmly. She relaxed, and sighed.

"Good. Then everything's all right. Here's the tram."

They got aboard and started down the long avenue, chatting of little things. Meantime Ravenal found himself sizing her up anew. He was good at this; every rascal, like every hotel clerk, learns to do it automatically. Yet she had fooled him at first sight.

NOW he saw her as a person not to be lightly regarded. Evidently she was a trained and supple spy, probably of French birth; her hands were slim and tapering, but they were strong, her features were vivacious and beautiful, but lacked any sympathy or compassion. She was obviously efficient, but also superficial.

At the Avenue de Londres they changed to a west-bound tram, and in time gained the crowded Place Halfaouine, with its trees and stone benches and French fountain and surrounding cafés, and the enormous Mosque Halfaouline at the far end. This was the very heart of the Medina or native city, thronged with Arabs of every hue, with grayish Berbers, with shiny black Soudanese, with magicians and story-tellers and snake-charmers, and the air a din of laughter and babbling voices.

"You speak English?" questioned Ravenal, as they settled down at a café table.

"Of course."

"Then stick to it, as the safest. Here's the soul of Tunis before your eyes," he said. "Squalor enough, but also beauty. They go in for fine clothes, these natives. Like the ancient Khmers who built the jungled ruins of Siam, they worship beauty— and the same vice. There, opium. Here, hashish. It spells decadence, effeminacy, weakness."

"How soon can you get off my information?" she demanded. She was practical, not dreaming of beauty; probably anxious and worried, thought Ravenal.

"Within half an hour. By short-wave wireless."

"Oh! And you only arrived here today?"

Ravenal waved at his hand. "Everything was long ago arranged. The superior Aryan race is most efficient. I am surprised that you did not run into any of our people."

"I did," she confessed. "But I had orders to report to you alone."

"Excellent woman!" he said, as their drinks arrived. "Now, then, let's have it."

She poured out a torrent of low, rapid speech, to which Ravenal listened without evidence of emotion. His pleasant, kindly features held their half-smile. His dark eyes narrowed a trifle; a shadowy, predatory air became visible and lent his face an incisive quality. Inwardly he fell into tumultuous and ghastly alarm.

"These special trade control officers the Americans have sent to Africa," she said, "have been here a year and a half. They ate picked Intelligence men, cooperating with the Free French sympathizers. Spies, all of them— spies! Agents working against us! No one has suspected this before. They're supposed to supervise the exchange of American products and food sent to North Africa for cork and other things. Something is in the air! Berlin must be warned at once. No one knows just what it is."

She paused. Into Ravenal's brain darted the words of the sick man. "The Americans— fleet from England to Algiers!" Could such a thing be? No, no, it was fantastic!

"That is the information you must send," she went on. "This man Wright, here at Tunis, is one of those agents. He has caused us terrific injuries."

"And therefore must be removed?" said Ravenal. She nodded.

"Exactly. That is my work; it is all arranged. I met him yesterday. He's not only in contact with the military authorities here, but with the British; also with Italians in Tripoli— the swine! He has caused the loss of invaluable ships sent to supply the Afrika Korps. How far may I count upon your help."

"All the way," said Ravenal. "But the thing must be kept quiet."

"just you and I and Kleine. He was our best man in Cairo but it got too hot for him and he had to clear out. He'll arrive here tonight or tomorrow. You'll like him."

Ravenal doubted this, but gathered that Kleine did not know Eric Horn, which was pleasant. She went on, a vicious edge creeping into her voice.

"We'll handle this American pig tomorrow night. Wright lives at the Hotel des Anglais and does his work there. He is circumspect, but a fool. I think he must be a naval officer. He is interested in helping me, and thereby gaining some vital information."

"You're a charming woman," said Ravenal, and almost meant it. "How did you trap him?"

She smiled, "Oh, my brother is an officet in the aviation; he is very ill. He wants to give the Americans full information on the latest dispositions at the Bizerte base, also at the Aouina military aviation base here. And you are to be the brother."

She broke into a laugh and stopped there, refusing to give him any hint about her plans. Glancing at her watch, she rose. "I must leave; I have my report to finish and get in the mail. TIl telephone you tomorrow. You'll send the information at once?"

"Immediately," said Ravenal. "But if you phone me at the hotel, do not ask for Eric Horn. Ask for Mr. Ravenal. I'll tell the desk clerk it's an affair of the heart and he'll be delighted to cooperate. I find it safer not to use the name of Horn."

The sun had set. They walked back to the tram line and parted. This Hesse Dubois was beautiful, but she was a very machine of a woman and not one for philandering; nor was she more than superficially clever. Ravenal's notions of voluptuous female agents went glimmering. He began to feel the very cold, steely edge of this young woman's real personality, and it frightened him.

He returned to the Avenue de Paris, dropped in at the betting office, and to his surprised delight found several thousand francs awaiting him. That tip from the chap in prison had been accurate. Decidedly, he reflected, he was finding virtue well rewarded! So, being the man he was, he sent half his winnings by a sure hand to the poor devil in prison, and sought the Brasserie Tantonville where he dined like a lord.

But, at the back of his brain, things were jangling. An American agent and a British agent both risking much to get accurate information on the local aerodromes— Americans, a fleet from London to Algiers— hell's bells! Could his wild fantastic thought actually be true? Were his own people going to move in on North Africa?

He went to a dance after dinner, not to watch the dancers but to watch the crowd, as he loved to do. Arab women were not allowed to dance in Tunis; the performers were women from the Jewish suburban community of Ariane, but the dances were purely Bedouin. Only a native-trained eye could appreciate them, since they were neither naughty nor graceful from other viewpoints. The crowd, mostly native, would sit entranced for hours, sniffing flowers and munching burnt almonds. Ravenal munched and sniffed also, and watched the people around. He finally headed for home, determining to call on Wright in the morning.

Upon reaching the hotel, he inquired after the sick man. The desk clerk shook his head; M. Horn might or might not survive the operation. One could not say. Only Allah could foretell the event!

Dick Ravenal slept soundly.

AT NINE next morning he was walking briskly down the Rue de Portugal. Just outside a gate of the Medina, the old native city, was his destination; an obscure French hotel of small size. Ravenal asked at the office for M. Wright. The clerk looked dubious; M. Wright was usually busy. One must be announced. So Ravenal gave his name and settled down to wait.

Presently came a query; his business with M. Wright? Somewhat nettled, Ravenal made answer that it was personal, concerning the Aouina airport. He waited again. At ten o'clock a cheerful garcon appeared and led him upstairs and down a corridor to a room door, and in. There, sitting behind a desk in a room that was obviously part of a suite, a room businesslike and bare, was a man with bleak eyes and stony features. A man of thirty, who nodded at him and bade him be seated.

"You have business with me, Mr. Ravenal?" came the brisk American words.

"Yes, of a rather personal nature," replied Ravenal. "In fact, I think that I can interest you in—"

"Pardon me," broke in Wright, who was fingering a dossier that lay before him. "You can interest me in nothing, Mr. Ravenal. Let me refresh your memory. You have been knocking around the Near East for some time in a disreputable manner. Your passport was long ago cancelled. In Egypt, you were implicated in the El Arish scandal; you had a share in the Myers cotton swindle; after a most unsavory series of episodes, you were expelled from the country because of your participation in the affair of Nabhas Pasha."

Ravenal writhed inwardly; pallor stole into his cheeks as he listened to the chill, unemotional words. Wright continued with pitiless voice.

"In Algeria, you had a bad record; twice arrested, each time released with charges unproven. At Constantine you had a finger nipped in the swindle of a French promoter; you came to Tunisia and have been mixed in the same sort of slippery business. Very recently you tasted prison life, being mistaken for an Italian spy. You are a second-rate con man. The world may be your oyster, Mr. Ravenal, but I am not. Is that sufficient?"

The cold eyes bored into Ravenal. met them squarely.

"No," he said quietly. "If I were the type of man you think me, I'd be blatting about how hard the world has used me, about everyone being down on me, and so forth. Well, I'm not. I admit frankly that I've been pretty much of a rascal. Maybe you remember a Jew named Saul?"

"Offhand, I do not," said Wright.

"You should. He made the same admission, and changed his name to Paul, and became quite a guy. I'm here because I can be of use in a big way, to you personally and to our own country. A man on the edge of the underworld often.has abilities and knowledge which make him of great value—"

"I don't think we care to deal with underworld characters," broke in Wright.

"Very well." Ravenal gathered himself to rise. "I see that she was right about the Annapolis ring; navy man, eh? And her report on your work and that of other trade control agents in North Africa, including your connections in Egypt and Tripoli, was probably correct. But the matter of a fleet from London to Algiers, and the American forces concerned, probably is of no interest to you, so I'll say good morning. Pleased to have met you."

He nodded amiably, rose, and started for the door. As his hand touched the knob, a word stopped him— a hoarse, strangled word.

"Wait!"

HE TURNED. Wright sat as though shocked into a paralysis. Twice he opened his lips, twice closed them. He gestured to the chair and found words.

"Come back. Sit down."

Ravenal complied. He sat and looked at Wright, whose stony features were becoming human under the stress of inward emotion, He said nothing. He perceived instantly that his words had struck to a vital spot. Not only was Wright frightfully startled, but his cold hauteur had smashed like an eggshell.

"What is it you're after?" Wright asked, with difficulty. "You want money, eh?"

"No," said Rayenal pleasantly. "Oh, no! I'd like to be given an emergency passport and get in good, standing again with the lodge, so to speak, and to be given a job without pay. I'm not selling information, if that's what you mean. I could be useful. I have friends among the natives, you know, all through these parts. I even speak their language at times."

"Wait," said Wright, who seemed to be in panic mentally. "You said— you mentioned a woman— that she took me for a navy man—"

RAVENAL nodded cheerfully. "Yes; you should not wear an Annapolis ring on this sort of job, Mr. Wright. A full report on you and other members of the trade control, and their real activities here, was turned in last night for transmission to Paris and Berlin; I killed it. I could tell you a lot of things, but I've no interest in telling you how wise I am, That's water over the dam."

"You seem," said Wright, choosing his words carefully, "to have picked up a lot of amazing and probably erroneous information, Mr. Ravenal."

"That's the wrong attitude," Ravenal replied, with kindly concern. "Really, it is. You're in a good deal of personal danger; that's why I came to you. It seems that you've done some very fine work, and the Nazis don't like it by half. With your Egyptian connections, you must have heard of a certain Nazi agent in Cairo named Kleine?"

Wright's eyes flickered slightly. Ravenal smiled.

"I see you have. I'll probably be chatting with him today. If there's anything you'd like to have conveyed to these Nazis, I'll be glad to—"

"See here!" Wright almost exploded. "Come across and tell me everything you know and where you got it. I'll make a deal with you. This— damn it, this is uncanny!"

Ravenal relaxed, laughed, and produced the Royal Khedivial cigarettes he was now enjoying. He lit one, unhurried. This was a hard man to deal with, but his play was won.

"No. I don't intend to empty my bag and then be kicked out. Luck has put me into a position where I may regain all that I've lost, including my self-respect, and I mean to do it. Let me give you an example. I can write letters to a few natives I know; and in three days can have the most detailed and exact information on every aviation field between here and Constantine. Simply because I know a native or two who have connections."

"We don't need that information," murmured Wright, who was staring at him.

"Perhaps not. I might warn you about certain things; I shan't do it. You're one of those men who must be allowed to make mistakes—"

"Confound you!" said Wright. "Who's this woman you're talking about?"

Ravenal smiled, regretfully.

"You see? You've formed a certain notion of me; therefore you must browbeat and make demands. Too bad.' A Nazi agent came to town the other day, via Algeria. He must have contacted some of your men there; at all events, he was bubbling over with information and surmises about American activity in North Africa. Well, he has stopped bubbling; in fact, he may be dead by now. That reminds me, I must inquire at the hospital."

Wright, by this time, had steadied and was under full control.

"Ravenal, you ask what I can't do off-hand," he said frankly. "I must get instructions. That will take time."

"As a navy man," said Ravenal, "you ought to know the value of individual action and responsibility."

"True." Wright bit his lips. "Still, I must have a bit of time on this thing."

"As you like. You say you don't need information on the aviation bases here; yet in reality, you and the British both need it badly. You can't make up your mind about me, so you refuse to trust me. That's natural; I don't blame you a particle. But just stick away in your mind what I said about Saul of Tarsus— he was a pretty bad egg, you know." Ravenal rose, smiling. "I'm at the Transat, as you probably know, so you can always reach me. But, if I were you," he added gently, "I'd not waste very much time. Good-by."

This time he walked out unhindered.

"Left him flat as a pancake," he reflected. "So, by heaven, it's true about our boys moving into French Africa— ships, planes and tanks! Probably the British, too. Well, maybe I should have warned Wright about the fair Dubois and what's on the carpet; still, I gave him plenty of hints. He's a stubborn ass! The only way I can convince him is by making deeds talk louder than words. But I've sure left him flattened out, poor devil!"

Ravenal was no hero and had no ambitions in that line. How long he could keep up the role of Eric Horn was an unpleasant conjecture; particularly as this fellow Kieine was sure to be far more clever and shrewd than the pretty Hesse Dubois. He must keep it up for this evening, anyway. Perhaps Wright would have brains enough to accept the warnings given, but he thought not. That man lacked the supple mentality needed in the sort of game that was afoot.

SO, regretfully, Dick Ravenal made up his mind to the worst, and prepared for it in his characteristic fashion. Life had taught him the folly of dramatics, and the practical value of success without trumpets, and he knew that Nazi agents were brutally direct in their methods. So he made no attempt to get hold of a pistol or other weapon, although some very curious things of that character were to be had in the Medina. Instead, he looked up a grain broker whom he knew in the Suk of the grain merchants, and talked with him for a long while.

"It can be arranged," said the Arab, pocketing a thousand-franc note. "Allah is great; blessed is Allah! It will be delivered before the sunset prayer. Loaded and ready."

Ravenal went to his hotel, since he was expecting word from Hesse Dubois at any moment. He inquired at the desk regarding Eric Horn; the man had died an hour previously, without regaining consciousness. The police were now taking away his effects.

In his own room, Ravenal pondered this turn. For the moment, all was well. But the police would wire Paris; by the morrow Berlin, and later all other Nazi agents, would know that Eric Horn was dead. So it would be just as well not to overplay his role— yes, just as well to end it this same evening!

"But," he vowed, "never again— never! No more of this damned secret service. Let Wright give me a job of some sort, no matter what, but count me out as a political agent. There are better things in life so far as Dick Ravenal is concerned."

A wise decision. He had scarcely made it when he was summoned to the office telephone to answer a call. He was greeted by the voice of Hesse Dubois.

"Our friend has arrived," she said, after satisfying herself of his identity. "Can you meet us about six at the Chianti Restaurant in the Avenue de France?"

"With pleasure," began Ravenal. She rang off before he could get in another word.

Ravenal was thirty-four, at the axis of life. If he was wise in chicanery, he was all the more apt at recognizing and borrowing the wisdom of others. Now he took a leaf from the Arab book and made his way to the Grand Mosque under the hill of the Kasbah. About the Tunisian mosques were grouped cafés, often by nationalities. He seated himself in the café of the Moroccans, bought flowers from one of the countless flower-sellers, ordered mint tea and sat there for the next three hours. He sniffed perfume, sipped tea, and meditated in relaxation and repose of mind, like the burnoused men around him.

When he came back to the hotel, he was renewed and invigorated. He found two telephone calls, and laughed; they were from Wright. He ignored them, went to his room, and changed clothes. While he was at it, a package arrived; the promised package.

He opened it and disclosed a malacca stick in two pieces. He screwed them together and had a light, rather thick, quite handsome walking stick, with a carved handle in place of the usual crook. The handle was of wood, carved into the shape of a goat's head with ruby eyes. He touched the horns with his thumb and they moved slightly.

He put his fingernail under one of the ruby eyes, and it came loose— a bit of glass on the end of a pin. He examined the tiny aperture and saw a drop of moisture; he quickly replaced the pin and eye, and nodded with satisfaction.

At five-fifty he left the hotel and walked briskly down the Avenue de France toward the Italian quarter. The Chianti was a notable dining place, not far from the Place de Rome. As he drew near, Ravenal saw Hesse sitting at one of the café tables, a man beside her. He went to them, bowed over her hand, and shook hands with Kleine at her introduction.

"I shall leave you gentlemen at once," she said, "having an engagement. There is no time to lose, M. Horn. You and Kleine will await us; I'll bring my friend to you. Kleine knows where. An apértif, and then to work."

The drink was ordered. Ravenal found Kleine devouring him with curiously intent gaze. This Cairo agent looked anything but a Nazi; Ravenal could have sworn, by looks and gestures that he was a Greek, and said so.

"You compliment me," said Kleine, with a flash of white teeth. "It is a matter of careful attention to détail, of course, from haircut to fingernails; I had the proper build to start with, luckily. But you, Monsieur— you astonish me! You do not answer to anything I have heard of the famous Eric Horn; it is marvelous!"

"Thank you," said Ravenal modestly. "What news have you?"

"All bad," returned Kleine. "Rommel is breaking. These damned English and Americans have assembled incredible strength! And that American army in England is about to strike, probably at Norway. I think we had better get our organization here together, eh?"

"We shall do so this evening, when our present task is done," said Ravenal. "I had a long talk today with your friend Wright, Mademoiselle. He is no fool. Do you think he'll risk his neck like a lovesick boy?"

HESSE gave him one flashing look. "Not at all. Evidently you misconstrue my ability. Do your part as well as I do mine, and all goes excellently. Now I must be off. *Au revoir*!"

She rose. The two men bowed her away, and then resumed their seats.

"That woman," observed the dark, swarthy Kleine, pulling at his long mustache, "has her limitations; but within them she has the devil's own brain!"

"Apparently so. She's not too obvious," assented Ravenal. "What's our program?"

"Simple, bold, efficient. She and I have taken rooms in the St. Georges Hotel in the Rue Hoche— a huge tourist place, eminently reputable and distinguished. You and I go there now and wait. She brings him to visit her very ill brother. It is all open and aboveboard, nothing secret, you understand. He comes. We kill him; we depart."

"Hm! Bold enough, certainly, and a trifle risky," said Ravenal. "How kill him?"

"Knives. They're ready and waiting. And she has a pistol, if needed. It won't be."

They paid for the drinks, departed, and caught a tram for the Rue Hoche in the upper French city.

Ravenal was not happy about this murder-trap, but nerved himself for the worst. Wright would be unsuspicious, of course; a big hotel, an atmosphere of absolute security, a plausible story. Well, it was going to be a nasty business at best; he clutched his walking-stick lovingly. No more of this damned secret

service! If he got out of here alive, somebody else could take over the job; Eric Horn was dead, and would stay dead.

THEY swung into the hotel, empty now of tourists but crammed with officers and their families, with consular service people and visitors and, above all, refugees who had money to spend. It was a gay and cosmopolitan crowd.

Kleine got his key at the desk, explained that his sister and a dinner guest would arrive 'at any moment, and led Ravenal away. From the ornate and somewhat overstuffed lobby they passed through cortidors and more corridors, until Kleine paused at a door and opened it, to show a very handsome two-room suite. Unopened luggage stood about.

"Bluff," said Kleine, kicking a suitcase. It was obviously new. "This is at the end of the building, excellent for our purpose; we can leave by the courtyard entrance. Not much time; here, into the bedroom. Throw some things about—"

He tumbled pillows and bedding and switched off the lights, leaving only a bedlamp burning in this farther room. From under his coat he drew a weapon, passing it to Ravenal; an Italian stiletto, razoredged, long and thin and deadly.

Ravenal dropped into a chair that stood at one side of the entrance. He put his walking-stick between his knees. The feel of that knife made him a bit sickish; he had seen Arabs at knife-work and it revolted him. If he needed anything to steel him to his own job, this was it. Kleine thumbed a similar stiletto with satisfaction, his swarthy features and glittering eyes touched with diabolic glee. The two of them were at either side of the doorway.

"As you're no doubt aware," Kleine said, "the important thing is to do it swiftly and shut his mouth. Not that noise would matter here; the court's on one side, the gardens on the other. An admirable location."

Ravenal shivered and the words ceased to register. Assassination, foul murder— should he take care of this Nazi fiend here and now? No, wait; he wanted above all else to convince that stubborn man Wright. It could be done deftly, with luck, when Wright appeared. The trap must be sprung, must be evident, if Wright was to believe—

"Arrived!"

WITH the word, Kleine crouched against the wall, opposite, stiletto ready. From the outer room came the slam of a door, the fresh, eager voice of Hesse in French.

"He is in the next room, Monsieur. Proceed, I beg you. Gilbert! Here is the visitor I promised! Is your light on?"

Wright came into the doorway between the rooms. Unexpectedly, he paused and turned.

"But, Mademoiselle—"

Just there, she struck him; what with, Ravenal could not see. Wright came staggering into the bedroom and groaned, and collapsed. Kleine leaped on him, knife ready—

Ravenal's thumb pressed on the horns of the carven goat, desperately. He had dropped the knife. A finger-nail had plucked out the two red eyes as he sat; he held the stick with steady aim. There was a slight hiss. Two invisible jets of liquid shot forth, straight into the face of the Nazi.

A howl of agony burst from Kleine. He hurled the stiletto to the floor and clawed at his eyes. Into the doorway came the woman Hesse, just as Ravenal rose to his feet. He swung the stick, pressed again— a fractional second too late. She was already swinging up a small pistol, her features convulsed with surprise and fury and comprehension. It exploded; then the ammoniated fluid jetted into her face and eyes. A stifled scream escaped her.

Ravenal felt that one bullet leave a sear across his cheek. He was already in motion, springing at the woman, wrenching the pistol from her and with one hearty shove sending her reeling and staggering away into the other room.

He whirled around. Kleine was spluttering oaths and grasping at the air. Ravenal aimed and fired; the bullet struck the Nazi just above the knee. Kleine howled anew, collapsed and sat clutching at his leg while his blinded eyes poured forth tears,

Ravenal swooped on Wright, who was feebly trying to rise. He helped Wright up, wrenched him about, and urged the dazed, bewildered man through into the other room, past Hesse who was gripping at a chair for support, and to the door. An 'instant later they were out in the corridor. Wright put a hand to the back of his head.

"Lord!" he groaned. "What is it? Who are you? See here—"

"Check it. I'm Dick Ravenal. Come along and get out of here, you blithering idiot!" He urged Wright along. What was it Kleine had said— out through the courtyard? Here were the stairs— good! He swung Wright at them. "This way! I had to shoot Kleine to make sure of him— only in the leg, though. You walked into a perfect murder-trap, and now you're walking out of it. Pull yourself together and we'll make the street from here."

They came into the cool, starry courtyard and caught a breath of perfume from the orange and lime trees. Wright clung for a moment to a carven pillar; his shoulders squared, he had himself in hand now.

"So that was it," he said. "Ravenal, I owe you apologies— more than apologies, by heaven! Will you shake hands?"

"I guess we can afford the time," said Ravenal, chuckling. "Do I get that bit of work?"

"You get any damned thing it's in my power to get for you," said Wright fervently. "And since you know so much about it, I don't mind telling you that this is the big night, over in Algeria and Morocco— the zero hour comes at dawn. American armies are landing to occupy the whole country, and British as well. It's the biggest thing that ever happened! You bet you'll get that bit of work— for your country!"

Ravenal pressed his hand. "Thanks. Thanks! Just one thing— no more of this blasted secret service stuff in mine. Anything but that; anything!"

"Okay," said Wright. "Let's go find a drink and talk it over."

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## 7: The Desert Islander

***Stella Benson***

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CONSTANTINE hopefully followed the Chinese servant through the unknown house. He felt hopeful of success in his plan of begging this Englishman for help, for he knew that an Englishman, alone among people of a different colour (as this Englishman was alone in this south China town), treated the helping of stray white men almost as part of the White Man's Burden. But even without this claim of one lonely white man upon another, Constantine would have felt hopeful. He knew himself to be a man of compelling manner in spite of his ugly, too long face, and his ugly, too short legs.

As Constantine stumped in on his hobnailed soles, Mr. White— who was evidently not a very tactful man— said, "Oh, are you *another* deserter from the Foreign Legion?"

"I am Constantine Andreievitch Soloviev," said Constantine, surprised. He spoke and understood English almost perfectly (his mother had been English) yet he could not remember ever having heard the word *another* applied to himself. In fact it did not— could not possibly— so apply. There was only one of him, he knew.

Of course, in a way there was some sense in what this stupid Englishman said. Constantine had certainly been a *légionnaire* in Tonkin up till last Thursday— his narrow pipe-clayed helmet, stiff khaki greatcoat, shabby drill uniform, puttees, brass buttons, and inflexible boots were all the property of the French government. But the core— the pearl inside this vulgar, horny shell— was Constantine Andreievitch Soloviev. That made all the difference.

Constantine saw that he must take this Didymus of an Englishman in hand at once and tell him a few exciting stories about his dangerous adventures between the Tonkin border and this Chinese city. Snakes, tigers, love-crazed Chinese princesses and brigands passed rapidly through his mind, and he chose the last, because he had previously planned several impressive things to do if he should be attacked by brigands. So now, though he had not actually met a brigand, those plans would come in useful. Constantine intended to write his autobiography some day when he should have married a rich wife and settled down. Not only did his actual life seem to him a very rare one but, also, lives were so interesting to make up.

Constantine was a desert islander— a spiritual Robinson Crusoe. He made up everything himself and he wasted nothing. *Robinson Crusoe* was his favourite book— in fact, almost the only book he had ever read— and he was proud to be, like his hero, a desert islander. He actually preferred clothing his

spirit in the skins of wild thoughts that had been the prey of his wits and sheltering it from the world's weather in a leaky hut of his brain's own contriving to enjoying the good tailoring and housing that dwellers on the mainland call experience and education. He enjoyed being barbarous, he enjoyed living alone on his island, accepting nothing, imitating nothing, believing nothing, adapting himself to nothing— implacably home-made. Even his tangible possessions were those of a marooned man rather than of a civilized citizen of this well-furnished world. At this moment his only luggage was a balalaika that he had made himself out of cigar boxes, and to this he sang songs of his own composition— very imperfect songs. He would not have claimed that either his songs or his instrument were better than the songs and instruments made by song-makers and balalaika-makers they were, however, much more rapturously *his* than any acquired music could have been and, indeed, in this as in almost all things, it simply never occurred to him to *take* rather than *make.* There was no mainland on the horizon of his desert island.

"I am not a beggar," said Constantine. "Until yesterday I had sixty piastres which I had saved by many sacrifices during my service in the Legion. But yesterday, passing through a dark forest of pines in the twilight, about twenty versts from here, I met—"

"You met a band of brigands," said Mr. White. "Yes, I know… you all say that."

Constantine stared at him. He had not lived, a desert islander, in a crowded and over-civilized world without meeting many rebuffs, so this one did not surprise him— did not even offend him. On the contrary, for a minute he almost loved the uncompromising Mr. White, as a sportsman almost loves the chamois on a peculiarly inaccessible crag. This was a friend worth a good deal of trouble to secure, Constantine saw. He realized at once that the desert islander's line here was to discard the brigands and to discard noble independence.

"Very well then," said Constantine. "I did *not* meet brigands. I *am* a beggar. I started without a penny and I still have no penny. I hope you will give me something. That is why I have come." He paused, drawing long pleased breaths through his large nose. This, he felt, was a distinctly self-made line of talk; it set him apart from all previous deserting *légionnaires.*

Mr. White evidently thought so too. He gave a short grunting laugh. "That's better," he said.

"These English," thought Constantine lovingly. "They are the next best thing to *being* originals, for they *admire* originals." "I like you, he added extravagantly, aloud. "I like the English. I am so glad I found an Englishman to beg of instead of an American— though an American would have been much

richer than you are, I expect. Still, to a beggar a little is enough. I dislike Americans; I dislike their women's wet finger-nails."

"Wet finger-nails?" exclaimed Mr. White. "Oh, you mean their manicure polishes. Yes… they *do* always have wet finger-nails… ha, ha… so they do. I should never have thought of that myself."

"Of course not," said Constantine, genuinely surprised. "*I* thought of it. Why should *you* have thought of it?" After a moment he added, "I am not a gramophone."

Mr. White thought that he had said, "Have you got a gramophone?" and replied at once with some pleasure, "Yes, I have— it is a very precious companion. Are you musical? But of course you are, being Russian. I should be very lonely without my daily ration of Chopin. Would you like some music while the servants are getting you something to eat?

"I should like some music," said Constantine, "but I should not like to hear a gramophone. I will play you some music— some unique and only music on a unique and only instrument."

"Thank you very much," said Mr. White, peering doubtfully through his glasses at the cigar-box balalaika. "What good English you speak," he added, trying to divert his guest's attention from his musical purpose. "But all Russians, of course, are wonderful linguists."

"I will play you my music," said Constantine. "But first I must tell you that I do not like you to say to me, 'Being Russian you are musical' or 'All Russians speak good English.' To me it seems so stupid to see me as one of many."

"Each one of us is one of many," sighed Mr. White patiently.

"*You,* perhaps— but *I,* not," said Constantine. "When you notice my English words instead of my thoughts it seems to me that you are listening wrongly— you are listening to sounds only, in the same way as you listen to your senseless gramophone— "

"But you haven't heard my gramophone," interrupted Mr. White, stung on his darling's behalf.

"What does it matter what sounds a man makes— what words he uses? Words are common to all men; thoughts belong to one man only."

Mr. White considered telling his guest to go to hell, but he said instead, "You're quite a philosopher, aren't you?"

"I am not *quite an* anything," said Constantine abruptly. "I am me. All people who like Chopin also say, 'You're quite a philosopher.'"

"Now you're generalizing, yourself," said Mr. White, clinging to his good temper. "Exactly what you've just complained of my doing."

"Some people *are* general," said Constantine. "Now I will play you my music, and you will admit that it is not one of many musics."

He sang a song with Russian words which Mr. White did not understand. As a matter of fact, such was Constantine's horror of imitating, that the words of his song were just a list of the names of the diseases of horses, learned while Constantine was a veterinary surgeon in the Ukraine. His voice was certainly peculiar to himself; it was hoarse— so hoarse that one felt as if a light cough or a discreet blowing of that long nose would clear the hoarseness away; it was veiled, as though heard from behind an intervening stillness; yet with all its hoarseness and insonorousness, it was flexible, alive, and exciting. His instrument had the same quality of quiet ugliness and oddity; it was almost enchanting. It was as if an animal— say, a goat— had found a way to control its voice into a crude goblin concord.

"That's my music," said Constantine. "Do you like it?"

"Frankly," said Mr. White, "I prefer Chopin."

"On the gramophone?"

"On the gramophone."

"Yet one is a thing you never heard before and will never hear again— and the other is a machine that makes the same sound for millions.

"I don't care."

Constantine chewed his upper lip for a minute, thinking this over. Then he shook himself. "Nevertheless, I like you," he said insolently. "You are almost a person. Would you like me to tell you about my life, or would you rather I explained to you my idea about Zigzags?"

"I would rather see you eat a good meal," said Mr. White, roused to a certain cordiality— as almost all Anglo-Saxons are— by the opportunity of dispensing food and drink.

"I can tell you my Zigzag idea while I eat," said Constantine, leading the way towards the table at the other end of the room. "Are you not eating too?"

"I'm not in the habit of eating a meat meal at ten o'clock at night."

"Is 'not being in the habit' a reason for not doing it now?"

"To me it is."

"Oh— oh— *oh*— I wish I were like you," said Constantine vehemently. "It is so tiring being me— having no guide. I *do* like you."

"Help yourself to spinach," said Mr. White crossly.

"Now shall I tell you my Zigzag idea?"

"If you can eat as well as talk."

Constantine was exceedingly hungry; he bent low over his plate, though he sat sideways to the table, facing Mr. White, ready to launch a frontal attack of talk. His mouth was too full for a moment to allow him to begin to speak, but quick, agonized glances out of his black eyes implored his host to be silent till his lips should be ready. "You know," he said, swallowing hurriedly, "I always

think of a zigzag as going *downwards.* I draw it in the air, *so*… a straight honest line, then— see— a diagonal subtle line cuts the air away from under it— *so*… Do you see what I mean? I will call the *zig* a *to,* and the *zag* a *from.* Now— "

"Why is one of your legs fatter than the other?" asked Mr. White.

"It is bandaged. Now, I think of this zigzag as a diagram of human minds. Always human minds are *zigs* or *zags*— a *to* or a *from*— the brave *zig* is straight, *so*… the cleverer, crueller *zag* cuts away below. So are men's— "

"But why is it bandaged?"

"It was kicked by a horse. Well, so are men's understandings. Here I draw the simple, faithful understanding— and here— *zag*— the easy, clever understanding that sees through the simple faith. Now below that— see— *zig* once more— the wise, the serene, and now a *zag* contradicts once more; this is the cynic who knows all answers to serenity. Then below, once more— "

"May I see your leg?" asked Mr. White. "I was in an ambulance unit during the war."

"Oh, what is this talk of legs?" cried Constantine. "Legs are all the same; they belong to millions. All legs are made of blood and bone and muscle— all vulgar things. Your ambulance cuts off legs, mends legs, fits bones together, corks up blood. It treats men like bundles of bones and blood. This is so dull. Bodies are so dull. Minds are the only onliness in men."

"Yes," said Mr. White. "But minds have to have legs to walk about on. Let me see your leg."

"Very well, then, let us talk of legs. We have at least legs in common, you and I."

"Hadn't you got more sense than to put such a dirty rag round an open wound?"

"It is not dirty; it is simply of a grey colour. I washed it in a rice field." Constantine spoke in a muffled voice from somewhere near his knee-cap, for he was now bent double, whole-heartedly interested in his leg. "I washed the wound too, and three boils which are behind my knee. This blackness is not dirt; it is a blackness belonging to the injury."

Mr. White said nothing, but he rose to his feet as though he had heard a call. Constantine, leaving his puttee in limp coils about his foot like a dead snake, went on eating. He began to talk again about the zigzag while he stuffed food into his mouth, but he stopped talking soon, for Mr. White was walking up and down the long room and not pretending to listen. Constantine, watching his host restively pacing the far end of the room, imagined that he himself perhaps smelled disagreeable, for this was a constant fear of his— that his body should play his rare personality this horrid trick. "What is the matter?" he asked anxiously, with a shamed look. "Why are you so far?"

Mr. White's lazy, mild manner was quite changed. His voice seemed to burst out of seething irritation. "It's a dam nuisance, just now. It couldn't happen at a worse time. I've a great deal of work to do— and this fighting all over the province makes a journey so dam— "

"What is so dam?" asked Constantine, his bewilderment affecting his English.

"I'll tell you what," said Mr. White, standing in front of Constantine with his feet wide apart and speaking in an angry voice. "You're going to bed now in my attic, and to-morrow at daylight you're going to be waked up and driven down in my car, by me (damn it!) to Lao-chow, to the hospital— a two days' drive— three hundred miles— over the worst roads you ever saw."

Constantine's heart gave a sickening lurch. "Why to hospital? You think my leg is dangerous?

"If I know anything of legs," said Mr. White rather brutally, "the doctor won't let you keep that one an hour longer than he has to."

Constantine's mouth began instantly to tremble so much that he could scarcely speak. He thought, "I shall die— I shall die like this— of a stupid black leg— this valuable lonely me will die." He glared at Mr. White, hungry for consolation. "He isn't valuable— he's one of many… of course he could easily be brave."

Mr. White, once more indolent and indifferent, led the little Russian to the attic and left him there. As soon as Constantine saw the white sheets neatly folded back, the pleasant blue rugs squarely set upon the floor, the open wardrobe fringed with hangers, he doubted whether, after all, he did value himself so very much. For in this neat room he felt betrayed by this body of his— this unwashed, unshaven, tired body, encased in coarse dirty clothes, propped on an offensive, festering leg. He decided to take all his clothes off, even though he had no other garment with him to put on; he would feel more appropriate to the shiny linen in his own shiny skin, he thought. He would have washed, but his attention was diverted as he pulled his clothes off by the wound on his leg. Though it was not very painful, it made him nearly sick with disgust now. Every nerve in his body seemed on tiptoe, alert to feel agony, as he studied the wound. He saw that a new sore place was beginning, well above the knee. With only his shirt on, he rushed downstairs, and in at the only lighted doorway. "Look— look," he cried. "A new sore place… Does this mean the danger is greater even than we thought?"

Mr. White, in neat blue-and-white pyjamas, was carefully pressing a tie in a tie-press. Constantine had never felt so far away from a human being in his life as he felt on seeing that tie-press, those pyjamas, those monogrammed silver brushes, that elastic apparatus for reducing exercises that hung upon the door.

"Oh, go to bed," said Mr. White irascibly. "For God's sake, show a little sense."

Constantine was back in his attic before he thought, "I ought to have said, 'For God's sake, show a little *non*sense yourself.' Sense is so vulgar."

Sense, however, was to drive him three hundred miles to safety, next day.

All night the exhausted Constantine, sleeping only for a few minutes at a time, dreamed trivial, broken dreams about establishing his own superiority, finding, for instance, that he had after all managed to bring with him a suitcase full of clean, fashionable clothes, or noticing that his host was wearing a filthy bandage round his neck instead of a tie.

Constantine was asleep when Mr. White, fully dressed, woke him next morning. A clear, steely light was slanting in at the window. Constantine was always fully conscious at the second of waking, and he was immediately horrified to see Mr. White looking expressionlessly at the disorderly heap of dirty clothes that he had thrown in disgust on the floor the night before. Trying to divert his host's attention, Constantine put on a merry and courageous manner. "Well, how is the weather for our motor-car jaunt?"

"It could hardly be worse," said Mr. White placidly. "Sheets of rain. God knows what the roads will be like."

"Well, we are lucky to have roads at all, in this benighted China."

"I don't know about that. If there weren't any roads we shouldn't be setting off on this beastly trip."

"I shall be ready in two jiffies," said Constantine, springing naked out of bed and shuffling his dreadful clothes out of Mr. White's sight. "But just tell me," he added as his host went through the door, "why do you drive three hundred miles on a horrible wet day just to take a perfect stranger— a beggar too— to hospital?" (He thought, "Now he *must* say something showing that he recognizes my value.")

"Because I can't cut off your leg myself," said Mr. White gloomily. Constantine did not press his question because this new reference to the cutting off of legs set his nerves jangling again; his hands trembled so that he could scarcely button his clothes. Service in the Foreign Legion, though it was certainly no suitable adventure for a rare and sensitive man, had never obliged him to face anything more frightening than non-appreciation, coarse food, and stupid treatment. None of these things could humiliate him— on the contrary, all confirmed him in his persuasion of his own value. Only the thought of being at the mercy of his body could humiliate the excited and glowing spirit of Constantine. Death was the final, most loathsome triumph of the body; death meant dumbness and decay— yet even death he could have faced courageously could he have been flattered to its very brink.

The car, a ramshackle Ford, stood in the rain on the bald gravel of the compound, as Constantine, white with excitement, limped out through the front door. His limp, though not consciously assumed, had developed only since last night. His whole leg now felt dangerous, its skin shrinking and tingling. Constantine looked into the car. In the back seat sat Mr. White's coolie, clasping a conspicuously neat little white canvas kit-bag with leather straps. The kit-bag held Constantine's eye and attacked his self-respect as the tie-press had attacked and haunted him the night before. Every one of his host's possessions was like a perfectly well-balanced, indisputable statement in a world of fevered conjecture. "And a camp-bed— so nicely rolled," said Constantine, leaning into the car, fascinated and humiliated. "But only one…"

"I have only one," said Mr. White.

"And you are bringing it— for me?" said Constantine, looking at him ardently, overjoyed at this tribute.

"I am bringing it for myself," said Mr. White with his unamused and short-sighted smile. "I am assuming that a *légionnaire* is used to sleeping rough. I'm not. I'm rather fixed in my habits and I have a horror of the arrangements in Chinese inns."

"He is morally brave," thought Constantine, though, for the first time, it occurred to him how satisfactory it would be to slap his host's face. "A man less brave would have changed his plans about the camp-bed at once and said, 'For you, my dear man, of course— why not?'" Constantine chattered nervously as he took his seat in the car next to his host, the driver. "I feel such admiration for a man who can drive a motor-car. I adore the machine when it does not— like the gramophone— trespass on matters outside its sphere. This machine's sphere is space, you see— it controls space— and that is so adorable, for no non-machine except human thought can do that. And you control *it.* It is truly admirable— even when the machine is so very unimpressive as this one. Mr. White, your motor-car is *very* unimpressive indeed. Are you sure it will run three hundred miles?"

