
PAST
MASTERS
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PAST MASTERS 183

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 Shadow and the Flash

Jack London

John Griffith Chaney, 1876-1916

The Bookman June 1903

WHEN I LOOK BACK, I realize what a peculiar friendship it was. First, there was Lloyd Inwood, tall, slender, and finely knit, nervous and dark. And then Paul Tichlorne, tall, slender, and finely knit, nervous and blond. Each was the replica of the other in everything except color. Lloyd's eyes were black; Paul's were blue. Under stress of excitement, the blood coursed olive in the face of Lloyd, crimson in the face of Paul. But outside this matter of coloring they were as like as two peas. Both were high-strung, prone to excessive tension and endurance, and they lived at concert pitch.

But there was a trio involved in this remarkable friendship, and the third was short, and fat, and chunky, and lazy, and, loath to say, it was I. Paul and Lloyd seemed born to rivalry with each other, and I to be peacemaker between them. We grew up together, the three of us, and full often have I received the angry blows each intended for the other. They were always competing, striving to outdo each other, and when entered upon some such struggle there was no limit either to their endeavors or passions.

This intense spirit of rivalry obtained in their studies and their games. If Paul memorized one canto of "Marmion," Lloyd memorized two cantos, Paul came back with three, and Lloyd again with four, till each knew the whole poem by heart. I remember an incident that occurred at the swimming hole—an incident tragically significant of the life-struggle between them. The boys had a game of diving to the bottom of a ten-foot pool and holding on by submerged roots to see who could stay under the longest. Paul and Lloyd allowed themselves to be bantered into making the descent together. When I saw their faces, set and determined, disappear in the water as they sank swiftly down, I felt a foreboding of something dreadful. The moments sped, the ripples died away, the face of the pool grew placid and untroubled, and neither black nor golden head broke surface in quest of air. We above grew anxious. The longest record of the longest-winded boy had been exceeded, and still there was no sign. Air bubbles trickled slowly upward, showing that the breath had been expelled from their lungs, and after that the bubbles ceased to trickle upward. Each second became interminable, and, unable longer to endure the suspense, I plunged into the water.

I found them down at the bottom, clutching tight to the roots, their heads not a foot apart, their eyes wide open, each glaring fixedly at the other. They were suffering frightful torment, writhing and twisting in the pangs of voluntary suffocation; for neither would let go and acknowledge himself beaten. I tried to break Paul's hold on the root, but he resisted me fiercely. Then I lost my breath and came to the surface, badly scared. I quickly explained the situation, and half a dozen of us went down and by main strength tore them loose. By the time we got them out, both were unconscious, and it was only after much barrel-rolling and rubbing and pounding that they finally came to their senses. They would have drowned there, had no one rescued them.

When Paul Tichlorne entered college, he let it be generally understood that he was going in for the social sciences. Lloyd Inwood, entering at the same time, elected to take the same course. But Paul had had it secretly in mind all the time to study the natural sciences, specializing on chemistry, and at the last moment he switched over. Though Lloyd had already arranged his year's work and attended the first lectures, he at once followed Paul's lead and went in for the natural sciences and especially for chemistry. Their rivalry soon became a noted thing throughout the university. Each was a spur to the other, and they went into chemistry deeper than did ever students before— so deep, in fact, that ere they took their sheepskins they could have stumped any chemistry or "cow college" professor in the institution, save "old" Moss, head of the department, and even him they puzzled and edified more than once. Lloyd's discovery of the "death bacillus" of the sea toad, and his experiments on it with potassium cyanide, sent his name and that of his university ringing round the world; nor was Paul a whit behind when he succeeded in producing laboratory colloids exhibiting amoeba-like activities, and when he cast new light upon the processes of fertilization through his startling experiments with simple sodium chlorides and magnesium solutions on low forms of marine life.

It was in their undergraduate days, however, in the midst of their profoundest plunges into the mysteries of organic chemistry, that Doris Van Benschoten entered into their lives. Lloyd met her first, but within twenty-four hours Paul saw to it that he also made her acquaintance. Of course, they fell in love with her, and she became the only thing in life worth living for. They wooed her with equal ardor and fire, and so intense became their struggle for her that half the student-body took to wagering wildly on the result. Even "old" Moss, one day, after an astounding demonstration in his private laboratory by Paul, was guilty to the extent of a month's salary of backing him to become the bridegroom of Doris Van Benschoten.

In the end she solved the problem in her own way, to everybody's satisfaction except Paul's and Lloyd's. Getting them together, she said that she

really could not choose between them because she loved them both equally well; and that, unfortunately, since polyandry was not permitted in the United States she would be compelled to forgo the honor and happiness of marrying either of them. Each blamed the other for this lamentable outcome, and the bitterness between them grew more bitter.

But things came to a head enough. It was at my home, after they had taken their degrees and dropped out of the world's sight, that the beginning of the end came to pass. Both were men of means, with little inclination and no necessity for professional life. My friendship and their mutual animosity were the two things that linked them in any way together. While they were very often at my place, they made it a fastidious point to avoid each other on such visits, though it was inevitable, under the circumstances, that they should come upon each other occasionally.

On the day I have in recollection, Paul Tichlorne had been mooning all morning in my study over a current scientific review. This left me free to my own affairs, and I was out among my roses when Lloyd Inwood arrived. Clipping and pruning and tacking the climbers on the porch, with my mouth full of nails, and Lloyd following me about and lending a hand now and again, we fell to discussing the mythical race of invisible people, that strange and vagrant people the traditions of which have come down to us. Lloyd warmed to the talk in his nervous, jerky fashion, and was soon interrogating the physical properties and possibilities of invisibility. A perfectly black object, he contended, would elude and defy the acutest vision.

"Color is a sensation," he was saying. "It has no objective reality. Without light, we can see neither colors nor objects themselves. All objects are black in the dark, and in the dark it is impossible to see them. If no light strikes upon them, then no light is flung back from them to the eye, and so we have no vision-evidence of their being."

"But we see black objects in daylight," I objected.

"Very true," he went on warmly. "And that is because they are not perfectly black. Were they perfectly black, absolutely black, as it were, we could not see them— ay, not in the blaze of a thousand suns could we see them! And so I say, with the right pigments, properly compounded, an absolutely black paint could be produced which would render invisible whatever it was applied to."

"It would be a remarkable discovery," I said non-committally, for the whole thing seemed too fantastic for aught but speculative purposes.

"Remarkable!" Lloyd slapped me on the shoulder. "I should say so. Why, old chap, to coat myself with such a paint would be to put the world at my feet. The secrets of kings and courts would be mine, the machinations of

diplomats and politicians, the play of stock-gamblers, the plans of trusts and corporations. I could keep my hand on the inner pulse of things and become the greatest power in the world. And I—" He broke off shortly, then added, "Well, I have begun my experiments, and I don't mind telling you that I'm right in line for it."

A laugh from the doorway startled us. Paul Tichlorne was standing there, a smile of mockery on his lips.

"You forget, my dear Lloyd," he said.

"Forget what?"

"You forget," Paul went on— "ah, you forget the shadow."

I saw Lloyd's face drop, but he answered sneeringly, "I can carry a sunshade, you know." Then he turned suddenly and fiercely upon him. "Look here, Paul, you'll keep out of this if you know what's good for you."

A rupture seemed imminent, but Paul laughed good-naturedly. "I wouldn't lay fingers on your dirty pigments. Succeed beyond your most sanguine expectations, yet you will always fetch up against the shadow. You can't get away from it. Now I shall go on the very opposite tack. In the very nature of my proposition the shadow will be eliminated—"

"Transparency!" ejaculated Lloyd, instantly. "But it can't be achieved."

"Oh, no; of course not." And Paul shrugged his shoulders and strolled off down the briar-rose path.

This was the beginning of it. Both men attacked the problem with all the tremendous energy for which they were noted, and with a rancor and bitterness that made me tremble for the success of either. Each trusted me to the utmost, and in the long weeks of experimentation that followed I was made a party to both sides, listening to their theorizings and witnessing their demonstrations. Never, by word or sign, did I convey to either the slightest hint of the other's progress, and they respected me for the seal I put upon my lips.

Lloyd Inwood, after prolonged and unintermittent application, when the tension upon his mind and body became too great to bear, had a strange way of obtaining relief. He attended prize fights. It was at one of these brutal exhibitions, whither he had dragged me in order to tell his latest results, that his theory received striking confirmation.

"Do you see that red-whiskered man?" he asked, pointing across the ring to the fifth tier of seats on the opposite side. "And do you see the next man to him, the one in the white hat? Well, there is quite a gap between them, is there not?"

"Certainly," I answered. "They are a seat apart. The gap is the unoccupied seat."

He leaned over to me and spoke seriously. "Between the red-whiskered man and the white-hatted man sits Ben Wasson. You have heard me speak of him. He is the cleverest pugilist of his weight in the country. He is also a Caribbean negro, full-blooded, and the blackest in the United States. He has on a black overcoat buttoned up. I saw him when he came in and took that seat. As soon as he sat down he disappeared. Watch closely; he may smile."

I was for crossing over to verify Lloyd's statement, but he restrained me. "Wait," he said.

I waited and watched, till the red-whiskered man turned his head as though addressing the unoccupied seat; and then, in that empty space, I saw the rolling whites of a pair of eyes and the white double-crescent of two rows of teeth, and for the instant I could make out a negro's face. But with the passing of the smile his visibility passed, and the chair seemed vacant as before.

"Were he perfectly black, you could sit alongside him and not see him," Lloyd said; and I confess the illustration was apt enough to make me well-nigh convinced.

I visited Lloyd's laboratory a number of times after that, and found him always deep in his search after the absolute black. His experiments covered all sorts of pigments, such as lamp-blacks, tars, carbonized vegetable matters, soots of oils and fats, and the various carbonized animal substances.

"White light is composed of the seven primary colors," he argued to me. "But it is itself, of itself, invisible. Only by being reflected from objects do it and the objects become visible. But only that portion of it that is reflected becomes visible. For instance, here is a blue tobacco-box. The white light strikes against it, and, with one exception, all its component colors— violet, indigo, green, yellow, orange, and red— are absorbed. The one exception is *blue*. It is not absorbed, but reflected. Wherefore the tobacco-box gives us a sensation of blueness. We do not see the other colors because they are absorbed. We see only the blue. For the same reason grass is *green*. The green waves of white light are thrown upon our eyes."

"When we paint our houses, we do not apply color to them," he said at another time. "What we do is to apply certain substances that have the property of absorbing from white light all the colors except those that we would have our houses appear. When a substance reflects all the colors to the eye, it seems to us white. When it absorbs all the colors, it is black. But, as I said before, we have as yet no perfect black. All the colors are not absorbed. The perfect black, guarding against high lights, will be utterly and absolutely invisible. Look at that, for example."

He pointed to the palette lying on his work-table. Different shades of black pigments were brushed on it. One, in particular, I could hardly see. It gave my eyes a blurring sensation, and I rubbed them and looked again.

"That," he said impressively, "is the blackest black you or any mortal man ever looked upon. But just you wait, and I'll have a black so black that no mortal man will be able to look upon it— and see it!"

On the other hand, I used to find Paul Tichlorne plunged as deeply into the study of light polarization, diffraction, and interference, single and double refraction, and all manner of strange organic compounds.

"Transparency: a state or quality of body which permits all rays of light to pass through," he defined for me. "That is what I am seeking. Lloyd blunders up against the shadow with his perfect opaqueness. But I escape it. A transparent body casts no shadow; neither does it reflect light-waves— that is, the perfectly transparent does not. So, avoiding high lights, not only will such a body cast no shadow, but, since it reflects no light, it will also be invisible."

We were standing by the window at another time. Paul was engaged in polishing a number of lenses, which were ranged along the sill. Suddenly, after a pause in the conversation, he said, "Oh! I've dropped a lens. Stick your head out, old man, and see where it went to."

Out I started to thrust my head, but a sharp blow on the forehead caused me to recoil. I rubbed my bruised brow and gazed with reproachful inquiry at Paul, who was laughing in gleeful, boyish fashion.

"Well?" he said.

"Well?" I echoed.

"Why don't you investigate?" he demanded. And investigate I did. Before thrusting out my head, my senses, automatically active, had told me there was nothing there, that nothing intervened between me and out-of-doors, that the aperture of the window opening was utterly empty. I stretched forth my hand and felt a hard object, smooth and cool and flat, which my touch, out of its experience, told me to be glass. I looked again, but could see positively nothing.

"White quartzose sand," Paul rattled off, "sodic carbonate, slaked lime, cutlet, manganese peroxide— there you have it, the finest French plate glass, made by the great St. Gobain Company, who made the finest plate glass in the world, and this is the finest piece they ever made. It cost a king's ransom. But look at it! You can't see it. You don't know it's there till you run your head against it.

"Eh, old boy! That's merely an object-lesson— certain elements, in themselves opaque, yet so compounded as to give a resultant body which is transparent. But that is a matter of inorganic chemistry, you say. Very true. But

I dare to assert, standing here on my two feet, that in the organic I can duplicate whatever occurs in the inorganic.

"Here!" He held a test-tube between me and the light, and I noted the cloudy or muddy liquid it contained. He emptied the contents of another test-tube into it, and almost instantly it became clear and sparkling.

"Or here!" With quick, nervous movements among his array of test-tubes, he turned a white solution to a wine color, and a light yellow solution to a dark brown. He dropped a piece of litmus paper into an acid, when it changed instantly to red, and on floating it in an alkali it turned as quickly to blue.

"The litmus paper is still the litmus paper," he enunciated in the formal manner of the lecturer. "I have not changed it into something else. Then what did I do? I merely changed the arrangement of its molecules. Where, at first, it absorbed all colors from the light but red, its molecular structure was so changed that it absorbed red and all colors except blue. And so it goes, ad infinitum. Now, what I purpose to do is this." He paused for a space. "I purpose to seek— ay, and to find— the proper reagents, which, acting upon the living organism, will bring about molecular changes analogous to those you have just witnessed. But these reagents, which I shall find, and for that matter, upon which I already have my hands, will not turn the living body to blue or red or black, but they will turn it to transparency. All light will pass through it. It will be invisible. It will cast no shadow."

A few weeks later I went hunting with Paul. He had been promising me for some time that I should have the pleasure of shooting over a wonderful dog— the most wonderful dog, in fact, that ever man shot over, so he averred, and continued to aver till my curiosity was aroused. But on the morning in question I was disappointed, for there was no dog in evidence.

"Don't see him about," Paul remarked unconcernedly, and we set off across the fields.

I could not imagine, at the time, what was ailing me, but I had a feeling of some impending and deadly illness. My nerves were all awry, and, from the astounding tricks they played me, my senses seemed to have run riot. Strange sounds disturbed me. At times I heard the swish-swish of grass being shoved aside, and once the patter of feet across a patch of stony ground.

"Did you hear anything, Paul?" I asked once.

But he shook his head, and thrust his feet steadily forward.

While climbing a fence, I heard the low, eager whine of a dog, apparently from within a couple of feet of me; but on looking about me I saw nothing.

I dropped to the ground, limp and trembling.

"Paul," I said, "we had better return to the house. I am afraid I am going to be sick."

"Nonsense, old man," he answered. "The sunshine has gone to your head like wine. You'll be all right. It's famous weather."

But, passing along a narrow path through a clump of cottonwoods, some object brushed against my legs and I stumbled and nearly fell. I looked with sudden anxiety at Paul.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Tripping over your own feet?"

I kept my tongue between my teeth and plodded on, though sore perplexed and thoroughly satisfied that some acute and mysterious malady had attacked my nerves. So far my eyes had escaped; but, when we got to the open fields again, even my vision went back on me. Strange flashes of vari-colored, rainbow light began to appear and disappear on the path before me. Still, I managed to keep myself in hand, till the vari-colored lights persisted for a space of fully twenty seconds, dancing and flashing in continuous play. Then I sat down, weak and shaky.

"It's all up with me," I gasped, covering my eyes with my hands. "It has attacked my eyes. Paul, take me home."

But Paul laughed long and loud. "What did I tell you?— the most wonderful dog, eh? Well, what do you think?"

He turned partly from me and began to whistle. I heard the patter of feet, the panting of a heated animal, and the unmistakable yelp of a dog. Then Paul stooped down and apparently fondled the empty air.

"Here! Give me your fist."

And he rubbed my hand over the cold nose and jowls of a dog. A dog it certainly was, with the shape and the smooth, short coat of a pointer.

Suffice to say, I speedily recovered my spirits and control. Paul put a collar about the animal's neck and tied his handkerchief to its tail. And then was vouchsafed us the remarkable sight of an empty collar and a waving handkerchief cavorting over the fields. It was something to see that collar and handkerchief pin a bevy of quail in a clump of locusts and remain rigid and immovable till we had flushed the birds.

Now and again the dog emitted the vari-colored light-flashes I have mentioned. The one thing, Paul explained, which he had not anticipated and which he doubted could be overcome.

"They're a large family," he said, "these sun dogs, wind dogs, rainbows, halos, and parhelia. They are produced by refraction of light from mineral and ice crystals, from mist, rain, spray, and no end of things; and I am afraid they are the penalty I must pay for transparency. I escaped Lloyd's shadow only to fetch up against the rainbow flash."

A couple of days later, before the entrance to Paul's laboratory, I encountered a terrible stench. So overpowering was it that it was easy to

discover the source— a mass of putrescent matter on the doorstep which in general outlines resembled a dog.

Paul was startled when he investigated my find. It was his invisible dog, or rather, what had been his invisible dog, for it was now plainly visible. It had been playing about but a few minutes before in all health and strength. Closer examination revealed that the skull had been crushed by some heavy blow. While it was strange that the animal should have been killed, the inexplicable thing was that it should so quickly decay.

"The reagents I injected into its system were harmless," Paul explained. "Yet they were powerful, and it appears that when death comes they force practically instantaneous disintegration. Remarkable! Most remarkable! Well, the only thing is not to die. They do not harm so long as one lives. But I do wonder who smashed in that dog's head."

Light, however, was thrown upon this when a frightened housemaid brought the news that Gaffer Bedshaw had that very morning, not more than an hour back, gone violently insane, and was strapped down at home, in the huntsman's lodge, where he raved of a battle with a ferocious and gigantic beast that he had encountered in the Tichlorne pasture. He claimed that the thing, whatever it was, was invisible, that with his own eyes he had seen that it was invisible; wherefore his tearful wife and daughters shook their heads, and wherefore he but waxed the more violent, and the gardener and the coachman tightened the straps by another hole.

Nor, while Paul Tichlorne was thus successfully mastering the problem of invisibility, was Lloyd Inwood a whit behind. I went over in answer to a message of his to come and see how he was getting on. Now his laboratory occupied an isolated situation in the midst of his vast grounds. It was built in a pleasant little glade, surrounded on all sides by a dense forest growth, and was to be gained by way of a winding and erratic path. But I have traveled that path so often as to know every foot of it, and conceive my surprise when I came upon the glade and found no laboratory. The quaint shed structure with its red sandstone chimney was not. Nor did it look as if it ever had been. There were no signs of ruin, no debris, nothing.

I started to walk across what had once been its site. "This," I said to myself, "should be where the step went up to the door." Barely were the words out of my mouth when I stubbed my toe on some obstacle, pitched forward, and butted my head into something that *felt* very much like a door. I reached out my hand. It *was* a door. I found the knob and turned it. And at once, as the door swung inward on its hinges, the whole interior of the laboratory impinged upon my vision. Greeting Lloyd, I closed the door and backed up the path a few paces. I could see nothing of the building. Returning and opening the door, at

once all the furniture and every detail of the interior were visible. It was indeed startling, the sudden transition from void to light and form and color.

"What do you think of it, eh?" Lloyd asked, wringing my hand. "I slapped a couple of coats of absolute black on the outside yesterday afternoon to see how it worked. How's your head? you bumped it pretty solidly, I imagine."

"Never mind that," he interrupted my congratulations. "I've something better for you to do."

While he talked he began to strip, and when he stood naked before me he thrust a pot and brush into my hand and said, "Here, give me a coat of this."

It was an oily, shellac-like stuff, which spread quickly and easily over the skin and dried immediately.

"Merely preliminary and precautionary," he explained when I had finished; "but now for the real stuff."

I picked up another pot he indicated, and glanced inside, but could see nothing.

"It's empty," I said.

"Stick your finger in it."

I obeyed, and was aware of a sensation of cool moistness. On withdrawing my hand I glanced at the forefinger, the one I had immersed, but it had disappeared. I moved and knew from the alternate tension and relaxation of the muscles that I moved it, but it defied my sense of sight. To all appearances I had been shorn of a finger; nor could I get any visual impression of it till I extended it under the skylight and saw its shadow plainly blotted on the floor.

Lloyd chuckled. "Now spread it on, and keep your eyes open."

I dipped the brush into the seemingly empty pot, and gave him a long stroke across his chest. With the passage of the brush the living flesh disappeared from beneath. I covered his right leg, and he was a one-legged man defying all laws of gravitation. And so, stroke by stroke, member by member, I painted Lloyd Inwood into nothingness. It was a creepy experience, and I was glad when naught remained in sight but his burning black eyes, poised apparently unsupported in mid-air.

"I have a refined and harmless solution for them," he said. "A fine spray with an air-brush, and presto! I am not."

This deftly accomplished, he said, "Now I shall move about, and do you tell me what sensations you experience."

"In the first place, I cannot see you," I said, and I could hear his gleeful laugh from the midst of the emptiness. "Of course," I continued, "you cannot escape your shadow, but that was to be expected. When you pass between my eye and an object, the object disappears, but so unusual and incomprehensible is its disappearance that it seems to me as though my eyes had blurred. When

you move rapidly, I experience a bewildering succession of blurs. The blurring sensation makes my eyes ache and my brain tired."

"Have you any other warnings of my presence?" he asked.

"No, and yes," I answered. "When you are near me I have feelings similar to those produced by dank warehouses, gloomy crypts, and deep mines. And as sailors feel the loom of the land on dark nights, so I think I feel the loom of your body. But it is all very vague and intangible."

Long we talked that last morning in his laboratory; and when I turned to go, he put his unseen hand in mine with nervous grip, and said, "Now I shall conquer the world!" And I could not dare to tell him of Paul Tichlorne's equal success.

At home I found a note from Paul, asking me to come up immediately, and it was high noon when I came spinning up the driveway on my wheel. Paul called me from the tennis court, and I dismounted and went over. But the court was empty. As I stood there, gaping open-mouthed, a tennis ball struck me on the arm, and as I turned about, another whizzed past my ear. For aught I could see of my assailant, they came whirling at me from out of space, and right well was I peppered with them. But when the balls already flung at me began to come back for a second whack, I realized the situation. Seizing a racquet and keeping my eyes open, I quickly saw a rainbow flash appearing and disappearing and darting over the ground. I took out after it, and when I laid the racquet upon it for a half-dozen stout blows, Paul's voice rang out:

"Enough! Enough! Oh! Ouch! Stop! You're landing on my naked skin, you know! Ow! O-w-w! I'll be good! I'll be good! I only wanted you to see my metamorphosis," he said ruefully, and I imagined he was rubbing his hurts.

A few minutes later we were playing tennis— a handicap on my part, for I could have no knowledge of his position save when all the angles between himself, the sun, and me, were in proper conjunction. Then he flashed, and only then. But the flashes were more brilliant than the rainbow— purest blue, most delicate violet, brightest yellow, and all the intermediary shades, with the scintillant brilliancy of the diamond, dazzling, blinding, iridescent.

But in the midst of our play I felt a sudden cold chill, reminding me of deep mines and gloomy crypts, such a chill as I had experienced that very morning. The next moment, close to the net, I saw a ball rebound in mid-air and empty space, and at the same instant, a score of feet away, Paul Tichlorne emitted a rainbow flash. It could not be he from whom the ball had rebounded, and with sickening dread I realized that Lloyd Inwood had come upon the scene. To make sure, I looked for his shadow, and there it was, a shapeless blotch the girth of his body, (the sun was overhead), moving along the ground. I

remembered his threat, and felt sure that all the long years of rivalry were about to culminate in uncanny battle.

I cried a warning to Paul, and heard a snarl as of a wild beast, and an answering snarl. I saw the dark blotch move swiftly across the court, and a brilliant burst of vari-colored light moving with equal swiftness to meet it; and then shadow and flash came together and there was the sound of unseen blows. The net went down before my frightened eyes. I sprang toward the fighters, crying:

"For God's sake!"

But their locked bodies smote against my knees, and I was overthrown.

"You keep out of this, old man!" I heard the voice of Lloyd Inwood from out of the emptiness. And then Paul's voice crying, "Yes, we've had enough of peacemaking!"