"It always seems to," said Mr. White. "I never do anything to it except pour petrol, oil, and water into the proper openings. I am completely unmechanical."

"You cannot be if you work a gramophone."

"You seem to have my gramophone on your mind. To me it doesn't answer the purpose of a machine— it simply *is* Chopin, to me."

Constantine stamped his foot in almost delighted irritation, for this made him feel a god beside this groundling. After a few minutes of self-satisfaction, however, a terrible thought invaded him. He became obsessed with an idea that he had left fleas in his bed in Mr. White's attic. That smug, immaculate

Chinese servant would see them when he made the bed, and on Mr. White's return would say, "That foreign soldier left fleas in our attic bed." How bitterly did Constantine wish that he had examined the bed carefully before leaving the room, or alternatively, that he could invent some elaborate lie that would prevent Mr. White from believing this revolting accusation. Constantine's mind, already racked with the fear of pain and death and with the agony of his impotence to impress his companion, became overcast with the hopelessness and remorselessness of everything. Everything despairing seemed a fact beyond dispute; everything hopeful, a mere dream. His growing certainty about the fleas, the persistence of the rain, combined with the leakiness of the car's side-curtains, the skiddiness of the road, the festering of his leg, the thought of the surgeon's saw, the perfection of that complacent kit-bag in the back seat, with the poor cigar-box balalaika tinkling beside it, the over-stability and over-rightness of his friend in need— there was not one sweet or flattering thought to which his poor trapped mind could turn.

The absurdly inadequate bullock-trail only just served the purpose of a road for the Ford. The wheels slid about, wrenching themselves from groove to groove. Constantine's comment on the difficulties of the road was silenced by a polite request on the part of Mr. White. "I can't talk while I'm driving, if you don't mind. I'm not a good driver, and I need all my attention, especially on such a bad road."

"I will talk and you need not answer. That is my ideal plan of conversation. I will tell you why I joined the Foreign Legion. You must have been wondering about this. It will be a relief for me from my misfortunes, to talk."

"I'd rather not, if you don't mind," said his host serenely.

"Mean old horse," thought Constantine passionately, his heart contracting with offence. "It is so English to give away nothing but the bare, bald, stony fact of help— no decorations of graciousnesses and smilings. A Russian would be a much poorer helper, but a how much better friend."

The car ground on. Constantine turned over again and again in his mind the matter of the fleas. The wet ochre-and-green country of south China streamed unevenly past, the neat, complex shapes of rice fields altering, disintegrating and re-forming, like groups in a country dance. Abrupt horns of rock began piercing through the flat rain-Striped valley, and these, it seemed, were the heralds of a mountain range that barred the path of the travellers, for soon cliffs towered above the road. A village which clung to a slope at the mouth of a gorge was occupied by soldiers. "This is where our troubles begin," said Mr. White peacefully. The soldiers were indolent, shabby, ineffectual-looking creatures, scarcely distinguishable from coolies, but their machine-guns, straddling mosquito-like about the forlorn village street, looked disagreeably

wideawake and keen. Constantine felt as if his precious heart were the cynosure of all the machine-guns' waspish glances, as the car splashed between them.

"Is this safe?" he asked. "Motoring through a Chinese war?"

"Not particularly," smiled Mr. White. "But it's safer than neglecting that leg of yours."

Constantine uttered a small, shrill, nervous exclamation— half a curse. "Is a man nothing more than a leg to you?"

As he spoke, from one side of the gorge along which they were now driving, a rifle shot cracked, like the breaking of a taut wire. Its echoes were overtaken by the sputtering of more shots from a higher crag. Constantine had been tensely held for just such an attack on his courage as this— and yet he was not ready for it. His body moved instantly by itself, without consulting his self-respect; it flung its arms round Mr. White. The car, thus immobilized at its source of energy, swerved, skidded, and stood still askew upon the trail. Constantine, sweating violently, recalled his pride and reassembled his sprawling arms. Mr. White said nothing, but he looked with a cold benevolence into Constantine's face and shook his head slightly. Then he started the car again and drove on in silence. There was no more firing.

"Oh, *oh,* I do *wish* you had been a little bit frightened too," said Constantine, clenching his fists. He was too much of a desert islander to deny his own fright, as a citizen of the tradition-ruled mainland might have denied it. Brave or afraid, Constantine was his own creation; he had made himself, he would stand or fall by this self that he had made. It was indeed, in a way, more interesting to have been afraid than to have been brave. Only, unfortunately, this exasperating benefactor of his did not think so.

The noon-light was scarcely brighter than the light of early morning. The unremitting rain slanted across the grey air. Trees, skies, valleys, mountains, seen through the rain-spotted windshield, were like a distorted, stippled landscape painted by a beginner who has not yet learned to wring living colour from his palette. However, sun or no sun, noontime it was at last, and Mr. White, drawing his car conscientiously to the side of the bullock trail, as if a procession of Rolls Royces might be expected to pass, unpacked a neat jigsaw puzzle of a sandwich box.

"I brought a few caviare sandwiches for you," he said gently. "I know Russians like caviare."

"Are your sandwiches then made of Old England's Rosbif?" asked Constantine crossly, for it seemed to him that this man used nothing but collective nouns.

"No; of bloater paste."

They said nothing more but munched in a rather sullen silence. Constantine had lost his desire to tell Mr. White why he had joined the Foreign Legion— or to tell him anything else, for that matter. There was something about Mr. White that destroyed the excitement of telling ingenious lies— or even the common truth; and this *something* Constantine resented more and more, though he was uncertain how to define it. Mr. White leaned over the steering-wheel and covered his eyes with his hands, for driving tired him. The caviare, and his host's evident weariness, irritated Constantine more and more; these things seemed like a crude insistence on his increasing obligation. "I suppose you are tired of the very sight of me," he felt impelled to say bitterly.

"No, no," said Mr. White politely but indifferently. "Don't worry about me. It'll all be the same a hundred years hence."

"Whether my leg is off or on— whether I die in agony or live— it will all be the same a hundred years hence, I suppose you would say," said Constantine, morbidly goading his companion into repeating this insult to the priceless mystery of personality.

"My good man, I can't do more than I *am* doing about your leg, can I?" said Mr. White irritably, as he restarted the car.

"A million times more— a million times more," thought Constantine hysterically, but with an effort he said nothing.

As the wet evening light smouldered to an ashen twilight, they drove into Mo-ming, which was to be their night's stopping-place. Outside the city wall they were stopped by soldiers; for Mourning was being defended against the enemy's advance. After twenty minutes' talk in the clanking Cantonese tongue, the two white men were allowed to go through the city gate on foot, leaving the Ford in a shed outside, in the care of Mr. White's coolie. Mr. White carried his beautiful little kit-bag and expected Constantine to carry the camp-bed.

"What— and leave my balalaika in the car?" protested Constantine childishly.

"I think it would be safe," said Mr. White, only faintly ironic. "Hurry up. I must go at once and call on the general in charge here. I don't want to have my car commandeered."

Constantine limped along behind him, the camp-bed on one shoulder, the balalaika faintly tinkling under his arm. They found the inn in the centre of a tangle of looped, frayed, untidy streets— a box-like gaunt house, one corner of which was partly ruined, for the city had been bombarded that day. The inn, which could never have been a comfortable place, was wholly disorganized by its recent misfortune; most of the servants had fled, and the innkeeper was entirely engrossed in counting and piling up on the verandah his rescued possessions from the wrecked rooms. An impudent little boy, naked down to

the waist— the only remaining servant— showed Mr. White and Constantine to the only room the inn could offer.

"One room between us?" cried Constantine, thinking of his shameful, possibly verminous, clothes and his unwashed body. He felt unable to bear the idea of unbuttoning even the greasy collar of his tunic within sight of that virgin-new kit-bag. Its luminous whiteness would seem in the night like triumphant civilization's eye fixed upon the barbarian— like the smug beam of a lighthouse glowing from the mainland upon that uncouth obstruction, a desert island. "I'm not consistent," thought Constantine. "That's my trouble. I ought to be proud of being dirty. At least that is a home-made condition."

"Yes— one room between us," said Mr. White tartly. "We must do the best we can. You look after things here, will you, while I go and see the general and make the car safe."

Left alone, Constantine decided not to take off any clothes at all— even his coarse greatcoat— but to say that he had fever and needed all the warmth he could get. No sooner had he come to this decision than he felt convinced that he actually was feverish; his head and his injured leg ached and throbbed as though all the hot blood in his body had concentrated in those two regions, while ice seemed to settle round his heart and loins. The room was dreary and very sparsely furnished with an ugly, too high table and rigid chairs to match. The beds were simply recesses in the wall, draped with dirty mud-brown mosquito-veils. Constantine, however, stepped more bravely into this hard, matted coffin than he had into Mr. White's clean attic bed. As he lay down, his leg burned and throbbed more fiercely than ever, and he began to imagine the amputation— the blood, the yawning of the flesh, the scraping of the saw upon the bone. His imagination did not supply an anæsthetic. Fever came upon him now in good earnest; he shook so much that his body seemed to jump like a fish upon the unyielding matting, he seemed to breathe in heat, without being able to melt the ice in his bones. Yet he remained artistically conscious all the time of his plight, and even exaggerated the shivering spasms of his limbs. He was quite pleased to think that Mr. White would presently return and find him in this condition, and so be obliged to be interested and compassionate. Yet as he heard Mr. White's heavy step on the stair, poor Constantine's eye fell on the fastidious white kit-bag, and he suddenly remembered all his fancies and fears about vermin and smells. By the time Mr. White was actually standing over him, Constantine was convinced that the deepest loathing was clearly shown on that superior, towering face.

"I can't help it— I can't help it," cried Constantine, between his chattering teeth.

Mr. White seemed to ignore the Russian's agitation. "I think the car'll be all right now," he said. "I left the coolie sleeping in it, to make sure. The general was quite civil and gave me a permit to get home; but it seems it's utterly impossible for us to drive on to Lao-chow. Fighting on the road is particularly hot, and the bridges are all destroyed. The enemy have reached the opposite side of the river, and they've been bombarding the city all day. I told the general about your case; he suggests you go by river in a sampan down to Lao-chow to-morrow. You may be fired on just as you leave the city, but nothing to matter, I dare say. After that, you'd be all right— the river makes a stiff bend south here, and gets right away from the country they're fighting over. It would take you only about eighteen hours to Lao-chow, going down stream. I've already got a sampan for you… Oh Lord, isn't this disgusting," he added, looking round the dreadful room and wrinkling his nose. "How I loathe this kind of thing."

"I can't help it. I can't help it." Constantine began first to moan and then to cry. He was by now in great pain, and he did not try to control his distress. It passed through his mind that crying was the last thing a stupid Englishman would expect of a *légionnaire;* so far so good, therefore— he was a desert islander even in his degradation. Yet he loathed himself; all his morbid fears of being offensive were upon him, and the unaccustomed exercise of crying, combined with the fever, nauseated him. Mr. White, still wearing his expression of repugnance, came to his help, loosened that greasy collar, lent a handkerchief, ordered some refreshing hot Chinese tea.

"You should have known me in Odessa," gasped Constantine in an interval between his paroxysms. "Three of the prettiest women in the town were madly in love with me. You know me only at my worst."

Mr. White, soaking a folded silk handkerchief in cold water, before laying it on Constantine's burning forehead, did not answer. He unrolled the pillow from his camp-bed and put it under Constantine's head. As he did so, he recoiled a little, but after a second's hesitation, he pushed the immaculate little pillow into place with a heroic firmness.

"I wore only silk next the skin then," snuffled Constantine. The fever rose in a wave in his brain, and he shouted curses upon his cruelly perfect friend.

Mr. White lay only intermittently on his camp-bed that night. He was kept busy making use of his past experience as a member of an ambulance unit. Only at daylight he slept for an hour or so.

Constantine, awakened from a short sleep by the sound of firing outside, lay on his side and watched Mr. White's relaxed, sleeping face. The fever had left Constantine, and he was now sunk in cold, limp depression and fear. Luckily, he thought, there was no need to stir, for certainly he could not be

expected— a sick man— to set forth in a sampan through such dangers as the persistent firing suggested. At least in this inn he knew the worst, he thought wearily, and his companion knew the worst too. "I will not leave him," Constantine vowed, "until I have somehow cured him of these frightful memories of me— somehow amputated his memory of me…" He lay watching his companion's face— hating it— obscurely wishing that those eyes, which had seen the worst during this loathsome night, might remain for ever shut.

Mr. White woke up quite suddenly. "Good Lord!" he said, peering at his watch. "Nearly seven. I told the sampan man to be at the foot of the steps at daylight."

"Are you mad?" asked Constantine shrilly. "Listen to the firing— quite near. Besides— I'm a very sick man, as you should know by now. I couldn't even walk— much less dodge through a crowd of Chinese assassins."

Mr. White, faintly whistling Chopin, laboriously keeping his temper, left the room, and could presently be heard hee-hawing in the Chinese language on the verandah to the hee-hawing innkeeper.

When he came back, he said, "The sampaneer's there, waiting— only too anxious to get away from the bombing they're expecting to-day. He's tied up only about a hundred yards away. You'll be beyond reach of the firing as soon as you're round the bend. Hurry up, man; the sooner you get down to hospital, and I get off on the road home, the better for us both."

Constantine, genuinely exhausted after his miserable night, did not speak, but lay with his eyes shut and his face obstinately turned to the wall. He certainly felt too ill to be brave or to face the crackling dangers of the battle-ridden streets, but he was conscious of no plan except a determination to be as obstructive as he could— to assert at least this ignoble power over his tyrant.

"Get up, you dam fool," shouted Mr. White, suddenly plucking the pillow from under the sick man's head, "or I'll drag you down to the river by the scruff of your dirty neck."

Dirty neck! Instantly Constantine sat up— hopeless now of curing this man's contempt, full of an almost unendurable craving to be far away from him— to wipe him from his horizon— to be allowed to imagine him dead. Invigorated by this violent impulse, he rolled out of bed and sullenly watched Mr. White settle up with the innkeeper and take a few packages out of that revoltingly refined kit-bag.

"A small tin of water-biscuits," said Mr. White, almost apologetically, "and the remains of the bloater paste. It's all I have with me, but it ought to keep you alive till you get to Lao-chow to-morrow morning… I'll see you down to the river first and then pick up these things." He spoke as if he were trying to make

little neat plans still against this disorderly and unwonted background. He brushed his splashed coat with a silver clothes-brush, wearing the eagerly safe expression Constantine had seen on his face as he bent over the tie-press the night before last. The orderly man was trying to maintain his quiet impersonal self-respect amid surroundings that humiliated him. Even Constantine understood vaguely that his attacker was himself being attacked. "Well, I've done my best," added Mr. White, straightening his back after buckling the last strap of the kit-bag, and looking at Constantine with an ambiguous, almost appealing look.

They left the inn. The steep street that led down to the river between mean, barricaded shops was deserted. The air of it was outraged by the whipping sound of rifle fire— echoes clanked sharply from wall to wall.

"It is not safe— it is not safe," muttered Constantine, suddenly standing rooted, feeling that his next step must bring him into the path of a bullet.

"It's safer than a gangrenous leg." With his great hand, Mr. White seized the little Russian's arm and dragged him almost gaily down the steps. Constantine was by now so hopelessly mired in humiliation that he did not even try to disguise his terror. He hung back like a rebellious child, but he was tweaked and twitched along, stumbling behind his rescuer. He was pressed into the little boat. "Here, take the biscuits— good-bye— good luck," shouted Mr. White, and a smile of real gaiety broke out at last upon his face. The strip of rainy air and water widened between the two friends.

"Strike him dead, God," said Constantine.

The smile did not fade at once from the Englishman's face, as his legs curiously crumpled into a kneeling position. He seemed trying to kneel on air; he clutched at his breast with one hand while the other hand still waved good-bye; he turned his alert, smiling face towards Constantine as though he were going to say again— "Good-bye— good luck." Then he fell, head downward, on the steps, the bald crown of his head just dipping into the water. Mud was splashed over the coat he had brushed only five minutes before.

There was a loud outcry from the sampan man and his wife. They seemed to be calling Constantine's already riveted attention to the fallen man— still only twenty yards away; they seemed uncertain whether he would now let them row yet more quickly away, as they desired, or insist on returning to the help of his friend.

"Row on— row on," cried Constantine in Russian and, to show them what he meant, he snatched up a spare pole and tried to increase the speed of the boat as it swerved into the current. Spaces of water were broadening all about the desert islander— home on his desert island again at last. As Constantine swayed over the pole, he looked back over his shoulder and flaunted his head,

afraid no more of the firing now that one blessed bullet had carried away unpardonable memory out of the brain of his friend.

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## 8: The Strangers' Hut

***Gilbert Parker***

1862-1932

In: *Cumner's Son, and other South Seas Folk*, 1910

First published in "The Speaker", c. 1893.

*Canadian author and later British Member of Parliament; and a best selling novelist, whose stories were frequently made into movies. For some years in the 1880s he was a journalist in Sydney, and spent time in the Pacific Islands. This is one of his stories set in Australia.*

I HAD come a long journey across country with Glenn, the squatter, and now we were entering the homestead paddock of his sheep-station, Winnanbar. Afar to the left was a stone building, solitary in a waste of saltbush and dead-finish scrub. I asked Glenn what it was.

He answered, smilingly: "The Strangers' Hut. Sundowners and that lot sleep there; there's always some flour and tea in a hammock, under the roof, and there they are with a pub of their own. It's a fashion we have in Australia."

"It seems all right, Glenn," I said with admiration. "It's surer than Elijah's ravens."

"It saves us from their prowling about the barracks, and camping on the front veranda."

"How many do you have of a week?"

"That depends. Sundowners are as uncertain as they are unknown quantities. After shearing-time they're thickest; in the dead of summer fewest. This is the dead of summer," and, for the hundredth time in our travel, Glenn shook his head sadly.

Sadness was ill-suited to his burly form and bronzed face, but it was there. He had some trouble, I thought, deeper than drought. It was too introspective to have its origin solely in the fact that sheep were dying by thousands, that the stock-routes were as dry of water as the hard sky above us, and that it was a toss-up whether many families in the West should not presently abandon their stations, driven out by a water-famine— and worse.

After a short silence Glenn stood up in the trap, and, following the circle of the horizon with his hand, said: "There's not an honest blade of grass in all this wretched West. This whole business is gambling with God."

"It is hard on women and children that they must live here," I remarked, with my eyes on the Strangers' Hut.

"It's harder for men without them," he mournfully replied; and at that moment I began to doubt whether Glenn, whom I had heard to be a bachelor, was not tired of that calm but chilly state. He followed up this speech immediately by this: "Look at that drinking-tank!"

The thing was not pleasant in the eye. Sheep were dying and dead by thousands round it, and the crows were feasting horribly. We became silent again.

The Strangers' Hut, and its unique and, to me, awesome hospitality, was still in my mind. It remained with me until, impelled by curiosity, I wandered away towards it in the glow and silence of the evening. The walk was no brief matter, but at length I stood near the lonely public, where no name of guest is ever asked, and no bill ever paid. And then I fell to musing on how many life-histories these grey walls had sheltered for a fitful hour, how many stumbling wayfarers had eaten and drunken in this Hotel of Refuge. I dropped my glances on the ground; a bird, newly dead, lay at my feet, killed by the heat.

At that moment I heard a child's crying. I started forward, then faltered. Why, I could not tell, save that the crying seemed so a part of the landscape that it might have come out of the sickly sunset, out of the yellow sky, out of the aching earth about me. To follow it might be like pursuing dreams. The crying ceased.

Thus for a moment, and then I walked round to the door of the hut. At the sound of slight moaning I paused again. Then I crossed the threshold resolutely.

A woman with a child in her arms sat on a rude couch. Her lips were clinging to the infant's forehead. At the sound of my footsteps she raised her head.

"Ah!" she said, and, trembling, rose to her feet. She was fair-haired and strong, if sad, of face. Perhaps she never had been beautiful, but in health her face must have been persistent in its charm. Even now it was something noble.

With that patronage of compassion which we use towards those who are unfortunate and humble, I was about to say to her, "My poor woman!" but there was something in her manner so above her rude surroundings that I was impelled to this instead: "Madam, you are ill. Can I be of service to you?"

Then I doffed my hat. I had not done so before, and I blushed now as I did it, for I saw that she had compelled me. She sank back upon the couch again as though the effort to achieve my courtesy had unnerved her, and she murmured simply and painfully: "Thank you very much: I have travelled far."

"May I ask how far?"

"From Mount o' Eden, two hundred miles and more, I think," and her eyes sought the child's face, while her cheek grew paler. She had lighted a tiny fire on the hearthstone and had put the kettle on the wood. Her eyes were upon it now with the covetousness of thirst and hunger. I kneeled, and put in the tin of water left behind by some other pilgrim, a handful of tea from the same source— the outcast and suffering giving to their kind. I poured out for her

soon a little of the tea. Then I asked for her burden. She gave it to my arms— a wan, wise-faced child.

"Madam," I said, "I am only a visitor here, but, if you feel able, and will come with me to the homestead, you shall, I know, find welcome and kindness, or, if you will wait, there are horses, and you shall be brought— yes, indeed," I added, as she shook her head in sad negation, "you will be welcome."

I was sure that, whatever ill chances had befallen the mother of this child, she was one of those who are found in the sight of the Perfect Justice sworn for by the angels. I knew also that Glenn would see that she should be cordially sheltered and brought back to health; for men like Glenn, I said to myself, are kinder in their thought of suffering women than women themselves-are kinder, juster, and less prone to think evil.

She raised her head, and answered: "I think that I could walk; but this, you see, is the only hospitality that I can accept, save, it may be, some bread and a little meat, that the child suffer no more, until I reach Winnanbar, which, I fear, is still far away."

"This," I replied, "is Winnanbar; the homestead is over there, beyond the hill."

"This is— Winnanbar?" she whisperingly said, "this— is— Winnanbar! I did not think— I was-so near."... A thankful look came to her face. She rose, and took the child again and pressed it to her breast, and her eyes brooded upon it. "Now she is beautiful," I thought, and waited for her to speak.

"Sir—" she said at last, and paused. In the silence a footstep sounded without, and then a form appeared in the doorway. It was Glenn.

"I followed you," he said to me; "and—!" He saw the woman, and a low cry broke from her.

"Agnes! Agnes!" he cried, with something of sternness and a little shame.

"I have come— to you— again-Robert," she brokenly, but not abjectly, said.

He came close to her and looked into her face, then into the face of the child, with a sharp questioning. She did not flinch, but answered his scrutiny clearly and proudly. Then, after a moment, she turned a disappointed look upon me, as though to say that I, a stranger, had read her aright at once, while this man held her afar in the cold courts of his judgment ere he gave her any welcome or said a word of pity.

She sank back on the bench, and drew a hand with sorrowful slowness across her brow. He saw a ring upon her finger. He took her hand and said: "You are married, Agnes?"

"My husband is dead, and the sister of this poor one also," she replied; and she fondled the child and raised her eyes to her brother's.

His face now showed compassion. He stooped and kissed her cheek. And it seemed to me at that moment that she could not be gladder than I.

"Agnes," he said, "can you forgive me?"

"He was only a stock-rider," she murmured, as if to herself, "but he was well-born. I loved him. You were angry. I went away with him in the night ... far away to the north. God was good—" Here she brushed her lips tenderly across the curls of the child. "Then the drought came and sickness fell and... death... and I was alone with my baby—"

His lips trembled and his hand was hurting my arm, though he knew it not.

"Where could I go?" she continued.

Glenn answered pleadingly now: "To your unworthy brother, God bless you and forgive me, dear!— though even here at Winnanbar there is drought and famine and the cattle die."

"But my little one shall live!" she cried joyfully. That night Glenn of Winnanbar was a happy man, for rain fell on the land, and he held his sister's child in his arms.

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## 9: The Passionate Snake.

***Ella Higginson***

Mrs. Russell Camden Higginson, 1861-1940

*The Black Cat*, Nov 1896

IF any man supposes that snakes do not understand the speech of human tongues, I— being a snake— will, in this short story, convince him that he is mistaken. I may convince him of some other truths, also.

We are the accursed of the earth. We have only to be seen to be straightway killed. Every man's hand is against us, not because of his own hate, for men are not cowards, but because of the hate of his women.

We have learned, therefore, through ages of cruel treachery, to make our blows swift and sure; yet I say to men, with scorn, that we are more honorable and more merciful than they: we give warning before we strike. We give each man one chance, at least, for his life. More, we strike only when our lives are threatened, or our privacy invaded.

I, being a female thing, have known love. Ay, most beautiful and graceful have I been from my birth. My form is slender and supple ; my movements are sin uous and alluring. The grasses sway in languid undulations, caressing me, as I slide slowly through them. My markings are of rich and unusual beauty and brilliancy. It is said that my eyes take on the color of my moods and passions. When I lie basking in the sunlight, they have the pale blue content of the skies. When I lift myself erect, suspecting danger or treachery, they are like two glittering, green emeralds. When I am jealous— -what female thing has not been?— they are a pale amber-yellow. Once it was said to me that they were— but that must wait.

But I am beautiful, so beautiful that other female snakes hate me. And I heard a man exclaim: "God, what a handsome thing!" one day, even as he lifted his heel to crush me. My beauty saved me, for, looking, he struck so reluctantly that I slid away and escaped. I was born in a pile of stones on a hill in the lovely Grande Ronde Valley, in Oregon. From my father, a rattlesnake, I inherited my strong will and fierce passions; from my mother, a blue-racer, who had been lured away from her kin down in the green valley, my beauty and grace.

Before I was three months old I had tasted fame. All the male snakes on the hill came to watch me as I coiled and uncoiled my magnificent length over the stones of my home. And, oh, I used to wish that the mated ones would not come, for their mates said such evil things of me! But they would come.

One day in spring, when I was a year old, the king of all the rattlesnakes himself came to see my beauty, and he desired me greatly, although I was so young and he so old. My father was proud and flattered. But I— Well, there

was a young and bold blue-racer who used to climb the hilL from the valley ; and on soft, moonless evenings, when my father slept and my mother pretended that she did not hear, I slid down and met him among the deep grasses that grew half way up the hill.

Ah, those hours of first love! Poor human things, who pass your nights within the four walls of a room, I pity you !

We were only snakes. But we had the night and all its sweets woven forever through our love. Soft winds,' scented with the pines on the crest of the Blue Mountains, rippled the grasses above us, as we tasted the bliss of loving companionship. The nighthawk sank to blow his shrill bugle-note beside us; the stars glowed redly through the breathing dusk; from the cañon far up in the hills came the mournful cry of a coyote. Down under the velvet grasses it was dark and sweet, and we Were alone, and we loved.

When at length I stole home and coiled myself on the smooth stones I could not sleep. I lay motionless until the pale greens and yellows came marching up the east, and the trees on the mountain's crest turned, one by one, to gold, and the meadow-larks sang, oh, so sweetly, in the valley where I knew he lay as motionless as I, dreaming of joys that had been and longing for those that were to be.

There was a full month of such bliss. But a day came when my father knew; and that night the king of the rattlesnakes went down the hill in my stead, and lay in wait for his rival.

WHEN I was convinced that they had killed him, I stole away in the night and made my way to the other side of the valley, and dwelt alone on another hill, and mourned. There were no snakes and there were no human things. And, oh, the days were long, and, oh, the nights were lonely.

Deep and passionate was my grief through all the spring, and summer, and fall. When winter drew on, how glad was I to curl myself in a dark, warm place for my long sleep. I recall that my last thought was of how dreary and heart-breaking my awakening would be in the spring. Yet when the awakening came— well, I am a female thing, and that must be sufficient explanation.

IT WAS on a warm and lovely day in April that I languidly uncoiled and slid out to lie upon the stones. Never shall I forget how the beauty of that day thrilled me ! I was glad, I exulted, only to live once more. My memories of love and sorrow seemed vague. Had I ever wished to die? Well, now I longed to live.

The valley stretched before my eyes, green and shining like a great emerald. There were splashes of yellow where the buttercups grew, and there were shooting-stars, and all the sweet winds of spring.

I remember my first glimpse of myself in a still pool that spring. You may have observed a woman, reft of her love, in your own life, you human things. You may have seen her tears, her anguish, her garb of woe. Then, when a few months have gone by, you must have one day had your eyes dazzled by her sudden blossoming out into a new and wonderful beauty. You must have marveled at the color in her cheeks, the brilliancy of her eyes, the warmth of her mouth, the subtle grace of her movements. So it was with me. Life throbbed once more through all my being.

The loneliness grew unbearable.

One day as I lay curled, half asleep, I heard a step. A moment later a man came close to my heap of stones. I sprang erect, hissing and swelling, for I had not time to eseape. He paused and looked at me.

“Beautiful thing!” he said, in a tone of sadness. “Strike, if you will. I shall not harm you.”

He threw himself on the ground near me. He was unarmed. Ashamed, but incredulous, I dropped back into a coil, and lay watching him, motionless, save for the slow sliding of my head from side to side. He looked at me steadily.

“That a snake could be so beautiful!” he said, in the same sad tone. He reached out his hand with a caressing motion. “Come,” he said, “we are alone. Let us be friends.”

His eyes drew me with an irresistible fascination. A new, strange feeling stirred me. I uncoiled, and slid to him with graceful undulations. He laid his hand upon me, and both of us were without fear.

Days passed. I learned gradually that he had come there to forget a woman. He pitched a tent near the stones and dwelt there. I followed him everywhere. I never permitted him to get out of my sight. I slept at his feet, and with the first dawn ray I found his hand and curled upon it, waiting patiently for his caress.

One night when the moon hung large and yellow on the violet breast of the sky, he threw himself upon his blankets, and held his hands out to me.

“I am sorrowful to-night, Lilith,” he said— he called me that. "Come close, closer, my beautiful. Make me forget— other nights.”

In that hour, as I slid into the warmth of his breast, I knew that sometime, somewhere, I had been a woman. Oh, the wild, sweet, passionate love that shook me! Oh, to utter but one word of it! Oh, to have hands to caress him, soft arms to enfold him, red lips to find his kisses! What had been my sin, then, when I was a woman, that I should have been re-created in this form? Beautiful, oh, beautiful! Yes; but unfitted for any save the lower loves, and this love was of the highest; the love of woman for man.

I shrank, quivering, from the memory of that other love. So must a woman shrink, loathing and shuddering, from the memory of such a love when, through some great, exalting passien, a new and noble soul has been bom in her.

Having no arms and no lips, I curled close, close, into his breast, and around his splendid throat I drew my throbbing coils. Then it was that he said, “Lilith, what eyes you have ! They are like two little lamps of crimson fire, glowing in the dusk.”

All that night, and many, many others, I slept there.

IN THE gorgeous pomp of an August dawn the man awoke, with the snake twined about him. The woman he had been trying to forget stood beside him. He flung the snake from him and stretched out trembling arms to the woman.

“Dearest!” she cried. “Did you think I could bear it? I knew better. I have followed you, and I shall never leave you again!” She sank to him, sobbing, and laid her mouth upon his.

He put his arms around her and held her there silently.

Suddenly she screamed and sprang erect.

“A snake! Kill it! Kill it!”

It was coiled, hissing, to spring at her. Already his hand was on his revolver. There was a flash. The woman screamed again. The snake was dead. In a moment the man had flung it outside the tent, and caught her, sobbing and trembling, to his breast.

“O my dearest,” he cried, “ if the reptile had struck you, I should have turned the revolver on myself. O my beloved, this accursed time without you! Give me your arms, your lips. Let us make up for this awful time apart!"

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## 10: A Christmas Mystery

***William John Locke***

1863-1930

*The Red Magazine*, Dec 1909

*"I cannot tell how the truth may be:*
*I say the tale as 'twas said to me."*

THREE MEN who had gained great fame and honour throughout the world met unexpectedly in front of the bookstall at Paddington Station. Like most of the great ones of the earth they were personally acquainted, and they exchanged surprised greetings.

Sir Angus McCurdie, the eminent physicist, scowled at the two others beneath his heavy black eyebrows.

"I'm going to a God-forsaken place in Cornwall called Trehenna," said he.

"That's odd; so am I," croaked Professor Biggleswade. He was a little, untidy man with round spectacles, a fringe of greyish beard and a weak, rasping voice, and he knew more of Assyriology than any man, living or dead. A flippant pupil once remarked that the Professor's face was furnished with a Babylonic cuneiform in lieu of features.

"People called Deverill, at Foulis Castle?" asked Sir Angus.

"Yes," replied Professor Biggleswade.

"How curious! I am going to the Deverills, too," said the third man.

This man was the Right Honourable Viscount Doyne, the renowned Empire Builder and Administrator, around whose solitary and remote life popular imagination had woven many legends. He looked at the world through tired grey eyes, and the heavy, drooping, blonde moustache seemed tired, too, and had dragged down the tired face into deep furrows. He was smoking a long black cigar.

"I suppose we may as well travel down together," said Sir Angus, not very cordially.

Lord Doyne said courteously: "I have a reserved carriage. The railway company is always good enough to place one at my disposal. It would give me great pleasure if you would share it."

The invitation was accepted, and the three men crossed the busy, crowded platform to take their seats in the great express train. A porter, laden with an incredible load of paraphernalia, trying to make his way through the press, happened to jostle Sir Angus McCurdie. He rubbed his shoulder fretfully.

"Why the whole land should be turned into a bear garden on account of this exploded superstition of Christmas is one of the anomalies of modern

civilization. Look at this insensate welter of fools travelling in wild herds to disgusting places merely because it's Christmas!"

"You seem to be travelling yourself, McCurdie," said Lord Doyne.

"Yes— and why the devil I'm doing it, I've not the faintest notion," replied Sir Angus.

"It's going to be a beast of a journey," he remarked some moments later, as the train carried them slowly out of the station. "The whole country is under snow— and as far as I can understand we have to change twice and wind up with a twenty-mile motor drive."

He was an iron-faced, beetle-browed, stern man, and this morning he did not seem to be in the best of tempers. Finding his companions inclined to be sympathetic, he continued his lamentation.

"And merely because it's Christmas I've had to shut up my laboratory and give my young fools a holiday— just when I was in the midst of a most important series of experiments."

Professor Biggleswade, who had heard vaguely of and rather looked down upon such new-fangled toys as radium and thorium and helium and argon— for the latest astonishing developments in the theory of radio-activity had brought Sir Angus McCurdie his world-wide fame— said somewhat ironically:

"If the experiments were so important, why didn't you lock yourself up with your test tubes and electric batteries and finish them alone?"

"Man!" said McCurdie, bending across the carriage, and speaking with a curious intensity of voice, "d'ye know I'd give a hundred pounds to be able to answer that question?"

"What do you mean?" asked the Professor, startled.

"I should like to know why I'm sitting in this damned train and going to visit a couple of addle-headed society people whom I'm scarcely acquainted with, when I might be at home in my own good company furthering the progress of science."

"I myself," said the Professor, "am not acquainted with them at all."

It was Sir Angus McCurdie's turn to look surprised.

"Then why are you spending Christmas with them?"

"I reviewed a ridiculous blank-verse tragedy written by Deverill on the Death of Sennacherib. Historically it was puerile. I said so in no measured terms. He wrote a letter claiming to be a poet and not an archæologist. I replied that the day had passed when poets could with impunity commit the abominable crime of distorting history. He retorted with some futile argument, and we went on exchanging letters, until his invitation and my acceptance concluded the correspondence."

McCurdie, still bending his black brows on him, asked him why he had not declined. The Professor screwed up his face till it looked more like a cuneiform than ever. He, too, found the question difficult to answer, but he showed a bold front.

"I felt it my duty," said he, "to teach that preposterous ignoramus something worth knowing about Sennacherib. Besides I am a bachelor and would sooner spend Christmas, as to whose irritating and meaningless annoyance I cordially agree with you, among strangers than among my married sisters' numerous and nerve-racking families."

Sir Angus McCurdie, the hard, metallic apostle of radio-activity, glanced for a moment out of the window at the grey, frost-bitten fields. Then he said:

"I'm a widower. My wife died many years ago and, thank God, we had no children. I generally spend Christmas alone."

He looked out of the window again. Professor Biggleswade suddenly remembered the popular story of the great scientist's antecedents, and reflected that as McCurdie had once run, a barefoot urchin, through the Glasgow mud, he was likely to have little kith or kin. He himself envied McCurdie. He was always praying to be delivered from his sisters and nephews and nieces, whose embarrassing demands no calculated coldness could repress.

"Children are the root of all evil," said he. "Happy the man who has his quiver empty."

Sir Angus McCurdie did not reply at once; when he spoke again it was with reference to their prospective host.

"I met Deverill," said he, "at the Royal Society's Soirée this year. One of my assistants was demonstrating a peculiar property of thorium and Deverill seemed interested. I asked him to come to my laboratory the next day, and found he didn't know a damned thing about anything. That's all the acquaintance I have with him."

Lord Doyne, the great administrator, who had been wearily turning over the pages of an illustrated weekly chiefly filled with flamboyant photographs of obscure actresses, took his gold glasses from his nose and the black cigar from his lips, and addressed his companions.

"I've been considerably interested in your conversation," said he, "and as you've been frank, I'll be frank too. I knew Mrs. Deverill's mother, Lady Carstairs, very well years ago, and of course Mrs. Deverill when she was a child. Deverill I came across once in Egypt— he had been sent on a diplomatic mission to Teheran. As for our being invited on such slight acquaintance, little Mrs. Deverill has the reputation of being the only really successful celebrity hunter in England. She inherited the faculty from her mother, who entertained

the whole world. We're sure to find archbishops, and eminent actors, and illustrious divorcées asked to meet us. That's one thing. But why I, who loathe country house parties and children and Christmas as much as Biggleswade, am going down there to-day, I can no more explain than you can. It's a devilish odd coincidence."

The three men looked at one another. Suddenly McCurdie shivered and drew his fur coat around him.

"I'll thank you," said he, "to shut that window."

"It is shut," said Doyne.

"It's just uncanny," said McCurdie, looking from one to the other.

"What?" asked Doyne.

"Nothing, if you didn't feel it."

"There did seem to be a sudden draught," said Professor Biggleswade. "But as both window and door are shut, it could only be imaginary."

"It wasn't imaginary," muttered McCurdie.

Then he laughed harshly. "My father and mother came from Cromarty," he said with apparent irrelevance.

"That's the Highlands," said the Professor.

"Ay," said McCurdie.

Lord Doyne said nothing, but tugged at his moustache and looked out of the window as the frozen meadows and bits of river and willows raced past. A dead silence fell on them. McCurdie broke it with another laugh and took a whiskey flask from his hand-bag.

"Have a nip?"

"Thanks, no," said the Professor. "I have to keep to a strict dietary, and I only drink hot milk and water— and of that sparingly. I have some in a thermos bottle."

Lord Doyne also declining the whiskey, McCurdie swallowed a dram and declared himself to be better. The Professor took from his bag a foreign review in which a German sciolist had dared to question his interpretation of a Hittite inscription. Over the man's ineptitude he fell asleep and snored loudly.

To escape from his immediate neighbourhood McCurdie went to the other end of the seat and faced Lord Doyne, who had resumed his gold glasses and his listless contemplation of obscure actresses. McCurdie lit a pipe, Doyne another black cigar. The train thundered on.

Presently they all lunched together in the restaurant car. The windows steamed, but here and there through a wiped patch of pane a white world was revealed. The snow was falling. As they passed through Westbury, McCurdie looked mechanically for the famous white horse carved into the chalk of the down; but it was not visible beneath the thick covering of snow.

"It'll be just like this all the way to Gehenna— Trehenna, I mean," said McCurdie.

Doyne nodded. He had done his life's work amid all extreme fiercenesses of heat and cold, in burning droughts, in simoons and in icy wildernesses, and a ray or two more of the pale sun or a flake or two more of the gentle snow of England mattered to him but little. But Biggleswade rubbed the pane with his table-napkin and gazed apprehensively at the prospect.

"If only this wretched train would stop," said he, "I would go back again."

And he thought how comfortable it would be to sneak home again to his books and thus elude not only the Deverills, but the Christmas jollities of his sisters' families, who would think him miles away. But the train was timed not to stop till Plymouth, two hundred and thirty-five miles from London, and thither was he being relentlessly carried. Then he quarrelled with his food, which brought a certain consolation.

THE TRAIN did stop, however, before Plymouth— indeed, before Exeter. An accident on the line had dislocated the traffic. The express was held up for an hour, and when it was permitted to proceed, instead of thundering on, it went cautiously, subject to continual stoppings. It arrived at Plymouth two hours late. The travellers learned that they had missed the connection on which they had counted and that they could not reach Trehenna till nearly ten o'clock. After weary waiting at Plymouth they took their seats in the little, cold local train that was to carry them another stage on their journey. Hot-water cans put in at Plymouth mitigated to some extent the iciness of the compartment. But that only lasted a comparatively short time, for soon they were set down at a desolate, shelterless wayside junction, dumped in the midst of a hilly snow-covered waste, where they went through another weary wait for another dismal local train that was to carry them to Trehenna. And in this train there were no hot-water cans, so that the compartment was as cold as death. McCurdie fretted and shook his fist in the direction of Trehenna.

"And when we get there we have still a twenty miles' motor drive to Foullis Castle. It's a fool name and we're fools to be going there."

"I shall die of bronchitis," wailed Professor Biggleswade.

"A man dies when it is appointed for him to die," said Lord Doyne, in his tired way; and he went on smoking long black cigars.

"It's not the dying that worries me," said McCurdie. "That's a mere mechanical process which every organic being from a king to a cauliflower has to pass through. It's the being forced against my will and my reason to come on this accursed journey, which something tells me will become more and more accursed as we go on, that is driving me to distraction."

"What will be, will be," said Doyne.

"I can't see where the comfort of that reflection comes in," said Biggleswade.

"And yet you've travelled in the East," said Doyne. "I suppose you know the Valley of the Tigris as well as any man living."

"Yes," said the Professor. "I can say I dug my way from Tekrit to Bagdad and left not a stone unexamined."

"Perhaps, after all," Doyne remarked, "that's not quite the way to know the East."

"I never wanted to know the modern East," returned the Professor. "What is there in it of interest compared with the mighty civilizations that have gone before?"

McCurdie took a pull from his flask.

"I'm glad I thought of having a refill at Plymouth," said he.

At last, after many stops at little lonely stations they arrived at Trehenna. The guard opened the door and they stepped out on to the snow-covered platform. An oil lamp hung from the tiny pent-house roof that, structurally, was Trehenna Station. They looked around at the silent gloom of white undulating moorland, and it seemed a place where no man lived and only ghosts could have a bleak and unsheltered being. A porter came up and helped the guard with the luggage. Then they realized that the station was built on a small embankment, for, looking over the railing, they saw below the two great lamps of a motor car. A fur-clad chauffeur met them at the bottom of the stairs. He clapped his hands together and informed them cheerily that he had been waiting for four hours. It was the bitterest winter in these parts within the memory of man, said he, and he himself had not seen snow there for five years. Then he settled the three travellers in the great roomy touring car covered with a Cape-cart hood, wrapped them up in many rugs and started.

After a few moments, the huddling together of their bodies— for, the Professor being a spare man, there was room for them all on the back seat— the pile of rugs, the serviceable and all but air-tight hood, induced a pleasant warmth and a pleasant drowsiness. Where they were being driven they knew not. The perfectly upholstered seat eased their limbs, the easy swinging motion of the car soothed their spirits. They felt that already they had reached the luxuriously appointed home which, after all, they knew awaited them. McCurdie no longer railed, Professor Biggleswade forgot the dangers of bronchitis, and Lord Doyne twisted the stump of a black cigar between his lips without any desire to relight it. A tiny electric lamp inside the hood made the darkness of the world to right and left and in front of the talc windows still

darker. McCurdie and Biggleswade fell into a doze. Lord Doyne chewed the end of his cigar. The car sped on through an unseen wilderness.

Suddenly there was a horrid jolt and a lurch and a leap and a rebound, and then the car stood still, quivering like a ship that has been struck by a heavy sea. The three men were pitched and tossed and thrown sprawling over one another onto the bottom of the car. Biggleswade screamed. McCurdie cursed. Doyne scrambled from the confusion of rugs and limbs and, tearing open the side of the Cape-cart hood, jumped out. The chauffeur had also just leaped from his seat. It was pitch dark save for the great shaft of light down the snowy road cast by the acetylene lamps. The snow had ceased falling.

"What's gone wrong?"

"It sounds like the axle," said the chauffeur ruefully.

He unshipped a lamp and examined the car, which had wedged itself against a great drift of snow on the off side. Meanwhile McCurdie and Biggleswade had alighted.

"Yes, it's the axle," said the chauffeur.

"Then we're done," remarked Doyne.

"I'm afraid so, my lord."

"What's the matter? Can't we get on?" asked Biggleswade in his querulous voice.

McCurdie laughed. "How can we get on with a broken axle? The thing's as useless as a man with a broken back. Gad, I was right. I said it was going to be an infernal journey."

The little Professor wrung his hands. "But what's to be done?" he cried.

"Tramp it," said Lord Doyne, lighting a fresh cigar.

"It's ten miles," said the chauffeur.

"It would be the death of me," the Professor wailed.

"I utterly refuse to walk ten miles through a Polar waste with a gouty foot," McCurdie declared wrathfully.

The chauffeur offered a solution of the difficulty. He would set out alone for Foullis Castle— five miles farther on was an inn where he could obtain a horse and trap— and would return for the three gentlemen with another car. In the meanwhile they could take shelter in a little house which they had just passed, some half mile up the road. This was agreed to. The chauffeur went on cheerily enough with a lamp, and the three travellers with another lamp started off in the opposite direction. As far as they could see they were in a long, desolate valley, a sort of No Man's Land, deathly silent. The eastern sky had cleared somewhat, and they faced a loose rack through which one pale star was dimly visible.

"I'M A MAN of science," said McCurdie as they trudged through the snow, "and I dismiss the supernatural as contrary to reason; but I have Highland blood in my veins that plays me exasperating tricks. My reason tells me that this place is only a commonplace moor, yet it seems like a Valley of Bones haunted by malignant spirits who have lured us here to our destruction. There's something guiding us now. It's just uncanny."

"Why on earth did we ever come?" croaked Biggleswade.

Lord Doyne answered: "The *Koran* says, 'Nothing can befall us but what God hath destined for us.' So why worry?"

"Because I'm not a Mohammedan," retorted Biggleswade.

"You might be worse," said Doyne.

Presently the dim outline of the little house grew perceptible. A faint light shone from the window. It stood unfenced by any kind of hedge or railing a few feet away from the road in a little hollow beneath some rising ground. As far as they could discern in the darkness when they drew near, the house was a mean, dilapidated hovel. A guttering candle stood on the inner sill of the small window and afforded a vague view into a mean interior. Doyne held up the lamp so that its rays fell full on the door. As he did so, an exclamation broke from his lips and he hurried forward, followed by the others. A man's body lay huddled together on the snow by the threshold. He was dressed like a peasant, in old corduroy trousers and rough coat, and a handkerchief was knotted round his neck. In his hand he grasped the neck of a broken bottle. Doyne set the lamp on the ground and the three bent down together over the man. Close by the neck lay the rest of the broken bottle, whose contents had evidently run out into the snow.

"Drunk?" asked Biggleswade.

Doyne felt the man and laid his hand on his heart.

"No," said he, "dead."

McCurdie leaped to his full height. "I told you the place was uncanny!" he cried. "It's fey." Then he hammered wildly at the door.

There was no response. He hammered again till it rattled. This time a faint prolonged sound like the wailing of a strange sea-creature was heard from within the house. McCurdie turned round, his teeth chattering.

"Did ye hear that, Doyne?"

"Perhaps it's a dog," said the Professor.

Lord Doyne, the man of action, pushed them aside and tried the door-handle. It yielded, the door stood open, and the gust of cold wind entering the house extinguished the candle within. They entered and found themselves in a miserable stone-paved kitchen, furnished with poverty-stricken meagreness—a wooden chair or two, a dirty table, some broken crockery, old cooking

utensils, a fly-blown missionary society almanac, and a fireless grate. Doyne set the lamp on the table.

"We must bring him in," said he.

They returned to the threshold, and as they were bending over to grip the dead man the same sound filled the air, but this time louder, more intense, a cry of great agony. The sweat dripped from McCurdie's forehead. They lifted the dead man and brought him into the room, and after laying him on a dirty strip of carpet they did their best to straighten the stiff limbs. Biggleswade put on the table a bundle which he had picked up outside. It contained some poor provisions— a loaf, a piece of fat bacon, and a paper of tea. As far as they could guess (and as they learned later they guessed rightly) the man was the master of the house, who, coming home blind drunk from some distant inn, had fallen at his own threshold and got frozen to death. As they could not unclasp his fingers from the broken bottleneck they had to let him clutch it as a dead warrior clutches the hilt of his broken sword.

Then suddenly the whole place was rent with another and yet another long, soul-piercing moan of anguish.

"There's a second room," said Doyne, pointing to a door. "The sound comes from there." He opened the door, peeped in, and then, returning for the lamp, disappeared, leaving McCurdie and Biggleswade in the pitch darkness, with the dead man on the floor.

"For heaven's sake, give me a drop of whiskey," said the Professor, "or I shall faint."

Presently the door opened and Lord Doyne appeared in the shaft of light. He beckoned to his companions.

"It is a woman in childbirth," he said in his even, tired voice. "We must aid her. She appears unconscious. Does either of you know anything about such things?"

They shook their heads, and the three looked at each other in dismay. Masters of knowledge that had won them world-wide fame and honour, they stood helpless, abashed before this, the commonest phenomenon of nature.

"My wife had no child," said McCurdie.

"I've avoided women all my life," said Biggleswade.

"And I've been too busy to think of them. God forgive me," said Doyne.

THE HISTORY of the next two hours was one that none of the three men ever cared to touch upon. They did things blindly, instinctively, as men do when they come face to face with the elemental. A fire was made, they knew not how, water drawn they knew not whence, and a kettle boiled. Doyne accustomed to command, directed. The others obeyed. At his suggestion they

hastened to the wreck of the car and came staggering back beneath rugs and travelling bags which could supply clean linen and needful things, for amid the poverty of the house they could find nothing fit for human touch or use. Early they saw that the woman's strength was failing, and that she could not live. And there, in that nameless hovel, with death on the hearthstone and death and life hovering over the pitiful bed, the three great men went through the pain and the horror and squalor of birth, and they knew that they had never yet stood before so great a mystery.

With the first wail of the newly born infant a last convulsive shudder passed through the frame of the unconscious mother. Then three or four short gasps for breath, and the spirit passed away. She was dead. Professor Biggleswade threw a corner of the sheet over her face, for he could not bear to see it.

They washed and dried the child as any crone of a midwife would have done, and dipped a small sponge which had always remained unused in a cut-glass bottle in Doyne's dressing-bag in the hot milk and water of Biggleswade's thermos bottle, and put it to his lips; and then they wrapped him up warm in some of their own woollen undergarments, and took him into the kitchen and placed him on a bed made of their fur coats in front of the fire. As the last piece of fuel was exhausted they took one of the wooden chairs and broke it up and cast it into the blaze. And then they raised the dead man from the strip of carpet and carried him into the bedroom and laid him reverently by the side of his dead wife, after which they left the dead in darkness and returned to the living. And the three grave men stood over the wisp of flesh that had been born a male into the world. Then, their task being accomplished, reaction came, and even Doyne, who had seen death in many lands, turned faint. But the others, losing control of their nerves, shook like men stricken with palsy.

Suddenly McCurdie cried in a high pitched voice, "My God! Don't you feel it?" and clutched Doyne by the arm. An expression of terror appeared on his iron features.

"There! It's here with us."

Little Professor Biggleswade sat on a corner of the table and wiped his forehead.

"I heard it. I felt it. It was like the beating of wings."

"It's the fourth time," said McCurdie. "The first time was just before I accepted the Deverills' invitation. The second in the railway carriage this afternoon. The third on the way here. This is the fourth."

Biggleswade plucked nervously at the fringe of whisker under his jaws and said faintly, "It's the fourth time up to now. I thought it was fancy."

"I have felt it, too," said Doyne. "It is the Angel of Death." And he pointed to the room where the dead man and woman lay.

"For God's sake let us get away from this," cried Biggleswade.

"And leave the child to die, like the others?" said Doyne.

"We must see it through," said McCurdie.

A SILENCE fell upon them as they sat round in the blaze with the new-born babe wrapped in its odd swaddling clothes asleep on the pile of fur coats, and it lasted until Sir Angus McCurdie looked at his watch.

"Good Lord," said he, "it's twelve o'clock."

"Christmas morning," said Biggleswade.

"A strange Christmas," mused Doyne.

McCurdie put up his hand. "There it is again! The beating of wings." And they listened like men spellbound. McCurdie kept his hand uplifted, and gazed over their heads at the wall, and his gaze was that of a man in a trance, and he spoke:

"Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given—"

Doyne sprang from his chair, which fell behind him with a crash.

"Man— what the devil are you saying?"

Then McCurdie rose and met Biggleswade's eyes staring at him through the great round spectacles, and Biggleswade turned and met the eyes of Doyne. A pulsation like the beating of wings stirred the air.

The three wise men shivered with a queer exaltation. Something strange, mystical, dynamic had happened. It was as if scales had fallen from their eyes and they saw with a new vision. They stood together humbly, divested of all their greatness, touching one another in the instinctive fashion of children, as if seeking mutual protection, and they looked, with one accord, irresistibly compelled, at the child.

At last McCurdie unbent his black brows and said hoarsely:

"It was not the Angel of Death, Doyne, but another Messenger that drew us here."

The tiredness seemed to pass away from the great administrator's face, and he nodded his head with the calm of a man who has come to the quiet heart of a perplexing mystery.

"It's true," he murmured. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. Unto the three of us."

Biggleswade took off his great round spectacles and wiped them.

"Gaspar, Melchior, Balthazar. But where are the gold, frankincense and myrrh?"

"In our hearts, man," said McCurdie.

The babe cried and stretched its tiny limbs.

Instinctively they all knelt down together to discover, if possible, and administer ignorantly to, its wants. The scene had the appearance of an adoration.

THEN THESE three wise, lonely, childless men who, in furtherance of their own greatness, had cut themselves adrift from the sweet and simple things of life and from the kindly ways of their brethren, and had grown old in unhappy and profitless wisdom, knew that an inscrutable Providence had led them, as it had led three Wise Men of old, on a Christmas morning long ago, to a nativity which should give them a new wisdom, a new link with humanity, a new spiritual outlook, a new hope.

And, when their watch was ended, they wrapped up the babe with precious care, and carried him with them, an inalienable joy and possession, into the great world.

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## 11: Wafou's New Ju-Ju

***Anonymous***

*Sunshine Advocate* (Victoria) 20 Jan 1939

*This story was published without a title or an author credit. I invented the title*

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20th, 1939.

**Short Story**

They lay sweating and dusty by the side of a stream.
Overhead a glaring ball of fire blazed mercilessly down, beating

THEY LAY sweating and dusty by the side of a stream.

Overhead a glaring ball of fire blazed , mercilessly down, beating the miles of waste land with hellish intensity. The whole atmosphere seemed charged, quivering with heat. Even the burnished sky had assumed a glaze— like a bright blue bowl fresh from the potter's oven.

For hours they had tramped, seeing no sign of life in all this deso-lation; hearing nothing, save the short, sharp cough of a disturbed jackal as it streaked across the scrub. Sharp to one side of them jutted a high range of mountains, its slopes precipitous and cactus-strewn. It was to the top of the nearest height that the little column hoped to make its way— so soon as certain, long-promised reinforce-ments joined them.

"And they call this war!" muttered a young Italian in the accoutrements of a Blackshirt officer, as he dipped his head gratefully in the clear cool water. "Do you realise, Vincenzo, that we have advanced five days with scarcely a flutter of white garments on the horizon for a sign of the enemy?"

Vincenzo looked up. He too was an officer. He too was young— scarcely more than a boy. His tunic lay on the ground beside him, and his body, sun-blistered, gleamed brick-red under the fierce white light. His face, as was that of his friend was burned almost as black as those of the Askari soldiers about them. He shrugged eloquently.

"We were told it was to be like this," he reminded. "They hope to lure us far enough from the main body to make us a miniature '96. Black swine!"

An Askari soldier squatting a few yards off overheard the epithet. He was grinning broadly, his immense white teeth flashing like diamonds against his skin. Wafou could remember the time— not so long ago— when he too would have been classified as a "black swine." That was when, as a child, he had bidden farewell to his father on the eve of Adowa. Queer, he thought, how that defeat still rankled with the Italians!

Vincenzo had removed his breeches and stepped into the stream. His tattered uniform and pathetic array of valuables lay heaped upon the bank. Wafou's eyes, egg-white in his coal-black face, flickered over them. A knife, a bunch of keys, two lira, some Marie Therese dollars and a pipe— and the watch!

Long had the Askari desired a watch like that. They were hard to come by back in the market at Asmara. Those, and he had had two of them, had failed to function inside a week. This, he knew, was a recent present to the young officer— a gift from his mother back in Florence. He had heard Vincenzo extol its virtues on many occasions.

The Askari's gaze moved reluctantly away from the gleaming silver disc and began to traverse the mountain side to his right. A wrinkle formed in the placid black skin of the warriors' brow. And then the sound of a harsh staccato laugh of a hyena sounded. Wafou smiled again.

Vincenzo, lying prone in the stream, had been joined by his friend. Their voices blended harmoniously in the Fascist Marching Song, *Giovannezza*. Wafou seemed to make up his mind.

He glanced quickly about him. No one was looking. Swiftly he stooped, stumbled over Vincenzo's bundle, and withdrew— to become one of many black-faced, red-fezzed soldiers squatting before the piled rifles.

When Vincenzo discovered his loss, Wafou was missing.

Sergeant Mahmoud hazarded the guess that the Askari, always of a roving disposition, had this time wandered too far from his comrades and fallen a prey to a predatory lion. It was an explanation as good as any— though it did not satisfy Vincenzo, who was a soldier and a watch the less. He groused all day.

"You don't understand how I feel about it," he told his friend. "My mother gave the watch to me for luck. Besides, it was a very special watch, and I am superstitious."

"Maybe," chaffed the other," "we shall shoot a lion and hear your blessed watch ticking inside him like the crocodile in the English play I saw in London."

"It's all very wel to joke," grunted Vincenzo. "For myself I hope we do. We shall at least be certain that one black thief has got his deserts!"

THE DAY simmered grimly on to a tepid finish and still the sentries gave no warning of the approaching reinforcements. Vincenzo and his comrade consulted together. It was decided to pitch camp. At least there was water here. To push on alone, uncertain of the location of the next well, would be courting a hideous death.

Night fell with tropcal swiftness. One moment the sun bleared redly above the jagged ridge of mountain to the west, the next the Southern Cross glittered bravely like brilliants on a purple mantle. A cold wind swept suddenly up the valley, and went, leaving the scrub motionless and still, save for the occasional crackle of a twig which betrayed the presence of some heavy animal.

Then gradually the darkness be-came filled with sound. Whisperings, mutterings, the stealthy thrash of bodies through the undergrowth. The frightened snortings, the chatter, the screech, the trumpeting and roaring of wild animals newly awakened from their sun-baked slumber of the day.

In his bivouac Vincenzo lay listening and thinking of his mother back in Florence. There was a girl in the Cafe Desti— pretty name, Amalia... They said this would be a long war... perhaps she'd marry that fair Swede after all. Girls like Amalia could not wait for ever. And that watch... it was like Mother to send it. Such sense of humour... always ragging him about not being able to get up in the mornings.

The camp grew still. He slept.

DOWN the mountain side, like squat bugs rolling down a wall, crawled a vast black army. Not for nothing had Wafou smiled when he had heard the laugh of a hyena echoing in the distance. Then only had he known for certain what hitherto he had suspected; namely, that Ras Kallu and his hyena-men were lying in wait for the invaders among the upper ridges of the mountains.

Nearer, nearer the came, silent footed and swift— naked or partially clad in their queer tog-like garments, with the long striped hyena tails dangling about their shoulders. In the forefront now marched Wafou— Wafou the deserter; now plumed and painted like his ancestors, whose blood surged too strongly in his veins for his allegiance. In his right hand, in place of his rifle which he now wore slung upon his back he carried a broad, sharp spear and his left arm, shielded by a wheel of hide, kept guard over the vital inches round his heart. No chain was about his neck, for Wafou though the son of chiefs, was tribeless and the last of his race, but in the place where the chief's chain should be, hung something else— a small round disc which ticked continuously at the end of a leathern thong.

Great indeed had been the interest in Wafou's new Ju-Ju when he had first presented himself among the men. They had listened awe-struck to the devil knocking to be released from the little silver case. And Wafou, who was wise in his generation, had elaborated on the white man's magic which only he among the black people could command— he,and the stranger Emperor who ruled Ethiopia from the great palace beyond the hills.

To Ras Kallu, he had spoken bravely in the language of his fathers.

"I see you, great Lord, and I come as a son to deliver your enemies into your hands. Lo! They lie sleeping the sleep of fools in the country of the lion— and in their pockets are many dollars. They have rifles, but these are not in their hands. They lie stacked in little heaps ready for warriors to seize. The two sentries guarding the camp are lazy fellows, prone to smoke in secret, and into their tobacco have I mixed the root of *N'gabrobwe*, which, as all men know, means death."

So Wafou, the deserter, became the hero of his people, and led them bravely to the massacre.

Closer drew the dark circle about the sleeping camp. Silently like snakes slithering through the scrub, wriggled the black bodies— a thousand to fifty. And in distant Florence, a mother was praying for the safety of her boy.

Upon two hammocks at opposite ends of the camp two red-fezzed soldiers lolled; their heads slumped forward, their rifles discarded on the ground. Towards one of these Wafou insinuated himself, his wide mouth a grin with animal delight. It was Ambusi who sat so still and breathless at his post— Ambusi who had beaten Wafou before his comrades not a moon ago.

Well, Wafou was even now. Stooping, he picked up the sen-try's rifle and turned. His jungle keen gaze which all the pseudo-civilisation of Asmara could not destroy noted the rows of eyes glaring out of the dark towards him. The blood of his ancestors raced in his veins, pounding madly at his temple and throat. There was killing to do.

Wafou threw back his head. The shrill cry of the hyena— the signal for attack— shivered for an instant in his throat.

And then: Brrrr-rrr-rrrr.

The sharp noise of a bell ringing split the stillness.

With a howl of fear Wafou stepped back, clutching at the watch at his breast. But the thing was secure about it. Grasp it tight as he might he could not still the ringing.

The nearest natives saw his terror and misunderstood. They knew only what Wafou had told them about the little knocking devil that lived in the silver box. Now, with bulging eyes and skins that dripped with sweat, they remembered how he described its theft. Here, then, was no ordinary Ju-ju. This was a powerful and a white man's Ju-ju. A Ju-ju that hated Wafou who had stolen it— who had recognised its home. They could hear it screaming— screaming for its master!

With a bellow of superstitious terror the foremost of the natives turned. Their flight spread consternation and panic to the rest. And, as scampering to their posts the first of the Askaris turned the deadly nozzle of a machine-gun into the darkness, Ras Kallu's hyena army fled.

Vincenzo bent over the bullet riddled body of a black man and recognised him.

"Wafou," he muttered. "So that's where you got to?"

His friend, stooping swiftly, de-tached something from the dead man's neck.

"Look, Vincenzo!" he cried. "Your alarm watch! You see I was right."

The Italian boy snatched at it gleefully, grimaced and threw it in to the scrub.

"Broken," he muttered regretfully. "And it was a present from Mother."

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## 12: The Ghost of a Lonely Dog

***Fred Jacob***

Edward Frederick Fulford Jacob, 1882-1928

*MacLean's* 15 March 1929

*Canadian journalist and author. He wrote 2 novels and 3 short stories. The short stories were all set in Petersville.*

THE haunted house did not look haunted; it only looked forlornly deserted. A brisk walker could reach it in ten minutes after leaving the outskirts of the town, but it had a history that made it an outcast among the other houses, most of them much less pleasing to look upon. In the year 1885, the eccentric spinster who had built the cottage was murdered by someone who believed the gossip that she kept gold coins on the premises, and the identity of the murderer was never discovered. If he had paid the penalty on the gallows, the haunted house might not have been shunned by the citizens of Petersville. The sinister reputation was augmented by the remoteness of the cottage. It stood on a roadside so little used that vehicles had to bump their way along three parallel ruts in the sod, in which flowering weeds grew bravely, and stiffened up again when the occasional horse that came that way tramped them down. People who walked there after dark grew nervous, and blamed the influence of the haunted house. For ten years it remained without a tenant.

When Anthony Pursford arrived, apparently from nowhere, and located in the haunted house, everybody suspected from the start that there must be something queer about him. In a surprisingly short time, the place ceased to be a crone, mistrusted by decent men and hiding away in waste places. Paint on the roof and green shutters gave the square stone building the appearance of having been scrubbed. He restored the gate and mended the picket fence and, with the organizing skill of an expert army officer, he marshaled the tangles of growth into disciplined flowerbeds. To celebrate their liberation from the tyranny of wild morning-glory, the hollyhocks grew to the eaves during the first summer.

Nobody could deny that the haunted house had been transformed into a thing of beauty. After tea, on the July evenings, people strolled out to look at it. But they never wavered from the original conviction that there must be something wrong about Anthony Pursford, that he was a queer one.

Having found the verdict without more ado, the task of collecting the evidence went steadily ahead; they did things that way in Petersville. Pursford was a foreigner. They described his accent as English, but the station-master furnished the information that his furniture had come from the United States.

He never went out of his way to explain why he should want to live so far from his home, wherever it was, and that fact alone was suspicious.

His only companion was Miss Pursford, presumably his sister, though he never actually gave out the information. She was many years older than her brother, and so gentle that it was impossible to think of her in any sinister connection. The presence of Miss Pursford in the household gave Mrs. Macready and Mrs. Meredith an excuse to call, though not together. Mrs. Macready regarded herself as the representative of the old families of the community, and Mrs. Meredith constituted herself, by right of aggression, the social leader of the newly prosperous.

In their method of approach, Mrs. Meredith and Mrs. Macready were much alike. They gave numerous openings for intimate confidences, but Anthony Pursford never responded. He pulled his thin white beard and contracted the skin on his high pale forehead in what Mrs. Meredith afterward described as a sarcastic manner.

Miss Pursford seemed a more promising source of information, but though she chattered, apparently irresponsibly, of Boston and New York, London and Paris, she left in the end on her curiosity seeking visitors only an abstract impression of gentility and wealth.

"She is a sly old thing," was Mrs. Meredith's conclusion. "She never lets anything slip."

Miss Pursford was more sociable than her brother. She repaid the calls; she spent a little money at the garden parties given to raise funds during the summer, and volunteered to assist at the quilting bees when the long evenings arrived. She visited the different churches occasionally, dropping in late and sitting near the back, but she showed no inclination to join one of them.

In October came Rally Sunday, and after the service of song Mrs. Meredith cornered her.

"Have you no preference?" she enquired. "I should think you would find it more satisfactory to be a regular member somewhere."

"Well, of course, I am a Unitarian," said Miss Pursford, "but I find the atmosphere of any church service restful, so long as I can avoid the sermon."

As Mrs. Meredith had never heard anything like that said about churchgoing, she had no reply ready. Then there was the confession. Miss Pursford had said she was a Unitarian, "of course." Didn't she realize that there were no Unitarians in Petersville? You might belong "of course" to any of the accepted denominations, but it was arrogant and in bad taste to link up an "of course" with any other religion. Imagine saying, "Of course, I am a Mohammedan."

In less than a week, everybody in the village knew that Anthony Pursford and his sister held the most outlandish views about God, and that Mrs. Meredith had been forced to rebuke Miss Pursford for some flippancy, no one knew quite what, on the subject. By the majority they were henceforth called unbelievers, but as the pastors did not forbid Miss Pursford to enter their churches, she trotted from one to another according to the impulse of the moment. She even went occasionally to the Church of the Holy Family because she liked Father Gagnon's voice and his French accent.

IT WAS while the town seethed with surmises about the religious views of the Pursfords that Rural Dean Horkins began calling upon them, but that, as Mrs. Meredith said, was to be expected. The rural Dean seemed to glory in the disapproval of his fellow clergy. He smoked a large pipe in public, with no thought of the effect that it might have on the impressionable minds of the young people.

Mrs. Meredith summed up the general attitude toward Rural Dean Horkins, outside of his own congregation, when she said: "It is a pity that Englishmen locate in this country when they have no conception of the spirit of Canada. It only leads to friction."

Still, he went on his brusque and cheery way, with his puffing pipe, and was apparently quite unconscious of any disapproval. That attitude was described as uppish— not sufficiently democratic.

The friendship between Horkins and Anthony Pursford created the impression that Pursford, also, was uppish.

Nothing more damning could be alleged against a newcomer to Petersville than uppishness.

Anthony Pursford's mail was studied as carefully as letters can be examined without being opened, for that seemed to be the only way of learning more about him. He wrote a neat and readable hand; everybody said at once that it was like copperplate. At regular intervals, he sent away bulky envelopes addressed to the editors of *The New World Review* or *The Boston Magazine* or *Hopkirk's Monthly*: none of these magazines was known in Petersville. They were published without pictures and severe in appearance, and the Library Board subscribed only for illustrated periodicals.

Sometimes similar envelopes came back again, addressed in his own handwriting. That in itself was peculiar, anybody would admit. He constantly received packages marked "Proofs only." The phrase suggested criminal trials, but the oddest part of it was that he sent them away again in less than a week, also marked "Proofs only." Once a thing had been proved to his satisfaction, he apparently took no more interest in the documents.

The librarian, who had a reputation for cleverness, asked the Public Library Board for permission to buy a few single copies of *The New World Review*. She did not tell anyone her intention, but she searched the magazine diligently month after month until she was rewarded by finding an article "by Anthony Pursford." Her discovery explained his mail, but did not greatly help his reputation. If it had been a sprightly love story in a popular monthly, they might have felt proud of him. But here were a dozen pages of gibberish, and sarcastic, too; yes, you could see it was intended to be sarcastic, even though you could not entirely understand it.

"Evidently, he thinks he knows it all," said the librarian.

Others believed that they could detect what they described as "slams" at Petersville; at least, he held views with which none of the librarian's friends could agree.

Microscopic examination of *The New World Review* strengthened the conviction that only a queer one would have written for it.

Another portion of Anthony Pursford's mail, the meaning of which was not so easily unearthed, consisted of blue envelopes with "Philip Bryson, M.D." in the corner. They arrived frequently, and at least once a month, Pursford despatched an envelope addressed to Dr. Bryson; occasionally he added to the address "The Bryson Retreat." These letters were registered.

During Pursford's second winter in Petersville, he received a telegram— "Come at once. Critical"— signed "Philip Bryson." He left by the next train, quite unconscious of the curious eyes that followed him. The whole town chattered, and not a few predicted that it was the last they would see of Anthony Pursford. But the following day he telegraphed to Miss Pursford:

*"Danger Past. No recognition. Waiting until next week."*

No messenger boy was permitted to deliver that telegram. Mr. Nichols, who operated the telegraph office in his drug store, carried the message out to Miss Pursford, and nimbly stepped inside the door with the suggestion that there might be a reply. She read it, and then carefully folded the yellow paper without a word.

"Is it good news?" he enquired, although he could have recited the eight words.

Then she remembered to smile, "Oh, yes, indeed. My brother has telegraphed to say that he is coming home."

Did she think the contents of a telegram were secret?

Anthony Pursford came back with dark rings round his eyes. All who saw him alight from the train agreed that he looked like a man who had been ill.

Nothing more happened. The Pursfords altered no item in their habits, and their letters came and went as usual. They were not conscious that the miasma of suspicion was settling more and more thickly about the haunted house.

**T**he children of the town did not follow the lead of their elders. Soon after Anthony Pursford and his sister settled in the white cottage, they began to make friends of the boys and girls, who were undeterred by the vague disapproval that they heard in their homes.

Miss Pursford's raspberry vinegar was the first bait to draw them. One sultry August day, she invited a party of sonnies, as she called them, to come inside the shady garden for a rest. They giggled and squirmed and grinned, but accepted. Miss Pursford's laconic questions and their furtive answers did not keep conversation alive for long. Then she disappeared into the house, and shortly returned with an assortment of goodies. On a big tray were glasses containing the reddest drink that the boys had ever been offered; quite apart from the flavor, the color would have recommended it. Homemade root beer that frothed recklessly and tasted like the sarsaparilla tonic doled out in March and April, was the only fancy drink that most of them knew. Raspberry vinegar was beautiful to look upon, and indescribably different in its appeal to the palate.

The news of the beverage that looked red enough to be wicked spread through Petersville. Other young visitors came to the Pursford's gate, and they were always taken in. When departing, they were invited to come again, and no one was ever known to refuse.

Very soon, Anthony Pursford began to join the parties in the garden, and then they became something more than silent orgies of food and drink. He knew all about birds and their nests and the color of their eggs; the boys had never before met a man who was their equal in this fascinating branch of knowledge. As they sat under the trees, he could identify the notes and twitters among the foliage, and if a rare one baffled them, he was the most eager of all to get a glimpse at the songster.

Sometimes a boy had an observation of his own to describe, and then Mr. Pursford listened, with a question here and there, as though it were entirely new to him. His manner was most flattering.

He had many novel possessions that he showed to them later when the cold weather drove them indoors. The bigger boys liked his electric battery, and they stood in circles while he sent the current tingling through their arms; they called it having their nerve tested. The girls preferred to look at his tiny watch that struck the hours with an almost inaudible tinkle when little springs were touched. All were fascinated by an Italian cane, the carved head of which drew out with a long ugly blade; he told them the cruel part it had taken in the

fate of a family that had played gallantly at the making of history in the days when a forest rustled year in and year out on the soil that was now Petersville.

He had an inexhaustible supply of stories. They came out of a land of wonderful adventure, and he told them so that for the time being they were true.

Once Jackie Dyer asked: "Are they founded on fact?" His mother never permitted him to read a novel unless he could assure her that it was founded on fact.

"What is fact, Jackie?" enquired Anthony Pursford. "Is it a fact that men were made so that they will not be able to fly among the birds except in great unmanageable balloons? If my stories are not founded on facts of the past, they may be founded on facts of the future."

They were puzzled by Mr. Pursford's quizzing, but they did not feel rebuffed by it.

For the smaller children he recited. When they got him started, they demanded more and more and more. His verses were mixtures of nonsense that made you laugh, even though, in the twilight, you shuddered as he intoned them.

*I heard the Bejum singing,*
*Its voice was soft and low.*
*I heard the Bejum singing—*
*The song, I did not know.*

*But while I stood to listen*
*Out on the upland fair,*
*The Bejum came a-flying,*
*And seized me by the hair...*

When Mr. Pursford sat there, looking twice his size, with his right arm extended and an ominous finger shaking, you did not know whether to laugh or to hug your nearest companion in convulsive fright. Then there was the horror of going home in the autumn gloaming, and darting across the open spaces where the Bejum might pounce upon you.

Mr. Pursford's verses and stories were never repeated.

The children had learned that anything Anthony Pursford did or said offended the grown-ups.

One evening, Jackie Dyer, who had a way of taking liberties, remarked: "You live in a haunted house, Mr. Pursford."

"Of course I do," he assented.

"Don't you mind?"

"Why, it is the only sort of house that I should want to live in."

The boys were agog.

He went on: "That is what I like about Europe. All the houses are haunted over there, and the people who live with ghosts gather lots of ideas from them."

That meant nothing to them. Then Jackie asked the question that all wanted to put.

"Is there really a ghost here? Have you ever seen it?"

"It is the most innocent little ghost that ever was. All the ghosts are innocent and young and pathetic in this country."

"What is it like?"

They leaned forward in the gloom to hear his answer.

"It is only the ghost of a lonely dog," he told them.

"Why a lonely dog?"

"You have no idea how lonely a dog can be; everybody wants to chivy it because it is a stray."

One or two of them felt guilty; they feared that Mr. Pursford had been spying on them.

"This poor little dog wanted so much to be patted, and all his life people threw sticks at him," he said. "When he came near to them and wagged his tail so hopefully, they only gave him a kick... Listen!"

They listened.

"Do you hear a soft pat, pat, pat?"

They were certain they could hear it.

"The ghost of the lonely dog is wagging his stumpy tail. He is crouching at your feet, and looking up at you so pleadingly with his bright eyes. All you can ever see of him are his eyes, gleaming up at you, but the room must be dark."

Feet were drawn gingerly under chairs.

"No, don't be afraid. Put down your hand and pat the lonely dog's head. You won't feel it, but you will be making the little fellow happy. The ghost of a lonely dog has waited all these years for kindness."

After that, when it grew dark at the haunted house, they looked anxiously for the two gleaming eyes, creeping close about their feet. They made a boast of seeing them. Sometimes, in dark halls at home, they heard the pat, pat, pat of the lonely dog's tail, but though the timid ones cried out with fear and were promptly questioned, the secret of Mr. Pursford's ghost remained inviolate.

THE FIRST telegram had ceased to be a topic for surmises when a second one came from Philip Bryson. It was a stormy day in March, and the station-master warned Pursford that the train might not get through the snow in the

cutting twenty miles below Petersville, but he bought a ticket for Boston without a word.

"He was terrible white," said the station-master at home that night, "and he looked right at me when I was speaking as though he had never seen me before."

"There is something about that man that he doesn't want known," declared Mrs. Station-Master.

"That's easy enough to guess," snapped her husband. "He acts like a criminal in hiding."

During the week of Anthony Pursford's absence, it was repeated a hundred times that he behaved like a criminal in hiding.

Then he returned. He landed from the afternoon train, and, carrying his valise, started off to walk home through the slush, though a hungry bus was yawning for passengers. He was haggard, and spoke to no one on the station platform. They looked after him and waggled their heads.

At the cottage, he found Miss Pursford sick in bed. She had let the fires go out and the result was a chill and a bad cold. She would be quite well in a few days, now that the weather was so much warmer.

"There was plenty of fuel in the house," he remonstrated, "and you promised to be careful."

"I forgot." Miss Pursford took a pride in being forgetful. "Jackie Dyer came in next morning and started the stoves again."

In the night, Anthony Pursford heard his sister fighting for breath. He made a mustard plaster and placed it on her chest, hoping to give her relief. The morning was breaking, bright but bleak, when he rattled at the doctor's door, and asked the weary man, only recently in bed to return with him. When they entered Miss Pursford's bedroom, she was sitting up against the pillows, with feverish eyes, and talking of someone whom she described as an irresponsible girl.

How the doctor could have speeded up the wagging of tongues if he had reported even a part of what he heard that day!

"Love cannot save her, Tony," she kept crying. "It is in her family. Her grandmother killed herself after childbirth. She is more than flighty."

Before night Miss Priscilla Pursford was dead.

For three days the haunted house became the main thoroughfare of the town. People passed in and out as though it had ceased to be private property. Anthony Pursford sat in his own room, but the hum of subdued voices came to him constantly. The only outsider whom he wanted to see was Rural Dean Horkins.

In Petersville, everybody, except the very busy and those who affected superior social airs, turned up to inspect the dead. You went to a house of mourning and knocked solemnly at the door. It opened quickly, as friends and neighbors delighted to be in attendance, and you asked in a hollow voice: "May I see the corpse?"

For five minutes or so, you stood beside the coffin gazing at the peaceful face. There were certain routine comments for the occasion, about being at rest, or release, or the untimeliness of the demise, and you uttered them with the same intonation that the local elocutionist used when reciting "The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold." Then, perhaps you stood at the doorway and asked questions about the final illness, if the facts were not already public property.

At first, Anthony Pursford was inclined to order the door shut in the faces of all strangers, but he changed his mind when Horkins told him that they called it showing respect to the dead.

Nobody paid much attention to the husky voice of the Rural Dean delivering the familiar words of the burial service. Eyes were too busy trying to discover how Anthony Pursford had been affected by the death of his sister. Someone suggested that he looked haunted, and that word was accepted as accurately descriptive.

The women agreed. "Death must seem awful to Mr. Pursford with his outlandish views."

A few said: "I should like to know the truth about that man and his sister, if she was his sister."

DURING the break-up of the winter, Anthony Pursford was away in the United States, but he came back when the hepaticas were banked white in the maple copse behind the house. He took up life there alone, and under his coaxing the flowers bloomed more beautifully than ever. He engaged a woman to clean his rooms, and had most of his meals at the hotel; otherwise his routine was unaltered.