From the sound of their voices I knew they had separated. I could not locate Paul, and so approached the shadow that represented Lloyd. But from the other side came a stunning blow on the point of my jaw, and I heard Paul scream angrily, "Now will you keep away?"

Then they came together again, the impact of their blows, their groans and gasps, and the swift flashings and shadow-movings telling plainly of the deadliness of the struggle.

I shouted for help, and Gaffer Bedshaw came running into the court. I could see, as he approached, that he was looking at me strangely, but he collided with the combatants and was hurled headlong to the ground. With despairing shriek and a cry of "O Lord, I've got 'em!" he sprang to his feet and tore madly out of the court.

I could do nothing, so I sat up, fascinated and powerless, and watched the struggle. The noonday sun beat down with dazzling brightness on the naked tennis court. And it was naked. All I could see was the blotch of shadow and the rainbow flashes, the dust rising from the invisible feet, the earth tearing up from beneath the straining foot-grips, and the wire screen bulge once or twice as their bodies hurled against it. That was all, and after a time even that ceased. There were no more flashes, and the shadow had become long and stationary; and I remembered their set boyish faces when they clung to the roots in the deep coolness of the pool.

They found me an hour afterward. Some inkling of what had happened got to the servants and they quitted the Tichlorne service in a body. Gaffer Bedshaw never recovered from the second shock he received, and is confined in a madhouse, hopelessly incurable. The secrets of their marvelous discoveries died with Paul and Lloyd, both laboratories being destroyed by grief-stricken relatives. As for myself, I no longer care for chemical research,

and science is a tabooed topic in my household. I have returned to my roses. Nature's colors are good enough for me.

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2: The Monk's Prophecy

Anonymous

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"CURIOUS, isn't it, how the old customs still hold their own! Here is the fashion of penance by pilgrimage still in vogue, with the additional aggravation of calling it 'travelling for pleasure.' "

"Well, Edward," said a sweet voice, "that's a very pretty compliment to us— your companions. I think I ought to make you do penance for that."

"That's right, Miss Wentworth; keep him in order," chimed in a third speaker. "However, going abroad has this one advantage for us English, that we can sometimes venture to seem amused without thereby committing the seven deadly sins in one."

Such was the chat that, passed among the group of four— two ladies and two gentlemen— seated at lunch on the balcony of the Hotel du Rhin, at Schaffhausen, one sunny afternoon in the latter part of May. The first speaker was a fine-looking young man of three-and-twenty, 'whose comely features, dark, curling hair and tall, well-shaped figure amply bore out, the name of 'Handsome Ned,' given by his intimates. Young, rich, good-looking, popular with high and low, in the plenitude of health and vigour, lately betrothed to the charming girl whose soft lustrous eyes were watching him half tenderly, half archly, from the other side of the board— Viscount Montague might fairly account himself an extremely lucky fellow. But upon that .bright, young face, firm and manly as it was, broodod the doomed look which haunts one in the portraits of Montrose of Claverhouse, of Charles I— ominously bearing out the loomy tradition among the elders of his native country, that 'the last of the Montagues' was so in a double sense, and that with him the grand old line which had left its mark upon every age of English history since the days of the Tudors was doomed to pass away for ever.

Beside him sat his inseparable associate, Sedley Burdett, whose square muscular figure and frank, sunburnt face looked the very embodiment of Young England at its best. Side by side the two young men had shot buffalos on American prairies, stalked moose through Canadian forests, bowled over royal tigers in Bengal, and hob-nobbed with negro kings on the coast of Africa, and they were now, *faute de mieux*, escorting their flower of Kent and her mother on the inevitable tour through Switzerland, not without it secret hope that some unscaled mountain might afford them a chance of breaking their necks in the good old British way.

"Did you see how old Johann eyed me as he brought in the lunch?" said Montague.

"He's evidently a devout believer in the Continental creed, that an Englishman's natural pastime is to knock somebody down, or set a house on fire, or to make a heavy bet that he'll jump head foremost out of the window, and then do it forthwith.'

"Aye," laughed Burdett, "just what Doctor Buchmann said to me yesterday: 'Mien Herr, those countrymen of yours! When I was practising in Saxony I had no peace for them! First thing in the morning, *kling*! *kling*! at my door. "What is it?" "An Englander, who has broken his leg trying to scale the Teufelshorn, which no one ever ascended yet." I set the Herr Englanders leg, and am making him comfortable, when *kling*! *kling*! again. "What now?" "An Englander nearly drowned in swimming across the Elbe for a wager." I wrap Herr Englander in hot blankets and bring him to. Before half an hour is over, *kling*! *kling*! once more. "Mein Herr! what's the matter?" "An Englander, who has broken a blood-vessel in trying to run twelve miles an hour, because somebody said he couldn't." Mein Herr, I am sorry to have to say it, but your countrymen are equally devoid of fear— and of reason.' "

"But you won't do any more of these horrible things now, Edward," said Marion Wentworth, entreatingly; "you promised to be more careful, you know, when you were with us."

"Don't be frightened, my child," answered the viscount, with his gay laugh; "believe me, I have no intention of being killed any sooner than is necessary. Would you believe it, Sed! this unreasonable young woman is making herself miserable, and daily expecting a notification to attend my funeral, on no better grounds than an old monk's prophecy."

"An old monk's prophecy?" echoed Burdett, inquiringly.

"What, haven't you heard of it?" cried Montague. "Well, this is a treat, to find one man, to whom that story's new. You must know, then (as those fellows in Sanford and Merton keep saying), that the estate which Harry the Eighth bestowed on my respected ancestor, Sir Anthony Browne, included Battle Abbey, and the land belonging to it; and mighty short work he made of the pour old monks, if all the tales be true. But after they were expelled, it began to be whispered that one monk remained in the old walls, and that he was not to be driven out by either king or lord."

"My word!" cried Burdett; "that's just the Black Friar of Norman Stone over again. Do you remember with what dramatic energy our old tutor used to repeat that verse:

"Beware, beware of the Black Friar!

He still retains his sway,
For he is still the Church's heir,
Whoe'er may he the lay.
Amundeville is heir by day,
But the monk is lord by night
Nor wine nor wassail can raise a vassal
To question that friar's right."

"Well," pursued Montague, "when my worthy forefather came into his property, the first thing he did was to give a big dinner in a great hall of Battle Abbey (if he found it half as tiresome as the dinner I had to give when I came of age, then impiety must have been its own avenger), and they lit up the old place with a perfect blaze of torches, and held high revel till midnight. And then all of a sudden, a chill blast of wind came moaning through the hall, making the old banners and mail-coats along the hall clank and rustle; and the huge door swung slowly open, and in the midst of the guests, no one could see whence or how, appeared the shrouded figure of a tall monk. It glided like a shadow up to the dais where my ancestor was seated, and said, in a deep, hollow voice that seemed to make the very torches grow pale as it spoke:

"Anthony of Cowdray! Thou hast enriched, thyself with the spoils of God's Church, and for that deed His judgments are upon thee and thine. As snow melts in the sunshine, so shall thy race decay, until the end come; and it shall come suddenly, in one day, by fire and by water!"

It was strange to note how Montague's light tone deepened into tragic solemnity as the dismal tide proceeded, and how the shadowy impress of doom on his handsome face came out plainer and plainer with every word.

The anxious look in Marion Wentworth's eyes grow into absolute terror as he ended, and she seemed about to speak, when the waiter's entrance with a dish of fruit interrupted her.

As he entered, Mrs Wentworth, evidently wishing to change the subject, spoke to him.

"Waiter, when did you say the night illumination of the falls was to be?"

"Tuesday week, gracious lady; but it will hardly be so good as the one we had last year, when they sent a big boat over the falls hung round with lanterns."

"Was there anyone in her?" asked Montague.

"What do you say, milord?" gasped the old man, with a stare of blank amazement.

"Was there anybody in the boat?"

"The boat, milord! The boat went over the falls, I tell you."

"Well, why shouldn't somebody go with her to keep her straight?"

"Why?" echoed Johann, goaded beyond endurance. "Because we Rhinelanders are no fonder of being drowned than other people. I've seen many a thing done in my time, but a man shooting Schaffhausen Falls in a boat is a thing I've never seen yet, and never shall."

The sudden gleam in Montague's dark eye and the glow on his handsome features sufficiently betrayed the wild thought suggested to him by the honest German's last words. The significant glance exchanged between him and Burdett showed that the same idea was in the minds of both, though the latter accompanied his looks with a warning gesture, reminding the reckless viscount of the effect which the words that were just about to break from his lips would have upon the two ladies. But when they had retired, Montague could contain himself no longer.

"Glorious idea! We'll do it— eh, Sed?"

"Do it? I should think we would! After the Gueule d'Enfer Rapids in Canada, this thing'll be a joke! 'Never seen it yet and never shall,' eh? We'll give Mr. Johann another story to tell to-morrow, one that'll last longer than his present stock.'

Our two heroes were not men to loiter over any enterprise, however desperate, upon which they had once resolved, and they lost not a moment in setting out in quest of a boat. But to find one was no easy matter. Some were unseaworthy, others failed to please the critical eye of Sedley Burdett, who, with all his recklessness, knew better than to leave any chance uncared for in a match where life itself was at stake. More than one conscientious native, on learning the nature of the proposed expedition, flatly refused to have anything to do with it; nor was it till late in the afternoon that they at length met with a less scrupulous individual, who, on receiving the full value of his boat in advance, and a handsome gratuity for the use of her, consented to let the "English madmen" have their way. He agreed to leave the boat in readiness at a convenient spot, and then took his leave.

IT WAS considerably past 11 o'clock that night, and Burdett, mindful of the tough work that awaited him next morning, was preparing for bed, when Montague (who slept in the next room) burst in, with a flush of unusual excitement on his face.

"Sed, old fellow, we must alter our time of starting. Those meddlesome asses, the local authorities, are going to put a spoke in our wheel!"

"Do you mean that they'll try to stop us?" asked Burdett, with the natural amazement of an Englishman at any one presuming to oppose his will.

"I do indeed! That prating fool of a boat-man (see if I don't punch his head when it's all over) must have let the cut out of the bag; for us I came through the hall just now, I heard the landlady say to her husband: 'Ought we to let them go? lt's really no better than a suicide!' and the old sinner answered with a chuckle: 'Be easy, my Gretten— when these young distracted ones get to their boat, they will find it in charge of certain *Gerichts Diener* (policemen) who are less foolish than they, and no harm will be done!"

"Just like their confounded cheek!" cried Burdett. "What shall we do thou V

"Do? Why, set the alarm clock two hours earlier (I'm safe to hear it where I am) and start at 4 instead of 6; and we'll just meet the minions of the law on our way back to breakfast, and a jolly sell it'll be for them! My word, every mortal thing seems to have conspired against this venture of ours; but I'll go through with it, no matter who stands in my way."

For one moment a thrill of superstitions awe shot through the stout heart of Sedley Burdett. Could it be that these countless hindrances were really a last barrier vainly opposed to the fatal impulse which was hurrying them both to destruction? The unnatural excitement of his comrade's manner, the feverish lustre of his eyes, the heated flush in his usually pale face, were all terribly suggestive of one goaded to his doom by some irresistible frenzy— flashing upon Burdett's mind with ghastly vividness the sudden memory of a long-forgotten painting of the young German knight lured to his death in the hungry waters of the Rhine by the siren-song of the Lorelei.

He opened his lips to propose the abandonment of the whole project, but the fear of ridicule (that fear which has destroyed many a gallant man) withered the wholesome impulse, and the favourable moment went by— for ever.

MORNING at last— a bright, breezy, glorious summer morning, over which all things in earth and heaven seemed to rejoice. The blue skies, the waving woods, the green, sunny slopes, the broad, bright stream of the great river itself, all seemed to smile a welcome to the eyes that might so soon be closed for ever. Even the two English athletes, absorbed as they were in their perilous enterprise, felt the influence, of the hour, and muttered with involuntary admiration:

"What a royal day!"

One vigorous stroke sent the light boat out into the swift, dark current, down which it shot like an arrow from the bow. Rocks, trees, houses seemed racing past on either side. No need to strain at the oars now! all that could be done with them was to keep the boat's bow perfectly straight, so as to offer as

little space as possible to the rush of a current which seemed well able to carry away an entire city.

Suddenly there came a dizzy plunge— a shock that throw both men from their places— and all around was one boiling whirl of foam, and the boat was flung to and fro, and dashed up and down, amid an uproar that seemed to rend the very sky. For one feverish moment life and death seemed to hang by a single hair; and then the two daring men found themselves Heating on the little border-line of calm water that separated the first fall from the worse peril of the second.

"Hurrah!" shouted Montague, gleefully, "who can say that it can't be done now! Keep her head straight, Sed, my boy, and we'll come out all right yet."

The triumphant cheer was answered by cry of dismay from the shore, and the two oarsmen, looking up, beheld Marion Wentworth rushing distractedly towards the edge of the high bank that overhung the second falling, followed by Montague's English servant, At the sound of his betrothed's voice, Montague turned his face towards her and waved his hand cheerily; and seldom has any painter conceived such a picture as the one which that moment branded for ever on the memory of those who saw it. The stern, black rocks on the other hand, decked with living green by the shrubs that clung to their craggy sides; the vast hill of leaping foam, half-way down which the boat hovered like, a leaf; the rainbow arch that spanned the black, howling gulf beneath the glory of the sunrise stealing softly into the pure, peaceful sky, in strange contrast with the rock-rending uproar below; the stalwart figures of the two gallant lads straining every nerve to accomplish their perilous task; the handsome, reckless face of the "last of the Montagues," with a gay smile on his short curved lip, and an ominous glitter in his large dark eyes.

"Good morning, my pet," cried he gaily, "you are just in time for the end of the play."

These were the last words that Viscount Montague ever spoke. That momentary negligence had allowed the boat's head to deviate slightly from the direct line, and in an instant the whirl of the current threw its exposed side full against the tremendous rush of the cataract. One frantic struggle to regain the lost ground, and then bout and men vanished for ever into the mists of the roaring abyss below.

From that fatal hour life was over for the 'Flower of Kent.' All that remained of the once bright and beautiful girl was a pale, silent, joyless phantom— a body, as it were, without a soul. Neither the tender care of her heart-broken mother, nor the skill of tho most accomplished physicians, nor even the sight of her dead lover's ruined home (the burning of which, on the very day of its master's death, fulfilled, by a sheer coincidence, the dismal

prediction), availed ought to break that deadly lethargy which she endured for the brief remainder of her life, checkered only by the spasms of convulsive agony invariably produced by the one sound which her ear still had power to recognise— the sound of rushing waters.

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3: Over The Edge of The World

Flora Annie Steel

1847-1929

The English Illustrated Magazine, Jan 1894

"SOME OF YOU must remember Graham."

"Stout man with a pretty daughter?"

"Possibly. But when I last saw him he was slim, and the daughter a bald baby. That was just after he died of cholera."

We in the smoking room sat up with glances wavering between the speaker's face and the whisky bottle, but there was nothing unusual in the appearance of either one or the other. There was a pause.

"I dare say it seems strange to talk of meeting a man after his death," began the speaker again. Someone murmured a polite hope that it had not been an unpleasantly warm expedition, whereat the gray man with the brown face got up quietly and lit another cigar.

"It was a bad year," he went on, between the puffs. "They were dying like sheep in the Salpur district."

Windows set wide open to the summer air, let in the noisy vitality of London streets, yet memory grasped many of us with her resistless hand, leading us back to silent, solitary days when the punkah throbbed intermittently in darkened rooms, and we sat wondering— more with a vague curiosity than fear— what havoc the cholera fiend was wreaking outside in the blaze of yellow sunlight. Now, when a man has once so waited and wondered, the interest abides in him always, so that the very name of cholera awakens a desire to hear and know more. We sat up and listened, but nothing came.

"A case of suspended animation, I suppose," remarked a young doctor. "It is not uncommon. I remember one—"

"So do I," interrupted the gray man imperturbably, "but this was different; Graham really died. I am sure of it."

Again we waited, expecting more, but the gray man was silent. Then we turned and looked to the Major. In cases of this kind he was our referee. He lifted his coat-tails and stood judicially in front of the fire.

"I think," he said, "that when a man offers a statement of that sort for the acceptance of this smoking room, he is bound to explain it."

"I can't," replied the gray man; "but as we don't dine for half an hour, I will tell you the story, such as it is. Perhaps some of you may understand it, I don't. I never shall till we see things face to face."

The tone of his voice gave me personally quite an unpleasant shiver down my back, and I felt impelled towards a sherry and bitters, though I had read all

the month's magazines, and in consequence was well posted up in the latest ghost developments.

"WHEN I FIRST knew Graham," began the gray man, "he was a *griff* [*newcomer*] at Allahabad, as good-looking, cheeky, high-spirited a young competition wallah as ever passed an examination only fit for bookworms. How the Government of India can expect—"

"Point, sir, point," murmured the Major.

"I beg your pardon; well, how he managed to have kept up such an absorbing interest in the formation of his white ties, or such a keen appetite for all things digestible or indigestible in the whole solar system was even then a mystery to me. For, although I was but a few years older, I already wore spectacles and felt myself circumscribed by the Penal Code. Graham, on the other hand, was absolutely untrammelled, except, perhaps, by good nature, and he was coming near the inevitable smash when typhoid fever stepped in between him and the dog's. To be brief, he fell out of the hands of a bad woman into the hands of a good one, who nursed him as she had nursed many another homeless boy through the valley of the shadow.

I am not going to say anything about this particular woman, because many of us have met her like when we were sick and sorry, and can supply her portrait from memory. Let us call her the *mem sahib*. Some of us, at any rate, have known her under that name. After he recovered he used to spend his leave with them, and more than once she came to look after him when he was ill; for there never was a more reckless chap as far as he himself was concerned. He was forever coming to grief at polo, or half killing himself with malaria. One sees a lot of sham sentiment of the motherly sort in India, but now and again one comes across a real case of adoption. This was Graham's luck, and as the years went by the tie of confidence between him and the *mem sahib* grew closer than that of most mothers and sons. I was stationed with him several times in outlying districts, and have often watched his face brighten when a letter from her came to cheer the long monotonous days. Then he married;— a charming wife to whom he was absolutely devoted, and we drifted apart, as men do after marriage even when it brings the most charming and tolerant of wives. Shortly after the *mem sahib's* husband left India for good, and she, if I may say so, left it for bad. At any rate she left many people in a sorry plight, for she was one of those women who have the knack of helping others.

I remember attempting to express my own sense of forlornness to her one day when Graham was by. She gave a half-jesting reply that old-fashioned Gamps were no longer necessary, since a sick man could go to the station

hospital and get nursed by the most scientific of sisters. Whereupon Graham, in the same half-jesting way, declared he would never part with *his* Gamp, and that she was welcome to every "piller" he possessed if she would only continue to come and nurse him. "Over the edge of the world?" she asked, still with a half smile. Adding, in a lower tone, "I would if I could, you know that well."

"Then I'll chance it," he replied. The look between them was good to see. After that the conversation drifted away into the borderland of the unknown—it had a trick of doing that when the *mem sahib* was among friends; and I remember her saying that life limited us more than death might do. She was full of fanciful theories and dreams. That was the last time I saw her; she died before I went home on furlough. I think the wrench was too hard for her soft heart.

To return to my story. Graham's wife had a baby, so it happened that we chummed together again during one hot weather when our respective wives were in the hills. Cholera raged in the district, and as it was Graham's first independent charge, he felt the responsibility a good deal. Nothing would serve him but to inspect the worst villages, and as my work lay that way, I went with him into camp, in the vain hope of making him take reasonable care of himself. But when the idea of duty seized him there never was any sparing of himself, and I was scarcely surprised on returning to my resthouse one evening, to find him down with the disease in its worst form. Of course I sent to headquarters for medical assistance at once; but we were twenty miles off, and the chance of its coming in time was very small.

Graham's bearer was in too great a funk to be useful, but a new *khansâman*, who had been put on when Graham's wife went to the hills taking the regular cook with her, did very well. It's a digression, but I've always thought that filching away of the best servants by our wives is simply brutal; perhaps they think it is the only way of impressing the horrors of absence on our minds. Well, Elahi Baksh showed such a knowledge of what ought to be done that I complemented him on his unusual skill. The man's impassive face never relaxed.

"I am of a family of *hakims, sahib*," he replied gravely. "My grandfather could have saved my master; now he is in the hands of God, who kept me from the wisdom of my fathers."

I looked at him inquiringly.

"The old man died," he replied; "my father was away and I was a child. How could I learn the elixir— but I have seen and tasted it."

He said no more, but obeyed my orders with a sort of mechanical, hopeless alacrity. The first hours passed quickly in restless busyness. I remember the room in which Graham lay jutted out into the little oasis of green garden, and

as it had windows all round I could see, through the chicks, right away on all sides to the dusty, level, whitey-brown plain, which looked so much lighter and more distant than the sky; that was purple-black with heavy rain clouds, save in the west where the horizon showed a sudden dull red. Graham recognised his danger calmly, as I knew he would, and gave me clear instructions how, if need be, the worst was to be broken to his wife. He laid great stress on her unfitness for travel, and even if he rallied she was not to be allowed to come and nurse him, or run any risk of any kind; adding, with one of his kindly looks, that he needed no better nursing than he had. Yet, though he never mentioned her name, I felt certain from his expression he was thinking of the *mem sahib* far away on the other side of the world. He made a good fight for life, waking up, as it were, every now and again from the dream of pain and death, to something of his imperious ways. Then he would wander again, and so drift into unconsciousness. It was in one of these throbs of life that a smile came suddenly to his face.

"I forgot," he murmured; "give me the forms, dear old boy."

"What forms?" I asked.

He signed feebly to the writing-case on a table hard by. In opening it my hands fell on a bundle of telegraph forms such as every Indian official carries about with him. His eager, wistful eyes gave assent, and I brought the papers to him.

"Pencil," he whispered, "quick, or it will be too late!"

Ere I could return with the latter, the cruel pain had seized him once more; but his mind was set and fixed. His cramped blue fingers forced themselves to write. The effort was pitiable to see, and I was glad when the resolve in his face melted away into the blank of unconsciousness. A glance at the paper as I hurriedly put it aside showed me that the effort had been in vain. Beyond one illegible scrawl nothing was to be seen. After that he never rallied, and before the doctor came, his holsters crammed with remedies, poor Graham was gone. It is curious how trifles strike one more strongly than the important factors in these tragedies of life. I remember thinking the scatter-brained Irish doctor was more sorry at losing the chance of trying some new nostrum than at the actual death of my poor friend. He waxed eloquent in regret at the delay; asserting that one little half hour might have saved a life; producing as proof a small bottle containing some infallible remedy which, he said, he had lately received from a native *hakim*. As the man was an inveterate *gobemouche*, forever thinking geese were swans, I paid little attention to him, and left him to Elahi Baksh while I went to make necessary arrangements. If Graham's last wishes were to be obeyed I had to make sure that the bad news, travelling proverbially fast, should not reach his wife through some side channel. The

only way to prevent this was to wire precautions to her immediate neighbours. I therefore wrote out a few telegrams, and after bidding a *sowar* prepare his horse to ride with them across country to the nearest railway station, I told the bearer to hand over the papers and needful rupees as soon as the man was ready to start. I am particular in these details, for on this point much of the mystery of my story depends. What I want you to understand is that I left the telegrams on the table whilst I busied myself in other things. There was much to be done. I had to ride twenty miles to headquarters that night, and be back by dawn if poor Graham was to find decent Christian burial.

The doctor, too, was anxious to be off, knowing that he might be required else where at any moment. Just as we were starting a thought struck me, and I went once more into the room where the dead man lay. The chicks had been tied up, and the four faintly glimmering squares of the windows only served to show the dark beyond. Night had fallen, and the heavy clouds seemed to smother all breath of life in the world. The only thing really visible was the hard, rigid square of the sheeted bed. A curious feeling that I was deserting a comrade came over me as I turned to seek for the telegraph form on which poor Graham had scrawled his last wish. It might, I thought, have a melancholy interest for his wife, and I wished to secure it from chance of loss. To my surprise it was nowhere to be seen, and after diligent search I was forced to accept Elahi Baksh's explanation, that in all probability it had gone with the other forms for despatch.

"The bearer is a fool," he said, "fear hath made his brain dissolve. Nevertheless the *sahib* need not be alarmed, I will watch, and no harm shall come to my master in your honour's absence."