In the evenings the children gathered in the garden as before, but the cookies and raspberry vinegar were missing. Sometimes, Mr. Pursford took long walks with Jackie Dyer, and they talked together in the quiet of the evening for hours at a time.

When Jackie was late getting home, Mrs. Dyer questioned him closely about this strange friendship. "What can a man like Mr. Pursford find to talk about to you?"

Scenting hostility in the motive, Jackie avoided satisfactory replies.

In September, Anthony Pursford did the thing that even the Rural Dean regarded as ill-advised. He wrote a letter to the village paper in which he discussed the probable origins of local social customs, "such as gaping at other people's beloved dead." Nobody pretended to understand the meaning of all the references in the letter, and an array of typographical errors did not make it any more lucid, but everybody concluded that the adjectives "primitive" and "ghoulish" and "heartless" were intended especially for the procession that followed the password "May I see the corpse?"

For days after the publication of the letter, the heat of the resentment mounted steadily.

With one accord, the parents of Petersville undertook to find what hold Anthony Pursford had upon their children. Sons and daughters were questioned with a pressure that had never before been brought to bear. Parts of "*The Bejum*" were repeated and dismissed as silly. "And they call that man clever!" "The magazines nowadays publish terrible rot!"

On the ghost of the lonely dog they fastened tenaciously.

"What a horrid idea to put into the heads of innocent children."

"It is so morbid."

"I knew from the first that there was something unhealthy about that man's mind."

Mrs. Dyer insisted that her husband must help her take Jackie in hand. They badgered him about the hours that he had spent alone with Anthony Pursford and, when his replies became a nervous jumble, they asked him if he meant this or didn't he mean that. That night a new horror about life entered into the imagination of Jackie Dyer. What were his father and mother driving at? He was ashamed to think that they thought about the vague beastliness at which they appeared to be hinting. Jackie sat staring stupidly; he was seeing new and vile people where his father and mother had stood.

Suddenly, Mrs. Dyer burst out crying, and catching him in her arms exclaimed: "Oh, my dear, innocent little son."

Because the town desired proof that Anthony Pursford was an unspeakable person, they made up their minds that the investigation had justified itself. They had discovered only the ghost of the lonely dog, but that was sufficient.

"He is no fit companion for growing boys and girls," they said.

The finding ran through the town like an alarm bell. Women recalled the article in *The New World Review*, the wickedness of which no one seemed to have fully appreciated at the time. Why was he so secretive? Why did he slip off at times to the United States? Why did he come back again looking so broken? Why did he do a hundred and one things that nobody in Petersville

had ever been known to do? And such notions—the ghost of a lonely dog, forsooth!

THE CHILDREN were warned to keep away from the haunted house. Some of them obeyed; the talk in their homes frightened them. There were others to whom the order seemed unreasonable; they were at that period of adolescence when the boyish mind is very logical in matters of fair play. When Anthony Pursford met Jackie Dyer and invited him for a walk, he accepted.

Mrs. Dyer appealed to Reeve Smithfield to do something in the matter.

"If I'd a' not done what my father told me when I was a kid, I'd a' been whaled proper," said the reeve, but he did not interfere.

As the children would not stay away from the haunted house, then Anthony Pursford would have to be told that he must not entice them to his home. That was the decision of Mrs. Dyer. She found it difficult to gather a committee to deliver the edict. Three prominent citizens were rude to her about it, and even her own pastor failed her. He suggested that she was going too far.

"You had better call it off," suggested Mr. Dyer.

Mrs. Dyer was defiant.

"I can get together several men who have the moral well-being of the community at heart," she said.

And she did, although they were not the committee she would have preferred.

Five visitors, whose nervous faces were unknown to him, called on Anthony Pursford, and he treated them with a dignified friendliness that made them uncomfortable. They refused his invitation to sit down, and each one looked hesitatingly at the others, desiring not to be the speaker. In an apologetic voice, Pursford was informed that his interest in the children was undesirable. The parents of Petersville wanted him to understand that their sons and daughters must not, in future, be invited to visit him.

What answer they expected, none of the quintet could have said, but they resented being politely bowed to the door. Anthony Pursford showed no resentment whatever.

The men were relieved to gain the outer air, but Mrs. Dyer stood her ground.

"You have been defiling their minds long enough." She almost screamed the words. "My Jackie is a different boy since he began to come here. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"So you are the mother of Jackie Dyer," was all that he said. Mrs. Dyer spoke afterward of his tone as mean and defiant.

Then they were out on the walk, and the door was shut.

When Rural Dean Horkins heard the story, he was troubled, but refused to admit to Pursford that there was any serious cause for concern.

"To these people," he said, "the unforgivable sin is to be different. Really, they are kindly folk, in many ways, to one another, but only to such as talk and think and do as they do. If I had been sensitive, I should have left the county years ago."

Pursford smiled. He could associate the burly Englishman with commonsense, but not with sensibilities.

"Still, it came as a shock," he said. "I did not suspect the existence of so much antipathy."

"Better forget about it," suggested Horkins. "It was probably the action of a small group."

"But a man hardly likes to be regarded as a plague."

"I suppose Mrs. Dyer was with them?" the clergyman asked.

"The mother of Jackie? She was the only one who gave her name."

"God gave that woman too much vitality," the Rural Dean commented. "She demands action when others would be content to gossip."

"There is something of the fanatic about her. I could see that."

"An occasional person growing up like Mrs. Dyer makes one feel that there is something to be said for the woman who strangles her child in infancy."

The conversation had grown emotional, and Rural Dean Horkins had hoped to lighten it with a heavy jocularity. He was startled to have Anthony Pursford turn on him like a man suddenly ill, the pouches of his cheeks livid.

"What made you say that?" he cried. "A baby, killed by the hand of its own mother. No man can carry a more terrible memory through life."

Horkins got up and crossed the room to where the blue decanter stood on the sideboard.

"You have let your nerves get the better of you," he said. "I am going to give you a glass of your own brandy. Then we'll talk of something more exhilarating than the bigotry of well-meaning villagers."

THAT NIGHT, the Rural Dean sat silent for so long over his tea that his wife enquired: "Did anything go wrong to-day?"

"I do not think that Pursford should stay on alone at the cottage," he replied.

Mrs. Horkins was surprised.

"You have always said he was the sort of a man that made a happy recluse."

He played a tattoo on the table with the stubby ends of his heavy fingers.

"I do not know what to think," he admitted, and then added, as she thought irrelevantly, "Mrs. Dyer is a good woman, but may the Good Lord forgive one of his priests for what I think of her sort."

He made it his business to see Anthony Pursford every day after that, but found him as he had always been in the months before that one outburst. Perhaps, after all, his own imagination had exaggerated it.

Then one day, Anthony Pursford came to the rectory with his valise in his hand.

"I am leaving for Boston to-day," he said, quite as though it were a matter of course.

"You have made up your mind suddenly," exclaimed Horkins.

"I received a telegram two hours ago that tells me my wife is dead." To the look of surprise he responded, "She died insane. She has not known me for twenty years. It is all over now."

Pursford's bearing forbade a word of sympathy.

"I am going to ask you a great favor," he said. "Will you ship some things after me, and then sell the remainder."

"You are not coming back?"

"Not if you will look after my house. I'll write you a letter of instruction next week."

"I shall miss you, Pursford." He spoke with hearty sincerity. "I have not found many companionable men in this town."

"I have had many pleasant hours here."

"And you intend to live in Boston?"

"No, I think I shall spend the remainder of my life in France. I wanted to go there years ago, but my sister thought she could find more understanding among her own kind. She never ceased to believe it." He smiled sadly, rather than bitterly. "She loved our New England towns, and she found the same atmosphere in Petersville."

"And you prefer Europe?"

"In foreign surroundings it is easier to forget the past."

Horkins dreaded any appearance of prying, so he changed the subject abruptly.

"And your charming cottage will fall into decay again," he said.

"Yes, I suppose nobody will want to live there now. Haunted!"

"Haunted!" with blustery contempt.

Pursford laughed unexpectedly. "Yes, by the ghost of a lonely dog."

When Anthony Pursford was walking toward the railroad station, he passed Mrs. Dyer but did not recognize her. She turned round on the sidewalk and gazed after him with a look of resentment. She had the appearance of a

woman who had just been addressed by a remark that appalled all her moral conceptions of what was what.

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## 13: The Grey Bat

***Fred Merrick White***

1859-1935

*The Western Mail*, Perth, 14 Jul 1916

*Immensely prolific British author of short stories and novels.*

THE DOOR opening into Oldaker's sitting room opened and a figure crept in. Then the door closed, and a woman stood with her back to it, swaying slightly with her hand to her side as if she were short of breath. Visions of Charlotte Corday crossed Oldaker's mind. He looked for the quick gleam of a revolver, but none came. The woman moved a step forward with a quick movement, and threw off her long wrap. There was something dramatic about it.

"Princess," Oldaker exclaimed, "Princess Elizabeth of— What in the name— ?"

"Betty," the Princess corrected eagerly. "Know that I am in the deepest trouble, my dear— Dick."

Something warm and rapturous played about Oldaker's heart. He was young and romantic; he was an Oldaker of Barons court, and the princess was beautiful. She must have known that herself, for Dick had told her so several times lately. They had seen a good deal of each other at Monte Carlo, and Dick had begun to dream dreams. And when one of the most daring and successful of aviators begins to dream dreams, he is in a bad way.

He knew he had no business to be in the Asturian capital at all. To suggest that the aviation ground there was better than a score of others was ridiculous. Besides, there was trouble brewing in Marenna. The Progressives looked like getting the upper hand, and King George had gone to Merum at a most critical time. Even his own followers were muttering of cowardice under their breath. There were many more delectable spots in Europe than Marenna just now. Still, Princess Elizabeth was there.

She came close to him, and laid her hands on his shoulders. It was a sweet, dainty pleading face, and there was something in the expression of it that set Dick's heart beating madly. And the glint in that golden hair!

"Dick," she said softly. "You love me, don't you?"

Princess or no princess, there was only one thing to do after that. Dick had the slender, palpitating figure cuddled up in his arms, his lips were pressed to hers. There was something intoxicating in the fragrance of the spungold hair.

"I've done it!" Dick smiled presently. "Good Lord! my cheek! I shall have to go away, Betty. King George—"

"I knew I should have to ask you," Betty smiled demurely. "My dear boy, the situation is not quite so original as you suppose. Besides, there were

Oldakers in Baronscourt long before the Asoffs came to Asturia. And on your mother's side you are related to the wealthiest financiers in Europe. Even if only on that score—"

"Yes," said Dick, thoughtfully. "I've got a tidy chunk of bullion. And ever since we first met—"

"Yes, I know, dear; you loved me. And I loved you, Dicky. And I always get my own way— always."

"And so you came here this afternoon—"

"I came because my sister, the queen, is in great distress. They say that George has fled to Merum. He had to go there."

"Never heard that King George had been accused of want of pluck before, Betty."'

"My dear, the poor man is as brave as you are. They are an artful lot, those conspirators. They have stirred up a nest of trouble both here and at Merum. When George is at Merum Marenna thinks he has gone away into hiding, and when he is here, Merum thinks he has deserted her."

"But no man can be in two places at the same time, Betty."

"There, my dear Dick," she said demurely, "is where I fail to agree with you. If the king could be here at midnight the situation would be saved. He wants to come here secretly and quietly at a moment when the conspirators are absolutely certain that he is at Merum. Then news must come from Merum that George is on his way here. In the ordinary way it would be a matter of hours. And then within an hour or two of striking hard here he must be at Merum again. Consider the paralysing effect of the whole thing; look at the dramatic possibilities of the situation."

"But, my dear Betty, it is a physical impossibility. It can't be done!"

"Really, Dick? Can't you see the way? I have sent a message to the king. He will expect you. And you will get him here before midnight, and back to Merum before daybreak. And you, above all men, tell me it can't be done."

"It is fearfully risky," he said. "In the daytime I should think nothing of it. But as you point out, daylight for our purpose is useless. It's the striking moral effect you're after. You deal a staggering blow in two places at once. And to leave the foe marvelling how it is done is the way to final victory. But it's dangerous, Betty."

The Princess looked grave and troubled. There was a suggestion of tears in her eyes.

"I know it," she said. "Ever since the idea came to me I have struggled against my own feelings. I am pulled this way and that. If—if anything happened to you, Dick—"

"Don't think of that for the moment, dear," Dick said tenderly. "Go on."

"Well, I felt bound to ask. And you are ready to go. I hoped you'd say no and yet I'm awfully proud and glad to find you so willing. George's whole heart is in his work and my sister, the Queen, loves her people. It would break her heart if anything happened. George must be here tonight. I don't say he is being actually kept a prisoner at Merum, but there are obstacles placed in his way— trouble on the line, a sudden breakdown in the garage. You understand."

"You can communicate with the King?"

"My dear, I have already done so. By secret code. George knows exactly what I am proposing to you. He will be all ready. The great light in the castle at Merum will be your guide. Between the Tower and St. Simon's church, where there is an illuminated clock, are gardens, great gardens laid out in the Italian fashion ages ago. If you make no noise—"

"Oh, I shall make no noise. You should see my new engines. I suppose King George has a few people he can rely upon to keep silence."

"Oh, there are plenty of them, Dick. Then you'll do it?"

"Of course I'll do it, darling."

The Princess kissed him tenderly.

"You're a hero," she whispered. "My hero, and I'll marry you though all the armies in Europe try to stop me. There never was any man but you, Dick, from the day we met. And you are going to save Asturia. If you can do this thing there will be no more trouble here. And you will come back to the castle with him. He may need your services. And I would like to know that you are safe."

She slipped her wrap over her head again and vanished. The happiest man in Europe lighted a cigarette. He had promised to enter upon a mad enterprise. And he was not in the least afraid. When the gods throw a beautiful Princess into the arms of a mere mortal man it is clearly up to them to see the business through.

IT WAS pitch dark and the hour near ten when Dick Oldaker picked his way through the Italian garden on the west front of the castle at Merum and fumbled in the direction of a lighted window on the ground floor. The window was open and Oldaker slipped through without hesitation. He dropped the blind back in its place and looked around him. From an American desk a man in uniform arose and approached the intruder with outstretched hand.

"You are the bravest man I ever met, Mr. Oldaker," the King said. "I congratulate you and I congratulate—the Princess Elizabeth. Oh, yes, she has told me everything. I shall not interfere. An Oldaker of Baronscourt is a fit mate for an Azoff any day. You had a safe journey?"

"Absolutely, your majesty," Dick replied, "My monoplane got here in an hour. There was no mishap at all. Your men appear to be discreet and silent. They did exactly as I told them."

The King, paced thoughtfully up and down the room.

"It is wonderful," he said. "Wonderful! With ordinary good fortune I shall strike two blows before daybreak that will end the trouble once and for all. When can we start back?"

"I am ready to start at this moment, your Majesty," Dick replied. "I have brought with me everything that is necessary for you in the way of clothing. The sooner we start the better."

"Then I will join you in the garden in ten minutes," the King replied. "I am supposed to be leaving for my capital at once by coach. The trains are broken down, there is no motor to be had. I shall merely go in my coach as far as the gates and then slip out, leaving the vehicle to proceed. I have a few faithful followers in the secret. Directly I am on my way the traitors in Marenna will be advised that I shall reach my capital some time tomorrow. Long before daybreak I shall be back here to deliver the second blow. I shall have the rascals yet."

Dick murmured his approval of these suggestions. Ten minutes later the King joined him in the garden. As the clocks at Marenna were on the stroke of midnight an astonished lackey staggered backwards as he saw the King come softly along the corridor of the Palace. The miracle had happened.

"Not a word," the King commanded. "Not a word to a soul as you value your liberty. Where is Nikolof and the rest of them. Tell me?"

The menial stammered something about the council Chamber, and the King strode on. A door at the end of the corridor opened, and a white face looked out. The face smiled dazzlingly and the blue eyes filled with happy tears as they fell on Dick.

There was a wave of the hand and the door closed again. Dick staggered along with his head erect and his heart swelling.

"Where shall I wait for your Majesty?" he asked.

"You shall come with me," the King said. "You shall see what you shall see. At any rate you'll see that your part has not been in vain."

The stream of the adventure was running bankful. Oldaker plunged into it with wholehearted joy. There was the uplifting sense that he was helping to make history. A little knot of men for the most part in uniform were gathered round a table illuminated by one shaded bunch of electrics.

The rest of the big gloomy apartment was in darkness. The King strode forward and grasped the neck of the man who sat with his back to the door, and dragged him from his seat.

"Who sits in my chair?" he cried. "Who but the twice-pardoned Lipski? So this is how my faithful ministers labour in my absence? What is the document you are considering? Oh, coquetting with Teutonia, are we? Rise, all of you. Mr. Oldaker, would you be so good as to pull back those curtains and open the window?"

A clock ticked heavily in the painful silence, the metallic jingle of the curtain rings as they clicked back sounded like pistol shots. A ring of pale-faced men stood round the table, silent, disconcerted, incredulity in their downcast eyes. Oldaker turned to the great quadrangle below the open window. In the velvet violet night electric lights gleamed everywhere, the streets were full of people, the theatres and halls were emptying. Suddenly the council chamber blazed with light, the brilliant uniforms were picked out from the street like striking stage pictures. The King, with his hand still on Lipski's neck, impelled him towards the window.

"You traitor," he cried. "Traitors every one of you. And so you tell my people I am deserting them while all the time I am at Merum fighting the rest of your gang. You thought that I was there still, that I could not possibly get away. But there are ways, there are ways."

The King's voice was pitched high, every word he said was carried to the street below. The roadway was blocked now by a breathless, hustling crowd. King George pushed the flaccid Lipski into the window recess and held him there. A ripple of cheers broke from the crowd below, it swelled into a deafening roar, it stopped as suddenly as if it had been cut with a knife. The star was on the stage and the audience eager to hear him.

"Behold a traitor," the King cried. "Lipski, whose life I saved. Behold the other liars cringing in the background. And these are the men by whom you were asked to choose someone to take my place. I hope you are proud of them. But I am back, and I am back just in time."

As the King paused, a vast sigh went up from the street, a sigh, and no more.

"They called me pleasure-loving and easy-going. It is a lie. Was I easy and pleasure-seeking for ten whole years when I lived in a tent defending my frontier and never during that time slept in a bed? For the Queen's sake I slacked the bow and took the month of holiday that I was conceited enough to feel I had earned. I was wrong."

A storm of protest broke from the street. The King smiled, and in that moment Oldaker knew that the battle was won. George whispered a word in his ear. Oldaker came back from the table a moment later with the secret treaty in his hand. The King crashed it down on Lipski's head so that the paper

broke and hung round the traitor's neck like a ham frill. The crowd below rocked with mirth.

"Take him," the King cried, "and treat him as he deserves. We have done with him here."

He raised Lipski in his arms as if he had been a child and tossed him through the window. He fell into a thicket of laurels below. There was a wild rush in his direction as King George slammed the window down and pulled the curtain across.

"They will be making jest of this in the music halls to-morrow. Lipski's power has gone. Nothing kills a political reputation more than ridicule."

"And what shall I say to the rest of you?" he demanded. "Is there not one honest man among you? You thought I was no more than a blunt soldier unskilled in the ways of diplomacy. I was the Mars who had forsaken his arms at the call of Venus. I was warned against Lipski, but I trusted him. And when I came to my senses it was nearly too late. But for this brave and gallant gentleman here I should have been too late. It was he who solved the problem whereby I could be in two places at the same lime. Before daybreak I shall be back at Merum and Staffanoff will come with me to bear testimony to the truth of what I say—"

An old faded grey man in the background shuffled uneasily. A gentle bead of perspiration glistened on Staffanoff's great bald head. His dark eyes moved shiftily.

"Sire," he stammered. "If you will allow me to explain."

"No explanations," the King thundered. "These are your marionettes, but your's the cunning hand that pulls the strings. Come with me to Merum."

Staffanoff cringed and fawned. The King crossed the room and rang the bell. A moment later the room was filled with armed men. With a contemptuous gesture the King indicated his unhappy councillors.

"Take them all save Staffanoff," he commanded. "They are prisoners, and shall be treated as such. They are not to see anyone except the gaolers. Now go."

The room was empty presently save for the King and Oldaker and Staffanoff. The latter stood there with bent shoulders and a frame shaking like a leaf.

"I am an old man, sire," he groaned. "A very old man, your Majesty—"

"As if that is any excuse," the King cried. "You are coming with me to Merum, and in my presence you shall tell your fellow conspirators the story of this fiasco. You have room for another passenger, Mr. Oldaker?"

"More if necessary, sir," Oldaker said, "But one of the sort is enough."

"Good. Then follow me in the grounds, Staffanoff. Wrap yourself up well for the journey that is by no means a warm one. Here, my friend. You are no longer puzzled. Get in."

Staffanoff stood there in the darkness shaking with terror.

"But it is madness, your Majesty," he protested. "I am an old man—"

"And therefore you should not mind, Staffanoff. It is madness like this that has saved Asturia to-night. Come, get in, unless you would he gagged and bound first. Get in, I say."

It was nearly two hours later, and the scene had shifted to Merum again. There was the council chamber, another little knot of conspirators gathered round the table. The King took the hoary old traitor by the shoulders and sent him spinning into the room. A hoarse cry came from the table.

"Staffanoff," the leader muttered. "How did you get here? The King is on his way to Marenna. It is impossible for him to reach there before, well, before it is too late. Is there anything wrong?"

"Everything is wrong," Staffanoff stammered. "The King has been to Marenna—"

"Oh, the man is mad," another cried. "Three hours ago the King was here. He—"

"I tell you I am speaking the truth," Staffanoff shrieked. "Gentlemen, we have failed."

"Failed, then in that case the treaty with Teutonia—" The speaker broke off abruptly, his jaw dropped. For the King was in the room with eyes turned with contempt and yet full of cynical mirth upon him.

"Tell him where the treaty with Teutonia is, Staffanoff," he mocked.

"Hanging in tatters round Lipski's neck," Staffanoff whined. "And Lipski is in the hands of the mob in the street who mocked and jeered him. All Europe will be laughing at us to-morrow. They will make us into a vaudeville for the comedy stage. Lipski as the chief clown of the piece and the rest of us will be low comedians. The King was there. The King threw him out of the window to the mob below. And, heavens, how they laughed! And the rest of them are all under lock and key."

A quivering silence followed. There was that in Staffanoff's face, and the palsy of his voice that carried conviction to the most cynical spirit there. Not so long ago they had seen the King on his way to Marenna; at the earliest possible time he could not reach the capital before daylight. And yet he had been there and back again. What unknown force had he called to his aid. Oldaker could have told them, but there was no one there who associated the silent Englishman with this miracle.

The faint grey dawn was breaking in the east as Oldaker stood alone with the King. Something in the way of a belated supper was waiting for him in a private room. The King raised his glass.

"Here's to our friend. Oldaker, the saviour of Asturia," he said.

"I am afraid I cannot make that claim your Majesty," Oldaker said modestly.

"Oh, yes, you can. Without you and your Grey Bat I should have been powerless. Here's to the Grey Bat, the most wonderful aeroplane that was ever made by man— the Grey Bat that flew in the dark and never made the semblance of a mistake. The gallant little craft is safely housed again? And we can trust our faithful allies to keep the secret. Good again. A fine night's work, Oldaker, and an adventure after my own heart—and yours. And here's to dear little Elizabeth who suggested the whole scheme. And may you be as happy with her as you desire. Did I hear the telephone?"

A servant came in with a message for Oldaker. He was wanted by Marenna. The sun was shining brightly and the birds were singing as Oldaker crossed the hall.

"Is that you, Dick?" a sweet voice asked.

"Elizabeth," Oldaker responded. "Well, then Betty. My Betty! You are well and safe?"

"I am well and safe," the sweet voice said. "I want to tell you that I shall be waiting in the Palace Gardens this afternoon to see you, and— and, oh, my dear, my dear—"

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## 14: The Far Islands

***John Buchan***

1875-1940

*Blackwood's Magazine*, Nov 1899

In: *The Watcher by the Threshold*, and other tales, London, 1902

*"Lady Alice, Lady Louise,*
*Between the wash of the tumbling seas—"*

WHEN Bran the Blessed, as the story goes, followed the white bird on the Last Questing, knowing that return was not for him, he gave gifts to his followers. To Heliodorus he gave the gift of winning speech, and straightway the man went south to the Italian seas, and, becoming a scholar, left many descendants who sat in the high places of the Church. To Raymond he gave his steel battle-axe, and bade him go out to the warrior's path and, hew his way to a throne; which the man forthwith accomplished, and became an ancestor in the fourth degree of the first king of Scots. But to Colin, the youngest and the dearest, he gave no gift, whispering only a word in his ear and laying a finger on his eyelids. Yet Colin was satisfied, and he alone of the three, after their master's going, remained on that coast of rock and heather.

In the third generation from Colin, as our elders counted years, came one Colin the Red, who built his keep on the cliffs of Acharra and was a mighty sea-rover in his day. Five times he sailed to the rich parts of France, and a good score of times he carried his flag of three stars against the easterly vikings. A mere name in story, but a sounding piece of nomenclature well garnished with tales. A master-mind by all accounts, but cursed with a habit of fantasy; for, hearing in his old age of a land to the westward, he forthwith sailed into the sunset, and three days later was washed up, a twisted body, on one of the outer isles.

So far it is but legend, but with his grandson, Colin the Red, we fall into the safer hands of the chroniclers. To him God gave the unnumbered sorrows of story-telling, for he was a bard, cursed with a bard's fervours, and none the less a mighty warrior among his own folk. He it was who wrote the lament called "The White Waters of Usna," and the exquisite chain of romances, "Glede-red Gold and Grey Silver." His tales were told by many fires, down to our grandfathers' time, and you will find them still pounded at by the folklorists. But his airs— they are eternal. On harp and pipe they have lived through the centuries; twisted and tortured, they survive in many songbooks; and I declare that the other day I heard the most beautiful of them all murdered by a band at a German watering-place. This Colin led the wanderer's life, for he disappeared at middle-age, no one knew whither, and his return

was long looked for by his people. Some thought that he became a Christian monk, the holy man living in the sea-girt isle of Cuna, who was found dead in extreme old age, kneeling on the beach, with his arms, contrary to the fashion of the Church, stretched to the westward.

As history narrowed into bonds and forms the descendants of Colin took Raden for their surname, and settled more firmly on their lands in the long peninsula of crag and inlets which runs west to the Atlantic. Under Donald of the Isles they harried the Kings of Scots, or, on their own authority, made war on Macleans and Macranalds, till their flag of the three stars, their badge of the grey-goose feather, and their on-cry of "Cuna" were feared from Lochalsh to Cantire. Later they made a truce with the King, and entered into the royal councils. For years they warded the western coast, and as king's lieutenants smoked out the inferior pirates of Eigg and Toronsay. A Raden was made a Lord of Sleat, another was given lands in the low country and the name Baron of Strathyre, but their honours were transitory and short as their lives. Rarely one of the house saw middle age. A bold, handsome, and stirring race, it was their fate to be cut off in the rude warfare of the times, or, if peace had them in its clutches, to man vessel and set off once more on those mad western voyages which were the weird of the family. Three of the name were found drowned on the far shore of Cana; more than one sailed straight out of the ken of mortals, One rode with the Good Lord James on the pilgrimage of the Heart of Bruce, and died by his leader's side in the Saracen battle. Long afterwards a Raden led the western men against the Cheshire archers at Flodden, and was slain himself in the steel circle around the king.

But the years brought peace and a greater wealth, and soon the cold stone tower was left solitary on the headland, and the new house of Kinlochuna rose by the green links of the stream. The family changed its faith, and an Episcopal chaplain took the place of the old mass-priest in the tutoring of the sons. Radens were in the '15 and the '45. They rose with Bute to power, and they long disputed the pride of Dundas in the northern capital. They intermarried with great English houses till the sons of the family were Scots only in name, living much abroad or in London, many of them English landowners by virtue of a mother's blood. Soon the race was of the common over-civilised type, graceful, well-mannered, with abundant good looks, but only once in a generation reverting to the rugged northern strength. Eton and Oxford had in turn displaced the family chaplain, and the house by the windy headland grew emptier and emptier save when `grouse and deer brought home its fickle masters.

A CHILDISH illness brought Colin to Kinlochuna when he had reached the mature age of five, and delicate health kept him there for the greater part of the next six, years. During the winter he lived in London, but from the late northern spring through all the long bright summers he lived in the great tenantless place Without company— for he was an only child. A French nurse had the charge of his doings, and when he had passed through the formality of lessons there were the long pinewoods at his disposal, the rough moor, the wonderful black holes with the rich black mud in them, and best of all the bay of Acharra, below the headland, with Cuna lying in the waves a mile to the west. At such times his father was busy elsewhere; his mother was dead; the family had few near relatives; so he passed a solitary childhood in the company of seagulls and the birds of the moor.

His time for the Leach was the afternoon. On the left as you go down through the woods from the house there runs out the great headland of Acharra, red and grey with mosses, and with a nimbus always of screaming sea-fowl. To the right runs a low beach of sand, passing into rough limestone boulders and then into the heather of the wood. This in turn is bounded by a reef of low rocks falling by gentle breaks to the water's edge. It is crowned with a tangle of heath and fern, bright at most seasons with flowers, and dwarf pine-trees straggle on its crest till one sees the meaning of its Gaelic name, "The Ragged Cock's-Comb?" This place was Colin's playground in fine weather. When it blew rain or snow from the north he dwelt indoors among dogs and books, puzzling his way through great volumes from his father's shelves. But when the mild west-wind weather fell on the sea, then he would lie on the hot sand— Amèlie the nurse reading a novel on the nearest rock— and kick his small heels as he followed his fancy. He built great sand castles to the shape of Acharra old tower, and peopled them with preposterous knights and ladies; he drew great moats and rivers for the tide to fill; he fought battles innumerable with crackling seaweed, till Amèlie, with her sharp cry of "Colin, Colin," would carry, him houseward for tea.

Two fancies remained in his mind through those boyish years. One was about the mysterious shining sea before him. In certain weathers it seemed to him a solid pathway. Cuna; the little ragged isle, ceased to block the horizon, and his own white road ran away down into the west, till suddenly it stopped and he saw no farther. He knew he ought to see more, but always at one place, just when his thoughts were pacing the white road most gallantly, there came a baffling mist to his sight, and he found himself looking at a commonplace sea with Cuna lying very real and palpable in the offing. It was a vexatious limitation, for all his dreams were about this pathway. One day in June, when the waters slept in a deep heat, he came down the sands barefoot, and lo!

there was his pathway. For one moment things seemed clear, the mist had not gathered on the road, and with a cry he ran down to the tide's edge and waded in. The touch of water dispelled the illusion, and almost in tears he saw the cruel back of Cuna blotting out his own magic way.

The other fancy was about the low ridge of rocks which bounded the bay on the right. His walks had never extended beyond it, either on the sands or inland, for that way lay a steep hillside and a perilous bog. But often on the sands he had come to its foot and wondered what country lay beyond. He made many efforts to explore it, difficult efforts, for the vigilant Amèlie had first to be avoided. Once he was almost at the top when some seaweed to which he clung gave way, and he rolled back again to the soft warm sand. By-and-by he found that he knew what was beyond. A clear picture had built itself up in his brain of a mile of reefs, with sand in bars between them, and beyond all a sea-wood of alders slipping from the hill's skirts to the water's edge. This was not what he wanted in his explorations, so he stopped till one day it struck him that the westward view might reveal something beyond the hog-backed Cuna. One day, pioneering alone, he scaled the steepest heights of the seaweed and pulled his chin over the crest of the ridge. There, sure enough, was his picture— a mile of reefs and the tattered sea-wood. He turned eagerly seawards. Cuna still lay humped on the waters, but beyond it he seemed to see his shining pathway running far to a speck which might be an island. Crazy with pleasure he stared at the vision, till slowly it melted into the waves, and Cuna the inexorable once more blocked the sky-line. He climbed down, his heart in a doubt between despondency and hope.

It was the last day of such fancies, for on the morrow he had to face the new world of school.

AT CECIL'S Colin found a new life and a thousand new interests. His early delicacy had been driven away by the sea-winds of Acharra, and he was rapidly growing up a tall, strong child, straight of limb like all his house, but sinewy and alert beyond his years. He learned new, games with astonishing facility, became a fast bowler with a genius for twists, and a Rugby three-quarters full of pluck and cunning. He soon attained to the modified popularity of a private school, and, being essentially clean, strong, and healthy, found himself a mark for his juniors' worship and a favourite with masters. The homage did not spoil him, for no boy was ever less self-possessed. On the cricket-ground and the football-field he was a leader, but in private he had the nervous, sensitive manners of the would-be recluse. No one ever accused him of "side"— his polite, halting address was the same to junior and senior; and the result was that wild affection which simplicity in the great is wont to inspire. He spoke

with a pure accent, in which lurked no northern trace; in a little he had forgotten all about his birthplace and his origin. His name had at first acquired for him the sobriquet of "Scottie," but the title was soon dropped from its manifest inaptness.

In his second year at Cecil's he caught a prevalent fever, and for days lay very near the brink of death. At his worst he was wildly delirious, crying ceaselessly for Acharra and the beach at Kinlochuna. But as he grew convalescent the absorption remained, and for the moment be seemed to have forgotten his southern life. He found himself playing on the sands, always with the boundary ridge before him, and the hump of Cuna rising in the sea. When dragged back to his environment by, the inquiries of Bellew, his special friend, who came to sit with him, he was so abstracted and forgetful that the good Bellew was seriously grieved. "The chap's a bit cracked, you know," he announced in hall. "Didn't known. Asked me what looter' meant when I told him about the Bayswick match, and talked about nothing but a lot of heathen Scotch names."

One dream haunted Colin throughout the days of his recovery. He was tormented with a furious thirst, poorly assuaged at long intervals by watered milk. So when he crossed the borders of dreamland his first search was always for a well. He tried the brushwood inland from the beach, but it was dry as stone. Then he climbed with difficulty the boundary ridge, and found little pools of salt water, while far on the other side gleamed the dark black bog-holes. Here was not what he sought, and he was in deep despair, till suddenly over the sea he caught a glimpse of his old path running beyond Cuna to a bank of mist. He rushed down to the tide's edge, and to his amazement found solid ground. Now was the chance for which he had long looked, and he ran happily westwards, till of a sudden the solid earth seemed to sink with him, and he was in the waters struggling. But two curious things he noted. One was that the far bank of mist seemed to open for a pinpoint of time, and he had a gleam of land. He saw nothing distinctly, only a line which was not mist and was not water. The second was that the water was fresh, and as he was drinking from this curious new fresh sea he awoke. The dream was repeated three times before he left the sick-room. Always he wakened at the same place, always he quenched his thirst in the fresh sea, but never again did the mist open for him, and show him the strange country.

From Cecil's he went to the famous school which was the tradition in his family The Head spoke to his house-master of his coming. "We are to have another Raden here," he said, "and I am glad of it, if the young one turns out to be anything like the others. There's a good deal of dry-rot among the boys just now. They are all too old for their years and too wise in the wrong way. They

haven't anything like the enthusiasm in sports they had twenty years ago when I first came here. I hope this young Raden will stir them up." The house-master agreed, and when he first caught sight of Colin's slim, well-knit figure, looked into the handsome kindly eyes, and heard his curiously diffident speech, his doubts' vanished. "We have got the right stuff now," he told himself, and the senior for whom the new boy fagged made the same comment.

From the anomalous insignificance of fagdom Colin climbed up the School, leaving everywhere a record of honest good-nature. He was allowed to forget his cricket and football, but in return he was initiated into the mysteries of the river. Water had always been his delight, so he went through the dreary preliminaries of being coached in a tub-pair till he learned to swing steadily and get his arms quickly forward. Then came the stages of scratch fours and scratch eights, till after a long apprenticeship he was promoted to the dignity of a thwart in the Eight itself. In his last year he was Captain of Boats, a position which joins the responsibility of a Cabinet Minister to the rapturous popular applause of a successful warrior. Nor was he the least distinguished of a great band. With Colin at seven the School won the Ladies' after the closest race on record.

The Head's prophecy fell true, for Colin was a born leader. For all his good-humour and diffidence of speech, he had a trick of shutting his teeth which all respected. As captain he was the idol of the school, and he ruled it well and justly. For the rest, he was a curious boy with none of the ordinary young enthusiasms, reserved for all his kindliness. At house "shouters" his was not the voice which led the stirring strains of "Stroke it all you know," though his position demanded it. He cared little about work, and the School-house scholar, who fancied him from his manner a devotee of things intellectual, found in Colin but an affected interest. He read a certain amount of modern poetry with considerable boredom; fiction he never opened. The truth was that he had a romance in his own brain which, Willy nilly, would play itself out, and which left him small relish for the pale second-hand inanities of art. Often, when with others he would lie in the deep meadows by the river on some hot summer's day, his fancies would take a curious colour. He adored the soft English landscape, the lush grasses, the slow streams, the ancient secular trees. But as he looked into the hazy green distance a colder air would blow on his cheek, a pungent smell of salt and pines would be for a moment in his nostrils, and he would be gazing at a line of waves on a beach, a ridge of low rocks, and a shining sea-path running out to— ah, that he could not tell! The envious Cuna would suddenly block all the vistas. He had constantly the vision before his eyes, and he strove to strain into the distance before Cuna should intervene. Once or twice he seemed almost to achieve it. He found that by

keeping on the top of the low rock-ridge he could cheat Cuna by a second or two, and get a glimpse of a misty something out in the west. The vision took odd times for recurring, once or twice in lecture, once on the cricket-ground, many times in the fields of a Sunday, and once while he paddled down to the start in a Trials race. It gave him a keen pleasure: it was his private domain, where at any moment he might make some enchanting discovery.

At this time he began to spend his vacations at Kinlochuna. His father, an elderly ex-diplomat, had permanently taken up his abode there, and was rapidly settling into the easy life of the Scotch laird. Colin returned to his native place without enthusiasm. His childhood there had been full of lonely hours, and he had come to like the warm south country. He found the house full of people, for his father entertained hugely, and the talk was of sport and sport alone. As a rule, your very great athlete is bored by Scotch shooting. Long hours of tramping and crouching among heather cramp without fully exercising the body; and unless he has the love of the thing ingrained in him, the odds are that he will wish himself home. The father, in his new-found admiration for his lot, was content to face all weathers; the son found it an effort to keep pace with such vigour. He thought upon the sunlit fields and reedy watercourses with regret, and saw little in the hills but a rough waste scarred with rock and sour with mosses.

He read widely throughout these days, for his father had a taste for modern letters, and new books lay littered about the rooms. He read queer Celtic tales which he thought "sickening rot," and mild Celtic poetry which he failed to understand. Among the guests was a noted manufacturer of fiction, whom the elder Raden had met somewhere and bidden to Kinlochuna, He had heard the tale of Colin's ancestors and the sea headland of Acharra, and one day he asked the boy to show him the place, as he wished to make a story of it. Colin assented unwillingly, for he had been slow to visit this place of memories, and he did not care to make his first experiment in such company. But the gentleman would not be gainsaid, so the two scrambled through the sea-wood and climbed the low ridge which looked over the bay. The weather was mist and drizzle; Cuna had wholly hidden herself, and the bluff Acharra loomed hazy and far. Colin was oddly disappointed: this reality was a poor place compared with his fancies. His companion stroked his peaked beard, talked nonsense about Colin the Red and rhetoric about "the spirit of the misty grey, weather having entered into the old tale."

"Think," he cried; "to those old warriors beyond that bank of mist was the whole desire of life, the Golden City, the Far Islands, whatever you care to call it." Colin shivered, as if his holy places had been profaned, set down the man in

his mind most unjustly as an "awful little cad," and hurried him back to the house.

Oxford received the boy with open arms, for his reputation had long preceded him. To the majority of men he was the one freshman of his year, and gossip was busy with his prospects. Nor was gossip disappointed. In his first year he rowed seven in the Eight. The next year he was captain of his college boats, and a year later the O.U.B.C. made him its president. For three years he rowed in the winning Eight, and old coaches agreed that in him the perfect seven had been found. It was he who in the famous race of 18— caught up in the last three hundred yards the quickened stroke which gave Oxford victory. As he grew to his full strength he became a splendid figure of a man— tall, supple, deep-chested for all his elegance. His quick dark eyes and his kindly hesitating manners made people think his face extraordinarily handsome, when really it was in no way above the common. But his whole figure, as he stood in his shorts and sweater on the raft at Putney, was so full of youth and strength that people involuntarily smiled when they saw him— a smile of pleasure in so proper a piece of manhood.

Colin enjoyed life hugely at Oxford, for to one so frank and well equipped the place gave of its best. He was the most distinguished personage of his day there, but, save to school friends and the men he met officially on the river, he was little known. His diffidence and his very real exclusiveness kept him from being the centre of a host of friends. His own countrymen in the place were utterly non-plussed by him. They claimed him, eagerly as a fellow, but he had none of the ordinary characteristics of the race. There were Scots of every description around him— pale-faced Scots who worked incessantly, metaphysical Scots who talked in the Union, industrious Scots who played football. They were all men of hearty manners and many enthusiasms,— who quoted Burns and dined to the immortal bard's honour every 25th of January; who told interminable Scotch stories, and fell into fervours over national sports, dishes, drinks, and religions. To the poor Colin it was all inexplicable. At the remote house of Kinlochuna he had never heard of a Free Kirk, or a haggis. He had never read a line of Burns, Scott bored him exceedingly, and in all honesty he thought Scots games inferior to southern sports. He had no great love for the bleak country, he cared nothing for the traditions of his house, so he was promptly set down by his compatriots as "denationalised and degenerate?"

He was idle, too, during these years as far as his "schools" were concerned, but he was always very intent upon his own private business. Whenever he sat down to read, when he sprawled on the grass at river picnics, in chapel, in lecture— in short, at any moment when his body was at rest and his mind at

leisure— his fancies were off on the same old path. Things had changed, however, in that country. The boyish device of a hard road running over the waters had gone, and now it was invariably a boat which he saw beached on the shingle. It differed in shape. At first it was an ugly salmoncoble, such as the fishermen used for the nets at Kinlochuna. Then it passed, by rapid transitions, through a canvas skiff which it took good watermanship to sit, a whiff, an ordinary dinghey, till at last it settled itself into a long rough boat, pointed at both ends, with oar-holes in the sides instead of row-locks. It was the devil's own business to launch it, and launch it anew he was compelled to for every journey; for though he left it bound in a little rock hollow below the ridge after landing, yet when he returned, lo! there was the clumsy thing high and dry upon the beach.

The odd point about the new venture was that Cuna had ceased to trouble him. As soon as he had pulled his first stroke the island disappeared, and nothing lay before him but the sea-fog. Yet, try as he might, he could come little nearer. The shores behind him might sink and lessen, but the impenetrable mist was still miles to the westward. Sometimes he rowed so far that the shore was a thin line upon the horizon, but when he turned the boat it seemed to ground in a second on the beach. The long laboured journey out and the instantaneous return puzzled him at first, but soon he became used to them. His one grief was the mist, which seemed to grow denser as he neared it. The sudden glimpse of land which he had got from the ridge of rock in the old boyish days was now denied him, and with the denial came a keener exultation in the quest. Somewhere in the west, he knew, must be land, and in this land a well of sweet water— for so he had interpreted his feverish dream. Sometimes, when the wind blew against him, he caught scents from it— generally the scent of pines, as on the little ridge on the shore behind him.

One day on his college barge, while he was waiting for a picnic patty to start, he seemed to get nearer than before. Out on that western sea, as he saw it, it was fresh, blowing weather, with a clear hot sky above. It was hard work rowing, for the wind was against him, and the sun scorched his forehead. The air seemed full of scents— and sounds, too, sounds of far-away surf and wind in trees. He rested for a moment on his oars and turned his head. His heart beat quickly, for there was a rift in the mist, and far through a line of sand ringed with snow-white foam.

Somebody shook him roughly,— "Come on, Colin, old man. They're all waiting for you. Do you know you've been half asleep?"

Colin rose and followed silently, with drowsy eyes. His mind was curiously excited. He had looked inside the veil of mist. Now he knew what was the land he sought.

He made the voyage often, now that the spell was broken. It was short work to launch the boat, and, whereas it had been a long pull formerly, now it needed only a few strokes to bring him to the Rim of the Mist. There was no chance of getting farther, and he scarcely tried. He was content to rest there, in a world of curious scents and sounds, till the mist drew down and he was driven back to shore.

The change in his environment troubled him little. For a man who has been an idol at the University to fall suddenly into the comparative insignificance of town is often a bitter experience; but Colin, whose thoughts were not ambitious, scarcely noticed it He found that he was less his own master than before, but he humbled himself to his new duties without complaint Many of his old friends were about him; he had plenty of acquaintances; and, being "sufficient unto himself," he was unaccustomed to ennui. Invitations showered upon him thick and fast. Match-making mothers, knowing his birth and his father's income, and reflecting that he was the only child of his house, desired him as a son-in-law. He was bidden welcome everywhere, and the young girls, for whose sake he was thus courted, found in him an attractive mystery. The tall good-looking athlete, with the kind eyes and the preposterously nervous manner, wakened their maidenly sympathies. As they danced with him or sat next to him at dinner, they talked fervently of Oxford, of the north, of the army, of his friends. "Stupid, but nice, my dear," was Lady Afflint's comment; and Miss Clarissa Herapath, the beauty of the year, declared to her friends that he was a "dear boy, but so awkward." He was always forgetful, and ever apologetic; and when he forgot the Shandwicks' theatre-party, the Herapaths' dance, and at least a dozen minor matters, he began to acquire the reputation of a cynic and a recluse.

"You're a queer chap, Col," Lieutenant Bellew said in expostulation.

Colin shrugged his shoulders; he was used to the description.

"Do you know that Clara Herapath was trying all she knew to please you this afternoon, and you looked as if you weren't listening? Most men would have given their ears to be in your place."

"I'm awfully sorry, but I thought I was very polite to her."

"And why weren't you at the Marshams' garden-party?"

"Oh, I went to polo with Collinson and another man. And, I say, old chap, I'm not coming to the Logans tomorrow. I've got a fence on with Adair at the school."

Little Bellew, who was a tremendous mirror of fashion and chevalier in general, looked up curiously at his tall friend.

"Why don't you like the women, Col, when they're so fond of you?"

"They aren't," said Colin, hotly, "and I don't dislike 'em. But, Lord! they bore me. I might be doing twenty things when I talk nonsense to one of 'em for an hour. I come back as stupid as an owl, and besides there's heaps of things better sport."

The truth was that, while among men he was a leader and at his ease, among women his psychic balance was so oddly upset that he grew nervous and returned unhappy. The boat on the beach, ready in general to appear at the slightest call, would delay long after such experiences, and its place would be taken by some woman's face for which he cared not a straw. For the boat, on the other hand, he cared a very great deal. In all his frank wholesome existence there was this enchanting background, this pleasure-garden which he cherished more than anything in life. He had come of late to look at it with somewhat different eyes. The eager desire to search behind the mist was ever with him, but now he had also some curiosity about the details of the picture. As he pulled out to the Rim of the Mist sounds seemed to shape themselves on his lips, which by-and-by grew into actual words in his memory. He wrote them down in scraps, and after some sorting they seemed to him a kind of Latin. He remembered a college friend of his, one Medway, now reading for the Bar, who had been the foremost scholar of his acquaintance; so with the scrap of paper in his pocket he climbed one evening to Medway's rooms in the temple.

The man read the words curiously, and puzzled for a bit. "What's made you take to Latin comps so late in life, Colin? It's baddish, you know, even for you. I thought they'd have licked more into you at Eton."

Colin grinned with amusement "I'll tell you about it later," he said. "Can you make out what it means?"

"It seems to be a kind of dog-Latin or monkish Latin or something of the sort," said Medway. "It reads like this:

"'*Soles occidere solent*' (that's cribbed from Catullus, and besides it's the regular monkish pun)...*qua*...then *blandula* something. Then there's a lot of Choctaw, and then *illae insulae dilectae in quas festinant somnia animulae gaudia*. That's pretty fair rot. Hullo, by George! here's something better—*Insula pomorum insula vitae*. That's Geoffrey of Monmouth."

He made a dive to a bookcase and pulled out a battered little calf-bound duodecimo. "Here's all about your Isle of Apple-trees. Listen. 'Situate far out in the Western ocean, beyond the Utmost Islands, beyond even the little Isle of Sheep where the cairns of dead men are, lies the Island of Apple-trees where the heroes and princes of the nations live their second life.'" He closed the book and put it back. "It's the old ancient story, the Greek Hesperides, the British Avilion, and this Apple-tree Island is the northern equivalent?"

Colin sat entranced, his memory busy with a problem. Could he distinguish the scents of apple-trees among the perfumes of the Rim of the Mist. For the moment he thought he could. He was roused by Medway's voice asking the story of the writing.

"Oh, it's just some nonsense that was running in my head, so I wrote it down to see what it was."

"But you must have been reading. A new exercise for you, Colin?"

"No, I wasn't reading. Look here. You know the sort of pictures you make for yourself of places you like."

"Rather! Mine is a Devon moor with a little red shooting-box in the heart of it."

"Well, mine is different. Mine is a sort of beach with a sea and a lot of islands somewhere far out. It is a jolly place, fresh, you know, and blowing, and smells good. 'Pon my word, now I think of it, there's always been a scent of apples?"

"Sort of cider-press? Well, I must be off. You'd better come round to the club and see the telegrams about the war. You should be keen about it."

One evening, a week later, Medway met a friend called Tillotson at the club, and, being lonely, they dined together. Tillotson was a man of some note in science, a dabbler in psychology, an amateur historian, a ripe genealogist. They talked of politics and the war, of a new book, of Mrs. Runnymede, and finally of their hobbies.

"I am Writing an article," said Tillotson. "Craikes asked me to do it for the 'Monthly? It's on a nice point in psychics. I call it 'The Transmission of Fallacies,' but I do not mean the logical kind. The question is, Can a particular form of hallucination run in a family for generations. The proof must, of course, come from my genealogical studies. I maintain it can. I instance the Douglas-Ernotts, not one of whom can see straight with the left eye. That is one side. In another class of examples I take the Drapiers, who hate salt water and never go on board ship if they can help it. Then you re member the Durwards? Old Lady Balcrynie used to tell me that no one of the lot could ever stand the sight of a green frock. There's a chance for the romancer. The Manorwaters have the same madness, only their colour is red."

A vague remembrance haunted Medway's brain.

"I know a man who might give you points from his own case. Did you ever meet a chap Raden— Colin Raden?" Tillotson nodded. "Long chap— in the Guards? 'Varsity oar, and used to be a crack bowler? No, I don't know him. I know him well by sight, and I should like to meet him tremendously— as a genealogist, of course."

"Why?" asked Medway.

"Why? Because the man's family is unique. You never hear much about them nowadays, but away up in that northwest corner of Scotland they have ruled since the days of Noah. Why, man, they were aristocrats when our Howards and Nevilles were green-grocers. I wish you would get this Raden to meet me some night."

"I am afraid there's no chance of it just-at present," said Medway, taking up an evening paper. "I see that his regiment has been ordered to the front. But remind me when he comes back, and I'll be delighted."

AND NOW there began for Colin a curious divided life— without, a constant shifting of scene, days of heat and bustle and toil— within, a slow, tantalising, yet exquisite adventure. The Rim of the Mist was now no more the goal of his journeys, but the starting-point. Lying there, amid cool, fragrant sea-winds, his fanciful ear was subtly alert for the sounds of the dim land before him. Sleeping and waking the quest haunted him. As he flung himself on his bed the kerosene-filled air would change to an ocean freshness, the old boat would rock beneath him, and with clear eye and a boyish hope he would be waiting and watching. And then suddenly he would be back on shore, Cuna and the Acharra headland shining grey in the morning light, and with gritty mouth and sand-filled eyes he would awaken to the heat of the desert camp.

He was kept busy, for his good-humour and energy made him a willing slave, and he was ready enough for volunteer work when others were weak with heat and despair. A thirty-mile ride left him unfired; more, he followed the campaign with a sharp intelligence and found a new enthusiasm for his profession. Discomforts there might be, but the days were happy; and then— the cool land, the bright land, which was his for the thinking of it.

Soon they gave him reconnoitring work to do, and his wits were put to the trial. He came well out of the thing; and earned golden praise from the silent colonel in command. He enjoyed it as he had enjoyed a hard race on the river or a good cricket match, and when his worried companions marvelled at his zeal he stammered and grew uncomfortable. "How the deuce do you keep it up, Colin?" the major asked him. "I'm an old hand et the job, and yet I've got a temper like devilled bones. You seem as chirpy as if you were going out to fish a chalk-stream on a June morning?'

"Well, the fact is—" and Colin pulled himself up short, knowing that he could never explain. He felt miserably that he had an unfair advantage of the others. Poor Bellew, who groaned and swore in the heat at his side, knew nothing of the Rim of the Mist. It was really rough luck on the poor beggars, and who but himself was the fortunate man?

As the days passed a curious thing happened. He found fragments of the Other world straying into his common life. The barriers of the two domains were falling, and more than once he caught himself looking at a steel-blue sea when his eyes should have found a mustard-coloured desert. One day, on a reconnoitring expedition, they stopped for a little on a hillock above a jungle of scrub, and, being hot and tired, scanned listlessly the endless yellow distances.

"I suppose yon hill is about ten miles off," said Bellew with dry lips.

Colin looked vaguely. "I should say five?'

"And what's that below it— the black patch? Stones or scrub?"

Colin was in a day-dream. "Why do you call it black? It's blue, quite blue?'

"Rot," said the other. "It's grey-black?'

"No, it's water with the sun shining on it. It's blue, but just at the edges it's very near sea-green?"

Bellew rose excitedly. "Hullo, Col, you're seeing the mirage! And you the fittest of the lot of us! You've got the sun in your head, old man!"

"Mirage!" Colin cried in contempt. He was awake now, but the thought of confusing his own bright western sea with a mirage gave him a curious pain. For a moment he felt the gulf of separation between his two worlds, but only for a moment. As the party remounted he gave his fancies the rein, and ere he reached camp he had felt the oars in his hand and sniffed the apple-tree blossom from the distant beaches.

The major came to him after supper.

"Bellew told me you saw the mirage to-day, Colin," he said. "I expect your eyes are getting a bit bad. Better get your sand-spectacles out?"

Colin laughed. "Thanks. It's awfully good of you to bother, but I think Bellew took me up wrong. I never was fitter in my life."

By-and-by the turn came for pride to be humbled. A low desert fever took him, and though he went through the day as usual, it was with dreary lassitude; and at night, with hot hands clasped above his damp hair, he found sleep a hard goddess to conquer.

It was the normal condition of the others, so he had small cause to complain, but it worked havoc with his fancies. He had never been ill since his childish days, and this little fever meant much to one whose nature was poised on a needlepoint. He found himself confronted with a hard bare world, with the gilt rubbed from its corners. The Rim of the Mist seemed a place of vague horrors; when he reached it his soul was consumed with terror; he struggled impotently to advance; behind him Cuna and the Acharra coast seemed a place of evil dreams. Again, as in his old fever, he was tormented with a devouring thirst, but the sea beside him was not fresh, but brackish as a rock-pool. He

yearned for the apple-tree beaches in front; there, he knew, were cold springs of water, the fresh smell of it was blown towards him in his nightmare.

But as the days passed and the misery for all grew more intense, an odd hope began to rise in his mind. It could not last, coolness and health were waiting near, and his reason for the hope came from the odd events at the Rim of the Mist. The haze was clearing from the foreground, the surf-lined coast seemed nearer, and though all was obscure save the milk-white sand and the foam, yet here was earnest enough for him. Once more he became cheerful; weak and light-headed he rode out again; and the major, who was recovering from sunstroke, found envy take the place of pity in his soul.

The hope was near fulfilment. One evening when the heat was changing into the cooler twilight, Colin and Bellew were sent with a small picked body to scour the foothills above the river in case of a flank attack during the night-march. It was work they had done regularly for weeks, and it is possible that precautions were relaxed. At any rate, as they turned a corner of a hill, in a sandy pass where barren rocks looked down on more barren thorn thickets, a couple of rifle shots tang out from the scarp, and above them appeared a line of dark faces and white steel. A mere handful, taken at a disadvantage, they could not hope to disperse numbers, so Colin gave the word to wheel about and return. Again shots rang out, and little Bellew had only time to catch at his friend's arm to save him from falling from the saddle.

The word of command had scarcely left Colin's mouth when a sharp pain went through his chest, and his breath seemed to catch and stop. He felt as in a condensed moment of time the heat, the desert smell, the dust in his eyes and throat, while he leaned helplessly forward on his horse's mane, Then the world vanished for him....

THE BOAT was rocking under him, the oars in his hand. He pulled and it moved, straight, arrow-like towards the forbidden shore. As if under a great wind the mist furled up and fled. Scents of pines, of apple-trees, of great fields of thyme and heather, hung about him; the sound of wind in a forest, of cool waters falling in showers, of old moorland music, came thin and faint with an exquisite clearness. A second and the boat was among the surf, its gunwale ringed with white foam, as it leaped to the still waters beyond. Clear and deep and still the water lay, and then the white beaches shelved downward, and the boat grated on the sand. He turned, every limb alert with a strange new life, crying out words which had shaped themselves on his lips and which an echo seemed to catch and answer. There was the green forest before him, the hills of peace, the cold white waters. With a passionate joy he leaped on the beach,

his arms outstretched to this new earth, this light of the world, this old desire of the heart— youth, rapture, immortality.

BELLEW brought the body back to camp, himself half-dead with fatigue and whimpering like a child. He almost fell from his horse, and when others took his burden from him and laid it reverently in his tent, he stood beside it, rubbing sand and sweat from his poor purblind eyes, his teeth chattering with fever. He was given something to drink, but he swallowed barely a mouthful.

"It was some d-d-damned sharpshooter," he said. "Right through the breast, and he never spoke to me again. My poor old Colin— He was the best chap God ever created, and I do-don't care a dash what becomes of me now. I was at school with him, you know, you men."

"Was he killed outright?" asked the Major hoarsely.

"N-no. He lived for about five minutes. But I think the sun had got into his head or he was mad with pain, for he d-d-didn't know where he was. He kept crying out about the smell of pine-trees and heather and a lot of pure nonsense about water."

"*Et dulces reminiscitur Argos*," somebody quoted mournfully, as they went out to the desert evening.

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## 15: The McWilliamses and the Burglar Alarm

***Mark Twain***

Samuel Langhorne Clemens, 1835-1910

*Harper's Christmas Pictures and Papers*, 1882

THE CONVERSATION drifted smoothly and pleasantly along from weather to crops, from crops to literature, from literature to scandal, from scandal to religion; then took a random jump, and landed on the subject of burglar alarms. And now for the first time Mr. McWilliams showed feeling. Whenever I perceive this sign on this man's dial, I comprehend it, and lapse into silence, and give him opportunity to unload his heart. Said he, with but ill-controlled emotion:

"I do not go one single cent on burglar alarms, Mr. Twain— not a single cent— and I will tell you why. When we were finishing our house, we found we had a little cash left over, on account of the plumber not knowing it. I was for enlightening the heathen with it, for I was always unaccountably down on the heathen somehow; but Mrs. McWilliams said no, let's have a burglar alarm. I agreed to this compromise. I will explain that whenever I want a thing, and Mrs. McWilliams wants another thing, and we decide upon the thing that Mrs. McWilliams wants— as we always do— she calls that a compromise. Very well: the man came up from New York and put in the alarm, and charged three hundred and twenty-five dollars for it, and said we could sleep without uneasiness now. So we did for awhile— say a month. Then one night we smelled smoke, and I was advised to get up and see what the matter was. I lit a candle, and started toward the stairs, and met a burglar coming out of a room with a basket of tinware, which he had mistaken for solid silver in the dark. He was smoking a pipe. I said, 'My friend, we do not allow smoking in this room.' He said he was a stranger, and could not be expected to know the rules of the house: said he had been in many houses just as good as this one, and it had never been objected to before. He added that as far as his experience went, such rules had never been considered to apply to burglars, anyway.

"I said: 'Smoke along, then, if it is the custom, though I think that the conceding of a privilege to a burglar which is denied to a bishop is a conspicuous sign of the looseness of the times. But waiving all that, what business have you to be entering this house in this furtive and clandestine way, without ringing the burglar alarm?'

"He looked confused and ashamed, and said, with embarrassment: 'I beg a thousand pardons. I did not know you had a burglar alarm, else I would have rung it. I beg you will not mention it where my parents may hear of it, for they are old and feeble, and such a seemingly wanton breach of the hallowed conventionalities of our Christian civilization might all too rudely sunder the

frail bridge which hangs darkling between the pale and evanescent present and the solemn great deeps of the eternities. May I trouble you for a match?'

"I said: 'Your sentiments do you honor, but if you will allow me to say it, metaphor is not your best hold. Spare your thigh; this kind light only on the box, and seldom there, in fact, if my experience may be trusted. But to return to business: how did you get in here?'

"'Through a second-story window.'

"It was even so. I redeemed the tinware at pawnbroker's rates, less cost of advertising, bade the burglar good-night, closed the window after him, and retired to headquarters to report. Next morning we sent for the burglar-alarm man, and he came up and explained that the reason the alarm did not 'go off' was that no part of the house but the first floor was attached to the alarm. This was simply idiotic; one might as well have no armor on at all in battle as to have it only on his legs. The expert now put the whole second story on the alarm, charged three hundred dollars for it, and went his way. By and by, one night, I found a burglar in the third story, about to start down a ladder with a lot of miscellaneous property. My first impulse was to crack his head with a billiard cue; but my second was to refrain from this attention, because he was between me and the cue rack. The second impulse was plainly the soundest, so I refrained, and proceeded to compromise. I redeemed the property at former rates, after deducting ten per cent. for use of ladder, it being my ladder, and, next day we sent down for the expert once more, and had the third story attached to the alarm, for three hundred dollars.

"By this time the 'annunciator' had grown to formidable dimensions. It had forty-seven tags on it, marked with the names of the various rooms and chimneys, and it occupied the space of an ordinary wardrobe. The gong was the size of a wash-bowl, and was placed above the head of our bed. There was a wire from the house to the coachman's quarters in the stable, and a noble gong alongside his pillow.

"We should have been comfortable now but for one defect. Every morning at five the cook opened the kitchen door, in the way of business, and rip went that gong! The first time this happened I thought the last day was come sure. I didn't think it in bed— no, but out of it— for the first effect of that frightful gong is to hurl you across the house, and slam you against the wall, and then curl you up, and squirm you like a spider on a stove lid, till somebody shuts the kitchen door. In solid fact, there is no clamor that is even remotely comparable to the dire clamor which that gong makes. Well, this catastrophe happened every morning regularly at five o'clock, and lost us three hours sleep; for, mind you, when that thing wakes you, it doesn't merely wake you in spots; it wakes you all over, conscience and all, and you are good for eighteen hours of wide-

awakeness subsequently— eighteen hours of the very most inconceivable wide-awakeness that you ever experienced in your life. A stranger died on our hands one time, and we vacated and left him in our room overnight. Did that stranger wait for the general judgment? No, sir; he got up at five the next morning in the most prompt and unostentatious way. I knew he would; I knew it mighty well. He collected his life-insurance, and lived happy ever after, for there was plenty of proof as to the perfect squareness of his death.

"Well, we were gradually fading toward a better land, on account of the daily loss of sleep; so we finally had the expert up again, and he ran a wire to the outside of the door, and placed a switch there, whereby Thomas, the butler, always made one little mistake— he switched the alarm off at night when he went to bed, and switched it on again at daybreak in the morning, just in time for the cook to open the kitchen door, and enable that gong to slam us across the house, sometimes breaking a window with one or the other of us. At the end of a week we recognized that this switch business was a delusion and a snare. We also discovered that a band of burglars had been lodging in the house the whole time— not exactly to steal, for there wasn't much left now, but to hide from the police, for they were hot pressed, and they shrewdly judged that the detectives would never think of a tribe of burglars taking sanctuary in a house notoriously protected by the most imposing and elaborate burglar alarm in America.

"Sent down for the expert again, and this time he struck a most dazzling idea— he fixed the thing so that opening the kitchen door would take off the alarm. It was a noble idea, and he charged accordingly. But you already foresee the result. I switched on the alarm every night at bed-time, no longer trusting on Thomas's frail memory; and as soon as the lights were out the burglars walked in at the kitchen door, thus taking the alarm off without waiting for the cook to do it in the morning. You see how aggravatingly we were situated. For months we couldn't have any company. Not a spare bed in the house; all occupied by burglars.

"Finally, I got up a cure of my own. The expert answered the call, and ran another ground wire to the stable, and established a switch there, so that the coachman could put on and take off the alarm. That worked first rate, and a season of peace ensued, during which we got to inviting company once more and enjoying life.

"But by and by the irrepressible alarm invented a new kink. One winter's night we were flung out of bed by the sudden music of that awful gong, and when we hobbled to the annunciator, turned up the gas, and saw the word 'Nursery' exposed, Mrs. McWilliams fainted dead away, and I came precious near doing the same thing myself. I seized my shotgun, and stood timing the

coachman whilst that appalling buzzing went on. I knew that his gong had flung him out, too, and that he would be along with his gun as soon as he could jump into his clothes. When I judged that the time was ripe, I crept to the room next the nursery, glanced through the window, and saw the dim outline of the coachman in the yard below, standing at present-arms and waiting for a chance. Then I hopped into the nursery and fired, and in the same instant the coachman fired at the red flash of my gun. Both of us were successful; I crippled a nurse, and he shot off all my back hair. We turned up the gas, and telephoned for a surgeon. There was not a sign of a burglar, and no window had been raised. One glass was absent, but that was where the coachman's charge had come through. Here was a fine mystery— a burglar alarm 'going off' at midnight of its own accord, and not a burglar in the neighborhood!

"The expert answered the usual call, and explained that it was a 'False alarm.' Said it was easily fixed. So he overhauled the nursery window, charged a remunerative figure for it, and departed.

"What we suffered from false alarms for the next three years no stylographic pen can describe. During the next three months I always flew with my gun to the room indicated, and the coachman always sallied forth with his battery to support me. But there was never anything to shoot at— windows all tight and secure. We always sent down for the expert next day, and he fixed those particular windows so they would keep quiet a week or so, and always remembered to send us a bill about like this:

| | |
|---|---|
| Wire | $2.15 |
| Nipple | 75 |
| Two hours' labor | 1.50 |
| Wax | 47 |
| Tape | 34 |
| Screws | 15 |
| Recharging battery | 98 |
| Three hours' labor | 2.25 |
| String | 02 |
| Lard | 66 |
| Pond's Extract. | 25 |
| Springs at 50 | 2.00 |
| Railroad fares | 7.25 |
| | 19.77 |

"At length a perfectly natural thing came about— after we had answered three or four hundred false alarms— to wit, we stopped answering them. Yes, I simply rose up calmly, when slammed across the house by the alarm, calmly inspected the annunciator, took note of the room indicated; and then calmly

disconnected that room from the alarm, and went back to bed as if nothing had happened. Moreover, I left that room off permanently, and did not send for the expert. Well, it goes without saying that in the course of time all the rooms were taken off, and the entire machine was out of service.

"It was at this unprotected time that the heaviest calamity of all happened. The burglars walked in one night and carried off the burglar alarm! yes, sir, every hide and hair of it: ripped it out, tooth and nail; springs, bells, gongs, battery, and all; they took a hundred and fifty miles of copper wire; they just cleaned her out, bag and baggage, and never left us a vestige of her to swear at— swear by, I mean.

"We had a time of it to get her back; but we accomplished it finally, for money. The alarm firm said that what we needed now was to have her put in right— with their new patent springs in the windows to make false alarms impossible, and their new patent clock attached to take off and put on the alarm morning and night without human assistance. That seemed a good scheme. They promised to have the whole thing finished in ten days. They began work, and we left for the summer. They worked a couple of days; then they left for the summer. After which the burglars moved in, and began their summer vacation. When we returned in the fall, the house was as empty as a beer closet in premises where painters have been at work. We refurnished, and then sent down to hurry up the expert. He came up and finished the job, and said: 'Now this clock is set to put on the alarm every night at 10, and take it off every morning at 5:45. All you've got to do is to wind her up every week, and then leave her alone— she will take care of the alarm herself.'

"After that we had a most tranquil season during three months. The bill was prodigious, of course, and I had said I would not pay it until the new machinery had proved itself to be flawless. The time stipulated was three months. So I paid the bill, and the very next day the alarm went to buzzing like ten thousand bee swarms at ten o'clock in the morning. I turned the hands around twelve hours, according to instructions, and this took off the alarm; but there was another hitch at night, and I had to set her ahead twelve hours once more to get her to put the alarm on again. That sort of nonsense went on a week or two, then the expert came up and put in a new clock. He came up every three months during the next three years, and put in a new clock. But it was always a failure. His clocks all had the same perverse defect: they would put the alarm on in the daytime, and they would not put it on at night; and if you forced it on yourself, they would take it off again the minute your back was turned.

"Now there is the history of that burglar alarm— everything just as it happened; nothing extenuated, and naught set down in malice. Yes, sir,— and

when I had slept nine years with burglars, and maintained an expensive burglar alarm the whole time, for their protection, not mine, and at my sole cost— for not a d—d cent could I ever get *them* to contribute— I just said to Mrs. McWilliams that I had had enough of that kind of pie; so with her full consent I took the whole thing out and traded it off for a dog, and shot the dog. I don't know what you think about it, Mr. Twain; but I think those things are made solely in the interest of the burglars. Yes, sir, a burglar alarm combines in its person all that is objectionable about a fire, a riot, and a harem, and at the same time had none of the compensating advantages, of one sort or another, that customarily belong with that combination. Good-by: I get off here."

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## 16: Smith and the Pharaohs

***H. Rider Haggard***

1856-1925

*The Strand Magazine*, Dec 1912, Jan, Feb 1913

*A novella*

SCIENTISTS, or some scientists— for occasionally one learned person differs from other learned persons— tell us they know all that is worth knowing about man, which statement, of course, includes woman. They trace him from his remotest origin; they show us how his bones changed and his shape modified, also how, under the influence of his needs and passions, his intelligence developed from something very humble. They demonstrate conclusively that there is nothing in man which the dissecting-table will not explain; that his aspirations towards another life have their root in the fear of death, or, say others of them, in that of earthquake or thunder; that his affinities with the past are merely inherited from remote ancestors who lived in that past, perhaps a million years ago; and that everything noble about him is but the fruit of expediency or of a veneer of civilisation, while everything base must be attributed to the instincts of his dominant and primeval nature. Man, in short, is an animal who, like every other animal, is finally subdued by his environment and takes his colour from his surroundings, as cattle do from the red soil of Devon. Such are the facts, they (or some of them) declare; all the rest is rubbish.

At times we are inclined to agree with these sages, especially after it has been our privilege to attend a course of lectures by one of them. Then perhaps something comes within the range of our experience which gives us pause and causes doubts, the old divine doubts, to arise again deep in our hearts, and with them a yet diviner hope.

Perchance when all is said, so we think to ourselves, man *is* something more than an animal. Perchance he has known the past, the far past, and will know the future, the far, far future. Perchance the dream is true, and he does indeed possess what for convenience is called an immortal soul, that may manifest itself in one shape or another; that may sleep for ages, but, waking or sleeping, still remains itself, indestructible as the matter of the Universe.

An incident in the career of Mr. James Ebenezer Smith might well occasion such reflections, were any acquainted with its details, which until this, its setting forth, was not the case. Mr. Smith is a person who knows when to be silent. Still, undoubtedly it gave cause for thought to one individual— namely, to him to whom it happened. Indeed, James Ebenezer Smith is still thinking over it, thinking very hard indeed.

J. E. Smith was well born and well educated. When he was a good-looking and able young man at college, but before he had taken his degree, trouble came to him, the particulars of which do not matter, and he was thrown penniless, also friendless, upon the rocky bosom of the world. No, not quite friendless, for he had a godfather, a gentleman connected with business whose Christian name was Ebenezer. To him, as a last resource, Smith went, feeling that Ebenezer owed him something in return for the awful appellation wherewith he had been endowed in baptism.

To a certain extent Ebenezer recognised the obligation. He did nothing heroic, but he found his godson a clerkship in a bank of which he was one of the directors— a modest clerkship, no more. Also, when he died a year later, he left him a hundred pounds to be spent upon some souvenir.

Smith, being of a practical turn of mind, instead of adorning himself with memorial jewellery for which he had no use, invested the hundred pounds in an exceedingly promising speculation. As it happened, he was not misinformed, and his talent returned to him multiplied by ten. He repeated the experiment, and, being in a position to know what he was doing, with considerable success. By the time that he was thirty he found himself possessed of a fortune of something over twenty-five thousand pounds. Then (and this shows the wise and practical nature of the man) he stopped speculating and put out his money in such a fashion that it brought him a safe and clear four per cent.

By this time Smith, being an excellent man of business, was well up in the service of his bank— as yet only a clerk, it is true, but one who drew his four hundred pounds a year, with prospects. In short, he was in a position to marry had he wished to do so. As it happened, he did not wish— perhaps because, being very friendless, no lady who attracted him crossed his path; perhaps for other reasons.

Shy and reserved in temperament, he confided only in himself. None, not even his superiors at the bank or the Board of Management, knew how well off he had become. No one visited him at the flat which he was understood to occupy somewhere in the neighbourhood of Putney; he belonged to no club, and possessed not a single intimate. The blow which the world had dealt him in his early days, the harsh repulses and the rough treatment he had then experienced, sank so deep into his sensitive soul that never again did he seek close converse with his kind. In fact, while still young, he fell into a condition of old-bachelorhood of a refined type.

Soon, however, Smith discovered— it was after he had given up speculating— that a man must have something to occupy his mind. He tried philanthropy, but found himself too sensitive for a business which so often

resolves itself into rude inquiry as to the affairs of other people. After a struggle, therefore, he compromised with his conscience by setting aside a liberal portion of his income for anonymous distribution among deserving persons and objects.

While still in this vacant frame of mind Smith chanced one day, when the bank was closed, to drift into the British Museum, more to escape the vile weather that prevailed without than for any other reason. Wandering hither and thither at hazard, he found himself in the great gallery devoted to Egyptian stone objects and sculpture. The place bewildered him somewhat, for he knew nothing of Egyptology; indeed, there remained upon his mind only a sense of wonderment not unmixed with awe. It must have been a great people, he thought to himself, that executed these works, and with the thought came a desire to know more about them. Yet he was going away when suddenly his eye fell on the sculptured head of a woman which hung upon the wall.

Smith looked at it once, twice, thrice, and at the third look he fell in love. Needless to say, he was not aware that such was his condition. He knew only that a change had come over him, and never, never could he forget the face which that carven mask portrayed. Perhaps it was not really beautiful save for its wondrous and mystic smile; perhaps the lips were too thick and the nostrils too broad. Yet to him that face was Beauty itself, beauty which drew him as with a cart-rope, and awoke within him all kinds of wonderful imaginings, some of them so strange and tender that almost they partook of the nature of memories. He stared at the image, and the image smiled back sweetly at him, as doubtless it, or rather its original— for this was but a plaster cast— had smiled at nothingness in some tomb or hiding-hole for over thirty centuries, and as the woman whose likeness it was had once smiled upon the world.

A short, stout gentleman bustled up and, in tones of authority, addressed some workmen who were arranging a base for a neighbouring statue. It occurred to Smith that he must be someone who knew about these objects. Overcoming his natural diffidence with an effort, he raised his hat and asked the gentleman if he could tell him who was the original of the mask.

The official— who, in fact, was a very great man in the Museum— glanced at Smith shrewdly, and, seeing that his interest was genuine, answered—

"I don't know. Nobody knows. She has been given several names, but none of them have authority. Perhaps one day the rest of the statue may be found, and then we shall learn— that is, if it is inscribed. Most likely, however, it has been burnt for lime long ago."

"Then you can't tell me anything about her?" said Smith.

"Well, only a little. To begin with, that's a cast. The original is in the Cairo Museum. Mariette found it, I believe at Karnac, and gave it a name after his

fashion. Probably she was a queen— of the eighteenth dynasty, by the work. But you can see her rank for yourself from the broken *uraeus*." (Smith did not stop him to explain that he had not the faintest idea what a *uraeus* might be, seeing that he was utterly unfamiliar with the snake-headed crest of Egyptian royalty.) "You should go to Egypt and study the head for yourself. It is one of the most beautiful things that ever was found. Well, I must be off. Good day."

And he bustled down the long gallery.

Smith found his way upstairs and looked at mummies and other things. Somehow it hurt him to reflect that the owner of yonder sweet, alluring face must have become a mummy long, long before the Christian era. Mummies did not strike him as attractive.

He returned to the statuary and stared at his plaster cast till one of the workmen remarked to his fellow that if he were the gent he'd go and look at "a live'un" for a change.

Then Smith retired abashed.

On his way home he called at his bookseller's and ordered "all the best works on Egyptology". When, a day or two later, they arrived in a packing-case, together with a bill for thirty-eight pounds, he was somewhat dismayed. Still, he tackled those books like a man, and, being clever and industrious, within three months had a fair working knowledge of the subject, and had even picked up a smattering of hieroglyphics.

In January— that was, at the end of those three months— Smith astonished his Board of Directors by applying for ten weeks' leave, he who had hitherto been content with a fortnight in the year. When questioned he explained that he had been suffering from bronchitis, and was advised to take a change in Egypt.

"A very good idea," said the manager; "but I'm afraid you'll find it expensive. They fleece one in Egypt."

"I know," answered Smith; "but I've saved a little and have only myself to spend it upon."

So Smith went to Egypt and saw the original of the beauteous head and a thousand other fascinating things. Indeed, he did more. Attaching himself to some excavators who were glad of his intelligent assistance, he actually dug for a month in the neighbourhood of ancient Thebes, but without finding anything in particular.

It was not till two years later that he made his great discovery, that which is known as Smith's Tomb. Here it may be explained that the state of his health had become such as to necessitate an annual visit to Egypt, or so his superiors understood.

However, as he asked for no summer holiday, and was always ready to do another man's work or to stop overtime, he found it easy to arrange for these winter excursions.

On this, his third visit to Egypt, Smith obtained from the Director-General of Antiquities at Cairo a licence to dig upon his own account. Being already well known in the country as a skilled Egyptologist, this was granted upon the usual terms— namely, that the Department of Antiquities should have a right to take any of the objects which might be found, or all of them, if it so desired.

Such preliminary matters having been arranged by correspondence, Smith, after a few days spent in the Museum at Cairo, took the night train to Luxor, where he found his head-man, an ex-dragoman named Mahomet, waiting for him and his fellaheen labourers already hired. There were but forty of them, for his was a comparatively small venture. Three hundred pounds was the amount that he had made up his mind to expend, and such a sum does not go far in excavations.

During his visit of the previous year Smith had marked the place where he meant to dig. It was in the cemetery of old Thebes, at the wild spot not far from the temple of Medinet Habu, that is known as the Valley of the Queens. Here, separated from the resting-places of their royal lords by the bold mass of the intervening hill, some of the greatest ladies of Egypt have been laid to rest, and it was their tombs that Smith desired to investigate. As he knew well, some of these must yet remain to be discovered. Who could say? Fortune favours the bold. It might be that he would find the holy grave of that beauteous, unknown Royalty whose face had haunted him for three long years!

For a whole month he dug without the slightest success. The spot that he selected had proved, indeed, to be the mouth of a tomb. After twenty-five days of laborious exploration it was at length cleared out, and he stood in a rude, unfinished cave. The queen for whom it had been designed must have died quite young and been buried elsewhere; or she had chosen herself another sepulchre, or mayhap the rock had proved unsuitable for sculpture.

Smith shrugged his shoulders and moved on, sinking trial pits and trenches here and there, but still finding nothing. Two-thirds of his time and money had been spent when at last the luck turned. One day, towards evening, with some half-dozen of his best men he was returning after a fruitless morning of labour, when something seemed to attract him towards a little *wadi*, or bay, in the hillside that was filled with tumbled rocks and sand. There were scores of such places, and this one looked no more promising than any of the others had proved to be. Yet it attracted him. Thoroughly dispirited, he walked past it twenty paces or more, then turned.

"Where go you, sah?" asked his head-man, Mahomet.

He pointed to the recess in the cliff.

"No good, sah," said Mahomet. "No tomb there. Bed-rock too near top. Too much water run in there; dead queen like keep dry!"

But Smith went on, and the others followed obediently.