Somehow I felt inclined to trust the man, and it was a relief as I rode away to see his still, impassible figure crouched beside the oil *chiragh* in the verandah. The night was dark as death itself, and I remember wondering how the feeble flicker of the oil lamp which scarcely showed the darkness around it could shine so far into the night. I must have been a good half mile away when I turned to look for it the last time, and there it was like a star. The rain came down in torrents; altogether a night to be remembered, with its ghastly rousing of carpenters and grave-diggers, and dreary, dreary preparations. Through it all the flicker of that oil lamp seemed to light up one corner in my tired brain— that which held the memory of the dead man lying all alone.

It cleared towards dawn, and half an hour after I had, in the darkness, charged and temporarily scattered a dismal little procession carrying the roughly made coffin on a string bed, I drew bridle in front of the resthouse once more, and dismissed the wearied beast to find its own stable. The

glimmering dawn whitened the bare outlines of the bungalow, and showed me Elahi Baksh still crouched beside the oil lamp.

I thought he was asleep, but at the first touch on his shoulder he stood up alert.

"Hâzar! mem sahib!" Then with a swift glance salaamed low, adding in apologetic tones:— "I did not know it was your honour. I thought it was the *mem sahib* once more."

A strangely dazed look in his eyes made me think he had been eating opium, and I reproached him angrily with having neglected his promise.

"Before heaven, my great lord!" he answered gently, "I have not slept all night, I have watched. If your honour doubts his slave's word let him ask the *mem sahib*."

Involuntarily I asked, "What *mem sahib?*"

The dazed look came stronger. "How should a poor man know? I mean the *mem* who came after your honour left."

"Came! after I left! Why!— where is she now?"

"With the *sahib*," he replied; "or stay! she is coming out."

He pointed to the door, and as I live something— the wind of dawn perhaps— swayed the chick, turning it to one side as if an invisible presence were passing through it. For a moment I hesitated; then reason rose in wrath against my fear, and I entered the room. All seemed the same as when I had left it, and the low bed with its white covering still gleamed the only distinct object amid the pale shadows of dawn. Suddenly I felt a rush of blood to my heart, and heard a cry. I must have uttered it, but I was unconscious of every sense and function save sight, as I strained my eyes with an awful eagerness to the outline of the sheet. Surely— surely— something moved! Rising and falling— rising and falling. A great horror seized me, and I could have fled from the fear of life as I had never fled from the dread of death. Slowly I forced myself to approach the bed, and turn back the sheet from the still face. My friend was dead I told myself; what could disturb his rest? It was a trick of fancy? a wavering shadow? Yet my hand shook, my feet failed me. A moment after, the knowledge that what I feared was true removed my terror. I found myself looking down on Graham's sleeping face with perfect calm; for it needed but a glance to show me that this was sleep, not death. Life, with all its possibilities, lay in the even, regular breathing, the quiet, painless face.

Then came the thought urgently persistent. Whose hand had guided him back? Whose care had come to his aid when friends forsook him? In my heart I knew, but I set the knowledge aside impatiently. Elahi Baksh still stood outside with folded arms. Him I would confront and question; there could be no

mystery— nothing beyond explanation. So I went to him, and asked him when this thing happened.

"What thing, my lord?" he answered.

"Don't look like a boiled owl," I cried; "you know quite well the *sahib* is alive— the danger is past— he will recover."

"God be praised!" was the reply. "Shall I make tea for the *mem*, she must be tired."

"There is no *mem sahib!"* I cried angrily; "you have been asleep and dreaming."

"Before heaven I have not slept! How could I? The *mem* came so often crying, 'Elahi Baksh! Elahi Baksh!'"

Then I spoke quietly to him, for I saw he believed what he was saying, and told him he was mistaken; but he shook his head.

"She came just after you left, *sahib*," he insisted. "I was sitting by the light, and when I looked up she stood there where you stand, and her voice was so kind and soft as she said, *'Elahi Baksh, your master is not dead: his soul is dreaming by the gate of life. I have come to let him in, for the gate of death is ajar for me. Bring fire to warm the empty house.'* So I brought fire. Sometimes when I looked up she was there, and sometimes she was not there. She came and went calling, *'Elahi Baksh! Elahi Baksh!'* And everything she bid me do, or bring, I did. She must have come a long way to nurse the *sahib*, she looked so pale and tired. God grant her and her children long lives."

"And when did you see her last?" I asked.

He put his hand to his head in confused thought.

"The night was so long, *sahib*, and she came so often calling *'Elahi Baksh! Elahi Baksh!'* At the false dawn, *sahib*, she touched me on the shoulder. I must have been drowsy. She was so white, and her hand cold as ice. The jackals were slinking away. I saw two by the pillar yonder. *'The door is open,'* she said, *'bring food to welcome the master home.'* So I brought it."

"And when you went into the room, was the *sahib* alive?" Again he passed his hand over his forehead and hesitated.

"I was not in the room, my lord. There was no light— nothing but the *mem sahib* standing where you stand, and calling to me *'Elahi Baksh! Elahi Baksh.'* Her voice was so soft, like the voice of someone far off— very far off."

I walked up and down the verandah several times before I asked him if he had ever seen this *mem sahib* or anyone like her.

He shook his head. "I have seen few *mem sahibs*. I do not know the face of my mistress, doubtless it was she."

Well, Graham recovered, but returning health brought him no memory of anything between the time of his trying to write the telegram and his

awakening next morning; nor did I think it wise to tell him Elahi Baksh's strange story. I hinted at it to the doctor, but he was in a furious rage at the loss of his bottle of elixir, which he had left behind in Graham's room by mistake, and which was not to be found next day. He declared that Elahi Baksh had tried its efficacy on his master, and finding it succeed had stolen the remainder, enough to have made him— the doctor— famous for life. "'Twas an old beast of a *fakir* gave it to me, what the divvle was in it I don't know; but Graham was as dead as a doornail, and now he's as fit as a fiddle. And the elixir's gone. What do ye say to that? except that I was a fool not to try it myself." It seemed reasonable; more reasonable than Elahi Baksh's story, till time brought a curious confirmation of the latter.

Coming home three weeks after I found Graham at his writing table. He lifted a pained set face as I entered, and pushing the letter, over which he had been leaning, towards me said,

"There is bad news. The *mem sahib* is dead." I glanced at the letter scarce seeing the words.

"It would not have been so hard," he said, after a while, "if there had been any message, any thought, but there was none— none."

"Perhaps there was a message;" I began.

"No; read it. There was no time. It was so sudden at the last."

She had been found late one morning dead at her writing table, her head resting on her clasped hands, beneath which lay a telegraph form on which was traced an illegible scrawl. Whether, feeling ill in the night she had risen, intending to telegraph for her husband who was away at the time, or whether she had fallen asleep for ever as she sat writing late into the night, as was her wont, no one could say. Nor could anyone decipher the secret of the telegram. It was an Indian form, but as others of the same sort were found in her desk even this clue was lost.

I put my hand on Graham's shoulder, feeling as it lay there the long-drawn breath of a strong man's grief. "Graham," I said, "there was more than a thought— more than a message. She kept her promise and came to you when you sent for her."

Then I told him Elahi Baksh's story. And he was comforted.

There was a pause. Then the young doctor spoke. "A clear case, as I said, of suspended animation. It is not in the least uncommon."

"But how about the telegram," asked the gray man; and the various replies lasted till the dinner-bell rang.

4: The Crows

Dowell O'Reilly

1865-1923

The Bulletin, 27 Dec 1906

Around the turn of the 20th Century a terrible, polonged drought afflicted the eastern half of inland Australia. The author was a poet and short story writer, and father of novelist Eleanor Dark.

FRESH from Keble College, Oxford, the little parson arrived in the Riverina during the long drought, and saw February's copper skies close down on the plains like a hot lid shutting down on smouldering ashes.

The sullen despair of the people was terrible, and his first wonder at their wickedness soon passed in pity of their sufferings and in admiration of their courage. They seldom spoke— only uttered short curses about stock, feed, water. They toiled incessantly. The railway sidings from Junee to Hay were congested with trucks, laden with fodder bought at famine prices from the farmers of Illawarra and the North Coast. This feed, with vast quantities of scrub cut from the river-belts, was carted many miles to the scattered flocks that were too weak to travel and had to be fed where they stood. The new-chum noticed with horror the famished brutes licking the very dust— as he thought; in reality nosing for the withered stalks and seeds of vanished herbage.

He rode a bicycle, and his flying black coat-tails were soon familiar in the district. A feverish pity and a longing to help drove his wheel far out into the plains. The hateful crows flapped heavily and cawed curses as he spurted past dead sheep; he pedalled slowly through thousands that could not die. The wicked blue mirage came and went about him; silent little waves of impalpable dust leapt from under his tyre; rhymes from the "Ancient Mariner" rang in his ears— he, too, was adrift in a sea of phantoms, and death, and corruption.

One day, he came up to a man stooping over a young ewe, still alive, but lying helpless. Her exposed eye was picked out by the crows. Her lamb lay near, dead— both eyes gone, the kidneys ripped out. The man set her on her legs, but she was too weak to stand.

"Kargh— kargh— kar-r-gh!"

"Look," said the stockman.

The other glanced up at the crows.

"No— here!" The man pointed at the ground.

The ewe lay in a dusty circle of innumerable hoof-prints. He shook his fist fiercely in the clergyman's face.

"She faced them bloody crows for two days— round and round— her little 'un beside her all the while suckin' her strength— but they got it at last."

He rode on, sick at heart.

"Hey, parson—"

He glanced back over his shoulder. The man was holding up the dead lamb by its tail.

"Feed my lambs!"

As his head again bowed forward the little carcase thudded almost under his wheel and rolled over and over in the dust. The monstrous insult was not meant for him.

At some of the larger tanks pumping engines had been rigged to lift what water remained into radiating troughs, but at the smaller hole he now approached there was other work forward. The thirst-maddened sheep had staggered by scores into the quagmire, and, too weak to return, had remained bogged until they fell, and were trampled under foot. Three men worked in the stinking slime, dragging out the living sheep, and building a protecting wall round the bog with the swollen carcases; from these the wool would be plucked by hand— later on. He dismounted on the blistered brink and looked down. There was something eerie, inhuman, abominable in the scene— the yellow pit quivering in white light— the mud-plastered men so active among the shapeless, silent, grey things. It was like a glimpse through a microscope at a drop of putrid water, swarming and seething with elementary life.

"Storm cornin'," said one of the men, looking up, and trying to wipe his forehead on his shoulder. A cylindrical dust-cloud was rolling from the west. He had spoken cheerfully; dust was preferable to stench and flies. The others scrambled to the brink to look.

"I've brought the Sydney papers." The parson threw a roll on the ground. They nodded thanks, and returned to their work; he remounted and followed his shadow back across the plains. The white sunlight suddenly fled before him. He looked back and saw that all the west was blotted out by a billow of red dust. It seemed as though the plains themselves were upheaving in a tidal wave.

He loved Nature. Despite Keble, and gold crosses, and ascetic illuminations, they twain were still one flesh, and her rising passion now thrilled him. He dismounted and leaned on his wheel, waiting. The lamb— the tainted slough— were forgotten in the thought that whenever Creation thus appealed to him he heard the voice of the Creator.

Scattered puffs of dust trailed towards him over the plains, as cats'-paws flick an oily sea— then the storm burst. He turned his back to the wind that licked the baked soil as bare as concrete. The heavier particles, driving along

the ground, tinkled against the steel spokes, and piled to windward of the tyres. He moved his foot, and already its outline was ridged in sand. He looked at it curiously, remembering the before-unaccountable heaps of red earth against the western side of every post. He pictured the fate of a sick or drunken man lying there, the earth-wave beating up against him— rippling over—

"Kargh— kargh— kar-r-gh!"

He could not see the black wings driving and wheeling, nor the wicked eyes that had found him, but the lightning thought of a dead lamb with bloody eye-sockets seared his soul— he became conscious of an obscene power, of which the evil birds were but a manifestation— a power malefic, wide-winged, with cruel beak, and tearing talons.

"Kar-r-gh!"

He stared up into the murk— dull red, like dry blood— and shook his fist madly at the accursed cry. An imprecation tore his heart and distorted his face.

"God—" he stopped.

The Great Name rang through his horror in a voice that was not his own; he flung down his machine and fell on his knees, his hands clasped, sobs shaking him.

"Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind."

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5: Five Shillings' Worth of Eternity

David Mckee Wright

1869-1928

The New Triad, 1 March 1928

A little bit of screwball humour when an Roman citizen goes astray in time and space. Like Sydney, NSW, in 1928.

SPURIUS LARTIUS, *eques*, elegian poet, collector of rare gems, and man about town, threw off his toga and reached his hands towards the blue flame. Spurius was of ancient descent. One of his ancestors was the famous Spurius Lartius who had paid a thousand sestertii— an enormous sum at the time— for the right to stand by Horatius Codes in his defence of the Sublician bridge. He did not, of course, actually stand on the bridge any more than the other two, but his favourite gladiator proved an excellent proxy and wore the helmet of his master with undoubted valour. The dented headpiece (see specimens in British Museum), still preserved in the family kitchen, was a source of pride to generations of Lartii. Filled with hot coals of Alban oak, it provided a ready means of roasting chestnuts on windy autumn nights.

But things of this nature did not now interest Spurius. The age of Augustus gave little opportunity for heroic deeds, and the roasting of chestnuts had become a bore. In plain Latin, he told himself that he was bored with most things; and, as a consequence, he had taken to magic. At first it was merely the gentle hocus-pocus of white magic that engaged him, but from it he passed rapidly to the transparent sort and thence to the Egyptian mysteries expensively conducted by the priests of Isis. Spurius did not mind the expense; in fact, he rather liked it. The business of getting rid of his money had become to him, as to so many Romans of the time, his only serious occupation ; but with the priests of Isis, he got no return for his effort. Blue magic— the terrible variety sold by Porcus Truculus— became his goal. He had passed through the various stages of his initiation in a manner which even Porcus condescended to praise, and now he was prepared to see an end of his boredom in a great adventure into the unknown.

"You could go beyond the torrid deserts of Africa and visit the black men who walk naked in the sun," said Porcus.

"I have a nose," said Spurius; "also, I have no use for savage spears."

"You could visit Athens in the time of Miltiades and see the destruction of the Persians," said Porcus.

"I have seen enough Greeks in Rome," said Spurius, "and my only regret is that the Persians didn't make a job of them."

"You could visit Ultima Thule, where they sail forth on icebergs to catch whales," said Porcus.

"I do not wish to catch whales," said Spurius.

"You could visit the bottom of the sea and hear the imperator of the oysters issuing orders for the making of pearls," said Porcus.

"There is enough water in my bath," said Spurius; "and I can buy pearls ready-made in the Vicus Tuscus."

"What would you then?" said Porcus. "It is for you to say."

"Oh, place me somewhere that no one has yet thought of at a time that may never be."

"That is easy," said the master; "but you should mention some fixed date."

"Well, say the year of the city 2680."

Porcus wrote the figures with his finger in the air.

"Are you ready?" he said, in a deep voice.

"Yes— that is, hold on a minute. Shall I be able to speak to the people I meet and remember who I am?"

"You will have enough of their language to be understood, and you will remember," said Porcus.

"I don't mind then. How long have I got to stay?"

"For the time that the magic endures. It will be less than one day," said the master.

" It's a bargain," said Spurius. " Bring on the fireworks."

" One moment," said the magician. "Put on your clothing. No; I guarantee it won't catch fire. I cannot regulate the temperature in the place you are going to. I should be afraid to send you half naked."

TWO MINUTES LATER, Spurius was glad of the master's final precaution. He felt extremely cold, even with his woollen toga held closely to his breast. The landscape was entirely unfamiliar. A great tree with broad green leaves whispered over him, and a green slope of grass fell away towards a steep declivity, below which he saw the sheen of still water. Ships, such as he had never before seen were anchored there, and beyond the water were houses half strange in their make and shape.

Spurius was not astonished. He had been bored too long to express any wonder even to himself. What he did observe with satisfaction was that the sun was about to rise.

"It will be less than one day that the magic lasts. Hercules! Have I been here all night?"

He shook out the folds of his white garment and stretched himself, preparatory to standing up and taking a comprehensive look at his new and temporary world.

"Got a match, mate?"

Spurius turned half round and saw a grimy unshaven face close to his own. Something which he took to be a small musical instrument was stuck between the lips of the speaker.

"A match. What is a match?" he asked in perfectly good English, wondering at the peculiar language which formed itself so readily in his mouth.

The grimy one grinned.

" 'Strewth, what sort of bloke are you? A light for me pipe was what I wanted— fire— it burns."

He went through the pantomime of striking a match.

"I do not carry fire," said Spurius.

"What are you, anyhow," said the grinning one. "Don't they use no matches on your ship?"

I have not a ship," said Spurius. Then he added with some dignity, "I am of Rome."

"Rome! That's where the Dago comes from. I never seen a Dago in them sort of togs. I took you for a bloomin' Lascar fireman."

"I do not carry fire," said Spurius again.

He had now risen to his feet, and the grimy person thrust his unlighted pipe in his pocket and surveyed him with some awe.

"Look like a bloomin' statue, you do. I seen the double of you cut out of stone, I have." Then, with a change of tone, he asked, "Got any money? You might help a pore bloke. I ain't had nothing to eat since the day before yesterday."

"I have some silver," said Spurius. He was conscious that he, too, was extremely hungry. This barbarian of a strange land might show him where food was to be obtained. " Lead me to the place where men eat, and you shall eat also."

"That's me," said the grimy one. " Call me Bill— William Mason is me name, but I come to the call of Bill when there's anythin' doin'. What's your own monniker?"

"What is monniker? I do not know him."

"Course not," said Bill. "I forgot you couldn't speak English. But I'll teach you. It ain't hard to learn. What's your name? That's what I was meanin'."

"My name is Spurius Fabricius Sura Lartius."

"Gawd!" said Bill. "Which part of it do they call you when they want you to have a drink?"

The Roman looked puzzled.

"I mean," said Bill, scratching his head in search of simplicity, "which end of the name comes first or last? What's the Christian end of it and which part does the family use?"

"I am of the Lartii," said Spurius.

Bill's eyes brightened.

"Larry, that's it. Come on, Larry. It's a bit early yet for breakfast, but I know a pub where they give us a roll with coffee royal."

They walked under great trees, and presently came to the city. Spurius found much that was familiar about the first buildings encountered, but as they approached the business centre he began to feel the strangeness of it all. An early tram came roaring along the street. He stared at it with fascinated eyes.

"It is a house on wheels."

"Ain't you never seen a tram before, Larry?"

The visitor still stared.

"It is magic," he said. "I am still dreaming."

"Not you, Larry. You're awake all right. Trams is a bit sudden if you ain't used to them, but they won't bite if you don't get in the road."

As they turned a corner, a policeman on the other side of the street watched them. Once he took a few steps, as if he intended to cross and speak to them, but thought better of it and slowly turned his broad back. At the next intersection of streets another tram whizzed by, followed closely by a motor van.

"Come on, Larry, we're near there now," said Bill. But the Roman could not be moved for a full minute. He felt that he was in close touch with the supernatural.

The place to which Bill conducted the stranger was at the shabby corner of a shabby street. They entered the large bar, where the morning light fell coldly through smoky windows. Strong reminders of yesterday's tobacco and beer were still in the air, and a lanky youth with a dirty white coat was sweeping the untidy floor. A big man with a lean unshaven face came quickly in by another door. He laid a shaking arm on the bar and spoke in a hoarse whisper.

"Whisky!" he said. "A double-header. Ye gods, I'm thirsty!"

The barman, grey in the shadows behind the bar, took down a bottle.

"Water?" he asked.

"Soda," said the whisperer.

He raised his glass in two hands and drank eagerly.

"Another," he said ; and this time his voice had some tone in it.

"Been having a night out, Professor?"

The barman bent to take something from a shelf, but did not smile.

"By the sandals of Bacchus, yes."

This time the voice was full and large.

"Have some coffee and rum. That steadies you."

The large man stretched himself and laughed.

"I will. I'm beginning to feel myself again."

Bill and Spurius had been standing at the end of the bar. The man in the grey shadows had not yet turned to them.

"Two more of them coffees here, Joe," shouted the guide of the Roman.

The barman nodded.

Spurius tasted the hot liquid, holding his cup awkwardly, and uttered an exclamation

"Hercules!" he said, "it is warm."

The big man drinking his coffee six paces away turned and fixed his eyes on him.

"Drink it down," said Bill. "That's the stuff to wake you up."

"Where's the cash, Bill?"

The barman had his open hand on the bar.

"Here, Larry, this is where you come to light. Money, cash, silver. You pay."

Spurius produced a bag from the folds of his toga and held out a handful of coins.

The barman looked at the silver doubtfully.

"What's this ?" he said. "Foreign money. That's no use here. Let's look. Here, Peter "— this to the youth sweeping the floor— "have a look at this. Ever seen any money like this?"

"It is good money," said Spurius. "See. The head and superscription of the Emperor."

"What Emperor might you be speaking of?" asked the barman.

"It's not Japanese, nor Chinese. Where do you come from?"

"Rome," said Spurius. "It is the head of the deified Augustus."

"Rome?" said the barman, pushing his fingers through his hair. "It's not Mussolini, is it? My word the stuff's heavy. They mint the money thick in your parts."

"It is good money," said Spurius again.

His coffee, with the strong rum admixture, was still steaming in his hand, and he had taken a doubtful bite of a stale roll. The big man, whom the barman had addressed as "professor," had all the time been drawing insensibly nearer. His eyes were wide and staring, and never for an instant wavered from the white-robed figure of the Roman.

Bill, feeling that difficulties might arise over further drinks, and seeing the stranger near, appealed to him.

"Hey, mister, you know about foreign parts! Is this good money?"

The barman held out the silver in his open palm.

"Ye gods!" said the big man. "Is it a dream or have I got them, Joe?"

"I don t know what to make of it, Professor. He says he comes from Rome. Is this good Roman money?"

The man appealed to fingered the coins and put his hand to his head.

"Give us another drink, Joe," he said, hoarsely. "Give them a drink, too. Have a drink yourself. Everybody have a drink! By Jove! By Jove!"

"Is it good money?"

"Good money! O ye gods! Good money! It was good money two thousand years ago. Good! Is it there at all or is this a trick?"

He looked wildly around the bar.

Bill, now happy behind a large measure of beer, took a hand.

"Steady yourself, mister. This here bloke is from Rome. Ask him. His name's Larry and some more. He can talk some words."

"When did you leave Rome?" said the Professor, hoarsely. He laid a trembling hand on the toga.

"I arrived this day," said Spurius.

"Yes, yes," said the Professor, "but what year— when did you leave?"

"In the year seven hundred and fifty-three of the city."

" What!" howled the Professor. "You left Rome in the time of Augustus and arrived in Sydney this morning! Oh, my head!"

"It is by blue magic," said the Roman, quietly.

"Give me a drink, Joe," said the Professor. Then, as an afterthought— "Give the Roman wine. He won't understand whisky."

Spurius drank the wine thoughtfully. Then he appealed to the Professor.

" Take me that I may eat."

The Professor turned to the barman.

"Am I very drunk, Joe?"

"Only ordinary," said Joe.

"Is he really standing there and am I here?" asked the Professor.

"You're here and he's there," said Joe. " Who pays for that first drink?"

The Professor threw a coin on the bar and turned to the Roman.

"May I ask your name?"

"Spurius Fabricius Sura Lartius."

"I don't care whether it's a dream or plain whisky, but historically I can find no fault in you. Come and have breakfast with me."

"Do I come, too?" asked Bill.

The big man turned upon him with a cold stare.

"I see nothing classical about you," he said.

"It was me found him, mister," said Bill. "I ain't going to part with him like that. Here, fair's fair. I'll sell me rights in him cheap. That's right, ain't it, Joe?"

The Professor did not smile.

"How much ?" he asked.

"Well, seeing as you said he had no faults, he ought to be worth a dollar."

"Don't you give it, Professor. I see the strong of this. It's a put-up thing between them," said the barman. "Here, Bill, you can't come that in this house."

"S'elp me Gawd, I found him," said Bill. " Dinkum, I did."

"That toga is not a put-up job, Joe," said the Professor, dreamily.

"Oh, all right, if you know, Professor. Don't say afterwards I didn't put you wise."

Bill pocketed the two half crowns and saw the Professor take the Roman by the arm and lead him out.

Spurius had now only one thought. He was famished in this strange world, and he was being taken to food.

The Professor walked on as one in a dream. The street was beginning to fill with people hurrying to work, but he knew that it was too early yet to obtain breakfast at any except the humblest and rudest restaurants. His first notion had been to take the mysterious visitor home, but there were some strong feminine reasons against such a course. Jack Roberts had a studio and flat, and Jack would be bound to have an artist's interest in the strange classical figure. If only his head was clearer he could ask the questions he wished to ask.

His knock at the artist's door had to be repeated three times before it brought a drowsy answer.

"Who's there?"

"Get up, Jack. It's Eggerston. I've got a Roman friend to introduce."

"Confound you, Eggerston. Why can't you come at a decent hour?"

"Open the door, Jack, or you will miss the opportunity of a lifetime. I've brought along the whole Roman Empire."

The artist, tall, bearded, and still heavy with sleep, stood in the doorway in pyjamas.

"Breakfast, Jack, for the love of Hercules! Here he is. Can you see him, too?"

"Julius Caesar!" cried the artist. "Come on in. He's perfect. I've got to paint this before it vanishes."

"Feed us first, Jack. This gentleman left Rome in the year one B.C., and has had nothing to eat since. He has some coins of Augustus to prove it. Oh, my head!"

"What?" said the artist.

"It's all mad, Jack, but it seems to be true. Look at his toga. I bought him for five shillings in a pub. His name is Spurius Fabricius Sura Lartius. Ye gods! He might know Ovid and remember Horace and Maecenas."

"Maecenas is dead," said Spurius, "and I, too, will die if I do not eat."

"There you are," howled the Professor. "He knows everybody we ever wanted to hear about. Oh, my head! I'll write a new book on Roman antiquities. Hurry, or he'll die on our hands before we can talk to him."

The artist had now caught something of the enthusiasm of the Professor. He grasped the Roman by the hand and dragged him into the disorderly studio. His eye took in every fold of the white toga, the peculiar lacing of the sandals, the general bearing and carriage of the visitor.

"Half a tick and I'll find something to eat. There's a bottle of wine and some beer, and I know I have some cheese and cold He swept a dozen articles from a couch to the floor and made his strange guest sit down.

"Do you happen to know Titus Livius, the historian asked the Professor, taking a creaking chair from which he had dislodged a pile of sketches and a clothes brush.

The Roman waved his hand as if to sweep the immortal historian aside.

"All Rome knows him," he said. "Under the favour of the deified Augustus, he is a great man— as great as a man may be who tells stories known to all and does not tell them well."

The Professor gasped.

"You don't like his writing." .

"It is well enough of its kind. He is as a Historian what Virgilius was as a poet."

Again the Professor gasped.

"Is Virgil not great?"

"He wrote to order for Augustus. How should he be great when the mighty Varius touched the stars."

"Varius!" the Professor almost howled. We have lost his works. Have you read his poems? Were they so wonderful."

"They will never die," said Spurius. "He has eclipsed all the Greeks."

"But his poems are dead, unless you can bring them back to us. What of Horace?"

"Ah," said the visitor, "our merry Horace jangled along merrily. In his way he was amusing."

The Professor realised that the very gods were crumbling in the heavens before this contemporary opinion. He turned to another line of enquiry.

"Tell me," he said, "what you think of Tiberius."

"The melancholy Tiberius," said Spurius with a drawl. "It is hard on a man to have such an earnest mother."

"You don't think much of Livia, then."

"Think much of her! Is not her name written forever in gold? Can a Roman think ill of her who lives for Rome, loves the Romans, dreams only of the greatness of the State? Is she not cast in the high mould of the great women of old?"

"Dear me," thought the Professor; "and I have always imagined her an interfering and dangerous old hag, scheming for her own interests."

The artist dashed in with a loaf of bread. He had an overcoat on and seemed out of breath.

"I had to catch a baker," he cried; "there was no bread. Come and help me, Eggerston. I want to get breakfast over and paint him."

The Professor rose heavily to his feet.

"Just a moment. What do you think of Julius Caesar and his death?"

The Roman laughed.

"What would you have me say ? He was the uncle of Augustus. He killed himself in time to avoid the great scandal."

"What!" roared the Professor.

"Come on, Eggerston. The questions can wait. We can't starve a man who has had nothing to eat for two thousand years."

"But I must know."

"Come on. He'll tell you a lot more at breakfast."

The Professor was dragged unwillingly from the room, and Spurius sat deeply in thought. What was going to happen in this strange world? He seemed to have fallen among people who meant well, but they certainly asked many questions. He wanted food. He wanted a bath. He wanted to ask many questions himself. These barbarians might be very different when he got to know them. He thought of the magic chariots he had seen in the street and shuddered. They might put him to death. They might torture him. Hercules! What torture these people might have devised!

All at once he felt faint. There was a sound as of rushing waters in his ears. Blue fires danced before his eyes and then began to turn in flying circles. The lights went out. It was dark, and he was falling down, down, down—

"You are back," said Porcus Truculus, and smiled hoarsely.

"I thank the gods I am back," said Spurius.

"Into what land did you fall?"

"Into a land where they ask foolish questions."

The magician nodded slowly.

"There will be many such lands."

"HE'S GONE, Jack!"

The artist rushed into the studio. The two men stared blankly at the place where Spurius had been sitting.

"Was he ever there?"

"We both saw him."

There fell a great silence between them. At last the Professor— he wasn't a professor, but he might easily have been one— came a step nearer and spoke in solemn tones.

"Jack, is insanity infectious?"

"I don't know. I know whisky is."

Again there was silence.

"He told me some strange things. Even if he wasn t here, I wish I had asked more."

"Even if he wasn't here, I wish I had painted him."

LATE in the day, the Professor, very sober, and urged by a desire to dispel the haunting memories of the morning, entered the bar where he had purchased the Roman.

Trade was brisk now, but Joe, the barman, left his customers and sidled along to him.

"Say, Professor, that foreign friend of yours left some of his money here. I've got it safe for you.

The big man reeled as from a blow, then recovered himself with a mighty effort and clung to the edge of the bar with both hands.

"Whisky," he said, in a whisper that might have been heard in the street, "whisky! a double-header."

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6: The Corner House

Percy Brebner

1864-1922

Chronicle (Adelaide) 4 April 1908

Percy James Brebner was a novelist and short story writer whose works are now largely forgotten, except possibly his two volumes of detective short stories featuring Francis Quarles. This early crime story appeared several years before his Quarles series.

CUT IN THE STONE PILLARS which supported the iron gate was the name Leicester Lodge, but the house was always known as the Corner House; had anyone entered Tavener-square and asked for it by its proper name the chances are that nobody would have been able to direct him.

As most people are aware, Tavener-square was at one time amongst the best residential neighborhoods in London; but fashion, drifting westward, had left it to rather a different kind of inhabitant. For a period it certainly became shabby, and then most of it was rebuilt, and it took on an atmosphere of eminent respectability and considerable comfort.

The corner house and the one adjoining it, evidently forming a single residence at one time, were really the only remains of the square as it used to be, and added a distinction to the square as it was on the particular night with which this history is concerned.

The corner house was occupied by a Mr. Kendall, an old gentleman who took his constitutional round the square every morning at a certain hour and was never seen again during the day. He was believed to be a student of antiquities, and although nobody could have said who his informant was, it was generally understood that the corner house was a perfect museum in this direction. In fact, the only modern thing about Mr. Kendall was his daughter, who was exceedingly pretty, and people rather pitied her. Beauty was not meant to exist in such a musty atmosphere, they argued.

The house adjoining, and originally a part of Leicester Lodge, was much smaller and was rather a thorn in the side of Tavener-square dwellers. On the Wire blinds in the ground floor windows was the name Freeman and Son. This was the office of a furniture depository in a street behind the square, with which it was connected by a covered way which had once been a strip of garden. Only an old housekeeper lived on these premises.

A fog had fallen over the square during the afternoon; not so thick as London can be guilty of, but bad enough to cause Constable Lever to anathematise the weather when he came on duty late in the evening. It was evident that a good many people were making merry, for laughter sounded out into the square from many of the houses, and the force of contrast

between the without as he knew it and the within as he imagined it had the effect of making Lever discontented with his lot for the time being.

At the corner house there was a light in a first-floor window, and a gas jet was turned low over the fanlight of the front door. The constable did not feel envious of that interior.

'Shouldn't wonder if it is haunted, as they say,' he murmured. 'It looks a likely enough place for ghosts.'

He paused to look at the house and now le turned to see who was approaching. The figures of a man and a woman loomed up out of the fog. The man he did not know; the woman was Miss Kendall, and the constable wished her good night.

There was a stone wall before the corner house, enclosing a narrow garden of dead and dying shrubs, and Miss Kendall and her companion, passing through the gate, stayed there talking.

'Why not come in, Harold?' the constable heard the girl say. 'When you spoke to him before you were not in such a good position as you are now.'

'It would be no use,' the man answered. 'You had better decide to run away with me, Ethel. The old man can make it up with us, if he likes, afterwards.'

'I cannot do that.'

'And you will marry this—'

The sentence remained unfinished. The voices, which had been loud enough for the constable to hear, had disturbed the occupant of the room on the first floor. The blind was drawn aside and the catch of the window unfastened. There was a sense of humor about Constable Lever and he chuckled at the sudden interruption to love's young dream as he commenced another round of the square.

When he passed the corner house again a light was still in the first-floor window, and he wondered whether 'Harold' had gone in after all.

'I should have braved the old man if a girl like that had asked me,' he said to himself; 'Aye, a dozen old men on such a night as this.'

As there seemed to be several dinner parties in the square that night it was natural that lights should be in the houses until a late hour. Lever said afterwards that it was close upon 1 o'clock in the morning when he noticed that a light was still burning in the first-floor window of the corner house, although the gas-had been turned out in the hall. This was quite an unusual thing, and Lever concluded that Miss Kendal's young man had gone in. His idea was confirmed as he stood looking up at the window, because the shadow of a man was thrown on the blind; a very distinct shadow, which was not Mr. Kendall's. He had a large head and a quantity of shaggy hair; like a poet, Lever

explained. A moment later the light went out. During his next beat round the square some people left No. 7 and a man coming from the direction of the corner house got into a belated cab. Soon afterwards only the street lamps broke the darkness, and when he was relieved Constable Lever had nothing to report.

It was not very much later when another constable, who happened to pause on his beat much as Lever had done, was aroused by the sudden opening of the front door of the corner house, and a girl in evening dress, holding aloft a lighted candle, looked out wildly.

'My father! He's dead— murdered!' she gasped. 'Come quickly!'

The constable was new to the neighborhood and did not know Edith Kendall, but he followed her into the house and up to the first floor. The door of the room was open and it seemed evident that the girl had rushed out without disturbing anything in an armchair, dose to the fireplace, lay an old man, his head fallen forwards, a look of agony in his wide open, staring eyes. Round his neck a thin piece of strong cord was tightly fastened, evidently the cause, of his death, and as evidently it could not have been tied by the man himself. It was murder, not suicide, and Tavener-square awoke that morning to a sensational tragedy.

The story told at the inquest had curious points in it; but, as the wiseacres remarked the evidence was perfectly straightforward and clear. There seemed to be a lack of motive for the crime; but that was only because the dead man couldn't speak and the murderer naturally would not. Harold Spencer, Edith Kendall's lover, had gone into the house. He had thought better in do so when old Mr. Kendall had come to the window. He had fully expected a stormy interview and was quite unprepared for the welcome he received, which, for Mr Kendall, was quite a cordial one.

Spencer had been in love with Edith for a long time and some months before had spoken to her father about her. The old man had flown into a temper, declared he was a pauper and only wanted her money, and, moreover, told him that she would shortly marry John Freeman, the sole partner in the depository business, the offices of which were next door.

Edith had declared that she would never marry this man, but she would not run away as Spencer had been urging her to do on that very evening. He was, therefore, most astonished when Mr. Kendall received him graciously, listened without anger to the repetition of his love story, and finally consented to an engagement.

He had lately changed his mind concerning Freeman, was all the explanation he gave.

At about 11 Edith went to bed at her father's suggestion.

'Harold and I will have a little talk about the future,' he said. Spencer declared that he remained only about half an hour after that, during which time the old man spoke chiefly about not being so well off as people supposed him to be.

'I assured him that no thought of his money was in my mind,' Spencer said in answer to the coroner's questions. 'I did not believe his statements: I thought he was miserly and wished to impress upon me the fact that he would do little for us when we were married. I arrived home at my rooms a few minutes after 12.'

He could not bring forward any satisfactory evidence to prove this.

Edith Kendall confirmed her lover's story. She was surprised at her father's cordiality that night, but recently he had not mentioned Mr. freeman so constantly to her. She said that she had heard Harold Spencer leave, for she had not yet gone to bed and was sitting by the fire in her bedroom. She could not say definitely what the time was. The coroner suggested that she might have been asleep; but she was positive that this was not the case. Constable Lever gave his experiences that night. He was certain about the time he saw the shadow on the blind. He was sure that it was not Mr. Kendall's shadow. He certainly thought the man who got into the cab had come from the corner house, but he could not swear that it was Harold Spencer.

Mr. Freeman voluntarily came forward to give evidence, but he could throw no light on the mystery. He had not seen Mr. Kendall for some days, and this was the first he had heard of any change in the old man's sentiments towards him. He could give no reason for the change, and was not inclined to believe Mr. Spencer's statement upon this point. He had not been at his offices that day at all, having started on a motoring tour with a friend, from which he did not return to town until some days later when he heard of the tragedy for the first time. His friend corroborated his statement.

As a result of the evidence given at the inquest Harold Spencer was arrested, and it was perhaps the seriousness of her lover's position which caused Edith Kendall's strange fortitude which some people considered unnatural.

It so chanced that another tragedy, involving some well-known society persons, robbed the Tavener-square mystery of being even a nine days' wonder; but it still filled the mind of Constable Lever.

The corner house was deserted, nothing had been moved from it. Lever had seen people stop to look at the window on the first floor, for there had been a rough sketch of the house in the papers, with a cross marking the room where the tragedy had occurred.

To-night he saw a man looking at the house from. the opposite side or the road; moreover, he was standing as much in the shade as possible, evidently not wanting to be observed. Lever felt convinced that he was the same man he had seen watching on two previous occasions, so he crossed over and spoke to him.

'You seem very interested in that house.'

'Hardly, wonderful, is it?' said the stranger.

'I shouldn't say it was very wise to show too much interest in it,' Lever answered. 'You might be asked awkward questions, because it's not likely we've got to the bottom of it yet.'

'I am inclined to think we have got a very little way into it,' said the stranger. 'Look here, constable; do you think that peculiar light on the blind is the reflection from some light without, or is it accounted for by some dim light within?'

'It doesn't look quite right,' Lever muttered, and then he said suddenly. 'By Jove! Something quivered across it just then.'

'The careless movement of a dark lantern, eh, constable? We ought to see who is in that house. Shall we? I am a private detective put on to the job by Miss Kendall. I am Mellor. You know the name.'

'Of course I do. Come along; we'll see what's going on.'

Clambering on to the wall by the help of the iron gate, they dropped silently into the garden and made their way to a ground-floor window. They had to try three before they could find one with a latch there was any chance of forcing.

'I should say there is more wealth about this house than is generally supposed for the old man to have taken such care about its security,' said Mellor as he got in.

The constable murmured an acquiescence and then they went upstairs.

The room where the tragedy occurred was in darkness, but there was a smell in it as if the chimney had been smoking. Lever turned on his lantern and certainly there was smoke in the room. The lantern also flashed on a bright object lying in front of the fireplace, which Mellor picked up.

'A ring!' he exclaimed. 'Look at it! Look at the diamonds in it.'

Lever whistled and began flashing his light about the room in search of other finds, and not in vain. A heavy piece of furniture had been drawn out of its place, and where it had stood was a loose board which would never have been noticed had it not been clumsily replaced in position, possibly in the hurry of escape. Underneath it was a carefully arranged hiding-place, in which were several cases containing jewels, some watches and bracelets, and other property, worth altogether many thousands of pounds.

'We've tumbled on a big thing, constable,' said Mellor.

'But we've lost our man,' said Lever.

'He must have been engaged in removing this property,' said the detective. 'Look at this. Part of to-day's paper— and torn. He has got a lot of stuff wrapped up in another piece of it.'

Lever did not answer, but his hand fell suddenly on his companion's arm, and the faces of both men looked curiously white and scared in the dim light of the lantern.

'It must hare been fancy,' whispered Mellor. 'When we both heard it?' questioned Lever.

'It certainly was like a groan, wasn't it?'

'They say the place is haunted,' and in spite of his uniform the constable trembled. They listened for some minutes, but the sound did not come again, and then they searched every corner of the house, but without result. The doors and windows were all locked and fastened. No one could have left the house unless he had gone by the window through which they had entered, a solution of the mystery which neither of them thought possible.

There was no sensational paragraph in the papers next morning. The police kept the discovery to themselves; nor did Mellor make any report to Miss Kendall.

In the afternoon, in company with a man from Scotland Yard and Constable Lever, he went to the offices of Freeman & Son with the object of finding some way through their premises by which a man might have escaped. Mr. Freeman was not in, but a clerk said they were at liberty to go over the house, and the housekeeper volunteered her services. On the first floor they came to a room which was locked

'I can't show you in there,' she said, 'because Mr. Freeman has the key.'

'Why, it's in the door on the inside,' said Mellor, with his eye to the keyhole. 'He was here late last night; or somebody was,' said Lever, 'because I noticed a light in this window.'

'It was Mr. Freeman,' said the housekeeper.

'We must look in here,' said the man from Scotland Yard decidedly, and the next few minutes were occupied in prising open the well-made and substantial door.

The room was empty, but a lamp on the table had burnt out and smoked. The dead ashes of a fire were in the grate, and a hat and coat were carelessly thrown down on a chair. Mellor picked up a piece of newspaper; it was part of the one they had found in the corner house!

'There must be some means of communication between this room and the corner house,' he said.

He was right, as everyone who reads the papers knows; but to discover the secret the two houses were pulled about so much that they were taken down. It is doubtful if anyone would have cared to live in either of them again.

The fireplace in Freeman's room and that in the first-floor room of the corner house opened, grate and all swinging back like a door; and if a fire were burning in either grate when they opened, the smoke, being stopped for a moment from going up the chimney, naturally came out into the room.

Between the fireplaces there was a narrow space, and the night Mellor and the constable had entered the house something had evidently gone wrong with the mechanism of this secret way. A piece of the masonry of the chimney had fallen, and, having escaped from the room in the corner house, Freeman was unable to get into his own. He was found wedged in this narrow place—suffocated; and some cases of jewels, wrapped in a newspaper, were beside him.

Subsequent enquiry led to the discovery that these jewels had been stolen at various times; that Kendall and Freeman were, in fact, receivers of stolen property. The furniture depository business had made it easy to keep this criminal traffic a secret.

It was further proved that Freeman had been in his office on the night of the murder, but the friend he had gone motoring with, and who gave evidence at the inquest, could not be found. Kendall's cordial reception of Harold Spencer on the night of the tragedy suggested that some quarrel had occurred between the partners, but the nature of it is never likely to be known. Perhaps, feeling himself secure, Kendall had threatened to betray his partner, and there is little doubt that Freemen entered suddenly upon the old man and strangled him before he had time to utter a sound.

There were a few uncharitable people who were inclined to think that Edith Kendall must have suspected what her father's business was, but certainly no one who knew her did; and although she asked Harold Spencer to think no more of her, but to choose a woman upon whose name there was no stain, he refused to do so. As Constable Lever remarked to his friends when telling the history of the corner house, a subject he never tired of—

'He would have been a fool to let a girl like that go. Pretty? Well, there!'

Words always failed him to describe her.

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7: The Fenchurch Street Mystery

Baroness Orczy

1865-1947

The Royal Magazine, May 1901

In: *The Old Man in the Corner*, 1909

Best known for her Scarlet Pimpernel novels and stories, the author also wrote many other novels, plus detective and mystery story series such as "The Old Man in the Corner", and "Lady Molly of Scotland Yard".

THE MAN IN THE CORNER pushed aside his glass, and leant across the table.

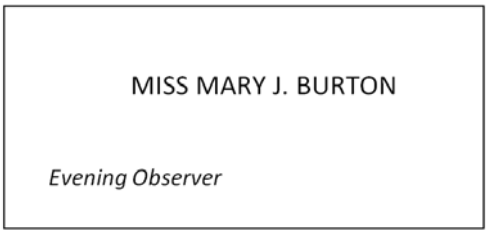
"Mysteries!" he commented. "There is no such thing as a mystery in connection with any crime, provided intelligence is brought to bear upon its investigation."

Very much astonished Polly Burton looked over the top of her newspaper, and fixed a pair of very severe, coldly inquiring brown eyes upon him.

She had disapproved of the man from the instant when he shuffled across the shop and sat down opposite to her, at the same marble-topped table which already held her large coffee (3d.), her roll and butter (2d.), and plate of tongue (6d.).

Now this particular corner, this very same table, that special view of the magnificent marble hall— known as the Norfolk Street branch of the Aërated Bread Company's depôts— were Polly's own corner, table, and view. Here she had partaken of eleven pennyworth of luncheon and one pennyworth of daily information ever since that glorious never-to-be-forgotten day when she was enrolled on the staff of the *Evening Observer* (we'll call it that, if you please), and became a member of that illustrious and world-famed organization known as the British Press.

She was a personality, was Miss Burton of the *Evening Observer*. Her cards were printed thus:



She had interviewed Miss Ellen Terry and the Bishop of Madagascar, Mr. Seymour Hicks and the Chief Commissioner of Police. She had been present at the last Marlborough House garden party— in the cloak-room, that is to say, where she caught sight of Lady Thingummy's hat, Miss What-you-may-call's

sunshade, and of various other things modistical or fashionable, all of which were duly described under the heading "Royalty and Dress" in the early afternoon edition of the *Evening Observer*.

(The article itself is signed M.J.B., and is to be found in the files of that leading halfpennyworth.)

For these reasons— and for various others, too— Polly felt irate with the man in the corner, and told him so with her eyes, as plainly as any pair of brown eyes can speak.

She had been reading an article in the *Daily Telegraph.* The article was palpitatingly interesting. Had Polly been commenting audibly upon it? Certain it is that the man over there had spoken in direct answer to her thoughts.

She looked at him and frowned; the next moment she smiled. Miss Burton (of the *Evening Observer)* had a keen sense of humour, which two years' association with the British Press had not succeeded in destroying, and the appearance of the man was sufficient to tickle the most ultra-morose fancy. Polly thought to herself that she had never seen any one so pale, so thin, with such funny light-coloured hair, brushed very smoothly across the top of a very obviously bald crown. He looked so timid and nervous as he fidgeted incessantly with a piece of string; his long, lean, and trembling fingers tying and untying it into knots of wonderful and complicated proportions.

Having carefully studied every detail of the quaint personality Polly felt more amiable.

"And yet," she remarked kindly but authoritatively, "this article, in an otherwise well-informed journal, will tell you that, even within the last year, no fewer than six crimes have completely baffled the police, and the perpetrators of them are still at large."

"Pardon me," he said gently, "I never for a moment ventured to suggest that there were no mysteries to the *police*; I merely remarked that there were none where intelligence was brought to bear upon the investigation of crime."

"Not even in the Fenchurch Street *mystery*. I suppose," she asked sarcastically.

"Least of all in the so-called Fenchurch Street *mystery*," he replied quietly.

Now the Fenchurch Street mystery, as that extraordinary crime had popularly been called, had puzzled— as Polly well knew— the brains of every thinking man and woman for the last twelve months. It had puzzled her not inconsiderably; she had been interested, fascinated; she had studied the case, formed her own theories, thought about it all often and often, had even written one or two letters to the Press on the subject— suggesting, arguing, hinting at possibilities and probabilities, adducing proofs which other amateur detectives were equally ready to refute. The attitude of that timid man in the

corner, therefore, was peculiarly exasperating, and she retorted with sarcasm destined to completely annihilate her self-complacent interlocutor.

"What a pity it is, in that case, that you do not offer your priceless services to our misguided though well-meaning police."

"Isn't it?" he replied with perfect good-humour. "Well, you know, for one thing I doubt if they would accept them; and in the second place my inclinations and my duty would— were I to become an active member of the detective force— nearly always be in direct conflict. As often as not my sympathies go to the criminal who is clever and astute enough to lead our entire police force by the nose.

"I don't know how much of the case you remember," he went on quietly. "It certainly, at first, began even to puzzle me. On the 12th of last December a woman, poorly dressed, but with an unmistakable air of having seen better days, gave information at Scotland Yard of the disappearance of her husband, William Kershaw, of no occupation, and apparently of no fixed abode. She was accompanied by a friend— a fat, oily-looking German— and between them they told a tale which set the police immediately on the move.

"It appears that on the 10th of December, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, Karl Müller, the German, called on his friend, William Kershaw, for the purpose of collecting a small debt— some ten pounds or so— which the latter owed him. On arriving at the squalid lodging in Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square, he found William Kershaw in a wild state of excitement, and his wife in tears. Müller attempted to state the object of his visit, but Kershaw, with wild gestures, waved him aside, and— in his own words— flabbergasted him by asking him point-blank for another loan of two pounds, which sum, he declared, would be the means of a speedy fortune for himself and the friend who would help him in his need.