He walked down the little slope of sand and boulders and examined the cliff. It was virgin rock; never a tool mark was to be seen. Already the men were going, when the same strange instinct which had drawn him to the spot caused him to take a spade from one of them and begin to shovel away the sand from the face of the cliff— for here, for some unexplained reason, were no boulders or *debris*. Seeing their master, to whom they were attached, at work, they began to work too, and for twenty minutes or more dug on cheerfully enough, just to humour him, since all were sure that here there was no tomb. At length Smith ordered them to desist, for, although now they were six feet down, the rock remained of the same virgin character.

With an exclamation of disgust he threw out a last shovelful of sand. The edge of his spade struck on something that projected. He cleared away a little more sand, and there appeared a rounded ledge which seemed to be a cornice. Calling back the men, he pointed to it, and without a word all of them began to dig again. Five minutes more of work made it clear that it was a cornice, and half an hour later there appeared the top of the doorway of a tomb.

"Old people wall him up," said Mahomet, pointing to the flat stones set in mud for mortar with which the doorway had been closed, and to the undecipherable impress upon the mud of the scarab seals of the officials whose duty it had been to close the last resting-place of the royal dead for ever.

"Perhaps queen all right inside," he went on, receiving no answer to his remark.

"Perhaps," replied Smith, briefly. "Dig, man, dig! Don't waste time in talking."

So they dug on furiously till at length Smith saw something which caused him to groan aloud. There was a hole in the masonry— the tomb had been broken into. Mahomet saw it too, and examined the top of the aperture with his skilled eye.

"Very old thief," he said. "Look, he try build up wall again, but run away before he have time finish." And he pointed to certain flat stones which had been roughly and hurriedly replaced.

"Dig— dig!" said Smith.

Ten minutes more and the aperture was cleared. It was only just big enough to admit the body of a man.

By now the sun was setting. Swiftly, swiftly it seemed to tumble down the sky. One minute it was above the rough crests of the western hills behind them; the next, a great ball of glowing fire, it rested on their topmost ridge. Then it was gone. For an instant a kind of green spark shone where it had been. This too went out, and the sudden Egyptian night was upon them.

The fellaheen muttered among themselves, and one or two of them wandered off on some pretext. The rest threw down their tools and looked at Smith. "Men say they no like stop here. They afraid of ghost! Too many *afreet* live in these tomb. That what they say. Come back finish to-morrow morning when it light. Very foolish people, these common fellaheen," remarked Mahomet, in a superior tone.

"Quite so," replied Smith, who knew well that nothing that he could offer would tempt his men to go on with the opening of a tomb after sunset. "Let them go away. You and I will stop and watch the place till morning."

"Sorry, sah," said Mahomet, "but I not feel quite well inside; think I got fever. I go to camp and lie down and pray under plenty blanket."

"All right, go," said Smith; "but if there is anyone who is not a coward, let him bring me my big coat, something to eat and drink, and the lantern that hangs in my tent. I will meet him there in the valley."

Mahomet, though rather doubtfully, promised that this should be done, and, after begging Smith to accompany them, lest the spirit of whoever slept in the tomb should work him a mischief during the night, they departed quickly enough.

Smith lit his pipe, sat down on the sand, and waited. Half an hour later he heard a sound of singing, and through the darkness, which was dense, saw lights coming up the valley.

"My brave men," he thought to himself, and scrambled up the slope to meet them.

He was right. These were his men, no less than twenty of them, for with a fewer number they did not dare to face the ghosts which they believed haunted the valley after nightfall. Presently the light from the lantern which one of them carried (not Mahomet, whose sickness had increased too suddenly to enable him to come) fell upon the tall form of Smith, who, dressed in his white working clothes, was leaning against a rock. Down went the lantern, and with a howl of terror the brave company turned and fled.

"Sons of cowards!" roared Smith after them, in his most vigorous Arabic. "It is I, your master, not an *afreet*."

They heard, and by degrees crept back again. Then he perceived that in order to account for their number each of them carried some article. Thus one had the bread, another the lantern, another a tin of sardines, another the sardine-opener, another a box of matches, another a bottle of beer, and so on. As even thus there were not enough things to go round, two of them bore his big coat between them, the first holding it by the sleeves and the second by the tail as though it were a stretcher.

"Put them down," said Smith, and they obeyed. "Now," he added, "run for your lives; I thought I heard two *afreets* talking up there just now of what they would do to any followers of the Prophet who mocked their gods, if perchance they should meet them in their holy place at night."

This kindly counsel was accepted with much eagerness. In another minute Smith was alone with the stars and the dying desert wind.

Collecting his goods, or as many of them as he wanted, he thrust them into the pockets of the great-coat and returned to the mouth of the tomb. Here he made his simple meal by the light of the lantern, and afterwards tried to go to sleep. But sleep he could not. Something always woke him. First it was a jackal howling amongst the rocks; next a sand-fly bit him in the ankle so sharply that he thought he must have been stung by a scorpion. Then, notwithstanding his warm coat, the cold got hold of him, for the clothes beneath were wet through with perspiration, and it occurred to him that unless he did something he would probably contract an internal chill or perhaps fever. He rose and walked about.

By now the moon was up, revealing all the sad, wild scene in its every detail. The mystery of Egypt entered his soul and oppressed him. How much dead majesty lay in the hill upon which he stood? Were they all really dead, he wondered, or were those fellaheen right? Did their spirits still come forth at night and wander through the land where once they ruled? Of course that was the Egyptian faith according to which the *Ka*, or Double, eternally haunted the place where its earthly counterpart had been laid to rest. When one came to think of it, beneath a mass of unintelligible symbolism there was much in the Egyptian faith which it was hard for a Christian to disbelieve. Salvation through a Redeemer, for instance, and the resurrection of the body. Had he, Smith, not already written a treatise upon these points of similarity which he proposed to publish one day, not under his own name? Well, he would not think of them now; the occasion seemed scarcely fitting— they came home too pointedly to one who was engaged in violating a tomb.

His mind, or rather his imagination— of which he had plenty— went off at a tangent. What sights had this place seen thousands of years ago! Once, thousands of years ago, a procession had wound up along the roadway which

was doubtless buried beneath the sand whereon he stood towards the dark door of this sepulchre. He could see it as it passed in and out between the rocks. The priests, shaven-headed and robed in leopards' skins, or some of them in pure white, bearing the mystic symbols of their office. The funeral sledge drawn by oxen, and on it the great rectangular case that contained the outer and the inner coffins, and within them the mummy of some departed Majesty; in the Egyptian formula, "the hawk that had spread its wings and flown into the bosom of Osiris," God of Death. Behind, the mourners, rending the air with their lamentations. Then those who bore the funeral furniture and offerings. Then the high officers of State and the first priests of Amen and of the other gods. Then the sister queens, leading by the hand a wondering child or two. Then the sons of Pharaoh, young men carrying the emblems of their rank.

Lastly, walking alone, Pharaoh himself in his ceremonial robes, his apron, his double crown of linen surmounted by the golden snake, his inlaid bracelets and his heavy, tinkling earrings. Pharaoh, his head bowed, his feet travelling wearily, and in his heart— what thoughts? Sorrow, perhaps, for her who had departed. Yet he had other queens and fair women without count. Doubtless she was sweet and beautiful, but sweetness and beauty were not given to her alone. Moreover, was she not wont to cross his will and to question his divinity? No, surely it is not only of her that he thinks, her for whom he had prepared this splendid tomb with all things needful to unite her with the gods. Surely he thinks also of himself and that other tomb on the farther side of the hill whereat the artists labour day by day— yes, and have laboured these many years; that tomb to which before so very long he too must travel in just this fashion, to seek his place beyond the doors of Death, who lays his equal hand on king and queen and slave.

The vision passed. It was so real that Smith thought he must have been dreaming. Well, he was awake now, and colder than ever. Moreover, the jackals had multiplied. There were a whole pack of them, and not far away. Look! One crossed in the ring of the lamplight, a slinking, yellow beast that smelt the remains of dinner. Or perhaps it smelt himself. Moreover, there were bad characters who haunted these mountains, and he was alone and quite unarmed. Perhaps he ought to put out the light which advertised his whereabouts. It would be wise, and yet in this particular he rejected wisdom. After all, the light was some company.

Since sleep seemed to be out of the question, he fell back upon poor humanity's other anodyne, work, which has the incidental advantage of generating warmth. Seizing a shovel, he began to dig at the doorway of the tomb, whilst the jackals howled louder than ever in astonishment. They were

not used to such a sight. For thousands of years, as the old moon above could have told, no man, or at least no solitary man, had dared to rob tombs at such an unnatural hour.

When Smith had been digging for about twenty minutes something tinkled on his shovel with a noise which sounded loud in that silence.

"A stone which may come in handy for the jackals," he thought to himself, shaking the sand slowly off the spade until it appeared. There it was, and not large enough to be of much service. Still, he picked it up, and rubbed it in his hands to clear off the encrusting dirt. When he opened them he saw that it was no stone, but a bronze.

"Osiris," reflected Smith, "buried in front of the tomb to hallow the ground. No, an Isis. No, the head of a statuette, and a jolly good one, too— at any rate, in moonlight. Seems to have been gilded." And, reaching out for the lamp, he held it over the object.

Another minute, and he found himself sitting at the bottom of the hole, lamp in one hand and statuette, or rather head, in the other.

"The Queen of the Mask!" he gasped. "The same— the same! By heavens, the very same!"

Oh, he could not be mistaken. There were the identical lips, a little thick and pouted; the identical nostrils, curved and quivering, but a little wide; the identical arched eyebrows and dreamy eyes set somewhat far apart. Above all, there was the identical alluring and mysterious smile. Only on this masterpiece of ancient art was set a whole crown of *uraei* surrounding the entire head. Beneath the crown and pressed back behind the ears was a full-bottomed wig or royal head-dress, of which the ends descended to the breasts. The statuette, that, having been gilt, remained quite perfect and uncorroded, was broken just above the middle, apparently by a single violent blow, for the fracture was very clean.

At once it occurred to Smith that it had been stolen from the tomb by a thief who thought it to be gold; that outside of the tomb doubt had overtaken him and caused him to break it upon a stone or otherwise. The rest was clear. Finding that it was but gold-washed bronze he had thrown away the fragments, rather than be at the pains of carrying them. This was his theory, probably not a correct one, as the sequel seems to show.

Smith's first idea was to recover the other portion. He searched quite a long while, but without success. Neither then nor afterwards could it be found. He reflected that perhaps this lower half had remained in the thief's hand, who, in his vexation, had thrown it far away, leaving the head to lie where it fell. Again Smith examined this head, and more closely. Now he saw that just beneath the breasts was a delicately cut cartouche.

Being by this time a master of hieroglyphics, he read it without trouble. It ran: "Ma-Mee, Great Royal Lady. Beloved of —" Here the cartouche was broken away.

"Ma-Mé, or it might be Ma-Mi," he reflected. "I never heard of a queen called Ma-Mé, or Ma-Mi, or Ma-Mu. She must be quite new to history. I wonder of whom she was beloved? Amen, or Horus, or Isis, probably. Of some god, I have no doubt, at least I hope so!"

He stared at the beautiful portrait in his hand, as once he had stared at the cast on the Museum wall, and the beautiful portrait, emerging from the dust of ages, smiled back at him there in the solemn moonlight as once the cast had smiled from the museum wall. Only that had been but a cast, whereas this was real. This had slept with the dead from whose features it had been fashioned, the dead who lay, or who had lain, within.

A sudden resolution took hold of Smith. He would explore that tomb, at once and alone. No one should accompany him on this his first visit; it would be a sacrilege that anyone save himself should set foot there until he had looked on what it might contain.

Why should he not enter? His lamp, of what is called the "hurricane" brand, was very good and bright, and would burn for many hours. Moreover, there had been time for the foul air to escape through the hole that they had cleared. Lastly, something seemed to call on him to come and see. He placed the bronze head in his breast-pocket over his heart, and, thrusting the lamp through the hole, looked down. Here there was no difficulty, since sand had drifted in to the level of the bottom of the aperture. Through it he struggled, to find himself upon a bed of sand that only just left him room to push himself along between it and the roof. A little farther on the passage was almost filled with mud.

Mahomet had been right when, from his knowledge of the bed-rock, he said that any tomb made in this place must be flooded. It *had* been flooded by some ancient rain-storm, and Smith began to fear that he would find it quite filled with soil caked as hard as iron. So, indeed, it was to a certain depth, a result that apparently had been anticipated by those who hollowed it, for this entrance shaft was left quite undecorated. Indeed, as Smith found afterwards, a hole had been dug beneath the doorway to allow the mud to enter after the burial was completed. Only a miscalculation had been made. The natural level of the mud did not quite reach the roof of the tomb, and therefore still left it open.

After crawling for forty feet or so over this caked mud, Smith suddenly found himself on a rising stair. Then he understood the plan; the tomb itself was on a higher level.

Here began the paintings. Here the Queen Ma-Mee, wearing her crowns and dressed in diaphanous garments, was presented to god after god. Between her figure and those of the divinities the wall was covered with hieroglyphs as fresh to-day as on that when the artist had limned them. A glance told him that they were extracts from the Book of the Dead. When the thief of bygone ages had broken into the tomb, probably not very long after the interment, the mud over which Smith had just crawled was still wet. This he could tell, since the clay from the rascal's feet remained upon the stairs, and that upon his fingers had stained the paintings on the wall against which he had supported himself; indeed, in one place was an exact impression of his hand, showing its shape and even the lines of the skin.

At the top of the flight of steps ran another passage at a higher level, which the water had never reached, and to right and left were the beginnings of unfinished chambers. It was clear to him that this queen had died young. Her tomb, as she or the king had designed it, was never finished. A few more paces, and the passage enlarged itself into a hall about thirty feet square. The ceiling was decorated with vultures, their wings outspread, the looped Cross of Life hanging from their talons. On one wall her Majesty Ma-Mee stood expectant while Anubis weighed her heart against the feather of truth, and Thoth, the Recorder, wrote down the verdict upon his tablets. All her titles were given to her here, such as— "Great Royal Heiress, Royal Sister, Royal Wife, Royal Mother, Lady of the Two Lands, Palm-branch of Love, Beautiful-exceedingly."

Smith read them hurriedly and noted that nowhere could he see the name of the king who had been her husband. It would almost seem as though this had been purposely omitted. On the other walls Ma-Mee, accompanied by her *Ka*, or Double, made offerings to the various gods, or uttered propitiatory speeches to the hideous demons of the underworld, declaring their names to them and forcing them to say: "Pass on. Thou art pure!"

Lastly, on the end wall, triumphant, all her trials done, she, the justified Osiris, or Spirit, was received by the god Osiris, Saviour of Spirits.

All these things Smith noted hurriedly as he swung the lamp to and fro in that hallowed place. Then he saw something else which filled him with dismay. On the floor of the chamber where the coffins had been— for this was the burial chamber— lay a heap of black fragments charred with fire. Instantly he understood. After the thief had done his work he had burned the mummy-cases, and with them the body of the queen. There could be no doubt that this was so, for look! among the ashes lay some calcined human bones, while the roof above was blackened with the smoke and cracked by the heat of the conflagration. There was nothing left for him to find!

Oppressed with the closeness of the atmosphere, he sat down upon a little bench or table cut in the rock that evidently had been meant to receive offerings to the dead. Indeed, on it still lay the scorched remains of some votive flowers. Here, his lamp between his feet, he rested a while, staring at those calcined bones. See, yonder was the lower jaw, and in it some teeth, small, white, regular and but little worn. Yes, she had died young. Then he turned to go, for disappointment and the holiness of the place overcame him; he could endure no more of it that night.

Leaving the burial hall, he walked along the painted passage, the lamp swinging and his eyes fixed upon the floor. He was disheartened, and the paintings could wait till the morrow. He descended the steps and came to the foot of the mud slope. Here suddenly he perceived, projecting from some sand that had drifted down over the mud, what seemed to be the corner of a reed box or basket. To clear away the sand was easy, and— yes, it was a basket, a foot or so in length, such a basket as the old Egyptians used to contain the funeral figures which are called *ushaptis*, or other objects connected with the dead. It looked as though it had been dropped, for it lay upon its side. Smith opened it— not very hopefully, for surely nothing of value would have been abandoned thus.

The first thing that met his eyes was a mummied hand, broken off at the wrist, a woman's little hand, most delicately shaped. It was withered and paper-white, but the contours still remained; the long fingers were perfect, and the almond-shaped nails had been stained with henna, as was the embalmers' fashion. On the hand were two gold rings, and for those rings it had been stolen. Smith looked at it for a long while, and his heart swelled within him, for here was the hand of that royal lady of his dreams.

Indeed, he did more than look; he kissed it, and as his lips touched the holy relic it seemed to him as though a wind, cold but scented, blew upon his brow. Then, growing fearful of the thoughts that arose within him, he hurried his mind back to the world, or rather to the examination of the basket.

Here he found other objects roughly wrapped in fragments of mummy-cloth that had been torn from the body of the queen. These it is needless to describe, for are they not to be seen in the gold room of the Museum, labelled "*Bijouterie de la Reine Ma-Mé, XVIIIème Dynastie*. Thebes (Smith's Tomb)"? It may be mentioned, however, that the set was incomplete. For instance, there was but one of the great gold ceremonial ear-rings fashioned like a group of pomegranate blooms, and the most beautiful of the necklaces had been torn in two— half of it was missing.

It was clear to Smith that only a portion of the precious objects which were buried with the mummy had been placed in this basket. Why had these been

left where he found them? A little reflection made that clear also. Something had prompted the thief to destroy the desecrated body and its coffin with fire, probably in the hope of hiding his evil handiwork. Then he fled with his spoil. But he had forgotten how fiercely mummies and their trappings can burn. Or perhaps the thing was an accident. He must have had a lamp, and if its flame chanced to touch this bituminous tinder!

At any rate, the smoke overtook the man in that narrow place as he began to climb the slippery slope of clay. In his haste he dropped the basket, and dared not return to search for it. It could wait till the morrow, when the fire would be out and the air pure. Only for this desecrator of the royal dead that morrow never came, as was discovered afterwards.

When at length Smith struggled into the open air the stars were paling before the dawn. An hour later, after the sky was well up, Mahomet (recovered from his sickness) and his myrmidons arrived.

"I have been busy while you slept," said Smith, showing them the mummied hand (but not the rings which he had removed from the shrunk fingers), and the broken bronze, but not the priceless jewellery which was hidden in his pockets.

For the next ten days they dug till the tomb and its approach were quite clear. In the sand, at the head of a flight of steps which led down to the doorway, they found the skeleton of a man, who evidently had been buried there in a hurried fashion. His skull was shattered by the blow of an axe, and the shaven scalp that still clung to it suggested that he might have been a priest.

Mahomet thought, and Smith agreed with him, that this was the person who had violated the tomb. As he was escaping from it the guards of the holy place surprised him after he had covered up the hole by which he had entered and purposed to return. There they executed him without trial and divided up the plunder, thinking that no more was to be found. Or perhaps his confederates killed him.

Such at least were the theories advanced by Mahomet. Whether they were right or wrong none will ever know. For instance, the skeleton may not have been that of the thief, though probability appears to point the other way.

Nothing more was found in the tomb, not even a scarab or a mummy-bead. Smith spent the remainder of his time in photographing the pictures and copying the inscriptions, which for various reasons proved to be of extraordinary interest. Then, having reverently buried the charred bones of the queen in a secret place of the sepulchre, he handed it over to the care of the local Guardian of Antiquities, paid off Mahomet and the fellaheen, and departed for Cairo. With him went the wonderful jewels of which he had

breathed no word, and another relic to him yet more precious— the hand of her Majesty Ma-Mee, Palm-branch of Love.

And now follows the strange sequel of this story of Smith and the queen Ma-Mee.

SMITH WAS SEATED in the sanctum of the distinguished Director-General of Antiquities at the new Cairo Museum. It was a very interesting room. Books piled upon the floor; objects from tombs awaiting examination, lying here and there; a hoard of Ptolemaic silver coins, just dug up at Alexandria, standing on a table in the pot that had hidden them for two thousand years; in the corner the mummy of a royal child, aged six or seven, not long ago discovered, with some inscription scrawled upon the wrappings (brought here to be deciphered by the Master), and the withered lotus-bloom, love's last offering, thrust beneath one of the pink retaining bands.

"A touching object," thought Smith to himself. "Really, they might have left the dear little girl in peace."

Smith had a tender heart, but even as he reflected he became aware that some of the jewellery hidden in an inner pocket of his waistcoat (designed for bank-notes) was fretting his skin. He had a tender conscience also.

Just then the Director, a French savant, bustled in, alert, vigorous, full of interest.

"Ah, my dear Mr. Smith!" he said, in his excellent English. "I am indeed glad to see you back again, especially as I understand that you are come rejoicing and bringing your sheaves with you. They tell me you have been extraordinarily successful. What do you say is the name of this queen whose tomb you have found— Ma-Mee? A very unusual name. How do you get the extra vowel? Is it for euphony, eh? Did I not know how good a scholar you are, I should be tempted to believe that you had misread it. Me-Mee, Ma-Mee! That would be pretty in French, would it not? *Ma mie*— my darling! Well, I dare say she was somebody's *mie* in her time. But tell me the story."

Smith told him shortly and clearly; also he produced his photographs and copies of inscriptions.

"This is interesting— interesting truly," said the Director, when he had glanced through them. "You must leave them with me to study. Also you will publish them, is it not so? Perhaps one of the Societies would help you with the cost, for it should be done in facsimile. Look at this vignette! Most unusual. Oh, what a pity that scoundrelly priest got off with the jewellery and burnt her Majesty's body!"

"He didn't get off with all of it."

"What, Mr. Smith? Our inspector reported to me that you found nothing."

"I dare say, sir; but your inspector did not know what I found."

"Ah, you are a discreet man! Well, let us see."

Slowly Smith unbuttoned his waistcoat. From its inner pocket and elsewhere about his person he extracted the jewels wrapped in mummy-cloth as he had found them. First he produced a sceptre-head of gold, in the shape of a pomegranate fruit and engraved with the throne name and titles of Ma-Mee.

"What a beautiful object!" said the Director. "Look! the handle was of ivory, and that *sacré* thief of a priest smashed it out at the socket. It was fresh ivory then; the robbery must have taken place not long after the burial. See, this magnifying-glass shows it. Is that all?"

Smith handed him the surviving half of the marvellous necklace that had been torn in two.

"I have re-threaded it," he muttered, "but every bead is in its place."

"Oh, heavens! How lovely! Note the cutting of those cornelian heads of Hathor and the gold lotus-blooms between— yes, and the enamelled flies beneath. We have nothing like it in the Museum."

So it went on.

"Is that all?" gasped the Director at last, when every object from the basket glittered before them on the table.

"Yes," said Smith. "That is— no. I found a broken statuette hidden in the sand outside the tomb. It is of the queen, but I thought perhaps you would allow me to keep this."

"But certainly, Mr. Smith; it is yours indeed. We are not niggards here. Still, if I might see it—"

From yet another pocket Smith produced the head. The Director gazed at it, then he spoke with feeling.

"I said just now that you were discreet, Mr. Smith, and I have been reflecting that you are honest. But now I must add that you are very clever. If you had not made me promise that this bronze should be yours before you showed it me— well, it would never have gone into that pocket again. And, in the public interest, won't you release me from the promise?"

"*No*," said Smith.

"You are perhaps not aware," went on the Director, with a groan, "that this is a portrait of Mariette's unknown queen whom we are thus able to identify. It seems a pity that the two should be separated; a replica we could let you have."

"I am quite aware," said Smith, "and I will be sure to send *you* a replica, with photographs. Also I promise to leave the original to some museum by will."

The Director clasped the image tenderly, and, holding it to the light, read the broken cartouche beneath the breasts.

" 'Ma-Mé, Great Royal Lady. Beloved of— ' Beloved of whom? Well, of Smith, for one. Take it, monsieur, and hide it away at once, lest soon there should be another mummy in this collection, a modern mummy called Smith; and, in the name of Justice, let the museum which inherits it be not the British, but that of Cairo, for this queen belongs to Egypt. By the way, I have been told that you are delicate in the lungs. How is your health now? Our cold winds are very trying. Quite good? Ah, that is excellent! I suppose that you have no more articles that you can show me?"

"I have nothing more except a mummied hand, which I found in the basket with the jewels. The two rings off it lie there. Doubtless it was removed to get at that bracelet. I suppose you will not mind my keeping the hand—"

"Of the beloved of Smith," interrupted the Director drolly. "No, I suppose not, though for my part I should prefer one that was not quite so old. Still, perhaps *you* will not mind my seeing it. That pocket of yours still looks a little bulky; I thought that it contained books!"

Smith produced a cigar-box; in it was the hand wrapped in cotton wool.

"Ah," said the Director, "a pretty, well-bred hand. No doubt this Ma-Mee was the real heiress to the throne, as she describes herself. The Pharaoh was somebody of inferior birth, half-brother— she is called 'Royal Sister,' you remember— son of one of the Pharaoh's slave-women, perhaps. Odd that she never mentioned him in the tomb. It looks as though they didn't get on in life, and that she was determined to have done with him in death. Those were the rings upon that hand, were they not?"

He replaced them on the fingers, then took off one, a royal signet in a cartouche, and read the inscription on the other: "'Bes Ank, Ank Bes.' 'Bes the Living, the Living Bes.'

"Your Ma-Mee had some human vanity about her," he added. "Bes, among other things, as you know, was the god of beauty and of the adornments of women. She wore that ring that she might remain beautiful, and that her dresses might always fit, and her rouge never cake when she was dancing before the gods. Also it fixes her period pretty closely, but then so do other things. It seems a pity to rob Ma-Mee of her pet ring, does it not? The royal signet will be enough for us."

With a little bow he gave the hand back to Smith, leaving the Bes ring on the finger that had worn it for more than three thousand years. At least, Smith was so sure it was the Bes ring that at the time he did not look at it again.

Then they parted, Smith promising to return upon the morrow, which, owing to events to be described, he did not do.

"Ah!" said the Master to himself, as the door closed behind his visitor. "He's in a hurry to be gone. He has fear lest I should change my mind about that ring. Also there is the bronze. Monsieur Smith was *ruse* there. It is worth a thousand pounds, that bronze. Yet I do not believe he was thinking of the money. I believe he is in love with that Ma-Mee and wants to keep her picture. *Mon Dieu!* A well-established affection. At least he is what the English call an odd fish, one whom I could never make out, and of whom no one seems to know anything. Still, honest, I am sure— quite honest. Why, he might have kept every one of those jewels and no one have been the wiser. And what things! What a find! *Ciel!* what a find! There has been nothing like it for years. Benedictions on the head of Odd-fish Smith!"

Then he collected the precious objects, thrust them into an inner compartment of his safe, which he locked and double-locked, and, as it was nearly five o'clock, departed from the Museum to his private residence in the grounds, there to study Smith's copies and photographs, and to tell some friends of the great things that had happened.

When Smith found himself outside the sacred door, and had presented its venerable guardian with a baksheesh of five piastres, he walked a few paces to the right and paused a while to watch some native labourers who were dragging a huge sarcophagus upon an improvised tramway. As they dragged they sang an echoing rhythmic song, whereof each line ended with an invocation to Allah.

Just so, reflected Smith, had their forefathers sung when, millenniums ago, they dragged that very sarcophagus from the quarries to the Nile, and from the Nile to the tomb whence it reappeared to-day, or when they slid the casing blocks of the pyramids up the great causeway and smooth slope of sand, and laid them in their dizzy resting-places. Only then each line of the immemorial chant of toil ended with an invocation to Amen, now transformed to Allah. The East may change its masters and its gods, but its customs never change, and if to-day Allah wore the feathers of Amen one wonders whether the worshippers would find the difference so very great.

Thus thought Smith as he hurried away from the sarcophagus and those blue-robed, dark-skinned fellaheen, down the long gallery that is filled with a thousand sculptures. For a moment he paused before the wonderful white statue of Queen Amenartas, then, remembering that his time was short, hastened on to a certain room, one of those which opened out of the gallery.

In a corner of this room, upon the wall, amongst many other beautiful objects, stood that head which Mariette had found, whereof in past years the cast had fascinated him in London. Now he knew whose head it was; to him it had been given to find the tomb of her who had sat for that statue. Her very

hand was in his pocket— yes, the hand that had touched yonder marble, pointing out its defects to the sculptor, or perhaps swearing that he flattered her. Smith wondered who that sculptor was; surely he must have been a happy man. Also he wondered whether the statuette was also this master's work. He thought so, but he wished to make sure.

Near to the end of the room he stopped and looked about him like a thief. He was alone in the place; not a single student or tourist could be seen, and its guardian was somewhere else. He drew out the box that contained the hand. From the hand he slipped the ring which the Director-General had left there as a gift to himself. He would much have preferred the other with the signet, but how could he say so, especially after the episode of the statuette?

Replacing the hand in his pocket without looking at the ring— for his eyes were watching to see whether he was observed— he set it upon his little finger, which it exactly fitted. (Ma-Mee had worn both of them upon the third finger of her left hand, the Bes ring as a guard to the signet.) He had the fancy to approach the effigy of Ma-Mee wearing a ring which she had worn and that came straight from her finger to his own.

Smith found the head in its accustomed place. Weeks had gone by since he looked upon it, and now, to his eyes, it had grown more beautiful than ever, and its smile was more mystical and living. He drew out the statuette and began to compare them point by point. Oh, no doubt was possible! Both were likenesses of the same woman, though the statuette might have been executed two or three years later than the statue. To him the face of it looked a little older and more spiritual. Perhaps illness, or some premonition of her end had then thrown its shadow on the queen. He compared and compared. He made some rough measurements and sketches in his pocket-book, and set himself to work out a canon of proportions.

So hard and earnestly did he work, so lost was his mind that he never heard the accustomed warning sound which announces that the Museum is about to close. Hidden behind an altar as he was, in his distant, shadowed corner, the guardian of the room never saw him as he cast a last perfunctory glance about the place before departing till the Saturday morning; for the morrow was Friday, the Mohammedan Sabbath, on which the Museum remains shut, and he would not be called upon to attend. So he went. Everybody went. The great doors clanged, were locked and bolted, and, save for a watchman outside, no one was left in all that vast place except Smith in his corner, engaged in sketching and in measurements.

The difficulty of seeing, owing to the increase of shadow, first called his attention to the fact that time was slipping away. He glanced at his watch and saw that it was ten minutes to the hour.

"Soon be time to go," he thought to himself, and resumed his work.

How strangely silent the place seemed! Not a footstep to be heard or the sound of a human voice. He looked at his watch again, and saw that it was six o'clock, not five, or so the thing said. But that was impossible, for the Museum shut at five; evidently the desert sand had got into the works. The room in which he stood was that known as Room I, and he had noticed that its Arab custodian often frequented Room K or the gallery outside. He would find him and ask what was the real time.

Passing round the effigy of the wonderful Hathor cow, perhaps the finest example of an ancient sculpture of a beast in the whole world, Smith came to the doorway and looked up and down the gallery. Not a soul to be seen. He ran to Room K, to Room H, and others. Still not a soul to be seen. Then he made his way as fast as he could go to the great entrance. The doors were locked and bolted.

"Watch must be right after all. I'm shut in," he said to himself. "However, there's sure to be someone about somewhere. Probably the *salle des ventes* is still open. Shops don't shut till they are obliged."

Thither he went, to find its door as firmly closed as a door can be. He knocked on it, but a sepulchral echo was the only answer.

"I know," he reflected. "The Director must still be in his room. It will take him a long while to examine all that jewellery and put it away."

So for the room he headed, and, after losing his path twice, found it by help of the sarcophagus that the Arabs had been dragging, which now stood as deserted as it had done in the tomb, a lonesome and impressive object in the gathering shadows. The Director's door was shut, and again his knockings produced nothing but an echo. He started on a tour round the Museum, and, having searched the ground floors, ascended to the upper galleries by the great stairway.

Presently he found himself in that devoted to the royal mummies, and, being tired, rested there a while. Opposite to him, in a glass case in the middle of the gallery, reposed Rameses II. Near to, on shelves in a side case, were Rameses' son, Meneptah, and above, his son, Seti II, while in other cases were the mortal remains of many more of the royalties of Egypt. He looked at the proud face of Rameses and at the little fringe of white locks turned yellow by the embalmer's spices, also at the raised left arm. He remembered how the Director had told him that when they were unrolling this mighty monarch they went away to lunch, and that presently the man who had been left in charge of the body rushed into the room with his hair on end, and said that the dead king had lifted his arm and pointed at him.

Back they went, and there, true enough, was the arm lifted; nor were they ever able to get it quite into its place again. The explanation given was that the warmth of the sun had contracted the withered muscles, a very natural and correct explanation.

Still, Smith wished that he had not recollected the story just at this moment, especially as the arm seemed to move while he contemplated it— a very little, but still to move.

He turned round and gazed at Meneptah, whose hollow eyes stared at him from between the wrappings carelessly thrown across the parchment-like and ashen face. There, probably, lay the countenance that had frowned on Moses. There was the heart which God had hardened. Well, it was hard enough now, for the doctors said he died of ossification of the arteries, and that the vessels of the heart were full of lime!

Smith stood upon a chair and peeped at Seti II. above. His weaker countenance was very peaceful, but it seemed to wear an air of reproach. In getting down Smith managed to upset the heavy chair. The noise it made was terrific. He would not have thought it possible that the fall of such an article could produce so much sound. Satisfied with his inspection of these particular kings, who somehow looked quite different now from what they had ever done before— more real and imminent, so to speak— he renewed his search for a living man.

On he went, mummies to his right, mummies to his left, of every style and period, till he began to feel as though he never wished to see another dried remnant of mortality. He peeped into the room where lay the relics of Iouiya and Touiyou, the father and mother of the great Queen Taia. Cloths had been drawn over these, and really they looked worse and more suggestive thus draped than in their frigid and unadorned blackness. He came to the coffins of the priest-kings of the twentieth dynasty, formidable painted coffins with human faces. There seemed to be a vast number of these priest-kings, but perhaps they were better than the gold masks of the great Ptolemaic ladies which glinted at him through the gathering gloom.

Really, he had seen enough of the upper floors. The statues downstairs were better than all these dead, although it was true that, according to the Egyptian faith, every one of those statues was haunted eternally by the *Ka*, or Double, of the person whom it represented. He descended the great stairway. Was it fancy, or did something run across the bottom step in front of him— an animal of some kind, followed by a swift-moving and indefinite shadow? If so, it must have been the Museum cat hunting a Museum mouse. Only then what on earth was that very peculiar and unpleasant shadow?

He called, "Puss! puss! puss!" for he would have been quite glad of its company; but there came no friendly "miau" in response. Perhaps it was only the *Ka* of a cat and the shadow was— oh! never mind what. The Egyptians worshipped cats, and there were plenty of their mummies about on the shelves. But the shadow!

Once he shouted in the hope of attracting attention, for there were no windows to which he could climb. He did not repeat the experiment, for it seemed as though a thousand voices were answering him from every corner and roof of the gigantic edifice.

Well, he must face the thing out. He was shut in a museum, and the question was in what part of it he should camp for the night. Moreover, as it was growing rapidly dark, the problem must be solved at once. He thought with affection of the lavatory, where, before going to see the Director, only that afternoon he had washed his hands with the assistance of a kindly Arab who watched the door and gracefully accepted a piastre. But there was no Arab there now, and the door, like every other in this confounded place, was locked. He marched on to the entrance.

Here, opposite to each other, stood the red sarcophagi of the great Queen Hatshepu and her brother and husband, Thotmes III. He looked at them. Why should not one of these afford him a night's lodging? They were deep and quiet, and would fit the human frame very nicely. For a while Smith wondered which of these monarchs would be the more likely to take offence at such a use of a private sarcophagus, and, acting on general principles, concluded that he would rather throw himself on the mercy of the lady.

Already one of his legs was over the edge of that solemn coffer, and he was squeezing his body beneath the massive lid that was propped above it on blocks of wood, when he remembered a little, naked, withered thing with long hair that he had seen in a side chamber of the tomb of Amenhotep II. in the Valley of Kings at Thebes. This caricature of humanity many thought, and he agreed with them, to be the actual body of the mighty Hatshepu as it appeared after the robbers had done with it.

Supposing now, that when he was lying at the bottom of that sarcophagus, sleeping the sleep of the just, this little personage should peep over its edge and ask him what he was doing there! Of course the idea was absurd; he was tired, and his nerves were a little shaken. Still, the fact remained that for centuries the hallowed dust of Queen Hatshepu had slept where he, a modern man, was proposing to sleep.

He scrambled down from the sarcophagus and looked round him in despair. Opposite to the main entrance was the huge central hall of the Museum. Now the cement roof of this hall had, he knew, gone wrong, with the

result that very extensive repairs had become necessary. So extensive were they, indeed, that the Director-General had informed him that they would take several years to complete. Therefore this hall was boarded up, only a little doorway being left by which the workmen could enter. Certain statues, of Seti II. and others, too large to be moved, were also roughly boarded over, as were some great funeral boats on either side of the entrance. The rest of the place, which might be two hundred feet long with a proportionate breadth, was empty save for the colossi of Amenhotep III. and his queen Taia that stood beneath the gallery at its farther end.

It was an appalling place in which to sleep, but better, reflected Smith, than a sarcophagus or those mummy chambers. If, for instance, he could creep behind the deal boards that enclosed one of the funeral boats he would be quite comfortable there. Lifting the curtain, he slipped into the hall, where the gloom of evening had already settled. Only the skylights and the outline of the towering colossi at the far end remained visible. Close to him were the two funeral boats which he had noted when he looked into the hall earlier on that day, standing at the head of a flight of steps which led to the sunk floor of the centre. He groped his way to that on the right. As he expected, the projecting planks were not quite joined at the bow. He crept in between them and the boat and laid himself down.

Presumably, being altogether tired out, Smith did ultimately fall asleep, for how long he never knew. At any rate, it is certain that, if so, he woke up again. He could not tell the time, because his watch was not a repeater, and the place was as black as the pit. He had some matches in his pocket, and might have struck one and even have lit his pipe. To his credit be it said, however, he remembered that he was the sole tenant of one of the most valuable museums in the world, and his responsibilities with reference to fire. So he refrained from striking that match under the keel of a boat which had become very dry in the course of five thousand years.

Smith found himself very wide awake indeed. Never in all his life did he remember being more so, not even in the hour of its great catastrophe, or when his godfather, Ebenezer, after much hesitation, had promised him a clerkship in the bank of which he was a director. His nerves seemed strung tight as harp-strings, and his every sense was painfully acute. Thus he could even smell the odour of mummies that floated down from the upper galleries and the earthy scent of the boat which had been buried for thousands of years in sand at the foot of the pyramid of one of the fifth dynasty kings.

Moreover, he could hear all sorts of strange sounds, faint and far-away sounds which at first he thought must emanate from Cairo without. Soon, however, he grew sure that their origin was more local. Doubtless the cement

work and the cases in the galleries were cracking audibly, as is the unpleasant habit of such things at night.

Yet why should these common manifestations be so universal and affect him so strangely? Really, it seemed as though people were stirring all about him. More, he could have sworn that the great funeral boat beneath which he lay had become re-peopled with the crew that once it bore.

He heard them at their business above him. There were trampings and a sound as though something heavy were being laid on the deck, such, for instance, as must have been made when the mummy of Pharaoh was set there for its last journey to the western bank of the Nile. Yes, and now he could have sworn again that the priestly crew were getting out the oars.

Smith began to meditate flight from the neighbourhood of that place when something occurred which determined him to stop where he was.

The huge hall was growing light, but not, as at first he hoped, with the rays of dawn. This light was pale and ghostly, though very penetrating. Also it had a blue tinge, unlike any other he had ever seen. At first it arose in a kind of fan or fountain at the far end of the hall, illumining the steps there and the two noble colossi which sat above.

But what was this that stood at the head of the steps, radiating glory? By heavens! it was Osiris himself or the image of Osiris, god of the Dead, the Egyptian saviour of the world!

There he stood, in his mummy-cloths, wearing the feathered crown, and holding in his hands, which projected from an opening in the wrappings, the crook and the scourge of power. Was he alive, or was he dead? Smith could not tell, since he never moved, only stood there, splendid and fearful, his calm, benignant face staring into nothingness.

Smith became aware that the darkness between him and the vision of this god was peopled; that a great congregation was gathering, or had gathered there. The blue light began to grow; long tongues of it shot forward, which joined themselves together, illumining all that huge hall.

Now, too, he saw the congregation. Before him, rank upon rank of them, stood the kings and queens of Egypt. As though at a given signal, they bowed themselves to the Osiris, and ere the tinkling of their ornaments had died away, lo! Osiris was gone. But in his place stood another, Isis, the Mother of Mystery, her deep eyes looking forth from beneath the jewelled vulture-cap. Again the congregation bowed, and, lo! she was gone. But in her place stood yet another, a radiant, lovely being, who held in her hand the Sign of Life, and wore upon her head the symbol of the shining disc— Hathor, Goddess of Love. A third time the congregation bowed, and she, too, was gone; nor did any other appear in her place.

The Pharaohs and their queens began to move about and speak to each other; their voices came to his ears in one low, sweet murmur.

In his amaze Smith had forgotten fear. From his hiding-place he watched them intently. Some of them he knew by their faces. There, for instance, was the long-necked Khu-en-aten, talking somewhat angrily to the imperial Rameses II. Smith could understand what he said, for this power seemed to have been given to him. He was complaining in a high, weak voice that on this, the one night of the year when they might meet, the gods, or the magic images of the gods who were put up for them to worship, should not include *his* god, symbolized by the "Aten," or the sun's disc.

"I have heard of your Majesty's god," replied Rameses; "the priests used to tell me of him, also that he did not last long after your Majesty flew to heaven. The Fathers of Amen gave you a bad name; they called you 'the heretic' and hammered out your cartouches. They were quite rare in my time. Oh, do not let your Majesty be angry! So many of us have been heretics. My grandson, Seti, there"— and he pointed to a mild, thoughtful-faced man— "for example. I am told that he really worshipped the god of those Hebrew slaves whom I used to press to build my cities. Look at that lady with him. Beautiful, isn't she? Observe her large, violet eyes! Well, she was the one who did the mischief, a Hebrew herself. At least, they tell me so."

"I will talk with him," answered Khu-en-aten. "It is more than possible that we may agree on certain points. Meanwhile, let me explain to your Majesty—"

"Oh, I pray you, not now. There is my wife."

"Your wife?" said Khu-en-aten, drawing himself up. "Which wife? I am told that your Majesty had many and left a large family; indeed, I see some hundreds of them here to-night. Now, I— but let me introduce Nefertiti to your Majesty. I may explain that she was my *only* wife."

"So I have understood. Your Majesty was rather an invalid, were you not? Of course, in those circumstances, one prefers the nurse whom one can trust. Oh, pray, no offence! Nefertari, my love— oh, I beg pardon! — Astnefert— Nefertari has gone to speak to some of her children— let me introduce you to your predecessor, the Queen Nefertiti, wife of Amenhotep IV.— I mean Khu-en-aten (he changed his name, you know, because half of it was that of the father of the gods). She is interested in the question of plural marriage. Good-bye! I wish to have a word with my grandfather, Rameses I. He was fond of me as a little boy."

At this moment Smith's interest in that queer conversation died away, for of a sudden he beheld none other than the queen of his dreams, Ma-Mee. Oh! there she stood, without a doubt, only ten times more beautiful than he had ever pictured her. She was tall and somewhat fair-complexioned, with

slumbrous, dark eyes, and on her face gleamed the mystic smile he loved. She wore a robe of simple white and a purple-broidered apron, a crown of golden *uraei* with turquoise eyes was set upon her dark hair as in her statue, and on her breast and arms were the very necklace and bracelets that he had taken from her tomb. She appeared to be somewhat moody, or rather thoughtful, for she leaned by herself against a balustrade, watching the throng without much interest.

Presently a Pharaoh, a black-browed, vigorous man with thick lips, drew near.

"I greet your Majesty," he said.

She started, and answered: "Oh, it is you! I make my obeisance to your Majesty," and she curtsied to him, humbly enough, but with a suggestion of mockery in her movements.

"Well, you do not seem to have been very anxious to find me, Ma-Mee, which, considering that we meet so seldom—"

"I saw that your Majesty was engaged with my sister queens," she interrupted, in a rich, low voice, "and with some other ladies in the gallery there, whose faces I seem to remember, but who I think were *not* queens. Unless, indeed, you married them after I was drawn away."

"One must talk to one's relations," replied the Pharaoh.

"Quite so. But, you see, I have no relations— at least, none whom I know well. My parents, you will remember, died when I was young, leaving me Egypt's heiress, and they are still vexed at the marriage which I made on the advice of my counsellors. But, is it not annoying? I have lost one of my rings, that which had the god Bes on it. Some dweller on the earth must be wearing it to-day, and that is why I cannot get it back from him."

"Him! Why 'him'? Hush; the business is about to begin."

"What business, my lord?"

"Oh, the question of the violation of our tombs, I believe."

"Indeed! That is a large subject, and not a very profitable one, I should say. Tell me, who is that?" And she pointed to a lady who had stepped forward, a very splendid person, magnificently arrayed.

"Cleopatra the Greek," he answered, "the last of Egypt's Sovereigns, one of the Ptolemys. You can always know her by that Roman who walks about after her."

"Which?" asked Ma-Mee. "I see several— also other men. She was the wretch who rolled Egypt in the dirt and betrayed her. Oh, if it were not for the law of peace by which we must abide when we meet thus!"

"You mean that she would be torn to shreds, Ma-Mee, and her very soul scattered like the limbs of Osiris? Well, if it were not for that law of peace, so

perhaps would many of us, for never have I heard a single king among these hundreds speak altogether well of those who went before or followed after him."

"Especially of those who went before if they happen to have hammered out their cartouches and usurped their monuments," said the queen, dryly, and looking him in the eyes.

At this home-thrust the Pharaoh seemed to wince. Making no answer, he pointed to the royal woman who had mounted the steps at the end of the hall.

Queen Cleopatra lifted her hand and stood thus for a while. Very splendid she was, and Smith, on his hands and knees behind the boarding of the boat, thanked his stars that alone among modern men it had been his lot to look upon her rich and living loveliness. There she shone, she who had changed the fortunes of the world, she who, whatever she did amiss, at least had known how to die.

Silence fell upon that glittering galaxy of kings and queens and upon all the hundreds of their offspring, their women, and their great officers who crowded the double tier of galleries around the hall.

"Royalties of Egypt," she began, in a sweet, clear voice which penetrated to the farthest recesses of the place, "I, Cleopatra, the sixth of that name and the last monarch who ruled over the Upper and the Lower Lands before Egypt became a home of slaves, have a word to say to your Majesties, who, in your mortal days, all of you more worthily filled the throne on which once I sat. I do not speak of Egypt and its fate, or of our sins— whereof mine were not the least— that brought her to the dust. Those sins I and others expiate elsewhere, and of them, from age to age, we hear enough. But on this one night of the year, that of the feast of him whom we call Osiris, but whom other nations have known and know by different names, it is given to us once more to be mortal for an hour, and, though we be but shadows, to renew the loves and hates of our long-perished flesh. Here for an hour we strut in our forgotten pomp; the crowns that were ours still adorn our brows, and once more we seem to listen to our people's praise. Our hopes are the hopes of mortal life, our foes are the foes we feared, our gods grow real again, and our lovers whisper in our ears. Moreover, this joy is given to us— to see each other as we are, to know as the gods know, and therefore to forgive, even where we despise and hate. Now I have done, and I, the youngest of the rulers of ancient Egypt, call upon him who was the first of her kings to take my place."

She bowed, and the audience bowed back to her. Then she descended the steps and was lost in the throng. Where she had been appeared an old man, simply-clad, long-bearded, wise-faced, and wearing on his grey hair no crown

save a plain band of gold, from the centre of which rose the snake-headed *uraeus* crest.

"Your Majesties who came after me," said the old man, "I am Menes, the first of the accepted Pharaohs of Egypt, although many of those who went before me were more truly kings than I. Yet as the first who joined the Upper and the Lower Lands, and took the royal style and titles, and ruled as well as I could rule, it is given to me to talk with you for a while this night whereon our spirits are permitted to gather from the uttermost parts of the uttermost worlds and see each other face to face. First, in darkness and in secret, let us speak of the mystery of the gods and of its meanings. Next, in darkness and in secret, let us speak of the mystery of our lives, of whence they come, of where they tarry by the road, and whither they go at last. And afterwards, let us speak of other matters face to face in light and openness, as we were wont to do when we were men. Then hence to Thebes, there to celebrate our yearly festival. Is such your will?"

"Such is our will," they answered.

It seemed to Smith that dense darkness fell upon the place, and with it a silence that was awful. For a time that he could not reckon, that might have been years or might have been moments, he sat there in the utter darkness and the utter silence.

At length the light came again, first as a blue spark, then in upward pouring rays, and lastly pervading all. There stood Menes on the steps, and there in front of him was gathered the same royal throng.

"The mysteries are finished," said the old king. "Now, if any have aught to say, let it be said openly."

A young man dressed in the robes and ornaments of an early dynasty came forward and stood upon the steps between the Pharaoh Menes and all those who had reigned after him. His face seemed familiar to Smith, as was the side lock that hung down behind his right ear in token of his youth. Where had he seen him? Ah, he remembered. Only a few hours ago lying in one of the cases of the Museum, together with the bones of the Pharaoh Unas.

"Your Majesties," he began, "I am the King Metesuphis. The matter that I wish to lay before you is that of the violation of our sepulchres by those men who now live upon the earth. The mortal bodies of many who are gathered here to-night lie in this place to be stared at and mocked by the curious. I myself am one of them, jawless, broken, hideous to behold. Yonder, day by day, must my *Ka* sit watching my desecrated flesh, torn from the pyramid that, with cost and labour, I raised up to be an eternal house wherein I might hide till the hour of resurrection. Others of us lie in far lands. Thus, as he can tell you, my predecessor, Man-kau-ra, he who built the third of the great pyramids,

the Pyramid of Her, sleeps, or rather wakes in a dark city, called London, across the seas, a place of murk where no sun shines. Others have been burnt with fire, others are scattered in small dust. The ornaments that were ours are stole away and sold to the greedy; our sacred writings and our symbols are their jest. Soon there will not be one holy grave in Egypt that remains undefiled."

"That is so," said a voice from the company. "But four months gone the deep, deep pit was opened that I had dug in the shadow of the Pyramid of Cephren, who begat me in the world. There in my chamber I slept alone, two handfuls of white bones, since when I died they did not preserve the body with wrappings and with spices. Now I see those bones of mine, beside which my Double has watched for these five thousand years, hid in the blackness of a great ship and tossing on a sea that is strewn with ice."

"It is so," echoed a hundred other voices.

"Then," went on the young king, turning to Menes, "I ask of your Majesty whether there is no means whereby we may be avenged on those who do us this foul wrong."

"Let him who has wisdom speak," said the old Pharaoh.

A man of middle age, short in stature and of a thoughtful brow, who held in his hand a wand and wore the feathers and insignia of the heir to the throne of Egypt and of a high priest of Amen, moved to the steps. Smith knew him at once from his statues. He was Khaemuas, son of Rameses the Great, the mightiest magician that ever was in Egypt, who of his own will withdrew himself from earth before the time came that he should sit upon the throne.

"I have wisdom, your Majesties, and I will answer," he said. "The time draws on when, in the land of Death which is Life, the land that we call Amenti, it will be given to us to lay our wrongs as to this matter before Those who judge, knowing that they will be avenged. On this night of the year also, when we resume the shapes we were, we have certain powers of vengeance, or rather of executing justice. But our time is short, and there is much to say and do before the sun-god Ra arises and we depart each to his place. Therefore it seems best that we should leave these wicked ones in their wickedness till we meet them face to face beyond the world."

Smith, who had been following the words of Khaemuas with the closest attention and considerable anxiety, breathed again, thanking Heaven that the engagements of these departed monarchs were so numerous and pressing. Still, as a matter of precaution, he drew the cigar-box which contained Ma-Mee's hand from his pocket, and pushed it as far away from him as he could. It was a most unlucky act. Perhaps the cigar-box grated on the floor, or perhaps the fact of his touching the relic put him into psychic communication with all these spirits. At any rate, he became aware that the eyes of that dreadful

magician were fixed upon him, and that a bone had a better chance of escaping the search of a Röntgen ray than he of hiding himself from their baleful glare.

"As it happens, however," went on Khaemuas, in a cold voice, "I now perceive that there is hidden in this place, and spying on us, one of the worst of these vile thieves. I say to your Majesties that I see him crouched beneath yonder funeral barge, and that he has with him at this moment the hand of one of your Majesties, stolen by him from her tomb at Thebes."

Now every queen in the company became visibly agitated (Smith, who was watching Ma-Mee, saw her hold up her hands and look at them), while all the Pharaohs pointed with their fingers and exclaimed together, in a voice that rolled round the hall like thunder:

"Let him be brought forth to judgment!"

Khaemuas raised his wand and, holding it towards the boat where Smith was hidden, said:

"Draw near, Vile One, bringing with thee that thou hast stolen."

Smith tried hard to remain where he was. He sat himself down and set his heels against the floor. As the reader knows, he was always shy and retiring by disposition, and never had these weaknesses oppressed him more than they did just then. When a child his favourite nightmare had been that the foreman of a jury was in the act of proclaiming him guilty of some dreadful but unstated crime. Now he understood what that nightmare foreshadowed. He was about to be convicted in a court of which all the kings and queens of Egypt were the jury, Menes was Chief Justice, and the magician Khaemuas played the *role* of Attorney-General.

In vain did he sit down and hold fast. Some power took possession of him which forced him first to stretch out his arm and pick up the cigar-box containing the hand of Ma-Mee, and next drew him from the friendly shelter of the deal boards that were about the boat.

Now he was on his feet and walking down the flight of steps opposite to those on which Menes stood far away. Now he was among all that throng of ghosts, which parted to let him pass, looking at him as he went with cold and wondering eyes. They were very majestic ghosts; the ages that had gone by since they laid down their sceptres had taken nothing from their royal dignity. Moreover, save one, none of them seemed to have any pity for his plight. She was a little princess who stood by her mother, that same little princess whose mummy he had seen and pitied in the Director's room with a lotus flower thrust beneath her bandages. As he passed Smith heard her say:

"This Vile One is frightened. Be brave, Vile One!"

Smith understood, and pride came to his aid. He, a gentleman of the modern world, would not show the white feather before a crowd of ancient Egyptian ghosts. Turning to the child, he smiled at her, then drew himself to his full height and walked on quietly. Here it may be stated that Smith was a tall man, still comparatively young, and very good-looking, straight and spare in frame, with dark, pleasant eyes and a little black beard.

"At least he is a well-favoured thief," said one of the queens to another.

"Yes," answered she who had been addressed. "I wonder that a man with such a noble air should find pleasure in disturbing graves and stealing the offerings of the dead," words that gave Smith much cause for thought. He had never considered the matter in this light.

Now he came to the place where Ma-Mee stood, the black-browed Pharaoh who had been her husband at her side. On his left hand which held the cigar-box was the gold Bes ring, and that box he felt constrained to carry pressed against him just over his heart.

As he went by he turned his head, and his eyes met those of Ma-Mee. She started violently. Then she saw the ring upon his hand and again started still more violently.

"What ails your Majesty?" asked the Pharaoh.

"Oh, naught," she answered. "Yet does this earth-dweller remind you of anyone?"

"Yes, he does," answered the Pharaoh. "He reminds me very much of that accursed sculptor about whom we had words."

"Do you mean a certain Horu, the Court artist; he who worked the image that was buried with me, and whom you sent to carve your statues in the deserts of Kush, until he died of fevers— or was it poison?"

"Aye; Horu and no other, may Set take and keep him!" growled the Pharaoh.

Then Smith passed on and heard no more. Now he stood before the venerable Menes. Some instinct caused him to bow to this Pharaoh, who bowed back to him. Then he turned and bowed to the royal company, and they also bowed back to him, coldly, but very gravely and courteously.

"Dweller on the world where once we had our place, and therefore brother of us, the dead," began Menes, "this divine priest and magician"— and he pointed to Khaemuas— "declares that you are one of those who foully violate our sepulchres and desecrate our ashes. He declares, moreover, that at this very moment you have with you a portion of the mortal flesh of a certain Majesty whose spirit is present here. Say, now, are these things true?"

To his astonishment Smith found that he had not the slightest difficulty in answering in the same sweet tongue.

"O King, they are true, and not true. Hear me, rulers of Egypt. It is true that I have searched in your graves, because my heart has been drawn towards you, and I would learn all that I could concerning you, for it comes to me *now* that once I was one of you— no king, indeed, yet perchance of the blood of kings. Also— for I would hide nothing even if I could— I searched for one tomb above all others."

"Why, O man?" asked the Judge.

"Because a face drew me, a lovely face that was cut in stone."

Now all that great audience turned their eyes towards him and listened as though his words moved them.

"Did you find that holy tomb?" asked Menes. "If so, what did you find therein?"

"Aye, Pharaoh, and in it I found these," and he took from the box the withered hand, from his pocket the broken bronze, and from his finger the ring.

"Also I found other things which I delivered to the keeper of this place, articles of jewellery that I seem to see to-night upon one who is present here among you."

"Is the face of this figure the face you sought?" asked the Judge.

"It is the lovely face," he answered.

Menes took the effigy in his hand and read the cartouche that was engraved beneath its breast.

"If there be here among us," he said, presently, "one who long after my day ruled as queen in Egypt, one who was named Ma-Mé, let her draw near."

Now from where she stood glided Ma-Mee and took her place opposite to Smith.

"Say, O Queen," asked Menes, "do you know aught of this matter?"

"I know that hand; it was my own hand," she answered. "I know that ring; it was my ring. I know that image in bronze; it was my image. Look on me and judge for yourselves whether this be so. A certain sculptor fashioned it, the son of a king's son, who was named Horu, the first of sculptors and the head artist of my Court. There, clad in strange garments, he stands before you. Horu, or the Double of Horu, he who cut the image when I ruled in Egypt, is he who found the image and the man who stands before you; or, mayhap, his Double cast in the same mould."

The Pharaoh Menes turned to the magician Khaemuas and said:—

"Are these things so, O Seer?"

"They are so," answered Khaemuas. "This dweller on the earth is he who, long ago, was the sculptor Horu. But what shall that avail? He, once more a living man, is a violator of the hallowed dead. I say, therefore, that judgment

should be executed on his flesh, so that when the light comes here to-morrow he himself will again be gathered to the dead."

Menes bent his head upon his breast and pondered. Smith said nothing. To him the whole play was so curious that he had no wish to interfere with its development. If these ghosts wished to make him of their number, let them do so. He had no ties on earth, and now when he knew full surely that there was a life beyond this of earth he was quite prepared to explore its mysteries. So he folded his arms upon his breast and awaited the sentence.

But Ma-Mee did not wait. She raised her hand so swiftly that the bracelets jingled on her wrists, and spoke out with boldness.

"Royal Khaemuas, prince and magician," she said, "hearken to one who, like you, was Egypt's heir centuries before you were born, one also who ruled over the Two Lands, and not so ill— which, Prince, never was your lot. Answer me! Is all wisdom centred in your breast? Answer me! Do you alone know the mysteries of Life and Death? Answer me! Did your god Amen teach you that vengeance went before mercy? Answer me! Did he teach you that men should be judged unheard? That they should be hurried by violence to Osiris ere their time, and thereby separated from the dead ones whom they loved and forced to return to live again upon this evil Earth?

"Listen: when the last moon was near her full my spirit sat in my tomb in the burying-place of queens. My spirit saw this man enter into my tomb, and what he did there. With bowed head he looked upon my bones that a thief of the priesthood had robbed and burnt within twenty years of their burial, in which he himself had taken part. And what did this man with those bones, he who was once Horu? I tell you that he hid them away there in the tomb where he thought they could not be found again. Who, then, was the thief and the violator? He who robbed and burnt my bones, or he who buried them with reverence? Again, he found the jewels that the priest of your brotherhood had dropped in his flight, when the smoke of the burning flesh and spices overpowered him, and with them the hand which that wicked one had broken off from the body of my Majesty. What did this man then? He took the jewels. Would you have had him leave them to be stolen by some peasant? And the hand? I tell you that he kissed that poor dead hand which once had been part of the body of my Majesty, and that now he treasures it as a holy relic. My spirit saw him do these things and made report thereof to me. I ask you, therefore, Prince, I ask you all, Royalties of Egypt— whether for such deeds this man should die?"

Now Khaemuas, the advocate of vengeance, shrugged his shoulders and smiled meaningly, but the congregation of kings and queens thundered an answer, and it was:—

"*No!*"

Ma-Mee looked to Menes to give judgment. Before he could speak the dark-browed Pharaoh who had named her wife strode forward and addressed them.

"Her Majesty, Heiress of Egypt, Royal Wife, Lady of the Two Lands, has spoken," he cried. "Now let me speak who was the husband of her Majesty. Whether this man was once Horu the sculptor I know not. If so he was also an evil-doer who, by my decree, died in banishment in the land of Kush. Whatever be the truth as to that matter, he admits that he violated the tomb of her Majesty and stole what the old thieves had left. Her Majesty says also— and he does not deny it— that he dared to kiss her hand, and for a man to kiss the hand of a wedded Queen of Egypt the punishment is death. I claim that this man should die to the World before his time, that in a day to come again he may live and suffer in the World. Judge, O Menes."

Menes lifted his head and spoke, saying:—

"Repeat to me the law, O Pharaoh, under which a living man must die for the kissing of a dead hand. In my day and in that of those who went before me there was no such law in Egypt. If a living man, who was not her husband, or of her kin, kissed the living hand of a wedded Queen of Egypt, save in ceremony, then perchance he might be called upon to die. Perchance for such a reason a certain Horu once was called upon to die. But in the grave there is no marriage, and therefore even if he had found her alive within the tomb and kissed her hand, or even her lips, why should he die for the crime of love?

"Hear me, all; this is my judgment in the matter. Let the soul of that priest who first violated the tomb of the royal Ma-Mee be hunted down and given to the jaws of the Destroyer, that he may know the last depths of Death, if so the gods declare. But let this man go from among us unharmed, since what he did he did in reverent ignorance and because Hathor, Goddess of Love, guided him from of old. Love rules this world wherein we meet to-night, with all the worlds whence we have gathered or whither we still must go. Who can defy its power? Who can refuse its rites? Now hence to Thebes!"

There was a rushing sound as of a thousand wings, and all were gone.

No, not all, since Smith yet stood before the draped colossi and the empty steps, and beside him, glorious, unearthly, gleamed the vision of Ma-Mee.

"I, too, must away," she whispered; "yet ere I go a word with you who once were a sculptor in Egypt. You loved me then, and that love cost you your life, you who once dared to kiss this hand of mine that again you kissed in yonder tomb. For I was Pharaoh's wife in name only; understand me well, in name only; since that title of Royal Mother which they gave me is but a graven lie. Horu, I never was a wife, and when you died, swiftly I followed you to the

grave. Oh, you forget, but I remember! I remember many things. You think that the priestly thief broke this figure of me which you found in the sand outside my tomb. Not so. *I* broke it, because, daring greatly, you had written thereon, 'Beloved,' not 'of *Horus* the God,' as you should have done, but 'of *Horu* the Man.' So when I came to be buried, Pharaoh, knowing all, took the image from my wrappings and hurled it away. I remember, too, the casting of that image, and how you threw a gold chain I had given you into the crucible with the bronze, saying that gold alone was fit to fashion me. And this signet that I bear— it was you who cut it. Take it, take it, Horu, and in its place give me back that which is on your hand, the Bes ring that I also wore. Take it and wear it ever till you die again, and let it go to the grave with you as once it went to the grave with me.

"Now hearken. When Ra the great sun arises again and you awake you will think that you have dreamed a dream. You will think that in this dream you saw and spoke with a lady of Egypt who died more than three thousand years ago, but whose beauty, carved in stone and bronze, has charmed your heart to-day. So let it be, yet know, O man, who once was named Horu, that such dreams are oft-times a shadow of the truth. Know that this Glory which shines before you is mine indeed in the land that is both far and near, the land wherein I dwell eternally, and that what is mine has been, is, and shall be yours for ever. Gods may change their kingdoms and their names; men may live and die, and live again once more to die; empires may fall and those who ruled them be turned to forgotten dust. Yet true love endures immortal as the souls in which it was conceived, and from it for you and me, the night of woe and separation done, at the daybreak which draws on, there shall be born the splendour and the peace of union. Till that hour foredoomed seek me no more, though I be ever near you, as I have ever been. Till that most blessed hour, Horu, farewell."

She bent towards him; her sweet lips touched his brow; the perfume from her breath and hair beat upon him; the light of her wondrous eyes searched out his very soul, reading the answer that was written there.

He stretched out his arms to clasp her, and lo! she was gone.

IT WAS a very cold and a very stiff Smith who awoke on the following morning, to find himself exactly where he had lain down— namely, on a cement floor beneath the keel of a funeral boat in the central hall of the Cairo Museum. He crept from his shelter shivering, and looked at this hall, to find it quite as empty as it had been on the previous evening. Not a sign or a token was there of Pharaoh Menes and all those kings and queens of whom he had dreamed so vividly.

Reflecting on the strange phantasies that weariness and excited nerves can summon to the mind in sleep, Smith made his way to the great doors and waited in the shadow, praying earnestly that, although it was the Mohammedan Sabbath, someone might visit the Museum to see that all was well.

As a matter of fact, someone did, and before he had been there a minute— a watchman going about his business. He unlocked the place carelessly, looking over his shoulder at a kite fighting with two nesting crows. In an instant Smith, who was not minded to stop and answer questions, had slipped past him and was gliding down the portico, from monument to monument, like a snake between boulders, still keeping in the shadow as he headed for the gates.

The attendant caught sight of him and uttered a yell of fear; then, since it is not good to look upon an *afreet*, appearing from whence no mortal man could be, he turned his head away. When he looked again Smith was through those gates and had mingled with the crowd in the street beyond.

The sunshine was very pleasant to one who was conscious of having contracted a chill of the worst Egyptian order from long contact with a damp stone floor. Smith walked on through it towards his hotel— it was Shepheard's, and more than a mile away— making up a story as he went to tell the hall-porter of how he had gone to dine at Mena House by the Pyramids, missed the last tram, and stopped the night there.

Whilst he was thus engaged his left hand struck somewhat sharply against the corner of the cigar-box in his pocket, that which contained the relic of the queen Ma-Mee. The pain caused him to glance at his fingers to see if they were injured, and to perceive on one of them the ring he wore. Surely, surely it was not the same that the Director-General had given him! *That* ring was engraved with the image of the god Bes. On *this* was cut the cartouche of her Majesty Ma-mee! And he had dreamed— oh, he had dreamed—!

To this day Smith is wondering whether, in the hurry of the moment, he made a mistake as to which of those rings the Director-General had given him as part of his share of the spoil of the royal tomb he discovered in the Valley of Queens. Afterwards Smith wrote to ask, but the Director-General could only remember that he gave him one of the two rings, and assured him that that inscribed "*Bes Ank, Ank Bes*," was with Ma-Mee's other jewels in the Gold Room of the Museum.

Also Smith is wondering whether any other bronze figure of an old Egyptian royalty shows so high a percentage of gold as, on analysis, the broken image of Ma-Mee was proved to do. For had she not seemed to tell him a tale of the melting of a golden chain when that effigy was cast?

Was it all only a dream, or was it— something more— by day and by night he asks of Nothingness?

But, be she near or far, no answer comes from the Queen Ma-Mee, whose proud titles were "Her Majesty the Good God, the justified Dweller in Osiris; Daughter of Amen, Royal Heiress, Royal Sister, Royal Wife, Royal Mother; Lady of the Two Lands; Wearer of the Double Crown; of the White Crown, of the Red Crown; Sweet Flower of Love, Beautiful Eternally."

So, like the rest of us, Smith must wait to learn the truth concerning many things, and more particularly as to which of those two circles of ancient gold the Director-General gave him yonder at Cairo.

It seems but a little matter, yet it is more than all the worlds to him!

To the astonishment of his colleagues in antiquarian research, Smith has never returned to Egypt. He explains to them that his health is quite restored, and that he no longer needs this annual change to a more temperate clime.

Now, *which* of the two royal rings did the Director-General return to Smith on the mummied hand of her late Majesty Ma-Mee?

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## 17: The Invisible Girl

***Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley***

1797-1851

*The Keepsake,* 1832

THIS SLENDER NARRATIVE has no pretensions to the regularity of a story, or the development of situations and feelings; it is but a slight sketch, delivered nearly as it was narrated to me by one of the humblest of the actors concerned: nor will I spin out a circumstance interesting principally from its singularity and truth, but narrate, as concisely as I can, how I was surprised on visiting what seemed a ruined tower, crowning a bleak promontory overhanging the sea, that flows between Wales and Ireland, to find that though the exterior preserved all the savage rudeness that betokened many a war with the elements, the interior was fitted up somewhat in the guise of a summer-house, for it was too small to deserve any other name. It consisted but of the ground-floor, which served as an entrance, and one room above, which was reached by a staircase made out of the thickness of the wall. This chamber was floored and carpeted, decorated with elegant furniture; and, above all, to attract the attention and excite curiosity, there hung over the chimney-piece— for to preserve the apartment from damp a fireplace had been built evidently since it had assumed a guise so dissimilar to the object of its construction— a picture simply painted in water-colours, which deemed more than any part of the adornments of the room to be at war with the rudeness of the building, the solitude in which it was placed, and the desolation of the surrounding scenery. This drawing represented a lovely girl in the very pride and bloom of youth; her dress was simple, in the fashion of the beginning of the eighteenth century; her countenance was embellished by a look of mingled innocence and intelligence, to which was added the imprint of serenity of soul and natural cheerfulness. She was reading one of those folio romances which have so long been the delight of the enthusiastic and young; her mandoline was at her feet— her parroquet perched on a huge mirror near her; the arrangement of furniture and hangings gave token of a luxurious dwelling, and her attire also evidently that of home and privacy, yet bore with it an appearance of ease and girlish ornament, as if she wished to please. Beneath this picture was inscribed in golden letters, "The Invisible Girl."

Rambling about a country nearly uninhabited, having lost my way, and being overtaken by a shower, I had lighted on this dreary-looking tenement, which seemed to rock in the blast, and to be hung up there as the very symbol of desolation. I was gazing wistfully and cursing inwardly my stars which led me to a ruin that could afford no shelter, though the storm began to pelt more seriously than before, when I saw an old woman's head popped out from a

kind of loophole, and as suddenly withdrawn;— a minute after a feminine voice called to me from within, and penetrating a little brambly maze that screened a door, which I had not before observed, so skilfully had the planter succeeded in concealing art with nature, I found the good dame standing on the threshold and inviting me to take refuge within. "I had just come up from our cot hard by," she said, "to look after the things, as I do every day, when the rain came on— will ye walk up till it is over?" I was about to observe that the cot hard by, at the venture of a few rain drops, was better than a ruined tower, and to ask my kind hostess whether "the things" were pigeons or crows that she was come to look after, when the matting of the floor and the carpeting of the staircase struck my eye. I was still more surprised when I saw the room above; and beyond all, the picture and its singular inscription, naming her invisible, whom the painter had coloured forth into very agreeable visibility, awakened my most lively curiosity; the result of this, of my exceeding politeness towards the old woman, and her own natural garrulity, was a kind of garbled narrative which my imagination eked out, and future inquiries rectified, till it assumed the following form.

Some years before, in the afternoon of a September day, which, though tolerably fair, gave many tokens of a tempestuous night, a gentleman arrived at a little coast town about ten miles from this place; he expressed his desire to hire a boat to carry him to the town of —— about fifteen miles farther on the coast. The menaces which the sky held forth made the fishermen loathe to venture, till at length two, one the father of a numerous family, bribed by the bountiful reward the stranger promised, the other, the son of my hostess, induced by youthful daring, agreed to undertake the voyage. The wind was fair, and they hoped to make good way before nightfall, and to get into port ere the rising of the storm. They pushed off with good cheer, at least the fishermen did; as for the stranger, the deep mourning which he wore was not half so black as the melancholy that wrapt his mind. He looked as if he had never smiled— as if some unutterable thought, dark as night and bitter as death, had built its nest within his bosom, and brooded therein eternally; he did not mention his name; but one of the villagers recognised him as Henry Vernon, the son of a baronet who possessed a mansion about three miles distant from the town for which he was bound. This mansion was almost abandoned by the family; but Henry had, in a romantic fit, visited it about three years before, and Sir Peter had been down there during the previous spring for about a couple of months.

The boat did not make so much way as was expected; the breeze failed them as they got out to sea, and they were fain with oar as well as sail to try to weather the promontory that jutted out between them and the spot they

desired to reach. They were yet far distant when the shifting wind began to exert its strength, and to blow with violent though unequal blasts. Night came on pitchy dark, and the howling waves rose and broke with frightful violence, menacing to overwhelm the tiny bark that dared resist their fury. They were forced to lower every sail, and take to their oars; one man was obliged to bale out the water, and Vernon himself took an oar, and rowing with desperate energy, equalled the force of the more practised boatmen. There had been much talk between the sailors before the tempest came on; now, except a brief command, all were silent. One thought of his wife and children, and silently cursed the caprice of the stranger that endangered in its effects, not only his life, but their welfare; the other feared less, for he was a daring lad, but he worked hard, and had no time for speech; while Vernon bitterly regretting the thoughtlessness which had made him cause others to share a peril, unimportant as far as he himself was concerned, now tried to cheer them with a voice full of animation and courage, and now pulled yet more strongly at the oar he held. The only person who did not seem wholly intent on the work he was about, was the man who baled; every now and then he gazed intently round, as if the sea held afar off, on its tumultuous waste, some object that he strained his eyes to discern. But all was blank, except as the crests of the high waves showed themselves, or far out on the verge of the horizon, a kind of lifting of the clouds betokened greater violence for the blast. At length he exclaimed, "Yes, I see it!— the larboard oar!— now! if we can make yonder light, we are saved!" Both the rowers instinctively turned their heads,— but cheerless darkness answered their gaze.

"You cannot see it," cried their companion, "but we are nearing it; and, please God, we shall outlive this night." Soon he took the oar from Vernon's hand, who, quite exhausted, was failing in his strokes. He rose and looked for the beacon which promised them safety;— it glimmered with so faint a ray, that now he said, "I see it;" and again, "it is nothing:" still, as they made way, it dawned upon his sight, growing more steady and distinct as it beamed across the lurid waters, which themselves became smoother, so that safety seemed to arise from the bosom of the ocean under the influence of that flickering gleam.

"What beacon is it that helps us at our need?" asked Vernon, as the men, now able to manage their oars with greater ease, found breath to answer his question.

"A fairy one, I believe," replied the elder sailor, "yet no less a true: it burns in an old tumble-down tower, built on the top of a rock which looks over the sea. We never saw it before this summer; and now each night it is to be seen,— at least when it is looked for, for we cannot see it from our village;—

and it is such an out-of-the-way place that no one has need to go near it, except through a chance like this. Some say it is burnt by witches, some say by smugglers; but this I know, two parties have been to search, and found nothing but the bare walls of the tower. All is deserted by day, and dark by night; for no light was to be seen while we were there, though it burned sprightly enough when we were out at sea."

"I have heard say," observed the younger sailor, "it is burnt by the ghost of a maiden who lost her sweetheart in these parts; he being wrecked, and his body found at the foot of the tower: she goes by the name among us of the 'Invisible Girl.' "

The voyagers had now reached the landing-place at the foot of the tower. Vernon cast a glance upward,— the light was still burning. With some difficulty, struggling with the breakers, and blinded by night, they contrived to get their little bark to shore, and to draw her up on the beach. They then scrambled up the precipitous pathway, overgrown by weeds and underwood, and, guided by the more experienced fisherman, they found the entrance to the tower; door or gate there was none, and all was dark as the tomb, and silent and almost as cold as death.

"This will never do," said Vernon; "surely our hostess will show her light, if not herself, and guide our darkling steps by some sign of life and comfort."

"We will get to the upper chamber," said the sailor, "if I can but hit upon the broken-down steps; but you will find no trace of the Invisible Girl nor her light either, I warrant."

"Truly a romantic adventure of the most disagreeable kind," muttered Vernon, as he stumbled over the unequal ground; "she of the beacon-light must be both ugly and old, or she would not be so peevish and inhospitable."

With considerable difficulty, and after divers knocks and bruises, the adventurers at length succeeded in reaching the upper storey; but all was blank and bare, and they were fain to stretch themselves on the hard floor, when weariness, both of mind and body, conduced to steep their senses in sleep.

Long and sound were the slumbers of the mariners. Vernon but forgot himself for an hour; then throwing off drowsiness, and finding his rough couch uncongenial to repose, he got up and placed himself at the hole that served for a window— for glass there was none, and there being not even a rough bench, he leant his back against the embrasure, as the only rest he could find. He had forgotten his danger, the mysterious beacon, and its invisible guardian: his thoughts were occupied on the horrors of his own fate, and the unspeakable wretchedness that sat like a nightmare on his heart.

It would require a good-sized volume to relate the causes which had changed the once happy Vernon into the most woful mourner that ever clung to the outer trappings of grief, as slight though cherished symbols of the wretchedness within. Henry was the only child of Sir Peter Vernon, and as much spoiled by his father's idolatry as the old baronet's violent and tyrannical temper would permit. A young orphan was educated in his father's house, who in the same way was treated with generosity and kindness, and yet who lived in deep awe of Sir Peter's authority, who was a widower; and these two children were all he had to exert his power over, or to whom to extend his affection. Rosina was a cheerful-tempered girl, a little timid, and careful to avoid displeasing her protector; but so docile, so kind-hearted, and so affectionate, that she felt even less than Henry the discordant spirit of his parent. It is a tale often told; they were playmates and companions in childhood, and lovers in after days. Rosina was frightened to imagine that this secret affection, and the vows they pledged, might be disapproved of by Sir Peter. But sometimes she consoled herself by thinking that perhaps she was in reality her Henry's destined bride, brought up with him under the design of their future union; and Henry, while he felt that this was not the case, resolved to wait only until he was of age to declare and accomplish his wishes in making the sweet Rosina his wife. Meanwhile he was careful to avoid premature discovery of his intentions, so to secure his beloved girl from persecution and insult. The old gentleman was very conveniently blind; he lived always in the country, and the lovers spent their lives together, unrebuked and uncontrolled. It was enough that Rosina played on her mandoline, and sang Sir Peter to sleep every day after dinner; she was the sole female in the house above the rank of a servant, and had her own way in the disposal of her time. Even when Sir Peter frowned, her innocent caresses and sweet voice were powerful to smooth the rough current of his temper. If ever human spirit lived in an earthly paradise, Rosina did at this time: her pure love was made happy by Henry's constant presence; and the confidence they felt in each other, and the security with which they looked forward to the future, rendered their path one of roses under a cloudless sky. Sir Peter was the slight drawback that only rendered their *tête-à-tête* more delightful, and gave value to the sympathy they each bestowed on the other. All at once an ominous personage made its appearance in Vernon Place, in the shape of a widow sister of Sir Peter, who, having succeeded in killing her husband and children with the effects of her vile temper, came, like a harpy, greedy for new prey, under her brother's roof. She too soon detected the attachment of the unsuspicious pair. She made all speed to impart her discovery to her brother, and at once to restrain and inflame his rage. Through her contrivance Henry was suddenly despatched on

his travels abroad, that the coast might be clear for the persecution of Rosina; and then the richest of the lovely girl's many admirers, whom, under Sir Peter's single reign, she was allowed, nay, almost commanded, to dismiss, so desirous was he of keeping her for his own comfort, was selected, and she was ordered to marry him. The scenes of violence to which she was now exposed, the bitter taunts of the odious Mrs. Bainbridge, and the reckless fury of Sir Peter, were the more frightful and overwhelming from their novelty. To all she could only oppose a silent, tearful, but immutable steadiness of purpose: no threats, no rage could extort from her more than a touching prayer that they would not hate her, because she could not obey.

"There must be something we don't see under all this," said Mrs. Bainbridge; "take my word for it, brother, she corresponds secretly with Henry. Let us take her down to your seat in Wales, where she will have no pensioned beggars to assist her; and we shall see if her spirit be not bent to our purpose."