"After a quarter of an hour spent in obscure hints, Kershaw, finding the cautious German obdurate, decided to let him into the secret plan, which, he averred, would place thousands into their hands."

Instinctively Polly had put down her paper; the mild stranger, with his nervous air and timid, watery eyes, had a peculiar way of telling his tale, which somehow fascinated her.

"I don't know," he resumed, "if you remember the story which the German told to the police, and which was corroborated in every detail by the wife or widow. Briefly it was this: Some thirty years previously, Kershaw, then twenty years of age, and a medical student at one of the London hospitals, had a chum named Barker, with whom he roomed, together with another.

"The latter, so it appears, brought home one evening a very considerable sum of money, which he had won on the turf, and the following morning he

was found murdered in his bed. Kershaw, fortunately for himself, was able to prove a conclusive *alibi*; he had spent the night on duty at the hospital; as for Barker, he had disappeared, that is to say, as far as the police were concerned, but not as far as the watchful eyes of his friend Kershaw were able to spy— at least, so the latter said. Barker very cleverly contrived to get away out of the country, and, after sundry vicissitudes, finally settled down at Vladivostok, in Eastern Siberia, where, under the assumed name of Smethurst, he built up an enormous fortune by trading in furs.

"Now, mind you, every one knows Smethurst, the Siberian millionaire. Kershaw's story that he had once been called Barker, and had committed a murder thirty years ago, was never proved, was it? I am merely telling you what Kershaw said to his friend the German and to his wife on that memorable afternoon of December the 10th.

"According to him Smethurst had made one gigantic mistake in his clever career— he had on four occasions written to his late friend, William Kershaw. Two of these letters had no bearing on the case, since they were written more than twenty-five years ago, and Kershaw, moreover, had lost them— so he said— long ago. According to him, however, the first of these letters was written when Smethurst, alias Barker, had spent all the money he had obtained from the crime, and found himself destitute in New York.

"Kershaw, then in fairly prosperous circumstances, sent him a £10 note for the sake of old times. The second, when the tables had turned, and Kershaw had begun to go downhill, Smethurst, as he then already called himself, sent his whilom friend £50. After that, as Müller gathered, Kershaw had made sundry demands on Smethurst's ever-increasing purse, and had accompanied these demands by various threats, which, considering the distant country in which the millionaire lived, were worse than futile.

"But now the climax had come, and Kershaw, after a final moment of hesitation, handed over to his German friend the two last letters purporting to have been written by Smethurst, and which, if you remember, played such an important part in the mysterious story of this extraordinary crime. I have a copy of both these letters here," added the man in the corner, as he took out a piece of paper from a very worn-out pocket-book, and, unfolding it very deliberately, he began to read:—

" 'Sir,— Your preposterous demands for money are wholly unwarrantable. I have already helped you quite as much as you deserve. However, for the sake of old times, and because you once helped me when I was in a terrible difficulty, I am willing to once more let you impose upon my good nature. A friend of mine here, a Russian merchant, to whom I have sold my business, starts in a few days for an extended tour to many European and Asiatic ports in his yacht, and has invited me to accompany him as far as England. Being tired of

foreign parts, and desirous of seeing the old country once again after thirty years' absence, I have decided to accept his invitation. I don't know when we may actually be in Europe, but I promise you that as soon as we touch a suitable port I will write to you again, making an appointment for you to see me in London. But remember that if your demands are too preposterous I will not for a moment listen to them, and that I am the last man in the world to submit to persistent and unwarrantable blackmail.

'I am, sir,
'Yours truly,
'Francis Smethurst.'

"The second letter was dated from Southampton," continued the old man in the corner calmly, "and, curiously enough, was the only letter which Kershaw professed to have received from Smethurst of which he had kept the envelope, and which was dated. It was quite brief," he added, referring once more to his piece of paper.

" 'Dear Sir,— Referring to my letter of a few weeks ago, I wish to inform you that the Tsarskoe Selo *will touch at Tilbury on Tuesday next, the 10th. I shall land there, and immediately go up to London by the first train I can get. If you like, you may meet me at Fenchurch Street Station, in the first-class waiting-room, in the late afternoon. Since I surmise that after thirty years' absence my face may not be familiar to you, I may as well tell you that you will recognize me by a heavy Astrakhan fur coat, which I shall wear, together with a cap of the same. You may then introduce yourself to me, and I will personally listen to what you may have to say.*

'Yours faithfully,
'Francis Smethurst.'

"It was this last letter which had caused William Kershaw's excitement and his wife's tears. In the German's own words, he was walking up and down the room like a wild beast, gesticulating wildly, and muttering sundry exclamations. Mrs. Kershaw, however, was full of apprehension. She mistrusted the man from foreign parts— who, according to her husband's story, had already one crime upon his conscience— who might, she feared, risk another, in order to be rid of a dangerous enemy. Woman-like, she thought the scheme a dishonourable one, for the law, she knew, is severe on the blackmailer.

"The assignation might be a cunning trap, in any case it was a curious one; why, she argued, did not Smethurst elect to see Kershaw at his hotel the following day? A thousand whys and wherefores made her anxious, but the fat German had been won over by Kershaw's visions of untold gold, held tantalisingly before his eyes. He had lent the necessary £2, with which his friend intended to tidy himself up a bit before he went to meet his friend the millionaire. Half an hour afterwards Kershaw had left his lodgings, and that was

the last the unfortunate woman saw of her husband, or Müller, the German, of his friend.

"Anxiously his wife waited that night, but he did not return; the next day she seems to have spent in making purposeless and futile inquiries about the neighbourhood of Fenchurch Street; and on the 12th she went to Scotland Yard, gave what particulars she knew, and placed in the hands of the police the two letters written by Smethurst."

ii

THE MAN in the corner had finished his glass of milk. His watery blue eyes looked across at Miss Polly Burton's eager little face, from which all traces of severity had now been chased away by an obvious and intense excitement.

"It was only on the 31st," he resumed after a while, "that a body, decomposed past all recognition, was found by two lightermen in the bottom of a disused barge. She had been moored at one time at the foot of one of those dark flights of steps which lead down between tall warehouses to the river in the East End of London. I have a photograph of the place here," he added, selecting one out of his pocket, and placing it before Polly.

"The actual barge, you see, had already been removed when I took this snapshot, but you will realize what a perfect place this alley is for the purpose of one man cutting another's throat in comfort, and without fear of detection. The body, as I said, was decomposed beyond all recognition; it had probably been there eleven days, but sundry articles, such as a silver ring and a tie pin, were recognizable, and were identified by Mrs. Kershaw as belonging to her husband.

"She, of course, was loud in denouncing Smethurst, and the police had no doubt a very strong case against him, for two days after the discovery of the body in the barge, the Siberian millionaire, as he was already popularly called by enterprising interviewers, was arrested in his luxurious suite of rooms at the Hotel Cecil.

"To confess the truth, at this point I was not a little puzzled. Mrs. Kershaw's story and Smethurst's letters had both found their way into the papers, and following my usual method— mind you, I am only an amateur, I try to reason out a case for the love of the thing— I sought about for a motive for the crime, which the police declared Smethurst had committed. To effectually get rid of a dangerous blackmailer was the generally accepted theory. Well! did it ever strike you how paltry that motive really was?"

Miss Polly had to confess, however, that it had never struck her in that light.

"Surely a man who had succeeded in building up an immense fortune by his own individual efforts, was not the sort of fool to believe that he had anything to fear from a man like Kershaw. He must have *known* that Kershaw held no damning proofs against him— not enough to hang him, anyway. Have you ever seen Smethurst?" he added, as he once more fumbled in his pocket-book.

Polly replied that she had seen Smethurst's picture in the illustrated papers at the time. Then he added, placing a small photograph before her:

"What strikes you most about the face?"

"Well, I think its strange, astonished expression, due to the total absence of eyebrows, and the funny foreign cut of the hair."

"So close that it almost looks as if it had been shaved. Exactly. That is what struck me most when I elbowed my way into the court that morning and first caught sight of the millionaire in the dock. He was a tall, soldierly-looking man, upright in stature, his face very bronzed and tanned. He wore neither moustache nor beard, his hair was cropped quite close to his head, like a Frenchman's; but, of course, what was so very remarkable about him was that total absence of eyebrows and even eyelashes, which gave the face such a peculiar appearance— as you say, a perpetually astonished look.

"He seemed, however, wonderfully calm; he had been accommodated with a chair in the dock— being a millionaire— and chatted pleasantly with his lawyer, Sir Arthur Inglewood, in the intervals between the calling of the several witnesses for the prosecution; whilst during the examination of these witnesses he sat quite placidly, with his head shaded by his hand.

"Müller and Mrs. Kershaw repeated the story which they had already told to the police. I think you said that you were not able, owing to pressure of work, to go to the court that day, and hear the case, so perhaps you have no recollection of Mrs. Kershaw. No? Ah, well! Here is a snapshot I managed to get of her once. That is her. Exactly as she stood in the box— over-dressed— in elaborate crape, with a bonnet which once had contained pink roses, and to which a remnant of pink petals still clung obtrusively amidst the deep black.

"She would not look at the prisoner, and turned her head resolutely towards the magistrate. I fancy she had been fond of that vagabond husband of hers: an enormous wedding-ring encircled her finger, and that, too, was swathed in black. She firmly believed that Kershaw's murderer sat there in the dock, and she literally flaunted her grief before him.

"I was indescribably sorry for her. As for Müller, he was just fat, oily, pompous, conscious of his own importance as a witness; his fat fingers, covered with brass rings, gripped the two incriminating letters, which he had identified. They were his passports, as it were, to a delightful land of

importance and notoriety. Sir Arthur Inglewood, I think, disappointed him by stating that he had no questions to ask of him. Müller had been brimful of answers, ready with the most perfect indictment, the most elaborate accusations against the bloated millionaire who had decoyed his dear friend Kershaw, and murdered him in Heaven knows what an out-of-the-way corner of the East End.

"After this, however, the excitement grew apace. Müller had been dismissed, and had retired from the court altogether, leading away Mrs. Kershaw, who had completely broken down.

"Constable D 21 was giving evidence as to the arrest in the meanwhile. The prisoner, he said, had seemed completely taken by surprise, not understanding the cause or history of the accusation against him; however, when put in full possession of the facts, and realizing, no doubt, the absolute futility of any resistance, he had quietly enough followed the constable into the cab. No one at the fashionable and crowded Hotel Cecil had even suspected that anything unusual had occurred.

"Then a gigantic sigh of expectancy came from every one of the spectators. The 'fun' was about to begin. James Buckland, a porter at Fenchurch Street railway station, had just sworn to tell all the truth, etc. After all, it did not amount to much. He said that at six o'clock in the afternoon of December the 10th, in the midst of one of the densest fogs he ever remembers, the 5.5 from Tilbury steamed into the station, being just about an hour late. He was on the arrival platform, and was hailed by a passenger in a first-class carriage. He could see very little of him beyond an enormous black fur coat and a travelling cap of fur also.

"The passenger had a quantity of luggage, all marked F.S., and he directed James Buckland to place it all upon a four-wheel cab, with the exception of a small hand-bag, which he carried himself. Having seen that all his luggage was safely bestowed, the stranger in the fur coat paid the porter, and, telling the cabman to wait until he returned, he walked away in the direction of the waiting-rooms, still carrying his small hand-bag.

"'I stayed for a bit,' added James Buckland, 'talking to the driver about the fog and that; then I went about my business, seein' that the local from Southend 'ad been signalled.'

"The prosecution insisted most strongly upon the hour when the stranger in the fur coat, having seen to his luggage, walked away towards the waiting-rooms. The porter was emphatic. 'It was not a minute later than 6.15,' he averred.

"Sir Arthur Inglewood still had no questions to ask, and the driver of the cab was called.

"He corroborated the evidence of James Buckland as to the hour when the gentleman in the fur coat had engaged him, and having filled his cab in and out with luggage, had told him to wait. And cabby did wait. He waited in the dense fog— until he was tired, until he seriously thought of depositing all the luggage in the lost property office, and of looking out for another fare— waited until at last, at a quarter before nine, whom should he see walking hurriedly towards his cab but the gentleman in the fur coat and cap, who got in quickly and told the driver to take him at once to the Hotel Cecil. This, cabby declared, had occurred at a quarter before nine. Still Sir Arthur Inglewood made no comment, and Mr. Francis Smethurst, in the crowded, stuffy court, had calmly dropped to sleep.

"The next witness, Constable Thomas Taylor, had noticed a shabbily dressed individual, with shaggy hair and beard, loafing about the station and waiting-rooms in the afternoon of December the 10th. He seemed to be watching the arrival platform of the Tilbury and Southend trains.

"Two separate and independent witnesses, cleverly unearthed by the police, had seen this same shabbily dressed individual stroll into the first-class waiting-room at about 6.15 on Wednesday, December the 10th, and go straight up to a gentleman in a heavy fur coat and cap, who had also just come into the room. The two talked together for a while; no one heard what they said, but presently they walked off together. No one seemed to know in which direction.

"Francis Smethurst was rousing himself from his apathy; he whispered to his lawyer, who nodded with a bland smile of encouragement. The employés of the Hotel Cecil gave evidence as to the arrival of Mr. Smethurst at about 9.30 p.m. on Wednesday, December the 10th, in a cab, with a quantity of luggage; and this closed the case for the prosecution.

"Everybody in that court already *saw* Smethurst mounting the gallows. It was uninterested curiosity which caused the elegant audience to wait and hear what Sir Arthur Inglewood had to say. He, of course, is the most fashionable man in the law at the present moment. His lolling attitudes, his drawling speech, are quite the rage, and imitated by the gilded youth of society.

"Even at this moment, when the Siberian millionaire's neck literally and metaphorically hung in the balance, an expectant titter went round the fair spectators as Sir Arthur stretched out his long loose limbs and lounged across the table. He waited to make his effect— Sir Arthur is a born actor— and there is no doubt that he made it, when in his slowest, most drawly tones he said quietly;

"'With regard to this alleged murder of one William Kershaw, on Wednesday, December the 10th, between 6.15 and 8.45 p.m., your Honour, I

now propose to call two witnesses, who saw this same William Kershaw alive on Tuesday afternoon, December the 16th, that is to say, six days after the supposed murder.'

"It was as if a bombshell had exploded in the court. Even his Honour was aghast, and I am sure the lady next to me only recovered from the shock of the surprise in order to wonder whether she need put off her dinner party after all.

"As for me," added the man in the corner, with that strange mixture of nervousness and self-complacency which had set Miss Polly Burton wondering, "well, you see, *I* had made up my mind long ago where the hitch lay in this particular case, and I was not so surprised as some of the others.

"Perhaps you remember the wonderful development of the case, which so completely mystified the police— and in fact everybody except myself. Torriani and a waiter at his hotel in the Commercial Road both deposed that at about 3.30 p.m. on December the 10th a shabbily dressed individual lolled into the coffee-room and ordered some tea. He was pleasant enough and talkative, told the waiter that his name was William Kershaw, that very soon all London would be talking about him, as he was about, through an unexpected stroke of good fortune, to become a very rich man, and so on, and so on, nonsense without end.

"When he had finished his tea he lolled out again, but no sooner had he disappeared down a turning of the road than the waiter discovered an old umbrella, left behind accidentally by the shabby, talkative individual. As is the custom in his highly respectable restaurant, Signor Torriani put the umbrella carefully away in his office, on the chance of his customer calling to claim it when he had discovered his loss. And sure enough nearly a week later, on Tuesday, the 16th, at about 1 p.m., the same shabbily dressed individual called and asked for his umbrella. He had some lunch, and chatted once again to the waiter. Signor Torriani and the waiter gave a description of William Kershaw, which coincided exactly with that given by Mrs. Kershaw of her husband.

"Oddly enough he seemed to be a very absent-minded sort of person, for on this second occasion, no sooner had he left than the waiter found a pocket-book in the coffee-room, underneath the table. It contained sundry letters and bills, all addressed to William Kershaw. This pocket-book was produced, and Karl Müller, who had returned to the court, easily identified it as having belonged to his dear and lamented friend 'Villiam.'

"This was the first blow to the case against the accused. It was a pretty stiff one, you will admit. Already it had begun to collapse like a house of cards. Still, there was the assignation, and the undisputed meeting between Smethurst and Kershaw, and those two and a half hours of a foggy evening to satisfactorily account for."

The man in the corner made a long pause, keeping the girl on tenterhooks. He had fidgeted with his bit of string till there was not an inch of it free from the most complicated and elaborate knots.

"I assure you," he resumed at last, "that at that very moment the whole mystery was, to me, as clear as daylight. I only marvelled how his Honour could waste his time and mine by putting what he thought were searching questions to the accused relating to his past. Francis Smethurst, who had quite shaken off his somnolence, spoke with a curious nasal twang, and with an almost imperceptible soupçon of foreign accent, He calmly denied Kershaw's version of his past; declared that he had never been called Barker, and had certainly never been mixed up in any murder case thirty years ago.

"'But you knew this man Kershaw,' persisted his Honour, 'since you wrote to him?'

"'Pardon me, your Honour,' said the accused quietly, 'I have never, to my knowledge, seen this man Kershaw, and I can swear that I never wrote to him.'

"'Never wrote to him?' retorted his Honour warningly. 'That is a strange assertion to make when I have two of your letters to him in my hands at the present moment.'

"'I never wrote those letters, your Honour,' persisted the accused quietly, 'they are not in my handwriting.'

"'Which we can easily prove,' came in Sir Arthur Inglewood's drawly tones, as he handed up a packet to his Honour; 'here are a number of letters written by my client since he has landed in this country, and some of which were written under my very eyes.'

"As Sir Arthur Inglewood had said, this could be easily proved, and the prisoner, at his Honour's request, scribbled a few lines, together with his signature, several times upon a sheet of note-paper. It was easy to read upon the magistrate's astounded countenance, that there was not the slightest similarity in the two handwritings.

"A fresh mystery had cropped up. Who, then, had made the assignation with William Kershaw at Fenchurch Street railway station? The prisoner gave a fairly satisfactory account of the employment of his time since his landing in England.

"'I came over on the *Tsarskoe Selo*,' he said, 'a yacht belonging to a friend of mine. When we arrived at the mouth of the Thames there was such a dense fog that it was twenty-four hours before it was thought safe for me to land. My friend, who is a Russian, would not land at all; he was regularly frightened at this land of fogs. He was going on to Madeira immediately.

"'I actually landed on Tuesday, the 10th, and took a train at once for town. I did see to my luggage and a cab, as the porter and driver told your Honour;

then I tried to find my way to a refreshment-room, where I could get a glass of wine. I drifted into the waiting-room, and there I was accosted by a shabbily dressed individual, who began telling me a piteous tale. Who he was I do not know. He *said* he was an old soldier who had served his country faithfully, and then been left to starve. He begged of me to accompany him to his lodgings, where I could see his wife and starving children, and verify the truth and piteousness of his tale.

"'Well, your Honour,' added the prisoner with noble frankness, 'it was my first day in the old country. I had come back after thirty years with my pockets full of gold, and this was the first sad tale I had heard; but I am a business man, and did not want to be exactly "done" in the eye. I followed my man through the fog, out into the streets. He walked silently by my side for a time. I had not a notion where I was.

"'Suddenly I turned to him with some question, and realized in a moment that my gentleman had given me the slip. Finding, probably, that I would not part with my money till I *had* seen the starving wife and children, he left me to my fate, and went in search of more willing bait.

"'The place where I found myself was dismal and deserted. I could see no trace of cab or omnibus. I retraced my steps and tried to find my way back to the station, only to find myself in worse and more deserted neighbourhoods. I became hopelessly lost and fogged. I don't wonder that two and a half hours elapsed while I thus wandered on in the dark and deserted streets; my sole astonishment is that I ever found the station at all that night, or rather close to it a policeman, who showed me the way.'

"'But how do you account for Kershaw knowing all your movements?' still persisted his Honour, 'and his knowing the exact date of your arrival in England? How do you account for these two letters, in fact?'

"'I cannot account for it or them, your Honour,' replied the prisoner quietly. 'I have proved to you, have I not, that I never wrote those letters, and that the man— er— Kershaw is his name?— was not murdered by me?'

"'Can you tell me of anyone here or abroad who might have heard of your movements, and of the date of your arrival?'

"'My late employés at Vladivostok, of course, knew of my departure, but none of them could have written these letters, since none of them know a word of English.'

"'Then you can throw no light upon these mysterious letters? You cannot help the police in any way towards the clearing up of this strange affair?'

"'The affair is as mysterious to me as to your Honour, and to the police of this country.'

"Francis Smethurst was discharged, of course; there was no semblance of evidence against him sufficient to commit him for trial. The two overwhelming points of his defence which had completely routed the prosecution were, firstly, the proof that he had never written the letters making the assignation, and secondly, the fact that the man supposed to have been murdered on the 10th was seen to be alive and well on the 16th. But then, who in the world was the mysterious individual who had apprised Kershaw of the movements of Smethurst, the millionaire?"

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THE MAN in the corner cocked his funny thin head on one side and looked at Polly; then he took up his beloved bit of string and deliberately untied every knot he had made in it. When it was quite smooth he laid it out upon the table.

"I will take you, if you like, point by point along the line of reasoning which I followed myself, and which will inevitably lead you, as it led me, to the only possible solution of the mystery.

"First take this point," he said with nervous restlessness, once more taking up his bit of string, and forming with each point raised a series of knots which would have shamed a navigating instructor, "obviously it was *impossible* for Kershaw not to have been acquainted with Smethurst, since he was fully apprised of the latter's arrival in England by two letters. Now it was clear to me from the first that *no one* could have written those two letters except Smethurst. You will argue that those letters were proved not to have been written by the man in the dock. Exactly. Remember, Kershaw was a careless man— he had lost both envelopes. To him they were insignificant. Now it was never *disproved* that those letters were written by Smethurst."

"But—" suggested Polly.

"Wait a minute," he interrupted, while knot number two appeared upon the scene, "it was proved that six days after the murder, William Kershaw was alive, and visited the Torriani Hotel, where already he was known, and where he conveniently left a pocket-book behind, so that there should be no mistake as to his identity; but it was never questioned where Mr. Francis Smethurst, the millionaire, happened to spend that very same afternoon."

"Surely, you don't mean?" gasped the girl.

"One moment, please," he added triumphantly. "How did it come about that the landlord of the Torriani Hotel was brought into court at all? How did Sir Arthur Inglewood, or rather his client, know that William Kershaw had on those two memorable occasions visited the hotel, and that its landlord could

bring such convincing evidence forward that would for ever exonerate the millionaire from the imputation of murder?"

"Surely," I argued, "the usual means, the police—"

"The police had kept the whole affair very dark until the arrest at the Hotel Cecil. They did not put into the papers the usual: 'If anyone happens to know of the whereabouts, etc. etc'. Had the landlord of that hotel heard of the disappearance of Kershaw through the usual channels, he would have put himself in communication with the police. Sir Arthur Inglewood produced him. How did Sir Arthur Inglewood come on his track?"

"Surely, you don't mean?"

"Point number four," he resumed imperturbably, "Mrs. Kershaw was never requested to produce a specimen of her husband's handwriting. Why? Because the police, clever as you say they are, never started on the right tack. They believed William Kershaw to have been murdered; they looked for William Kershaw.

"On December the 31st, what was presumed to be the body of William Kershaw was found by two lightermen: I have shown you a photograph of the place where it was found. Dark and deserted it is in all conscience, is it not? Just the place where a bully and a coward would decoy an unsuspecting stranger, murder him first, then rob him of his valuables, his papers, his very identity, and leave him there to rot. The body was found in a disused barge which had been moored some time against the wall, at the foot of these steps. It was in the last stages of decomposition, and, of course, could not be identified; but the police would have it that it was the body of William Kershaw.

"It never entered their heads that it was the body of *Francis Smethurst, and that William Kershaw was his murderer*.

"Ah! it was cleverly, artistically conceived! Kershaw is a genius. Think of it all! His disguise! Kershaw had a shaggy beard, hair, and moustache. He shaved up to his very eyebrows! No wonder that even his wife did not recognize him across the court; and remember she never saw much of his face while he stood in the dock. Kershaw was shabby, slouchy, he stooped. Smethurst, the millionaire, might have served in the Prussian army.

"Then that lovely trait about going to revisit the Torriani Hotel. Just a few days' grace, in order to purchase moustache and beard and wig, exactly similar to what he had himself shaved off. Making up to look like himself! Splendid! Then leaving the pocket-book behind! He! he! he! Kershaw was not murdered! Of course not. He called at the Torriani Hotel six days after the murder, whilst Mr. Smethurst, the millionaire, hobnobbed in the park with duchesses! Hang such a man! Fie!"