Sir Peter consented, and they all three took up their abode in the solitary and dreary-looking house before alluded to as belonging to the family. Here poor Rosina's sufferings grew intolerable. Before, surrounded by well-known scenes, and in perpetual intercourse with kind and familiar faces, she had not despaired in the end of conquering by her patience the cruelty of her persecutors;— nor had she written to Henry, for his name had not been mentioned by his relatives, nor their attachment alluded to, and she felt an instinctive wish to escape the dangers about her without his being annoyed, or the sacred secret of her love being laid bare, and wronged by the vulgar abuse of his aunt or the bitter curses of his father. But when she was taken to Wales, and made a prisoner in her apartment, when the flinty mountains about her seemed feebly to imitate the stony hearts she had to deal with, her courage began to fail. The only attendant permitted to approach her was Mrs. Bainbridge's maid; and under the tutelage of her fiend-like mistress, this woman was used as a decoy to entice the poor prisoner into confidence, and then to be betrayed. The simple, kind-hearted Rosina was a facile dupe, and at last, in the excess of her despair, wrote to Henry, and gave the letter to this woman to be forwarded. The letter in itself would have softened marble; it did not speak of their mutual vows, it but asked him to intercede with his father, that he would restore her to the place she had formerly held in his affections, and cease from a cruelty that would destroy her. "For I may die," wrote the hapless girl, "but marry another— never!" That single word, indeed, had sufficed to betray her secret, had it not been already discovered; as it was, it gave increased fury to Sir Peter, as his sister triumphantly pointed it out to him, for it need hardly be said that while the ink of the address was yet wet, and the seal still warm, Rosina's letter was carried to this lady. The culprit was

summoned before them. What ensued none could tell; for their own sakes the cruel pair tried to palliate their part. Voices were high, and the soft murmur of Rosina's tone was lost in the howling of Sir Peter and the snarling of his sister. "Out of doors you shall go," roared the old man; "under my roof you shall not spend another night." And the words infamous seductress, and worse, such as had never met the poor girl's ear before, were caught by listening servants; and to each angry speech of the baronet, Mrs. Bainbridge added an envenomed point worse than all.

More dead then alive, Rosina was at last dismissed. Whether guided by despair, whether she took Sir Peter's threats literally, or whether his sister's orders were more decisive, none knew, but Rosina left the house; a servant saw her cross the park, weeping, and wringing her hands as she went. What became of her none could tell; her disappearance was not disclosed to Sir Peter till the following day, and then he showed by his anxiety to trace her steps and to find her, that his words had been but idle threats. The truth was, that though Sir Peter went to frightful lengths to prevent the marriage of the heir of his house with the portionless orphan, the object of his charity, yet in his heart he loved Rosina, and half his violence to her rose from anger at himself for treating her so ill. Now remorse began to sting him, as messenger after messenger came back without tidings of his victim. He dared not confess his worst fears to himself; and when his inhuman sister, trying to harden her conscience by angry words, cried, "The vile hussy has too surely made away with herself out of revenge to us," an oath the most tremendous, and a look sufficient to make even her tremble, commanded her silence. Her conjecture, however, appeared too true: a dark and rushing stream that flowed at the extremity of the park had doubtless received the lovely form, and quenched the life of this unfortunate girl. Sir Peter, when his endeavours to find her proved fruitless, returned to town, haunted by the image of his victim, and forced to acknowledge in his own heart that he would willingly lay down his life, could he see her again, even though it were as the bride of his son— his son, before whose questioning he quailed like the veriest coward; for when Henry was told of the death of Rosina, he suddenly returned from abroad to ask the cause— to visit her grave, and mourn her loss in the groves and valleys which had been the scenes of their mutual happiness. He made a thousand inquiries, and an ominous silence alone replied. Growing more earnest and more anxious, at length he drew from servants and dependents, and his odious aunt herself, the whole dreadful truth. From that moment despair struck his heart, and misery named him her own. He fled from his father's presence; and the recollection that one whom he ought to revere was guilty of so dark a crime, haunted him, as of old the Eumenides tormented the souls of men given

up to their torturings. His first, his only wish, was to visit Wales, and to learn if any new discovery had been made, and whether it were possible to recover the mortal remains of the lost Rosina, so to satisfy the unquiet longings of his miserable heart. On this expedition was he bound when he made his appearance at the village before named; and now, in the deserted tower, his thoughts were busy with images of despair and death, and what his beloved one had suffered before her gentle nature had been goaded to such a deed of woe.

While immersed in gloomy reverie, to which the monotonous roaring of the sea made fit accompaniment, hours flew on, and Vernon was at last aware that the light of morning was creeping from out its eastern retreat, and dawning over the wild ocean, which still broke in furious tumult on the rocky beach. His companions now roused themselves, and prepared to depart. The food they had brought with them was damaged by sea-water, and their hunger, after hard labour and many hours' fasting, had become ravenous. It was impossible to put to sea in their shattered boat; but there stood a fisher's cot about two miles off, in a recess in the bay, of which the promontory on which the tower stood formed one side; and to this they hastened to repair. They did not spend a second thought on the light which had saved them, nor its cause, but left the ruin in search of a more hospitable asylum. Vernon cast his eyes round as he quitted it, but no vestige of an inhabitant met his eye, and he began to persuade himself that the beacon had been a creation of fancy merely. Arriving at the cottage in question, which was inhabited by a fisherman and his family, they made a homely breakfast, and then prepared to return to the tower, to refit their boat, and, if possible, bring her round. Vernon accompanied them, together with their host and his son. Several questions were asked concerning the Invisible Girl and her light, each agreeing that the apparition was novel, and not one being able to give even an explanation of how the name had become affixed to the unknown cause of this singular appearance; though both of the men of the cottage affirmed that once or twice they had seen a female figure in the adjacent wood, and that now and then a stranger girl made her appearance at another cot a mile off, on the other side of the promontory, and bought bread; they suspected both these to be the same, but could not tell. The inhabitants of the cot, indeed, appeared too stupid even to feel curiosity, and had never made any attempt at discovery. The whole day was spent by the sailors in repairing the boat; and the sound of hammers, and the voices of the men at work, resounded along the coast, mingled with the dashing of the waves. This was no time to explore the ruin for one who, whether human or supernatural, so evidently withdrew herself from intercourse with every living being. Vernon, however, went over

the tower, and searched every nook in vain. The dingy bare walls bore no token of serving as a shelter; and even a little recess in the wall of the staircase, which he had not before observed, was equally empty and desolate. Quitting the tower, he wandered in the pine wood that surrounded it, and, giving up all thought of solving the mystery, was soon engrossed by thoughts that touched his heart more nearly, when suddenly there appeared on the ground at his feet the vision of a slipper. Since Cinderella so tiny a slipper had never been seen; as plain as shoe could speak, it told a tale of elegance, loveliness, and youth. Vernon picked it up. He had often admired Rosina's singularly small foot, and his first thought was a question whether this little slipper would have fitted it. It was very strange!— it must belong to the Invisible Girl. Then there was a fairy form that kindled that light— a form of such material substance that its foot needed to be shod; and yet how shod?— with kid so fine, and of shape so exquisite, that it exactly resembled such as Rosina wore! Again the recurrence of the image of the beloved dead came forcibly across him; and a thousand home-felt associations, childish yet sweet, and lover-like though trifling, so filled Vernon's heart, that he threw himself his length on the ground, and wept more bitterly than ever the miserable fate of the sweet orphan.

In the evening the men quitted their work, and Vernon returned with them to the cot where they were to sleep, intending to pursue their voyage, weather permitting, the following morning. Vernon said nothing of his slipper, but returned with his rough associates. Often he looked back; but the tower rose darkly over the dim waves, and no light appeared. Preparations had been made in the cot for their accommodation, and the only bed in it was offered Vernon; but he refused to deprive his hostess, and, spreading his cloak on a heap of dry leaves, endeavoured to give himself up to repose. He slept for some hours; and when he awoke, all was still, save that the hard breathing of the sleepers in the same room with him interrupted the silence. He rose, and, going to the window, looked out over the now placid sea towards the mystic tower. The light was burning there, sending its slender rays across the waves. Congratulating himself on a circumstance he had not anticipated, Vernon softly left the cottage, and, wrapping his cloak round him, walked with a swift pace round the bay towards the tower. He reached it; still the light was burning. To enter and restore the maiden her shoe, would be but an act of courtesy; and Vernon intended to do this with such caution as to come unaware, before its wearer could, with her accustomed arts, withdraw herself from his eyes; but, unluckily, while yet making his way up the narrow pathway, his foot dislodged a loose fragment, that fell with crash and sound down the precipice. He sprung forward, on this, to retrieve by speed the advantage he had lost by this unlucky

accident. He reached the door; he entered: all was silent, but also all was dark. He paused in the room below; he felt sure that a slight sound met his ear. He ascended the steps, and entered the upper chamber; but blank obscurity met his penetrating gaze, the starless night admitted not even a twilight glimmer through the only aperture. He closed his eyes, to try, on opening them again, to be able to catch some faint, wandering ray on the visual nerve; but it was in vain. He groped round the room; he stood still, and held his breath; and then, listening intently, he felt sure that another occupied the chamber with him, and that its atmosphere was slightly agitated by another's respiration. He remembered the recess in the staircase; but before he approached it he spoke;— he hesitated a moment what to say. "I must believe," he said, "that misfortune alone can cause your seclusion; and if the assistance of a man— of a gentleman— "

An exclamation interrupted him; a voice from the grave spoke his name— the accents of Rosina syllabled, "Henry!— is it indeed Henry whom I hear?"

He rushed forward, directed by the sound, and clasped in his arms the living form of his own lamented girl— his own Invisible Girl he called her; for even yet, as he felt her heart beat near his, and as he entwined her waist with his arm, supporting her as she almost sank to the ground with agitation, he could not see her; and, as her sobs prevented her speech, no sense but the instinctive one that filled his heart with tumultuous gladness, told him that the slender, wasted form he pressed so fondly was the living shadow of the Hebe beauty he had adored.

The morning saw this pair thus strangely restored to each other on the tranquil sea, sailing with a fair wind for L——, whence they were to proceed to Sir Peter's seat, which, three months before, Rosina had quitted in such agony and terror. The morning light dispelled the shadows that had veiled her, and disclosed the fair person of the Invisible Girl. Altered indeed she was by suffering and woe, but still the same sweet smile played on her lips, and the tender light of her soft blue eyes were all her own. Vernon drew out the slipper, and showed the cause that had occasioned him to resolve to discover the guardian of the mystic beacon; even now he dared not inquire how she had existed in that desolate spot, or wherefore she had so sedulously avoided observation, when the right thing to have been done was to have sought him immediately, under whose care, protected by whose love, no danger need be feared. But Rosina shrunk from him as he spoke, and a deathlike pallor came over her cheek, as she faintly whispered, "Your father's curse— your father's dreadful threats!" It appeared, indeed, that Sir Peter's violence, and the cruelty of Mrs. Bainbridge, had succeeded in impressing Rosina with wild and unvanquishable terror. She had fled from their house without plan or

forethought— driven by frantic horror and overwhelming fear, she had left it with scarcely any money, and there seemed to her no possibility of either returning or proceeding onward. She had no friend except Henry in the wide world; whither could she go?— to have sought Henry would have sealed their fates to misery; for, with an oath, Sir Peter had declared he would rather see them both in their coffins than married. After wandering about, hiding by day, and only venturing forth at night, she had come to this deserted tower, which seemed a place of refuge. How she had lived since then she could hardly tell: she had lingered in the woods by day, or slept in the vault of the tower, an asylum none were acquainted with or had discovered: by night she burned the pinecones of the wood, and night was her dearest time; for it seemed to her as if security came with darkness. She was unaware that Sir Peter had left that part of the country, and was terrified lest her hiding-place should be revealed to him. Her only hope was that Henry would return— that Henry would never rest till he had found her. She confessed that the long interval and the approach of winter had visited her with dismay; she feared that, as her strength was failing, and her form wasting to a skeleton, that she might die, and never see her own Henry more.

An illness, indeed, in spite of all his care, followed her restoration to security and the comforts of civilised life; many months went by before the bloom revisiting her cheeks, and her limbs regaining their roundness, she resembled once more the picture drawn of her in her days of bliss before any visitation of sorrow. It was a copy of this portrait that decorated the tower, the scene of her suffering, in which I had found shelter. Sir Peter, overjoyed to be relieved from the pangs of remorse, and delighted again to see his orphan ward, whom he really loved, was now as eager as before he had been averse to bless her union with his son. Mrs. Bainbridge they never saw again. But each year they spent a few months in their Welsh mansion, the scene of their early wedded happiness, and the spot where again poor Rosina had awoke to life and joy after her cruel persecutions. Henry's fond care had fitted up the tower, and decorated it as I saw; and often did he come over, with his "Invisible Girl," to renew, in the very scene of its occurrence, the remembrance of all the incidents which had led to their meeting again, during the shades of night, in that sequestered ruin.

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## 18: The Owner of the "*Patriarch*"

***Morley Roberts***

1857-1942

*The Strand Magazine*, April 1904

IF ANYONE cares to look up the *Patriarch* in *Lloyd's List* it will be discovered that the owner of her was T. Tyser, but it matters very little whether she was built of heavier plating than the rules required, or whether she was cemented or built under special survey or what not. For T. Tyser, otherwise Mr. Thomas Tyser, was not only the owner of the *Patriarch*, but also the owner of a dozen other vessels all beginning with a "P." He was, moreover, the owner of a large block of land in the heart of Melbourne; he had several streets, of which the biggest was Tyser Street, S.E., in London, and his banking account was certainly of heavier metal than he had any personal use for. He was a rough dog from the north country, and in the course of half a century's fight in London he came out top dog in his own line and was more or less of a millionaire.

"And he's my uncle," said Geordie Potts; "his sister was my mother, and here I am before the stick in one of his old wind-jammers and gettin' two-pun-ten in this here *Patriarch* of his, and hang me if I believe the old bloke has another relation in the world. It's hard lines, mates—it's hard lines. Don't you allow it's hard lines?"

It was Sunday morning in the south-east trades, and every sail was drawing "like a bally droring-master," as Geordie once said, and the "crowd" of the *Patriarch* were all fairly easy in their minds and ready for a discussion.

"*If* so be you are 'is nevvy, as you state," said the port watch, cautiously, "we allow it's hard lines."

"I've stated it frequent," said Geordie, "and it's the truth, the whole truth, and nothin' but it, so help me. D'ye think I'd claim to be old Tyser's sister's son if I wasn't? I'd scorn to claim it."

"Any man would scorn to be Tyser's sister's son," said the starboard watch. "He'd scorn to be 'im unless he was, for Tyser's a mean old dog, ain't he, Geordie?"

Geordie thanked his watch-mates for backing him up so.

"That's right, chaps. There's no meaner in the north of England—or the south, for that matter—and the way this ship's found is scandalous."

"The grub's horrid," said both watches.

"And look at the gear," said Geordie; "everything ready to part a deal easier than my uncle is. I never lays hold of a halliard but I'm thinking I'll go on my back if I pulls heavy. Oh, it's a fair scandal!"

He considered the scandal soberly and with some sadness.

"He might leave you some dibs, Geordie," suggested his mate, Jack Braby. "He might, after all."

"Not a solitary dime," said Geordie. "Him and me quarrelled because my father fought him in the street, and I hit the old hunks with a bit of a brick because he got my dad down."

"Wot was the row about?" asked the others, eagerly.

"Nothin' to speak of," said Geordie. "My old man said he was a bloodsucker, and that led to words. And I never hurt him to speak of. And yet I've shipped in one of his ships, and am as poor as he's rich. He allowed none of us would get a farthing; he shouted it out in the market-place and said hospitals would get it, because one of his skippers that he'd sacked cut him up awful with a staysail hank, and they sewed him very neat at one of 'em."

"There's nothin' so good in a fight as a staysail 'ank," said Jack Braby, contemplatively. "I cut a policeman all to rags wiv one once."

"Was that the time you done three months' 'ard?" asked the port watch.

"Six," said Braby, proudly; "and I told the beak I could do it on my 'ead. But, Geordie, if you was owner yourself what would you do?"

"Yes, wot?" asked the rest.

Geordie shook his head and sighed.

"I'd make my ships such that sailormen would be wantin' to pay to go in 'em," said Geordie. "I've laid awake thinkin' of it."

"Oh, tell us," said all hands, with as much unanimity as if they were tailing on to the halliards under the stimulus of "Give us some time to blow the man down." "Tell us, Geordie."

"I'd be friends with all my men, for one thing," said Geordie, "and I'd not have a single Dutchman in a ship of mine."

The three "Dutchmen" on board, one of whom was a Swede, another a German, and the third a Finn, shifted uneasily on their chests, but said nothing.

"And not a Dago," continued the "owner," "and I'd give double wages and grog three times a day and tobacco thrown in. And the cook shouldn't be a hash-spoiler, but what Frenchies call a *chef*."

"We never heard of that. How d'ye spell it, Geordie?"

"S—H—E—double F," said Geordie; "and it means a man that is known not to spoil vittles, as most sea-cooks does, by the very look of him. And when it was wet or cold the galley fire should be alight all night. And the skipper and the mates should be told by me, and told very stern, that if they vallied their billets a continental they'd behave like gents and not cuss too much. And there shouldn't be no 'working up,' and any officer of mine that was dead on 'dry pulls' on the halliards should have the sack quick. And every time a ship of

mine came into dock I'd be there, and I'd see what the crowd's opinion was of the skipper and the mates. Oh, I'd make my ship a Paradise, I would!"

Most of the men nodded approval, but Braby wasn't quite satisfied.

"And would there be grog every time of shortenin' sail, Geordie?"

"Oh, of course," said Geordie, "and every time you made sail too."

But an old seaman shook his head.

"'Tis mighty fine, mates, to 'ear Geordie guff as to what 'e'd do," he growled, "but I ain't young and I've seed men get rich, and they wasn't in the least what they allowed they'd be. Geordie 'ere is one of hus now, and 'e feels where the shoe pinches; but if so be 'e got rotten with money 'e'd be for calling sailormen swine as like as not. And 'e'd wear a topper."

"You're a liar; I wouldn't," roared Geordie.

"Maybe I am a liar," said the old chap, "but I've seen what I've looked at. If you was to learn as your uncle was dead now, you'd go aft and set about on the poop and see hus doin' pulley-hauley, with a seegar in your teeth. Riches spoils a man, and it can't be helped; it 'as to, somehow. I've no fault to find with you now, Geordie Potts; for so young a man you're a good seaman and a good shipmate (though you *'ave* called me a liar), but you take my word for it, money would make an 'og of you."

And here was matter for high debate which lasted all through the trades, through the horse latitudes, and into the region of the brave west winds till the *Patriarch* had made more than half her casting.

"So I'm to be a mean swab and a real swine when I'm rich," said Geordie. "Oh, well, have it your own way. There's times some of you makes me feel I'd like to make you sit up."

"'Ear, 'ear," said the old fo'c's'le man; "there's the very 'aughty richness workin' in his mind, shipmates. What'll the real thing do if 'is huncle pegs out sudden?"

It was curious to note that a certain subdued hostility rose up between most of the men and Geordie. They sat apart and discussed him. Even Jack Braby threw out dark and melancholy hints that they wouldn't be chums any more if old Tyser's money came to his nephew. There were at times faint suggestions that Geordie was getting touched with his possible prosperity.

"I'll live ashore and have a public-house," said Geordie Potts.

And they picked up Cape Otway light in due time, and ran through Port Phillip Heads by-and-by, and came to an anchor off Sandridge. Presently they berthed alongside the pier and began to discharge their cargo; and one hot day went by like another, till they were empty and began to fill up again with wool. In six weeks they were almost ready for sea once more. And the very night before they hauled out from their berth and lay at anchor in the bay, Geordie

went ashore at six o'clock "all by his lonesome," as he and Jack Braby had fought over the job which Braby was to get from his mate when old Tyser died intestate. And as he got to the end of the pier he met a young clerk from the agent's office who knew him by sight.

"I say, I'm in a great hurry," said the boy; "my girl's waiting for me. Will you take these letters to Captain Smith, or I'll miss my train back? I'll give you a bob."

"Righto!" said Geordie; and he pouched the shilling and the letters, and the young fellow ran for his train.

"The letters can wait," said Geordie Potts, "but the bob can't, and I've five more besides. Jack might have had his whack out of it if he hadn't wanted to be my manager when he ain't fit for it."

He put the letters into his pocket and made his way to the Sandridge Arms, where he sat and drank by himself. It was seven o'clock, and he was by then tolerably "full," before it occurred to him to see if he still had the letters. He took them out, and the very first his eyes lighted on was one in a long envelope addressed to

George Potts, Esq.,c/o Captain Smith, *Patriarch*.

"Jerush," said Geordie, "this can't be me! 'Esq.' is what they puts after names of gents. Even the skipper don't have it after his."

He fingered the long envelope and took another drink to consider the matter on.

"Snakes! it must be me," he said, as he drew confidence out of his glass; "there's no other Potts but me."

He was over-full by now, and he opened the letter and began to read it:—

*"My Dear Sir—"*

"By all that's living," said Geordie, "me 'my dear sir'!"

He went on reading:—

*My Dear Sir,—*

*We regret to inform you of the sudden death of your uncle, Mr. Thomas Tyser, on the 10th instant. He left no will, and you, as the next of kin and heir-at-law, are entitled to all his real and personal estate, which is, as you are doubtless aware, very large. According to our present estimate it will amount to at least half a million sterling, and as we have been his legal advisers for the last twenty years and know all his affairs we can assure you that with proper management of certain undertakings at present in our hands, it may be much more than our estimate. In order that you may return at once we enclose you a draft on the Union Bank of Australia for two hundred pounds, and have instructed Captain Smith to give you your discharge, which he will, of course, do at once.*

*We hope, as we have been so long in the confidence of Mr. Tyser, that you will see no reason to complain of our care of your interests.*

*We are, my dear sir,*
*Your obedient servants,*
*Thomas Wiggs and Co.*

"My stars!" said Geordie. And he stared aghast at a square piece of paper, which he had reason to believe represented two hundred pounds. "My stars! what a pot o' money!"

He gasped and took another drink.

"I'm the owner of the *Patriarch*," he said, and grasping all the letters and his two-hundred-pound draft he rammed them down into the bottom of his inside breast-pocket. "I'm the owner of— hic— the— hic— *Patriarch*."

He came out of his corner and went to the bar.

"Gimme a drink—an expensive drink, one that'll cost five bob," he demanded of the barman.

"You'd better have a bottle o' brandy," said the barman.

"I wants the best."

"This is Hennessy's forty star brandy," said the liar behind the bar. "There's no better in the world."

And Geordie retreated with the bottle to his corner and took a long drink of a poisonous compound which contained as much insanity in it as a small lunatic asylum. He came back to the bar presently and told the barman that he was a millionaire.

"I own half Newcastle and a lot of Bourke Street, Melbourne, and a baker's dozen of ships, and lumps of London!" said Geordie.

"Lend me a thousand pounds till to-morrow," said the barman.

"I like you— hic— I'll do it," said Geordie, and with that he fell headlong and forgot his wealth. They dragged him outside on the veranda and let him lie in the cool of the evening. He was picked up there two hours later by Jack Braby and some of the starboard watch and taken on board.

"He let on he was a millionaire," said the barman, contemptuously.

Braby shook his head.

"Ah, he's liable to allow that when he's full, sir," said Braby.

But that fatal bottle kept Geordie Potts wholly insensible till they were outside the Heads again and on their way to England, with the smoke of the tug-boat far astern. And presently the second mate, Mr. Brose, who was a very rough sort of dog, and had sweated his way up to his present exalted rank from that of a foremast hand, hauled Geordie out by the collar of his coat, and had him brought to by means of a bucketful of nice Bass's Straits water. Geordie gasped like a dying dolphin, but came to rapidly.

"I'll teach you to get drunk, you swab," said Brose. "Take them wet things off and turn to."

And Geordie obeyed like a child in the presence of *force majeure*.

"Oh, I've got a head," he told his mates, "and it seems to me that I had a most extraordinary dream."

"Wot did you dream of, old Cocklywax?" asked Braby; "did you dream you'd come in for old Tyser's money?"

And Geordie gasped.

"S'help me," he murmured. "S'help me, did I dream?"

He dropped his marline-spike as if it were red hot and made a break for the fo'c's'le and his wet coat.

"Now if so be I dreamed," he said, "there'll be naught in this pocket. And if I didn't, I'm jiggered."

He put his hand in and brought out a handful of damp and crushed letters, and came out upon deck staggering. Mr. Brose saw him, and was on his tracks like a fish-hawk on a herring-gull. Geordie saw him coming and stood open-mouthed.

"Oh, sir," said Geordie. "Oh, sir—"

"Oh, rot," said Brose; "what's your little shenanakin game? Get to work, or I'll have you soused till you're half dead."

But Geordie could explain nothing.

"Oh, sir," he stammered, and held up his papers, shaking them feebly. And Brose shook him, anything but feebly, so that Geordie's teeth chattered.

"If you please, sir," he cried out at last, "if you please, sir, don't. I owns her."

"You owns wot?" demanded Brose; and the rest of the men edged as near as they dared.

"He's drunk still," said Braby, as Brose shook his mate once more.

"I owns the bally *Patriarch*," screamed Geordie, "and all the rest of 'em, and all my uncle's richness, and I won't be shook, I won't!"

And Brose let him go.

"You're mad," said Brose, "you're mad."

"I ain't," roared Geordie, who was fast recovering from the shock, "I ain't. Take these; read 'em—read 'em out; let the skipper read 'em. I owns the *Patriarch* and the *Palermo* and the *Proosian* and the whole line. The lawyer says so!"

He put the lot of damp letters into Mr. Brose's hands and sat down on the spare top-mast lashed under the rail.

"There's letters for the captain 'ere," said Brose, suspiciously; "'ow did you get 'em?"

"'Twas a youngster from the office give 'em me," replied Geordie, "and I took a drink first, and there was one for me, and it said so— said I was the owner, said it plain."

And when Brose had read the opened letter he gasped too and went aft to see the skipper. The rest of the watch gathered round Geordie and spoke in awe-struck whispers.

"Is it true, Geordie?"

"Gospel," said Geordie. "It's swore to. They sends me two hundred quid in a paper."

"Show us," said the starbowlines, "show us."

" 'Tis in the paper the second has," said Geordie. "It's wrote, 'Pay George Potts, Esq., two hundred quid on the nail.'"

"I'd never 'ave let the second 'ave it," said Braby. "Like as not 'e'll keep it."

"Then I'll sack him," said Geordie, firmly. "Let him dare try to keep it, and I'll sack him and not pay him no wages."

"This is a very strange game, this is," said Braby. "I never 'eard tell of the likes. Did they put 'Esk' on your letter?"

"They done so," said Geordie. "I've seen uncle's letters and they done so to him."

"Then it must be true," said Braby. "They only puts 'Esk' on gents' letters."

And Williams, the steward, was observed coming for'ard scratching his head.

"Where the deuce am I?" asked Williams, "and wot's the game? I'm sent by the captain to say, 'Will Mr. Potts step into the cabin?'"

They all looked at Geordie.

"Mr. Potts? Why, that's you, Geordie."

"I s'pose it must be," said the owner. "Must I go, mates?"

"Of course," cried Braby.

But Geordie fidgeted.

"I could go in if we were painting of her cabin," he murmured; "but to talk with the skipper—"

That evidently disgruntled him.

" 'Tis your own cabin any'ow," said Braby. "I'd walk in like a lord."

"Well, I s'pose I must," said Geordie, reluctantly, and he went aft with Williams.

"And you're the owner?" asked Williams.

Geordie sighed.

"So it seems, stooard," he admitted.

"It licks creation," said Williams.

"So it does," said Geordie, and the next moment he found himself announced as "Mr. Potts," and he stood before the captain with his cap in his hand, looking as if he was about to be put in irons for mutiny; but, as a matter of fact, the old skipper was a deal more nervous than he was.

"This seems all correct, Mr. Potts," said Smith.

"Does it, sir?" asked Geordie. "I'm very sorry, sir, but it ain't my fault, sir. I never meant— at least, I never allowed my uncle would do it, because my father, sir, said he was a bloodsucker, and they fought, and I hit uncle with a brick, sir, to make him let go of father's beard."

"Oh, yes, to be sure," said the captain, nervously, "but I'm thinking what to do. It's a very anomalous situation for you to be here, Potts— Mr. Potts, I mean."

But Geordie held up his hand.

"I'd *much* rather be Potts, sir, thanking you all the same."

"I couldn't do it," replied the skipper. "I was thinking that you might like me to put back to Melbourne?"

"Wot for, sir?" demanded the owner.

"So that you could go home in a P. and O. boat," said old Smith.

"Thanking you kindly, sir," replied Geordie, "I'd rather stay in the *Patriarch*. I don't like steamers and never did."

He had a vague notion that the skipper wanted him to go home before the mast in one.

"Then you wish me not to put back, Mr. Potts?" said Smith.

"I'd very much rather not, sir," replied Geordie. "I'm very happy here, sir, and takin' it all round the *Patriarch's* a comfortable ship, sir. May I go for'ard now, sir?"

He made a step for the cabin door.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," said old Smith, "you mustn't; you must have a berth here and be a passenger."

The skipper's obvious nervousness was not without its effect upon the new owner. For old Smith knew that if he lost his present billet he was not likely to find another one, and he had nothing saved to speak of. So somehow, and without knowing why, Geordie, without being in the least disrespectful, was more decided in his answer than he would have been if the "old man" had showed himself as hard and severe as usual.

"Not me," said Geordie, "not me, sir; I wouldn't and I couldn't. I'd be that uncomfortable—oh, a passenger, good evings, no!"

"But bein' owner you *can't* stay for'ard," urged the skipper.

"Oh, yes, I can, sir," said Geordie; "I'd prefer it."

Smith sighed.

"If you prefer it, of course you must. But if you change your mind you'll let me know."

"Right— I will, sir," said Geordie.

The skipper walked with him to the cabin door.

"And if you don't want to work, Mr. Potts, I dare say we can get on without your services, though we shall miss them," he said, anxiously.

"I couldn't lie about and do nix," replied Geordie. "I'd die of it."

And away he went for'ard, while the skipper and Mr. Brose and Mr. Ware, waked out of his watch below to hear the extraordinary news, discussed the situation.

"And 'ave I to call 'im Mr. Potts?" asked Brose, with a pathetic air of disgust.

"I say so," replied the skipper. "I can't afford, Brose, as you know, to lose this job. And old Tyser promised me a kind of marine superintendent's billet when I left the *Patriarch*, and I dessay this young chap will act decent about it."

"I'm fair knocked," replied Ware. "I'm jolly glad that he ain't in my watch. This is hard lines on you, Brose."

"If you please, Mr. Potts, will you be so good has to be so kind has to be so hobliging as to go and over'aul the gear on the main," piped Brose, in furious mockery, "Oh, this is 'ard!"

"Far from it," said old Smith; "you ought to be proud. It ain't every second mate has a millionaire owner in his watch."

But Brose was sullen.

"You mark me, this josser won't do no 'and's turn that 'e don't like."

And for'ard the crowd said the same. As a result, for at least ten days Geordie Potts worked very well indeed. But, of course, Brose, under the skipper's orders, gave him all the soft jobs that were going. The second mate got into a mode of exaggerated courtesy which was almost painful.

"Be so good, Mr. Potts, as to put a nice, neat Matthew Walker on this 'ere lanyard."

Or—

"Mr. Potts, please be kind enough to go aloft and stop that spilling line to the jack-stay."

And at meal times the port watch mimicked Brose.

"Dear Mr. Potts, howner, be so good as to heat this 'orrid 'ash without growling."

And presently, when the weather began to get cold and the men brought out their Cape Horn pea-jackets and their mitts, Geordie commenced to growl a little.

"I hates turnin' out in the gravy-eye watch worse and worse," he said. "I've half a mind to let on I'm sick."

"You'd better go haft and tell the old man to 'ave the galley fire kep' alight all night," said the crowd, crossly. "But you dasn't."

"I dast," said Geordie; "why, I owns the bally galley!"

"You dasn't!"

"I will," said Geordie. And next morning he went aft and touched his cap to the skipper and begged to be allowed to speak to him.

"The galley fire at night?" said Smith. "Oh, certainly, Mr. Potts. I never done it because it was against the horders of your late revered huncle, sir."

"He was as mean as mean," said Geordie; "I think I can afford the fire, sir."

The fire was lighted and the crowd said Geordie was the right sort.

"And wot about the gear, Mr. Howner?" asked Jack Braby. "If I was you, before it gets too rotten cold I'd 'ave a real over'aulin' of things."

"I'll think of it," said Geordie. And that very afternoon he tackled Brose.

"The gear's tolerable rotten, sir," he began. And the second greaser knew he was right and yet didn't like to say so. He yearned to curse him. "And I'm thinkin'," said Geordie, "it would be a good thing to get up new stuff and overhaul everything. I risks my life every time I goes aloft. The very reef earings would part if a schoolgirl yanked at 'em."

"You'd better speak to Mr. Ware," said Brose, choking.

And at eight bells Geordie spoke to the chief officer, who was quite as anxious as the skipper to keep his billet.

"It shall be done, Mr. Potts," said Ware.

In the first watch that night Geordie felt very tired, and said so. When it was eight bells in the middle watch he was still asleep, or pretended to be.

"Rouse out, howner," said Braby, and he shook Geordie up.

"I feels tolerable ill," said Geordie; "I don't think I shall turn out."

He didn't, and the rest of the port watch went on deck by themselves. At the muster Mr. Potts didn't answer to his name.

"Mr. Potts is hill, sir," said the obsequious watch; "'e said 'e couldn't turn out."

"I thought it would come soon," said Brose to himself. And he went for'ard to the fo'c's'le.

"Are you *very* ill?" he asked, drily.

"I don't know quite how I feel," said the owner, "but I thinks a little drop of brandy would do me good."

"I wish I could poison it," said Brose, under his voice. "This is most 'umiliatin' to a man in the persition of an officer."

By noon Geordie was well enough to sit on deck and smoke a pipe. The "old man" came to see him.

"Wouldn't you like a berth aft now, Mr. Potts?" urged the skipper.

"I'll think about it, captain," said Geordie. "And in the meantime I don't think I'll turn to."

The skipper turned to Brose.

"We can dispense with Mr. Potts's services for the time, eh, Mr. Brose?"

"Certingly," said Brose. But he walked to the rail and spat into the great Pacific.

From that time onward Geordie did no work to speak of except to take his trick at the wheel. And when they were south of the Horn he decided to do that no longer.

"If you'll take my wheel for the rest of the passage, I'll double your wages," he said to Braby. And Braby jumped at the offer. In the morning Geordie went to the poop. It was noticeable that he went up the weather poop ladder. Except in cases of hurry and emergency such a thing is next door to gross insubordination at sea.

"I ain't goin' to take no more wheels," said Geordie. "And Braby will take mine. I've doubled his wages."

Even old Smith gasped. As for Brose, he felt sea-sick for the first time since he first went down Channel in an outward-bounder thirty years before.

"I'll make a note of it," said the skipper.

They shortened sail in a quick flurry of a gale out of the south-west later in the day, and as all the topsails were down on the cap at once it was "jump," and no mistake. As an act of kindly condescension the owner went to the wheel and shoved away the Dutchman there, who was congratulating himself on not being on a topsail yard.

"Get aloft, you Dutch swab," said Geordie; "I'll take her for you."

And Mr. Ware bellowed like a bull, for he had a fine foretopsail voice, and when it was a real breeze his language rose with the seas and was fine and flowery, vigorous and ornamental, and magnificent. While he was in the middle of a peroration which would have excited envy in Cicero, or Burke, or a barrister with no case, he heard the owner shouting; for a private interview with the steward had given Geordie great confidence.

"Mr. Ware, Mr. Ware, I'd be glad if you'd cuss the men less. I don't like it."

The chief officer collapsed as if he were a balloon with a hole in it. And for the next minute he and the skipper engaged in an excited conversation.

"I can't— can't stand it," said Ware.

"You must," said old Smith, almost tearfully.

And Ware did stand it. But when the *Patriarch* was shortened down and he left the deck, he went below and swore very horribly for five minutes by any chronometer.

"Now I know what Brose feels," said Ware. "I've a great sympathy for poor Brose."

The owner ordered a tot for all hands when they came down from aloft. And he called the cook aft and harangued him from the break of the poop.

"Now, Mr. Spoil-Grub, mind you cook better than you've been doin', or I'll have you ducked in a tub and set your mate to do your work."

He turned to the skipper with a beaming smile in his blue eyes.

"I can talk straight, can't I, cap?" he hiccoughed, blandly. "I'm thinkin' I'll lie down in the cabin."

And when the old man went below he found Geordie dossing in his own sacred bunk. The poor old chap went and sat in the cabin and put his head on his hands.

"This is a most horrid experience," he said, mournfully. "I don't like howners on board— I don't like 'em a bit."

But it was not only the after-guard who suffered. Geordie shifted his dunnage aft at last, and though when he was sober he left the skipper's berth, he made himself very comfortable in the steward's. And he loafed about all day on deck with his pipe in his mouth. He began to look at the men with alien eyes.

"I tell you they're loafin'," said he to Ware. "Don't I know 'em? They watches you like cats, and when your eyes are off 'em they do nothin'. I'm payin' 'em to work and I'm payin' you to make 'em. There's a leak somewhere."

And he addressed the crowd from the poop.

"You're a lazy lot," he said, "that's wot you are. For two pins I'd put out the galley fire, and I'd cut off your afternoon watch below."

And next day he raised their wages. A week later he cut them down again. The skipper had a hard job to keep track of what the ship owed them.

"I wish we was home," groaned old Smith. "Oh, he'll be a terror of an owner!"

"I'll murder him," said Brose.

"Wot did I tell you chaps about the 'orrid effecs of sudden richness on a man?" asked the old fo'c's'le man for'ard. "Geordie Potts was a good sort, but Mr. George Potts, Esquire, is an 'oly terror. 'E raises hus hup and cuts hus down like grass."

And it presently came about that the only time they had any peace was when Geordie was very much intoxicated. But when they got into the calms of Capricorn on the home stretch to the north he developed a taste for gambling

and made the old skipper sit up all night playing "brag" for huge sums of money.

"I lends you the dibs, and, win or lose, it's all hunky for you," said Geordie. He made out orders to pay the "old man" several thousand pounds, and Smith began to feel rich. Then Geordie raked Ware into the game. At last even Brose succumbed to the lure of "I promises to pay Mr. Brose five hundred on the nail," and joined the gamble.

"This is a dash comfortable ship," said Geordie. "What's a few thousand to me? I don't mind losin'. Stooard, bring rum."

By the time they picked up the north-east trades poor old Smith owed the "owner" ten thousand pounds. Ware was five thousand to the good, and Brose, who had played poker in California, was worth fifteen thousand in strange paper. He began to dream of a row of houses with a public-house at each end. He and Geordie grew quite thick and compared public-house ideals.

"I'm goin' to buy a hotel," said Geordie; "there's one in Trafalgar Square, London, as I've in my mind. I'll fit up the bar till it fair blazes with golden bottles."

He borrowed the mate's clothes and had a roaring time, and then they came into the Channel and picked up a tug, and went round the Foreland into London river.

"I'll bet lawyers and so on will be down to meet me," said Geordie. "They'll be full up with gold. To think of it! And to think I hit my poor old uncle with a brick!"

He mourned over his brutality.

"He wasn't half a bad chap," he said, "and I don't see what call my dad had to call him a bloodsucker after all."

They docked in the South-West Dock, and sure enough they had not been alongside their berth five minutes before old Tyser's usual London agent and a very legal-looking person came on board.

"Let me introduce you to the new owner," said the obsequious skipper, as he led up Geordie, who had a smile on him large enough to cut a mainsail out of.

"Oh," said the lawyer, "then this is Mr. Potts?"

"That's me," said Geordie. "Have you brought any money with you? I owes Mr. Ware five thousand and Mr. Brose fifteen."

The lawyer smiled.

"I'm afraid there's some mistake, Mr. Potts. Your uncle left a will after all."

Geordie's jaw dropped and so did Ware's. But Brose's fell as falls the barometer in the centre of a cyclone.

"And me— did he leave me nothin'?" roared Geordie.

"Oh, yes," said the solicitor. "Mr. Gray, will you kindly give me that cash-box you are carrying?"

And the agent handed him the cash-box. "He left you this," said the lawyer. "And in this sealed envelope is the key."

Geordie grabbed the box eagerly.

"It's heavy," he said, "it's tolerable heavy."

And putting it on the rail he opened it with the key.

There was half a brick in it.

**End**