He fumbled for his hat. With nervous, trembling fingers he held it deferentially in his hand whilst he rose from the table. Polly watched him as he strode up to the desk, and paid twopence for his glass of milk and his bun. Soon he disappeared through the shop, whilst she still found herself hopelessly bewildered, with a number of snap-shot photographs before her, still staring at a long piece of string, smothered from end to end in a series of knots, as bewildering, as irritating, as puzzling as the man who had lately sat in the corner.

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8: The Test

E. Nesbit

1886–1924

In: *To the Adventurous*, Hutchinson, 1923
World's News (Sydney) 19 March 1927

Probably first published in a magazine, but I don't know the details. Her collection "To the Adventurous", is now hard to find in print form.

UNITY APPLEDORE stood at the window and looked out at the farm buildings— the familiar lines of roof and wall, the old wind-bitten trees, and the great shoulder of the downs curving over all. In the diffused pink light of late sunset every detail showed with the clearness of a steel engraving, the softness of a mezzotint. A woman was driving fowls into an outhouse; two men organised a procession of heavy footed farm horses from the stable below the house to the pasture above it. In the cleft between the downs the sea showed like a section of alabaster. The furze on the hill was in flower, and a late skylark still sang. A bat skimmed past, in stealthy circling flight, and from the open door of the cottage down the road a mother was calling to her children. Miss Appledore drew the curtains, and turned back into the room where already candles were alight on the dark wooden mantelpiece, each reflected in the mirror that hung there in its frame of tarnished gold.

The room was furnished with that heavy simplicity which we used to sneer at as Victorian, but to which time and the swing of fashion's pendulum have now given a new value. The deep mahogany sofa was covered with faded green damask, and at the three low windows hung curtains of the same soft-tinted fabric. The easy chairs had red cushions. A lamp stood on the square dining table. Old sporting prints were on the walls, and on the hearth rugs a tangle of dogs.

The girl stood pensive by the hearth where already— for September evenings are chill— a little bright fire blazed and glowed. She stood, incongruous to her surroundings as a street lamp in a cornfield. The smooth oval of a very pretty face was, surmounted by a coiffure so much in the fashion as to be almost unfashionable— her delicate white blouse and townily-cut black skirt showed to advantage a slender upright figure, dowered with that conscious grace so prized in mantle departments. Miss Appledore had what is known as a "good trying-on figure." And she knew it, had reason to know it since it had been her means of livelihood for the six years since she had left Dis Farm, goaded by the nagging of an aunt and stifled by the apathy of an uncle.

She had not quarreled with them; after all, though the bread of dependence had not been sweet, they had provided the bread— and the

butter and the meat, the shoes and frocks, and all that a growing girl needs to clothe and develop her young body. She had not been ungrateful, though they may have thought so. Only she had wanted to earn her own living in her own way— and that way, in a London shop, had led very swiftly from the drapery to the mantles. She had not been ungrateful, but now she felt as though she had been. If the nagging aunt was dead, the apathetic uncle, with a curious, unexpected pathos, had not cared to live without her— he was dead, too, and he had left all he possessed to his dear niece, Unity Appledore. All, without condition, and without reserve. The farm, the land, the stock, the furniture, the money in the banks, and the stocks and shares that stood for his life's careful savings.

That had been six months ago, and abruptly deserting the mantles, had for six months run the farm, and run it well. Not for nothing had been those old days of hard work, constant fault-finding, and niggard praise. Miss Appledore was a competent farmer. The dairy, the poultry, the pigs, the cattle— everything under her hands succeeded. Neighboring farmers, who had shaken wise heads at a girl's headstrong folly in attempting the management of all those acres, now owned that the girl was not such a fool as they had thought her. Others, who had ridden by Dis oftener than need was, to advise and help the heiress, were justified to the world of the faith they had at least professed. Miss Appledore was a success.

Miss Appledore was bored to death.

She took a letter from her pocket and read it— for the twentieth time, and as she read it she looked at the red-cushioned arm-chair and wondered whether life on a farm would be better worth living if someone one could grow fond of sat there in leather gaiters and shooting jacket, with his feet among the dogs.

"Dear Miss Unity," said the letter*, "I have often tried to speak to you about something very important— to me, that is— but when I am with you I can never think of anything to say."*

"I wonder whether you'd always be like that," said Unity to herself, "even if— "

"—of anything to say. You must have seen what I feel about it. May I hope? Father and mother would be very pleased, especially as your land fits in so well with ours."

"Ah," said Unity.

"And I shall have the place on father's decease, though I hope it will be long first. If she will have me. I shall do my best to make her a good husband. Of course, I know no one is good enough for you, let alone me, and so no more at present from your obedient servant,

"George Monro.

"Perhaps I might look in this evening, if I can get away. But do write, in case I can't come."

"I do like George," she assured herself. And she was very, very lonely. She took the bulging blotter from the sideboard and the inkstand made out of a hoof of her uncle's old hunter, mounted in brass, found a pen that would write, dipped it in the ink, and wrote:—

'"Dear Mr. Monro,—"

Then she stopped, biting the penholder's end. It was difficult. Marriage is so irrevocable. Suppose, when she had married him, she didn't like him. How was one to be sure?

She dipped the pen again and wrote with determination.

"Dear Mr. Monro,
I appreciate very much your flattering offer, and I think, perhaps, it would be better to wait a little and go on as usual, but I shall bear your offer in mind, and—"

She read that through and tore it up, looked at the empty chair again, and wrote in extreme haste: —

"Dear Mr. Monro.
The answer is 'Yes.'
Yours sincerely,
U. Appledore."

She took the note out to the kitchen, and gave it to Gladys, the little maid.

"Give this to Jim to post when he goes across to the village," she said, and went back to her solitary fireside.

Naturally, when the big bell jangled at the front door, she assumed that it was rung by the hand of Mr. George Monro. Instead of which Gladys opened the sitting-room door and closed it again, in discreet speechlessness, having introduced a perfect stranger, who made two strides to the fireside where Unity stood, and took her tenderly but fervently in his arms.

"My own girl!" he said. And the dogs on the hearth all got up and barked together.

Unity, conscious of having had a moment before consented to become someone else's own girl, could only push the stranger away with violence and decision, and gasp, "How dare you? Down, dogs, down!"

The stranger's arms fell, limp. He was a tall, lean stranger, with tanned face, and short bronze beard, and blue eyes that reminded her of someone, but she could not remember who. He stood looking at her.

"You aren't," he asked, in quite a different voice, "you aren't married? The girl said Miss Appledore was in."

"No," said Unity, arranging her hair automatically with little delicate pats, "I'm not married, but I've got men-servants in the house to protect me, and— Why, it's Bert!"

"Of course, it's Bert," said the stranger, and clasped her again before she could help herself. "Oh, my darling girl, what luck, eh?" and with that he turned her face up with his hand under her chin, and kissed her for all the world as though he had all the right in the world to kiss her.

Again she pushed him away, but the push was no longer very violent—not quite decisive. Rather it was an apologetic push, that seemed to say, "I concede your right to think you have rights, but I should prefer to discuss their validity at a discreeter distance." The dogs read her voice as truce speaking, and subsided onto the hearthrug.

"Sit down," her voice said. "Yes, you must, it's such a long time since we met. I'd— I'd almost forgotten you," she said, with tremulous sprightliness.

His blue eyes clouded, and he took the vacant chair.

"You're saying what isn't quite true, dear, aren't you?" he said gently, his feet among the dogs who wagged lazy tails, while the old spaniel got slowly up and laid a head on his knee, "I don't know why you are— but you are."

"It's such a long time ago," said Unity, "and you stopped writing."

"Now, isn't that like a girl?" he said. "You told me to stop, didn't you? Because it couldn't come to anything, with neither of us having any income or prospects. You've not forgotten that?"

"Did you walk over from the station?" she asked hastily. "Are you tired? Have you had supper? Won't you have a glass of wine and a biscuit?"

He laughed, shortly.

"It won't do, my dear.... If you've forgotten, I'll remind you. When I was an apprentice and you were an improver... Do you remember the first time I kissed you? Behind the Bolton sheetings at sale time?

"And the day we went to Richmond and looked at the deer. Have you forgotten what I said then?"

"Yes," she said, most untruly.

"You said, 'One of us is sure to maker a fortune somehow, pick up an old lady's purse, or open a door for an old gentleman and then they'll leave us all their money, and we can be married, then, Bert,' you said."

"Have you got a fortune now, then?" she asked.

"Not me!" he laughed. "I've been store-keeping in Montreal like I wrote you. But when I saw in the paper about you having the farm and the money left you— why, I saw it was all right for us at last. And I took the first boat home, never thinking you could have changed. You haven't girl? Say you haven't. You're just playing with me to try me, some girl's nonsense, isn't it? You are my girl still, aren't you?"

He came round the heap of dogs, and knelt at her feet, taking her two hands ever so gently.

"Don't tease me any more U," he pleaded. "I've never given a thought to another girl. I only went out there to try to make enough for us to be able to come together. You know that, don't you? And all the way back you were getting nearer and nearer, and me gladder and gladder till I thought that old steamer was as slow as a steam-roller— because she wouldn't bring me to you any quicker. And all the way down in the train and up through the dusk— I knew my way without asking from all you'd told me about the place. If you knew— you wouldn't tease your boy like this."

He had raised her hands to his shoulders and held them there, while his eyes challenged and implored. Her dainty head dropped nearer and nearer to his. Then his cheek was laid against hers, she unresisting, and her hands were round his neck. He breathed deeply, and unmeasured relief sounded in his words. "I knew you were only teasing me. Oh, but you did have me frightened. U. Just for a minute that is. But I soon tumbled to it."

"Don't talk," she whispered. "Just stay quiet and let me think."

"Think of what's to come for us, my darling," said he. "All the love and happiness after all we've been through."

And then he, too, was silent; the big clock ticked, the fire purred and flickered, and they held each other fast.

Then, suddenly, came a heavy step on the brick pathway outside. The big bell at the front door clanged and jangled again, and the two by the fire sprang to their feet apart.

"Oh, Bert," she said, very quickly. "I ought never to have let you kiss me. I meant to break it gently to you— but I was so glad to see you safe. I.... Oh, there's Gladys going to the door. Oh, whatever shall I do? Bert— I've just promised to marry somebody else, and that's him at the door!"

The evening was one of incredible stiffness, one of those dreadful evenings full of long pauses.

George Monro, tall, dark, spare, with the ruddy apple face of the man who lives mostly out of doors, strode in in brown tweeds and brown gaiters, and the very brown boots she had thought of as being at home on the hearthrug among the dogs.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Monro," said Unity, so agitated that she looked really glad to see him. "This is an old friend, Mr. Dyer, from Montreal. He just looked in as he was passing," she added wildly.

The two men shook hands.

"Quite cold, for the time of year," said Unity, wondering whether people's teeth ever did chatter with sheer nervousness as hers felt like doing. "Do sit down, won't you?"

They all sat down.

"Making a long stay in these parts?" asked George affably.

"I hope so," said Bert, with clouded brow. "It depends."

"I see." said George, helpfully.

Pause.

"It's a new moon to-night, isn't it? I saw it through glass. That's dreadfully unlucky," said Miss Appledore, stirring the fire, which was doing very well as it was.

"It was new yesterday," said George.

"So your seeing it through glass to-day doesn't count as unlucky," said Bert. "On the second day it only means a wedding."

George tried to catch her eye. So did Bert, but her eyes were for the hearthrug and the heap of dogs.

"I was thinking Silky wasn't very well," said the girl, pulling long-fringed ears through her hands. "I wish you'd have a look at her, Mr. Monro."

"She's getting on, isn't she?" George asked, and leaned to look at the spaniel. "It's just old age," he said. "I shouldn't keep her if I were you."

"I know a girl in Montreal who's got a dog fourteen years old," said Bert. "Had it from a puppy, dotes on it."

"Really," said George. "I don't think they understand dogs in America, do you?"

Pause.

"The weather looks well for harvest-time, don't you think?" That was Unity.

"Fair," said George. No change threatened. "I believe there'll be thunder to-morrow, if not to-night," said Bert, who thought nothing less likely.

Pause.

The whole evening was like that, perfectly distracting. What was a girl to do? How could you even begin to make up your mind whose boots were to have the right to be among the dogs, for life, so to speak, when you had enough to do to get the two men to be civil to each other for a few minutes till you could get rid of them both?

The clock ticked low through the talk and loud in the silences, and Miss-Appledore looked at the clock's bland painted face more often and less furtively as the minutes fell slowly past.

Gladys brought glasses and cake, and Unity unlocked the corner cupboard and produced the square decanter of whisky left there by the uncle.

This, she hoped, might make a break— start them on their farewells, and their departure. Neither was hungry, thank you, and both were teetotallers.

She drew back the window curtain and looked out.

"It's a fine night," she said, and they both said "Yes, it is," and sat where they were.

She went out to send Gladys to bed, for it was past nine o'clock. She left her door open so that she might hear if they spoke to one another. She heard Mr. Dyer say:—

"Do you live far from here?" and Mr. Monro replied. "A matter of a mile or so."

"It'll be late by the time you get home," Bert suggested.

"I daresay I shall catch you up." said George.

She had to go back to them, and it was worse than ever. For a stricken hour the rivals sat patiently, each resolute to outstay the other. It was George whose patience was the first to give out.

"I really came on business to-night. Miss Appledore," he said.

"Oh, but," said Unity brightly, "I always do business in the morning. My head's clearer then."

"I came for pleasure," said Bert. "The evening's the time for pleasure, and there's nothing pleasanter than to sit and talk over old times with old friends."

Really, they were dreadful.

"Whatever shall I do?" she asked herself. "I believe they mean to sit here all night rather than be the first to go, both of them do." And her sympathies were so far with both of them that she meant them when they did go to go together. She knew she could trust Bert not to say anything to him. And it didn't matter what George said. The pauses were growing more prolonged. The tide of silence was growing stronger and more difficult to stem. She almost ceased to struggle against it. She even began almost to be able to think. George was much the handsomest, certainly. And his land did join on to here. And he did know all about farming. What a help! But then Bert was her old sweetheart, and he had come back to her across half the world. Yes— but not till he knew that she had lands and money. But George had talked about the land, too. It was very difficult.

"I suppose you've got most of your apples stored by now," George was saying. "Bracken's better than straw to store them in."

"I use paper myself," said Bert, "paper bags; it comes handier for eating."

She jumped up. It was no good waiting for them to go; they never would go; never in this world.

"Goodness! How late it is." she cried. "A quarter past ten! I never did! How time does fly. doesn't it?"

"In pleasant company," said George.

"Like an aeroplane," said Bert. And each stuck faithfully to his chair.

"I must put the dogs away," she said decisively. "And then I'll go with you to the gate."

They had to get up then and follow her to the front door.

"Allow me," said Bert.

"Let me," said George, and their two hands met on the door-handle, and drew back hastily. In the end she opened the door herself. And a red glare lit up the sky.

"Something's on fire." said Bert, sniffing.

"The ricks!" cried George, and the three ran along the brick path to the garden gate. But when they got there, they saw the ricks lying quiet in the starlight. It was the house that was on fire— the wing of it furthest away from the parlor, where they had sat out their dismal evening.

"It's that, Gladys!" said Unity. "Oh, my goodness! Reading in bed again. She'll be burnt alive!"

But the kitchen door opened and Gladys, in a very short nightgown, large boots, and a shawl, came out safe and scared, and quite unable to explain anything.

"The stairway was a-catching as I came down, so I went back and put on the boots," was all she would say. But that she said again and again.

Three windows were red squares— smoke was pouring out of the kitchen door— and tongues of flame were licking at the thatch.

"Oh," cried Unity, with a new note of horror in her voice. "The cat and her kittens are in the store-room over the kitchen." She never remembered taking hold of either of them, but now she was holding an arm of each of the men, and as she spoke she felt a sort of spring in the arm of one of them. And she never could understand afterwards what made her say, after a pause, too slight to be perceptible, "And all my money and the insurance policy and the title deeds of the farm and securities and things in the cash-box on the table in the back room!"

She felt the spring in both arms now, and next moment the two men were jostling each other in the doorway of her kitchen.

"Oh, what have I done? Oh, whatever made me?" she asked herself.

"Come back! ' she shouted. "Come back!" But the tire shouted louder than she, and they did not come back.

She went as near to the door as Gladys, now heavily clinging to her, would permit, and the whole long wretched evening seemed a short and happy minute compared with the minutes that passed while she stood there waiting, waiting. Someone was coming, someone thrust the cash-box into her hands and said "I'll go to Eastbourne for the engines. Wake the men and send someone to Seaford."

She let the box drop clattering on the bricks. Then someone else came and pushed a bundle into her arms— a bundle that was someone's coat, full of live softness and gently-moving fur. This man's shirt-sleeves were smouldering and breaking into little flames. He was beating them out with his hands, and she had put clown the. cat and kittens and broken away from Gladys, and was trying to help to beat out the fire on his arms.

"Don't!" he said, you'll burn your hands. Isn't there a garden hose?"

"Yes," she said, "and free water laid on from Eastbourne. Gladys, run and wake the man. Don't be silly, you must. You're not hurt. Go this minute!"

Gladys went. Then Unity put her arms round the man who had saved the cats.

"It's all right, Bert," she said, "I'm not. going to marry anyone but you. You aren't burnt, are you?"

"Not to matter," he answered, with his arms in their burnt sleeves round her for a moment. "Where's the hose? It's no use me going for an engine. That chap's taken my bike. He's welcome, so long as I've got you."

"It's all insured," said Unity calmly, "and I'm not so very fond of the house— at least, I wasn't till now. But now— well, it wouldn't be honest to the insurance people not to try to save it."

They were connecting the hose by this time, and made such play with it that when the engines came they did not come too late to save at least half the house.

She had a word with Mr. George Monro, as they faced each other, blackened and dishevelled, in the sweet, pearly morning by the gate.

"I wrote you a letter last night," she said. "You'll find it when you get home. And I'm very grateful to you for saving my cash-box. I do thank you."

She held out her hand.

"Oh that's nothing," he said awkwardly. "What was in the letter?"

"I wish you wouldn't open it," she said, "but I know you will. I mean the exact opposite of what it said. I mean— thank you very much, but..."

"So it's no." he said. "That Montreal chap, I suppose?"

"Well, yes," said Unity. "You see, she added apologetically, "he was my old sweetheart."

"I see," said George. "Well, there's no more to be said. But I met the lad with the letter that said 'Yes.' If it hadn't been for that you wouldn't have caught me going into a burning house after your money and your papers."

"No," said she, "I suppose not. Well, thank you ever so much all the same. Good morning."

When the distracted Gladys had at last consented to prepare breakfast, the two that were left took it together in the horn bean arbor at the end of the garden, "away from the smell of the fire," as Unity said. His arms were bandaged, and would be bandaged for some time yet the doctor said.

"But they'll be all right," said he: "don't you worry. But I'm sorry you lost your money and things. I'd have got them only I'd all I could carry."

"Mr. Monro got the cash-box," said she.

"Good man! I didn't think he had it in him. I thought he went back out of the fire."

"Perhaps he went round by the other stairs— the ones that weren't alight— Bert—"

"Yes, girl."

"Could you love a liar?"

"If it was you I'd have a try."

"Because I am. I don't know whatever made me do such a dreadful thing. It came to me like lightning, and I said it before I thought. There wasn't any money or papers or anything in the box."

"Where are they, then?"

"At the solicitors, of course, and at the bank. You don't think I'd be so silly as to have things like that in the house? I just said they were in the box, see?"

"But why?"

"I don't know. I really don't. Unless it was to see what he would do. Can you love a girl that's told such a silly lie?"

"Don't give it another thought," he said comfortingly. "You must have been beside yourself with fright, and no wonder. But what was in the blessed box?"

"Spices," she answered, half laughing, and yet not far from tears. "I have to keep the box locked because Gladys will eat the cinnamon."

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9: A Question of Respect

Ambrose Pratt

1874-1944

The Bulletin, 19 Jun 1897

"IF ONLY men were Men!" sighed the woman.

The man looked tired and gazed abstractedly into the distance. "What do you want me to do?" he asked.

The woman became instantly energetic. "Do you want me?" sharply.

"You know I do," replied the man, aroused.

The woman went closer, placing both hands on his shoulders. "Would you really marry me after the—?" Her lips were white and she was trembling.

"Dear," said the man almost tenderly, " because *he* does not reverence you, please don't doubt me. I shall be honored in my wife no matter how she comes to me!"

The woman's eyes were brilliant, but she was not satisfied. "Do you respect me— although I am—?"

The man took all the necessary oaths.

"You are a *man*! Now l am happy!" said the woman.

THE INCUBUS, who had been listening throughout, hidden by the ivy tendrils and the dusk, stepped forward, curious.

"Do you really respect her?" he asked the man, pointing impolitely to the woman, who had started back, pale as death, from the man's arms. The man recovered himself with difficulty, and the Incubus repeated the question, but this time bowed to the woman instead of pointing.

"Yes!" answered the man confusedly, but sincerely.

"Ah, thank you," said the Incubus; "I was momentarily interested in ascertaining your predominant characteristic. I do not think you are much of a rogue!" He nodded and passed on down the path.

The woman had been eyeing the man and the Incubus with agony and apprehension. Amazement overcame her now. Recovering, she sprang down the path and faced the Incubus, less quickly followed by the man.

"What are you going to do?" she demanded.

"Nothing!"

"Which means—?"

"Anything but a divorce!" The Incubus laughed and struck a match on his leggings. Both sounds grated on the woman's nerves.

"Why? why? why?" she cried distractedly. "You hate me, why won't you let us both be free?"

The Incubus spoke deliberately. "I beg your pardon, madam. I neither like nor dislike you!"

"Then why—?"

He purposely misunderstood her. "Because, madam, any affection would argue a foundation of respect you cannot inspire, at least in *me*." He bowed ironically towards the man whose figure was sharply silhouetted against the sands of the bay.

The man stepped forward with clenched fists— he was very young. "Enough of this!" he said hoarsely. "I can't stand much more.

"I beg your pardon," said the Incubus with consummate courtesy, "I had forgotten your relationship to the lady. I beg to retract anything offensive my remarks contained!" And ne tie parted unopposed into the shadows.

The woman laughed hysterically, but drew back when the man would have taken her in his arms. "No! don't touch me! don't touch me! Ah, how cruel he is! No, keep from me. You men are all the same. He swore he loved me when he married me, and scarcely a month after our wedding he grew cold. It is coldness kills us women!"

She was sobbing, bitterly sobbing; pacing up and down; now pressing her hands to tier side, now wringing them in absolute despair.

The man was miserable, and almost crying, too. He was scarcely 23.

"I did nothing to change him!" moaned the woman— "only love him. My God, how I loved him!"

"But you love me now? " asked the man, passionately.

"I don't know," said the woman. "Don't ask me; I do not know!"

At breakfast next morning the Incubus was sipping coffee as he read the cables, when the woman entered, pale and purposeful, with dark-rimmed eyes. She held something tightly clutched in her left hand.

Rising, with old-fashioned courtesy, he waited till she was seated, then went on with the cables.

"Nearly sure to be a big European war," he said, absently; but recollecting, amiably offered her the paper.

She took it, and crushed it, with many rustles, into the chair beside her. "I want your attention!"

"It's so early— scarcely ten, he said, deprecatingly.

Something seemed to choke the woman, though eating nothing.

"Please be a little kind to me!" she said with a queer, catching voice, "I am only a woman. What are you going to do with me?"

"Where is—?" he asked presently. His voice was altered too.

"I have sent him away for ever! What will you do with me?"

"What do you deserve?"

"As God's above me, I've done you no dishonor. I'm fit to be your wife yet!"

"You are quite pretty enough," suggested the Incubus, "but"— brutally— "I've had to do with many such as you before my marriage. The pity is, with all my experience, I was unable to choose just what I wanted."

The woman slunk away as if he had been too close to her.

"Don't— you— believe— me?" she whispered.

"As I live, l am a pure woman. I swear—"

she stopped at the smile on her companion's face.

"Physically pure, yes," agreed the Incubus. "I suppose it's a fault in the training— all the others were the same. The intention is nothing with you women. Morally rotten, you are goddesses because physically intact. I congratulate you on your—"

The woman toyed with the something she had been holding in her hand.

"Will you give me some water?" she asked.

He handed her a glass with all the grace of a courtier.

The woman unscrewed the lid from the something, and emptied a white powder into the water.

"Poison?" asked the Incubus. "Pardon my curiosity, but I hate to see you suffer unnecessary pain, and arsenic or strychnine give the greatest agony. Women invariably use one or other. Absurd, too, considering there are painless modes of self-destruction available." He was watching her keenly, but appeared oblivious; her lips were moving as if in speech, and she raised the glass slowly to her mouth; her eyes half-closed, apparently seeing nothing.

"Stop!" said the man, sternly.

The woman looked at him, a passion of beseeching tenderness in her eyes. "Forgive me! Love me! I do not want to die!" It was a heart prayer.

The man took the glass gently from her and placed it out of reach with elaborate care, then suddenly stood up.

He took her in his arms and, bending back her head, looked into her eyes. "Swear by God in Heaven you will never do that again!"

A mad hope seized the woman. "I swear," she said. "Oh, dear love, love me a little! I cannot live without your love. I was mad last night. You make me mad when you despise me. Love me a little, dear!"

"I have been a fool," said the Incubus, ambiguously; "I have always loved you."

After a long, rapturous moment the woman looked up. "And you do respect me a little?"

"Everything in the world, dear," said the man foolishly.

THEY WENT arm in arm into the garden through the open French window, and lost themselves among the roses.

"Ah, dear!" said the woman suddenly, with a start of seeming horror, and hiding her face in her hands. "The poison! Someone may drink it!" She started toward the house.

"No, dear, I'll go," said the Incubus. "Wait here for me!"— authoritatively.

He ran with light steps into the breakfast-room and, going swiftly to the table, without hesitation drank the poison.

"I am not taking any risks, I think," he said cynically. "My respect for women will save me!"

———————

10: Death Kiss

Anonymous

Telegraph (Brisbane) 4 May 1912

FROM THE VERY FIRST I felt that the hypothesis of suicide outraged the probabilities even if it fitted the superficial facts. Ostensibly, of course, everything pointed in that direction; but it is axiomatic in our profession that hastily formed conclusions are worse than useless.

When, therefore, Lady Stapenhill declared in her somewhat highly-pitched accents that she did not, and would not, believe it, I neither sided with nor against her, but preserved a discreet silence. Briefly, the details as she related them on my arrival were as follow:

FOR SOME TIME past Harbourne Manor had been occupied by Lady Stapenhill and her niece, a young lady of 22 years of age, and, of course, the usual servants. It was the invariable rule of the household to be in bed by about 11 o'clock at night. The previous evening was no exception and after wishing each other "Goodnight," the two ladies proceeded to their respective chambers, with no hint that aught of an unusual character was about I to happen.

In the morning, however, the younger one was found dead, not having even undressed; and a somewhat lurid commentary as to the manner of her decease was present in the form of an opened packet labelled "Cyanide of potassium—poison," which lay on the dressing-table a few feet away. All the essentials of a thoroughly mysterious tragedy were there.

Lady Stapenhill, as I have said, discredited the theory of suicide, arid, when I suggested, the possibility of an accidental dose of the fatal substance in mistake for some harmless preparation similar in appearance only shook her head, and said that it was unlikely.

Yet if foul play were assumed, where look for the miscreant? The only point of any importance which came out in the course of our conversation was that the .door of the room was not found locked when the tragic discovery was made.

A visit to the druggist who had made up the presumably fatal packet— his name and address were conspicuously displayed on the wrapper— likewise threw no very definite light on the subject. He had sold it to Miss Stapenhill herself four days previously— on that point he was positive. He was also quite certain that she asked no questions regarding its properties— its fatal properties, as I suggested for example. The rest was hazy.

Knowing that the lady was an amateur photographer, he had no hesitation in supplying her; and he believed (but would not definitely affirm) that he observed her refer, to a written memorandum when making her purchase.

There was just one item which struck me as being .worthy of investigation. It was quite inconceivable that Miss Stapenhill could have swallowed anything like the amount of the stuff which the tradesman represented as being missing from the packet; and I was curious to learn what had become of the remainder.

Very fortunately, Lady Stapenhill told me her niece's room. had not been disturbed since the events described, and therefore, the morning after our conversation, I instituted a rigorous search there, on the chance that some of the deadly stuff might have been spilled. An observer might, have smiled to see a middle-aged gentleman on his hands and knees, peering into every nook and cranny and occasionally taking out a pocket magnifying glass to observe some suspicious-looking bit more closely: and certain am I that not even the exemplary old dame in quest of her lost silver could have challenged the thoroughness of my investigation. Every inch of carpet, the table, chairs, clothes on the bed— every article in the room, in fact, which could possibly harbour the least trace of what I sought— did I scrutinise: but in vain.

The doctor— a country practitioner of the old order— had by this time completed his examination; and given it as his opinion that the lady died from the effects of cyanide poisoning; but he likewise noted that he was only able to find minute traces of the substance just round the corners of her lips, and the coincidence struck me as queer.

Baffled at this stage, the only thing was to proceed on ordinary lines, in the hope that a definite clue of one sort or another would turn up shortly; and this I did, Up to a certain point the mystery had very much the appearance of remaining for ever a mystery. The finding of an ordinary half-inch mother-of-pearl button (which I put into my pocket through mere force of habit) was for some time the only incident of note; and then, all at once the tangled threads parted slightly.

The discovery of a single detached human hair turned the balance. It lay across the bodice of the dress which Miss Stapenhill had worn the previous night; and with a kind of instinct that it might furnish the much desired clue. I took it between my finger and thumb, and held it up to the light. What I saw caused me to lay it down again on a sheet of paper with ten times the care that I had picked it up— nay, if it had been a piece of priceless old Sevres I could not have handled it more delicately. Then I took out my glass again, and examined it at length.

It was covered with a fine powder or dust. What was this dust? How came it there? Had the incident any hearing on the matter which I was investigating? These were questions which presented themselves in an instant. The last I quickly answered to myself in the affirmative; the others demanded more consideration.

The obvious necessity before proceeding further was to discover the original owner of this remarkable specimen of the material which mother nature has given to us for a head-covering. A woman, clearly; the length of the hair showed so much. And, equally, clearly, not Miss Stapenhill herself, for she was 22, and dark, while this hair was of a lighter shade; and had lost the first glossy tinge of youth. Some other woman, then; probably a middle-aged one.

Two women in the house fitted the theory; in one case the probability, of its correctness might reasonably be assumed, in the other it was exceedingly remote.

Accordingly, into the bedroom of the first woman I proceeded without delay. The comb and brush were objects of special attention. With satisfaction I deserved, that a few loose hairs still clung to them; and a brief inspection assured me that they were identical— identical in thickness; colour, everything —with the one which I had found in Miss Stapenhill's room. Further, all were covered with the same impalpable dust. The comb and brush themselves were not free from it; and a guess that the basin and towel in the room would display the same characteristic was fully confirmed by an investigation on those articles.

Here was a remarkable series of facts and, if I denied that the direction things were taking astonished me not a little, notwithstanding the adage that "it is the unexpected which happens," I should not he adhering strictly to the truth.

It must not be supposed that, what I have described was the work of five or ten minutes. As a matter of fact, it took up the best part of a day; and a lot still remained to be done to verify the theory which the various incidents had led me to form. Fantastic, unlikely, it might be; but all the same, the more I considered it, the more it impressed itself on my mind.

The hardest nut to crack was the composition of this strange white powder. Utterly unlike anything of which I possessed a knowledge— and an intimate acquaintance with a fairly wide range of poisons is an elementary requirement in a detective's equipment— it defied all the usual tests which I applied to it. The futility of these demonstrated, I picked up one of the hairs and put it to my-tongue, in the hope that the sense of taste might suggest a clue to its nature.

Instantly I experienced an intense nausea and a convulsive shudder ran through my whole body.

As it happened, I had taken the precaution to carefully wipe the hair before allowing it to touch my lips, and l know now that this saved my life. Had I not done so; I should infallibly have shared the fate of Miss Stapenhill.

The particulars necessary to complete my case came, strangely enough, from an outside source. It was nothing more, or less than a paragraph in the county news-paper which I reproduce here as nearly verbatim as I can remember:

Our readers will learn with regret of the death of Miss Stapenhill, of Harbourne Manor, which took place in an exceedingly tragic manner on Tuesday last. We understand that the whole of the effects, which were considerable, go to her aunt, Lady Stapenhill (widow of Sir Joseph Stapenhill, Bart, C.B., late Governor of the Andaguinea Islands), for whom much sympathy will be felt, in her sad bereavement.

The allusion of the late Sir Joseph's governorship immediately struck a new train of thought in my mind. It brought to recollection some notes of a friend, which I had briefly scanned some months before, on the subject of poison., employed by savage races, in which the native peoples of the Andaguinea and neighbouring islands figured largely; and I hastened off at once to the local post office on the slender chance of being able to get a wire through to him and a reply the same night. My message was:

Wire at once symptoms of poisoning by lak-bay-nim, and characteristic test for latter. Matter urgent. I am waiting post office for reply.

Luckily, he must have been at home when it arrived, or the answer could not possibly have come when it did— about seven or eight minutes before the office closed. I had just begun to abandon hope of it, when the needle clicked out the call signal.

Symptoms practical identical with poisoning by prussic acid. Muriatic acid gives peculiar purplish colour when lakbaynim present. Test infallible; cannot be mistaken. Anything else?

So the reply read, when eagerly I had taken the pink sheet from the post mistress's fingers, and but for her presence I could have indulged in a *pas seul* of delight.

"I WANT yesterday's dirty linen," I said to one of the maids, as soon as I reached the manor, "and— there is no need tor you to talk about it. You understand?" She, did— perhaps the half-crown quickened her intellect— and

came back with the basket in about a couple of minutes, and I picked out the articles I required in less time than it takes to tell. Then, descending to the drawing-room, I requested half an hour's private conversation with Lady Stapenhill, at the same time placing carefully on the table in front of us the solitary hair which had played such an important part, the button which I had found, and a couple of dirty pocket handkerchiefs.

"Well?" she asked, lifting her eyebrows slightly, "may I ask what these articles are?"

If she had any suspicion of what was coming she concealed it admirably, for her tones were quite ordinary.

"Important pieces of evidence as to Miss Stapenhill's death, if l am not greatly mistaken, I replied. "My theory is not yet entirely verified; but I propose, with your permission, to try a few experiments as we go along."

I then detailed the various incidents up I to the finding of the hair, and the circumstances connected with it.

"In a certain bedroom in this house, Lady Stapenhill, I found other hairs, undoubtedly from the same head, covered with this same mysterious dust. Clearly I there was something unusual about it, and coupled with the doctor's inability to find traces of cyanide poisoning, but only symptoms, and my own failure in a similar direction, it set me thinking. The net result of my investigation is that your niece did not, as has been assumed, commit suicide, and that cyanide of potassium, in spite of appearances, was not the agent of her death."

She looked up sharply at this; and I fancy that now she began to wonder how much I knew.

"My theory is this: There is a certain vegetable compound, known to, perhaps, not more than half a dozen Europeans, but in very common use among the Polynesian and other savage races; which is an exceedingly deadly poison— so deadly that an almost infinitesimal amount, if absorbed into the human system, has fatal effects in a remarkably short time. A very queer point about this substance— a point which might cause incredible danger if ever it got widely known— is that its effects are hardly to he distinguished from those of prussic acid, or its sister compound, cyanide of potassium.

"Well, let us proceed a little further, On the evening of Miss Stapenhill's death a certain person— recollect that I am only theorising at present; but. I will endeavour-to show the truth of my words shortly— who was in possession of the secret of this death-dealing horror, dusted a liberal supply of it into her hair. The hair, being tinged with grey, would show no signs of it to the casual glance; thus detection was unlikely.

"Before retiring to. bed, Miss Stapenhill exchanged kisses with this person— probably it was their usual custom. A very simple manoeuvre would insure that kiss should fall on the other's hair. Is this way a little of the insidious powder would adhere to her lips; the rest is simple. The first time she moistened her lips with her tongue, the agent would have done its work. A few minutes later the tragedy would have been completed.

"Shortly afterwards the other woman who was anxious to cover up tho traces of her handiwork, proceeded to Miss Stapenhill's room. (As a matter of fact, she did not by any means achieve her object; possibly knowing the secret nature of her method, she was a bit reckless, and left undone certain things which she might otherwise have done.) Her first act there would be to wipe off any of this powder that still clung to the dead women's lips. I have here two handkerchiefs which I am going to submit to a small test."

I took a little bottle of acid from my pocket, and poured some of it into a saucer which happened to be standing near Lady Stapenhill had had black coffee after her dinner. Then I dipped one of the hand kerchiefs into it. No result. Then the second. Several spots of an intense purplish colour appeared instantly.

"The characteristic action of lak-bay-nim," I said slowly. "To resume my narrative— her second action was to place on the dressing table an opened packet of cyanide (which, by an obvious ruse, Miss Stapenhill had been induced' to purchase a few days before), a little of which she smeared on the spot from whence her own hideous preparation had just been wiped."

My auditor was not looking at me, her eyes were fixed steadily on the table. A queer stillness seemed to have come over the room.

"And, Lady Stapenhill," I added, filled with a righteous horror, "the person who planned and carried out all these things was— you! Yours was the bedroom in which I found those fatal hairs; yours are those handkerchiefs"— I showed her the monogram in the corner— "you are too person who lived in the Andaguinea islands, where you acquired your fiendish knowledge, and you are the person from whom your niece took that kiss— the kiss of death! I have still one more proof. Look at this button. It lay in a corner of your niece's room: I have told your maid to bring your dressing gown to me, when I ring this bell," and suiting the action of the word, I pressed the button.

The servant entered and went out again closing the door after her. I took the garment, and pointed to the place where the fourth button had been, and where now, as I surmised, only a piece of thread was hanging.

"Am I correct ?" I said, sternly.

But she did not answer; she did not even look; up. Her face was covered by her hands, and she lay back heavily in her chair— a beaten, cowed, remorse-stricken piece of humanity.

That was the fast I saw of Lady Stapenhill. It was not my duty to arrest her; I am not a policeman. I went, of course, to the authorities with my knowledge; but I might as well have saved myself the trouble. The accident to the night mail train at Hennywere Junction a few years back will he within the recollection of all; and in the memorable catastrophe Lady Stapenhill, a fugitive from the justice which she richly deserved, met a swift and terrible retribution.

The motive for her behaviour lay, I think, in her niece's wealth and her own comparative poverty; and the extraordinary fact that she employed me to investigate the affair (with the end of putting all gossip and innuendo forever aside, I assume), and the various incidents which came to light displaying her stupendous recklessness are only explicable by the supposition that she considered it entirely out of the bounds of possibility for her crime to be discovered. Wherein, as I have shown, she was wrong.

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11: State Papers

Douglas Newton

1884-1951

Bathurst Times (NSW) 5 Feb 1914

THE MAN at next table was whispering. With a shock, I realised that he was whispering to me.

'You're an Englishman?' he whispered. 'Aren't you an. Englishman?'

He had a penetrative whisper, and I could hear him quite distinctly, though I doubt if anyone else could; we were rather aloof in an emptyish cafe. This cafe, by the way, was in Esin, which is the capital town of the Empire of Altonnia.

'I say,' I demanded, 'are you talking to me?'

'Yes,' whispered the man. He kept his eyes fixed straight ahead on the orchestra.

'Yes, I am.'

'But don't be an ass about it. Don't look at me. Do as I do— or, rather, read that paper on the table.'

The man was quite mad. 'I've read it already,' I told him huffily '

' Oh ! don't be a fool,' said the man testily, and I suddenly realised that he was sweating gently.

'I don't want you to read it. What I want you to do is to make them imagine you're reading it— see?'

'Quite,' I snapped. I wasn't a fool at all, but had only been taken off my guard by the extraordinariness of the, whole episode. I did not think the man mad. I thought him a rogue.

'Confidence, trick,' I told my mind. All the same, I picked up the paper— the *Woche*.

'Who are— they?' I demanded colloquially.

The man at the other table, a small quick man with bright sea-gull eyes, held his liquor glass to the light with a clever ('damn clever,' thought I) affectation of being concerned only with its color and texture.

'If you look through the door,' he said, 'you'll see two men trying their hardest not to appear police-officers They are them. They are police officers. They are going to arrest me when I go outside this place.'

'The devil,' I said, apparently to *Die Woche*. 'Why?'

'You're an Englishman all light? he demanded.

'I am,' I told him. I was beginning, in spite of myself, to be interested. I was beginning to be excited.

'Do you mind- telling me something about yourself— your name?'

I stiffened. It was roguery after all. In an uncanny way the other man, with out taking his eyes off the orchestra saw me stiffen.

'I must know some thing about you,' he said in a whisper 'It's rather important.'

I thought a moment. After all, the name didn't hurt. And it might be important.

'My name's Merriman,' I said. 'Compton Merriman.'

Even on the unemotional face of the other appeared suddenly, and went suddenly, a flicker of relief.

'The big game hunter?'

'Yes.'

'I thought it was you, Mr. Merriman,' said the whisperer, still whispering. He had leaned back in his chair, and was apparent drinking in with all his soul the Kreisler variation of a Viennese *waltze* played remarkably well (as only in Altonnia would one have found it played remarkably well) by the seedy orchestra violinist.

'I thought it was you. That's why I took the risk.'

'Want to hear anything more?' I asked grimly.

'No, thanks. I know all there is to know already,' said the astonishing little man.

My attitude said, I suppose, 'I think you're a liar!' For again, uncannily the whisperer perceived what was in my mind, and answered it.

'As a matter of fact, you'll find a picture of yourself in the *Woche* you aren't, reading! A picture and a paragraph describing what you've been killing, in Africa, what you've killed all over the world, and the tight corners you've got yourself out of. It's a tight corner business that takes me just now.'

'That how you know, then?' I said, ignoring the hinder part of the sentence, which I saw no reason for not thinking sheer flattery.

'That— and other things. I know a good many men in England; you know— and I'm a member of the 'Travellers' myself.'

My simmering' interest blazed up actively, as the little man had meant it to blaze up actively.

'By Jove, you you?' I burst out. 'What's your name?'

The little man smiled' a little.

'Not so loud,' he insisted. 'We'll let my name drop for the moment. It's best for this business that you don't know'.'

'Ah, the business,' I echoed. 'What is the business?'

The little, bright-eyed man felt casually in his pocket for his cigar' case. His movements were leisurely. All the same, my occupation had taught me to use my eyes, and I saw that the casual movement had merely been undertaken to

enable the whisperer to sweep the entirety of the café with a keen and absorbing gaze.

As. he chose his cigar, he whispered again— I noticed that he managed the whole business of smoking, taking the cigar from his lips and whispering between puffs, in a consummate, manner.

'It's a damned ticklish business,' continued the other. 'It's rendered more damned ticklish, by the presence of that big, red-headed fellow over to the left of us.'

'I know,' I retorted. 'In spite of the absorption of *Die Woche*, I've been watching the lout. His eyes had never left you in spite of the magnetic attraction of his plate and liver sausage.'

'Good man,' ejaculated the whisperer. 'His eyes have no right to leave me. He's in here for that purpose. He's blood brother to the twain outside.'

'A police officer?'

'A police officer.'

'Again why?' I asked. 'If they want you, why don't they take you: Why wait?'

'My reason for speaking to you is the reason why. I've got something that they want to take— undestroyed. If they touch me in here, there might be a row. With all these people about that— something might be passed off. Out in the street, the thing should be on me— should, ' he insisted.

'I see,' I said. ' And where will the something they want be when they 'take' you?' I flipped over a page of *Die Woche*. I saw the photo of myself. It was horrible.

'Eh?' he hissed cheerily. 'But you're a man built for the job—' he touched a copy of the *Fliegende Blatter* lying upon the table.

'It'll be in this *Fliegende Blatter*. It is, as a matter of fact, in it now— folded— it's paper y'know.'

'Ah,' said I— 'paper!' I began to see light.

'It's my own *Fliegende*. Before I go, I will take it up. I will make as though to put it in my pocket, but will think better of it and simply fling it back in my chair. And after I am gone—'

'It might enter my head to read the *Fliegende*?'

'You've got it.'

'I see,' I thought. 'It's quite straight, of course— the business, I mean?'

'Utterly.'

I hung. It was only show. I was the type of man, uncommon, but not quite so uncommon as city-dwelling modern people imagine, created absolutely for adventure. Adventure was my wine. Love of adventure, not love of killing, had

made me a fairly good (some said the finest in huntingdom) big-game stalker and resourceful hunter.

'All right,' I told him. 'I'll read the *Fliegende*.'

The little man sat up stiff, and, almost visibly, showed his enormous relief.

'Thank the Lord,' he hissed. 'You can't guess what a momentous thing your agreement is.'

'No,' I said. But I believe I could, I waited. 'There are more instructions, of course?'

'Not many— the most important is that the paper inside the *Fliegende* mustn't leave you for an instant, day or night They may find out about you; they are pretty cunning and thorough; but by nothing on earth or over it must you let 'em have it, let anybody have it. Destroy it first. Destroy it at the slightest danger.'

'All right,' I said. 'It shan't leave me. I'll see to that. Where do I deliver? England?'

The whisperer paused. 'No— Belgium. Take it to Frederick Richardson. He is the British Consul at Orldwerp, just over the border; and once Richardson gets it, it's safe. His place is number seven, Rue du Pont.'

'He'll get it,' said I.

'For Heaven's sake see that he docs. The paper might win a war or lose a war. It's worth while remembering that.' He rose to go.

'I'll remember it,' I told him. 'Trust me.'

'They'll watch you all the way to Richardson's door— watch you and try to get it.'

'I'll watch too, I'm good at watching.'

'Good luck,' he whispered. He went through the little by-way with the *Fliegende* and went out.

The two official-looking men swung at his. heels and followed him. My eyes came back to the interior, of the café just as the big, red-headed man was reaching for the *Fliegende*. My hand grasped it but two seconds before his.

'I beg your pardon,' I said naively. 'Would you mind taking my *Woche*? I have yet to read the *Fliegende*.'

The red-haired man glared, and I could see him wavering between suspicion and the throttling sense of red-tapeism of Altonnia officialdom. He was wondering whether he dared demand the paper and risk a row that might force him to disclose his identity. Blessed Altonnian red tape: it won. In thirty seconds I was slipping an envelope that cracked with oil-paper of plan-tracing, up my sleeve.

I WAS OUTSIDE the cafe ten minutes later.

I had been thinking rapidly and I knew what I had got to do, I had to get across the border to Richardson, the Consul of Orldwerp, Belgium, in the sharpest possible manner. My best bet would be to go straight to the railway station at once. I could then get on a train before they even started suspecting me. Once they started suspecting me, I'd have a hot time. Once they caught me with those papers, I'd be gaoled. They don't mince matters in Altonnia. Also, this was something they could not mince matters about. Papers that would win or lose a war must be something mighty big. It must be something of enormous worth both to England and Altonnia.'

'Then,' thought I, 'here's the station.'

The simplest ways are the best! I took one step forward. At that moment I was assaulted in the back by a small elephant. I sprang round sharply. I found Red Hair.

At once I gathered what was Red Hair's little game. Red Hair was so palpably going to be rude as an Altonnian cannot be. Instead of raising his hat and apologising as is the nature of his race, he was glaring and choking with a most admirable (sham) anger. Directly our eyes met he called me a clumsy English pig, who get in the way of respectable law abiding Altonnians.

It was clever. In about two minutes I saw that both this police officer and myself were going to be arrested by another police officer for brawling. Once arrested, of course, they could search me quietly.

I saw that Red Hair only looked a fool, and realised that I would have to act like lightning. I found that by this time my habits of life were being described as London, Cockney, and swinish. More, the man was obviously waiting for my retort that would land the episode into that stratum of violence from whence only a policeman could extricate it. I saw him waiting for my retort as an actor waits for his cue. In thirty seconds he fancied he would have me on the way to the lock-up.

So I said, 'I say, I'm awfully sorry. Have I hurt you?'

If I had ducked his head in a bucket of water he could not have been more startled. He stepped back for a moment in his astonishment, and for a moment I thought I was all light But only for a moment. Red Hair was certainly no fool. He simply turned my apology into a further insult and came at me in the attitude of one determined to punch my head.

In this he was stupid; for one thing the Altonnian mind— though its gifts in other directions are great— has not the head punching attributes in the greatest degree, for another, I have.

Red Hair came at me with his big hands slung loose as a wrestler— anyhow, certainly not a boxer— might come, and he slashed at my head in an absurd manner I did not slash at all. I stepped quickly under his arms and hit him twice, once in the ribs to bring his chin forward and on the chin to knock him out. Then I ran.

I ran very quickly because I knew the faster I ran at first, the more chances I had of getting out of sight before onlookers collected enough wits to run after me. For the same reason I went round all the corners I could. There is nothing like a multitude of corners for cutting one off from the vulgar gaze of the curious. When I had gone round a number of corners, and had run, I decided, far enough, I pulled up and began to walk slowly and to think.

Presently I turned into barber's shop and thought more. It is easy to think under the soothing hands of a barber. Also on this occasion the barber did me a distinct service. He took off my excessively English moustache, he cut and trimmed my hair, which fortunately was rather thick, in the stiff, upstanding manner proper to the conventional citizens of Altonnia. When I left that barber's, I was half disguised. I went along to a cheap, ready-made tailor to complete my disguise.

My plan had already formed in my head. I was in the middle of Altonnia and I had to get out of it and over the border into Belgium. There were only two ways of doing so— by air or by land. As I had no aeroplane, land was my only choice, and of the. land conveyances, the railway was the quickest mode possible. I had to go by railway.

But I had to go in such a manner that they would recognise and stop me. I must not on any account be stopped.

iii

THEY DID NOT come up with me until late that night, about five hours later. This Was not altogether their fault. I daresay they had watched pretty keenly the principal railway stations, but I had modestly avoided the principal railway stations. I slipped into some allotment gardens and got into my disguise, then I worked my way through these gardens, and by a series of field-paths made my way to a little wayside station that was not watched. A man used to game hunting finds cross-country work easy.

They came up with me, at a junction— I think it was Spesberg— where one. changes for Belgium from the local line (it was here, by the way, I took my through ticket.)

There was a big rapscallion on the platform who kept his eyes busy on all waiting passengers. I saw him eyeing me, and fitting the telegraphed

description to me. To get away from him I went to the bar and ordered a drink. This was a stupid move, for he came after me, and I saw his eyes fixed on my right hand. I knew at once that I had given myself away. The knuckles of my right hand were split and raw and had obviously been engaged in the business of knocking someone out. In the big man's eyes I saw that he knew I was the man who had knocked Red Hair out.

I got into my carriage he disappeared into the station office.

'Telegraphing,' I thought.... 'They'll be waiting for me at the next stop,' and I looked quickly down at my map and swore under my breath.

The next stop was only four miles from the frontier. It was horrible to think that I might be caught so near success. Just as the train stalled the man metamorphosed abruptly out of the night, ran along the platform, and jumped into my compartment. He did it so neatly that I hadn't a chance He was in before I could move, and had plumped down on the seat in front and was smiling at me. I smiled back

'You were nearly left then,' I told him.

'Oh, no,' he said, 'I timed it very well. I rarely get left.'

He looked me squarely in the eyes and I perceived that he considered he had said something distinctly clever I was glad to see it. Of all the people one has to deal with the conscientiously clever man is by far the most simple. He is so busy being clever, I suppose. At once, also, he began to talk, and presently was asking me about myself. I told him as much as he wanted. I said I had been to the Panoramas (a fashionable resort on the coast). I said that I had had the best sea-bathing I had over known. It had been fairly rough, and I like it so.

This was perfectly true. I had been at the Panoramas but two days ago, just before I went to Esin.

'Ah,' he smiled, and in his clever way of seizing a chance, 'Ah, but you have not come off scatheless in your encounter with the sea.' He looked knowingly at my knuckles. 'It retaliates '

He smiled again as I put my hands quickly in my pockets He knew he was very clever. So did I. He had said exactly what I wanted him to say.

'Oh no,' I told him. 'That was not the sea— that was a man's chin I had reason to hit a man this morning.'

He was taken aback. It had never occurred to him that it would be as profitable for me to force his hand as he to force mine.

'At the Panoramas?' he asked.

'No— at Esin.'

He sat and blinked at me Like all very clever men he felt quite lost facing a simple fact. But I had more for his bewilderment.

'Well,' I said, 'what are you going to do about it?'

He did a little more than blink now.

'Hey?' he gasped.

I smiled at him.

'Persons who disappear into the station to telegraph and then deliberately choose my carriage at the last moment, are persons I naturally suspect. I suspect them finally when they have policeman's boots and then pockets bulge— with handcuffs. What do you intend to do, my friend?'

He eyed me narrowly. He put his right hand to his handcuff pocket.

'Since you are so urgent, I will tell you,' he said, endeavoring to meet me with my own lightness, 'I am going to arrest you.'

'Or to try and arrest me?' I asked him

'No,' he retorted, certain in his great bulk. 'No, I am going to arrest you—' His hand came out with the handcuffs.

'You re certain,' I insisted.

'Quite,' he snapped 'You will find my chin not so easy as Blumenfield's. Put out your hands '

'Since you are so urgent, I will,' I said. And I took my hands out of my coat pockets and held them to him But he did not handcuff me. Instead, he jumped back a foot and sat as far as he could away, from me in the corner.

'It does not do to repeat an old joke every time I meet one of you gentlemen of the police,' I told him. 'Therefore, I have decided to use another.' I wagged the tiny automatic pistol in my right hand at him. 'You will agree with me, I think, that it has quite as much point as the blow on the chin.'

iv

'DON'T SHOOT,' he said, 'don't shoot!'

'I hope not,' I told him. 'Drop the handcuffs.;

Metal clinked on the floor; his, hands went up. I could see, in his eyes that he was thinking quickly. I felt inclined to say to him, 'Think away as hard as you can, my friend, for you are very safely caught.' But, fortunately, I did not say it. For, abruptly, he did a very brave and clever thing— the one thing in fact that he could do with his hands in the air. He inclined them sideways suddenly, reached out to the side of the carriage and pulled the communication cord.

Now,' he said, quietly sitting still, 'shoot away, Mr. Spy.'

I could see the sweat of the fear of death dewing his face. I rose at my end of the carriage and bowed to him.

'Not at all,' I answered, as the train began to slow down, 'I know a brave man when I see him, and I respect him.'

My left hand found the door catch behind, and I bowed again, pushing open the door. Then, before he could move, I had jumped out and was clear of the train just as the brakes ground; home and the train began to stop.

v

AS I STRUCK the ground I appreciated rather than saw the snap of his revolver. He could not expect to hit me, and he did not. What he expected to do was to draw people's attention to his side of the train so that search might begin immediately it stopped.

In this he was successful. The train pulled up practically in its own length, and before it had quite ceased to move, men were jumping down on to sandy plain after me, certain that, though I could have taken no hurt from my fall on this soft ground, I could not be far away. I could hear the babel of shouts and commands of the, passengers quite plainly, for l was not far away.

I was, in fact, no further away than the other side of the train. You see, I knew exactly what would happen. I was a fugitive, and they could only think of me as a fugitive. They would think of me only as running away, so they ran after me, or rather they ran in the direction they imagined I would have run, that is, over the plain away from the train.

On my part I had stayed exactly where I had dropped while the train ground on its brakes slowly .past me. Then I had risen and whipped quickly across the ballast behind the last carriage into the calm of the further side. At first I saw-some faces at the lighted windows, but these disappeared directly it was apparent that all the excitement was on the other side.

As soon as they had disappeared I climbed up on to the footboard of a first-class coach (the train carried but few passengers, and these were mainly third and fourth class), and stealthily finding a compartment whose closed doors and uninhabited seats proved that it had not been occupied, I got inside— and under the seat.

I felt exceedingly safe under the seat. I knew that the policeman and all in the train would imagine me out there on the plain, either running or hiding, but certainly there. When they found that it was useless to try and catch me in the night, they would come back, still animated by the comfortable certainty that I was on the plain.

They would then go on to the nearest town, and the clever policeman would be rather pleased with himself as he telegraphed, for he would be communicating to all the town, military posts, and block houses (and these were excessive in number), and those towns, military posts, and block houses would send out a cordon, a positive net of men that must certainly catch

anything on the plain. Interest in the train I was in would cease from that moment, for all interest would be concentrated on the plain they imagined I was inland so I would be safe. At least I would be safe until I reached Orldwerp.

Unfortunately, such is the languidness of continental trains, I would not reach Orldwerp until nearly midday; and by that time I felt the Altonnians would have come to the conclusion that, after all, I was not on the plain.

They would wire to their agents in the Belgium town, and Orldwerp would be swarming with strong men anxious to come between me and Frederick Richardson. I should have a very warm time. I should need all my energies for that warm time, so, though my position was not an ideally comfortable one, and was less comfortable when the train started (as I had guessed it would) a few minutes later, I set myself to foster my energies. I went to sleep.

vi

MY judgment was right, or I suppose it was right, for I slept through the journey without disturbance and only woke up at Anverst, which is in Belgium, and but one or two stations removed from Orldwerp itself. Here I assumed the normal existence of a citizen on top of the seat instead of under it. Also, since Anverst is something of a junction, and because a junction on the continent is but an excuse for wasting time, I got out and stretched my legs.

They certainly needed it. Anverst is a bleak place, but I did not regret my half-hour's stay there, I strolled about. I had what I needed a good deal, *cafe au lait*. I bought French papers from the lady who presided over the bookstall and chatted with her; I also chatted with other amiable people, including the station master and the guard.

When I resumed my seat in the train I was conscious of having spent at least a pleasant as well as profitable stay at Anverst, whatever Orldwerp had in store for me. Orldwerp certainly had much in store for me. I saw this directly I drew into the station. Unfortunately I had not been able to carry the wardrobe of disguises about with me that the man in the story usually does.

I was still the same pleasant fellow that had held up the Altonnian policeman in the train. The Altonnian agents at Orldwerp station knew me at once. There were three of them, and I could see their keen determination to do what Altonnia expected of every man— that is, his duty, gleaming in each of their six eyes. They watched me from the moment I stepped from the train, like cats.

If the little bevy of gendarmes which adorn every continental station had not been there, I do not doubt they would have been at me like cats. They would have taken their chance of getting that paper in the rough and tumble

of an assault. The gendarmes being there, they were going to move heaven and earth to attain their ends by strategy.

It was interesting. I dawdled by the train and by the bookstall, for the time I had determined to dawdle, that is fifteen minutes, and I watched the three fume. When I thought they had fumed enough, I made my first move. I went up to that Altonnian agent who was dressed like a hotel concierge, and asked him if his hotel was at all a decent one. It is always amusing to watch underhand people suffering from a direct attack.

To watch this fellow was exceedingly amusing. He gasped. He stammered. He forgot all the neat things about his hotel he had primed himself to say. Then, with a giant effort he pulled himself together, and in the most unnatural way in the world, he strove to be natural. I was exceedingly amused, and I was much more natural than he. I did the dull but earnest tourist. Acted with supreme gravity. I let him persuade me.

Like the real tourist lamb, I shuffled after him towards the hotel 'bus and so into the clutches of the second Altonnian agent, the driver of the 'bus. And like the dull tourist I showed no surprise, that this particular hotel— I think they called it Hotel de la Paix— should have only attracted one other client, that is the third Altonnian agent who had been hanging about the station in the modest disguise of an ordinary human being.

I kept up my air of amiable idiocy while they drove me through a residential quarter where common sense and my own knowledge of Orldwerp told me there was no possibility of ever finding a hotel. Indeed, I only resumed intelligence when I faced the concierge, the other client and a third and more authoritative fellow in a discreet room of a private house discreetly isolated in a suburb.

I then woke up. I nodded brightly at the authoritative man. I smiled at him.

'I hope you will make your search a quick one. I do not wish to stay at this end of Orldwerp very long. I have always found it relaxing.'

The authoritative man looked at me quickly. He was an oldish man, and a courteous one.

He bowed to me. 'We understand each other, then,' he said.

'Perfectly. I have been understanding you— all of you— since I saw your longing eyes fixed on me at the Orldwerp terminus.'

He bowed again. 'I see,' he said. 'You understand the game is up.'

I looked at the clock. 'I understand the game is finished,' I told him.

He seemed perplexed. 'You hint,' he said, 'that you have not certain papers? '

'Search me,' I suggested.

The oldish man looked at me under his eyebrows. Then he nodded to his men. They searched me. They did it exceedingly well. As searchers, they must have been at the top of their profession. I was thoroughly overhauled. But they found nothing. At last they stood back from me with gestures of final frustration. The oldish man looked at me puzzled, taken aback.

'There seems to have been a mistake,' he muttered.

'There does,' I said briskly.

'We— we certainly thought you possessed— possessed— vital to us.'

'I rather assumed that there must be a reason for the little attentions I have received since I left Esin,' I admitted.

He bowed again. 'I must apologise,' he murmured.

'I accept it,' I told him, and he bowed me out of the house.

vii

HALF-AN-HOUR later I was with Richardson. Richardson was glowing with enthusiasm.

'You got the papers?' I asked.

'Got them— rather. It is the biggest coup of the era. But it was risky sending them like that— you know what they were?'

'What were they?' I asked.

'The mobilisation plans of the Altonnian army— for aggression. It might have meant invasion, ruin to us if you had not got them. How did you think of the idea, so simple, so natural, yet so jolly effective?'

'In a simple way,' I told him. 'At one time in my life I happened to be a journalist. Journalists often have to "express" copy by rail. That is, by paying a special fee, putting manuscript into the hands of the train-guard and telegraphing for those papers to be met at their destination. At Anverst I realised that I should have a warm time when I arrived at Orldwerp. The Altonnian agents would use desperate means to obtain those plans by a final effort. I had a chat with the stationmaster at Anverst. He told me the method of "training" dispatches common to English journalists was also common to journalists in Belgium. The rest was simple enough. I bought a large envelope. I addressed it to you. I paid my fee, and the guard of the train took it. Then I wired to you to send to meet it. While your man was meeting and taking it from Orldwerp station, I put the Altonnian agents off the scent by attracting them to me. When I knew the plans were safe, I let them act, with the result that they were fooled— the papers are ours. Simple enough, eh?'

'It was splendid,' said Richardson

12: Her Thrilling Experience

Rosa Praed

1851-1935

(as by Mrs. Campbell Praed)

Australian Town and Country Journal (Sydney) 28 April 1909

PEACE FELL at last upon the disturbed domestic atmosphere of Woodcroft— the peace of exhaustion which follows upon storm. Storms were frequent enough in the house of Mr. Mompesson, but this had been a tornado. Now, the creator of the tempest drove off in his motor-car to London, having first practically cleared but the establishment. The manservant, and his wife the cook— immediate cause of the row— departed for the station in the gardener's cart, and with them the housemaid, who, incontinently terrified, forfeited her month's wages in consequence. The only woman left now in the place was Grace Yarrett, Mr. Mompesson's secretary. There still rang in her ears the parting fulminations of the cook, as they must have rung in the ears of Mr. Mompesson, who only waited to see the cart out of the back gate before starting down the front drive.

"Call himself a gentleman!" shrieked the woman. "A tyrannical devil! That's what he is, and his language such as no respecting person, would be demeaned to put up with. A devil that frightened his poor wife into her grave, and his only son to starve in the streets. Oh! neighbors has tongues— for all that none of the houses round visits here, nor will one of his own kith cross the monster's doorstep. Glad we are to be out of this hell. Yes, we're going, but you hain't heard the last of us, Mr. Mompesson, for there'll be a summons out on you for assault before you're much older. And as for you, Miss Yarrett, we wish you good luck— which you won't find here. Take my warning, and clear out likewise, or it'll be a hospital or a lunatic asylum for you be fore you've done with that bullying brute."

Miss Yarrett shivered through all her small, keenly-strung body. She thought to herself as she went back into the empty house that there might be good foundation for the woman's warning, and that permanent employment as Mr. Mompesson's typist might well result in a premature grave or a sanatorium.

Grace Yarrett, however, was not fundamentally a coward. There was in her nature a quality of courageous pertinacity, and it served her in her present situation. She had a motive for remaining in it. Mr. Mompesson paid her better wages than she could have commanded elsewhere. This because of her occasional long hours and speed in typing from dictation. Everything this famous author produced was dictated to his typist as he walked up and down his study. He dictated essays and novels that were too odd and erudite to be

popular, except with learned men, or to be of any use to Grace as models in her own literary attempts.

For Miss Yarrett was an author, too, in a crude fashion. She sent out stories by the dozen, most of which came back to her, and went forth again and again, sometimes to be laid away finally. But a few were accepted by the commoner magazines, and brought her in occasional guineas for the swelling of a small hoard in the savings bank which was destined towards the realisation of her dear ambition.

She wanted to make a home with her sister, who was being educated at a charitable institution, and was the darling of Grace Yarrett's heart. This sister was the reason why Miss Yarrett put up with Mr. Mompesson's tempers and the irk of her lonely life at Woodcroft. Yet the loneliness gave her leisure to write. The author himself, saturnine and brooding when not in one of his fits of rage, avoided human companionship. She thought that she would be able to do some work of her own now. Mr. Mompesson had not told her when he would return— he had been too blind with passion even to speak to her when he drove off— but she had gleaned from a remark of the chauffeur that he meant to put up in London that night.

Woodcroft was about 12 miles from town— a lonely two-storey house, of the cottage type, set in a hundred or so acres of wood, and well off the main road. Its wood and its loneliness were attractions to Mr. Mompesson. To most people they would have been drawbacks. There was an ill-kept garden, giving on to the wood, and behind the dwelling-house, across a straggling yard, stood the stables, with a clock and an alarm bell above rooms in which the chauffeur and gardener slept. It had been near sunset when the belligerent parties took themselves off, and the early spring evening closed in quickly.

Grace lingered in the dusk, drawing in a sense of peace from the budding things, and the soft earthy odor of the garden. In the relief of solitude after turmoil she forgot at first that she was now absolutely alone in the place, and that even when the gardener should return from the station there would be no one but herself sleeping in the house. By-and-bye she went in. There was nobody to cook her supper, but that did not matter. As often as not she had to be content with cold leavings. She foraged in the larder, but was still too shaken to eat much.

She decided to establish herself in her own room, light the fire— for the evenings were chilly— and there settle, down to work. But first she went round the house to draw the bolts and bar the shutters. The front door was fastened securely, but a small side entrance door near the study, of which Mr. Mompesson had the key, was kept unbarred, in case— as frequently happened— he returned unexpectedly.

It was a comfort to Grace, in concluding her tour, to see that the cart was in the yard, and to know that the gardener had come back. Yet even so, she would have to ring the alarm-bell to summon him, should there be need. But why should there be need? Nothing alarming had ever happened in the master's brief absences during her six months' stay at Woodcroft.

She inspected the study last. It was a large gloomy room, with cases of-books, a great desk piled with type-script and note books and various bits of old-fashioned furniture including a fine old Chippendale bureau which Grace had never seen unlocked.

She turned on the electric light; Mr. Mompesson had it installed there for the convenience of his night work, and usually regulated the small dynamo himself. This light illuminated a portrait of the late Mrs. Mompesson, which hung over the mantelpiece— a delicate, timid-faced woman, with yellow curls and blue eyes, whose scared look must, Grace thought, be a perpetual reproach to the choleric widower.

She saw that the bay window was shuttered, put out the light, and ascended to her own chamber above. She did not undress, but when she had lighted the fire settled her self beside it with her author's pad and stylograph. At once she wrote down the title of her composition— "My most thrilling experience."

But there she came to a standstill. Her most thrilling experience! The phrase was an irony! Grace felt that she had been rash to enter that prize literary competition. It occurred to her for the first time that the laws of the competition might require the experience to be a personal one, and, if so, what should she do— she who had never had a thrilling experience of any sort?

She had assumed that it would be permissible to soar into fiction, and rather prided herself upon her blood-curdling effects, which, let it be stated, were nevertheless of an elementary kind. So after pondering the matter, she got out the advertisement setting forth the rules of the competition, and studied it, arriving at no fixed conclusion.

The terms were ambiguous; yet the venture seemed worth trying for, seeing she could grasp as definite facts that there was a ten guinea first prize, with second, third, and consolation awards as well. Surely she ran a good chance of gaining one of these.

After much reflection she decided that she must venture into fiction, since it was obligatory on her to do so. For in her grey, shrinking, sordid little life the most thrilling experiences she had ever known had been Mr. Mompesson's irrational bursts of rage. And she always avoided them whenever it was possible.

Hers was truly not the temperament which leaps to thrills of any kind. As for a lover, the usual concomitant of a really enjoyable thrill, he had never existed for Grace Yarrett, except in type-script and dreams. Yet had she not been so over-strained and repressed Grace might have presented an attractive morsel to a lover. She was small and dainty in figure, and she had beautiful dark-lashed grey eyes, soft brown hair.

She sat for a long time with her feet on the fender, her pad on her knee, staring into the fire, her brows wrinkled in the effort to conjure up some sensational episode which might serve for a plot. Midnight struck, however, before she had written more than the heading. Then after jerkily scribbling a couple of pages or so, she tore them up impatiently and cast the shreds on the fire. Her imagination had refused to be goaded, and she longed intensely for some really interesting adventure to befall her— something which should be worth chronicling.

Presently one o'clock boomed forth a melancholy note from the big clock in the hall, striking with a starting effect upon these disappointed reflections, and a sudden sense of extreme loneliness fell upon the girl.

Up till now, she had not heeded the night noises to. which during many literary vigils she had grown accustomed. But now she became acutely conscious of creakings and scutterings, of stealthy rustlings and uncanny knockings in the old house. She started up, her first thought that she would ring the alarm-bell. But to do so, she must go into Mr. Mompesson's bedroom, at which she hesitated, lest by chance it might be he himself who had returned. The only other room in the house with which the bell was connected was the study below her, and it was from that very room that the faint sounds seemed to come.

Her lips parted in a quavering smile of uncertainty. It flashed upon her that here was the occasion for that thrilling experience for which she had longed. Midnight— herself the solitary occupant of a lonely country house, and— a possible burglar! What more promising materials could she have for a romantic adventure?

Fortunately for her, however, Fate was more likely to deal in rats than in burglars at Woodcroft, for there was nothing to burgle there— or so Grace thought. She knew that there was very little plate of any value in the house, and who would want to steal Mr. Mompesson's crabbed notebooks and manuscripts in Persian and Arabic— he went to the East for his source of inspiration— and Grace could think of nothing likely to be kept in that old Chippendale bureau in the study that might be likely to attract a burglar. Of course, there really was no one about, she considered, unless it might be Mr. Mompesson, but perhaps she had better go down just to make sure.

It was characteristic of the girl that she never shrank from what seemed clearly her duty, and now she took a lighted candle and started down stairs. She wanted to be certain that she had hasped every one of the small mullioned windows. Meanwhile the wind had risen, and a loosened branch of ivy tapping loudly on a pane of glass comforted her, for it appeared to account for some of her previous fears. No doubt it was the rustling of the wind in the ivy that had disturbed her. Emboldened, she went on to the study door. It was shut as she had left it, and now no sound came from within. Grace opened the door softly.

At first it seemed that, except for the feeble glimmer which her own candle cast before her, the place was in one dense shadow, through which the sombre walls, the heavy furniture, and dull-hued rows of books blended indistinguishably. But one subject shone prominently out of the gloom with ghost-like effect. This was the pictured face of the late Mrs. Mompesson, and Grace started as she met the gaze of the dead lady's pathetic blue eyes.

The portrait was illumined in an extraordinary fashion— as though a small search light were concentrated upon it.

All at once the startled girl realised that someone was holding a dark lantern up before the picture, and that the hand that held the lantern trembled exceedingly. The rays focussed now on the eyes, now on the mouth, as though that someone was so absorbed in contemplation of the painted features that he had no attention to spare for any other object.

Then a smothered ejaculation from the girl startled him in his turn, and he rounded suddenly upon her. The glowing bull's-eye of the lantern and the pale candle confronted each other in the dimness of the book-lined room, till Grace instinctively put her hand to the wall and switched on a flood of electric light.

Immediately the burglar sprang back, putting up his arm to screen his face, as though the yellow glare blinded him. Yet as he moved a sudden glitter of diamonds on the Chippendale bureau behind him caught Grace's eye.

The bureau, its strong lock rifled, stood open, and a velvet-lined case lay full in view, within which reposed a large curiously-shaped cross of magnificent brilliants surrounding an emerald of great size and lustre. Grace had never seen a jewel so resplendent, nor had she guessed that the bureau contained such a treasure. Yet it seemed evident that the man had known of it, and that he was there to steal.

"Oh, you are a thief," she cried, and all the native courage that had lain cooped in her slender little frame rose to the occasion. She made a rush towards the corner of the room where hung the iron chain of the alarm-ball with its brass handle. But before she could reach it, the man, realising her intention, had, darted after her; she felt her arms pinioned, and knew that in his grasp she was powerless.

He forced her back into Mr. Mompesson's chair. Her candle had dropped from her hand, but he caught it cleverly before it was extinguished, and placed it on a stand near. His own lantern stood on the floor.

"We may as well keep the lights," he said, coolly. "You may want them, if I do not. Now, if you please, I don't wish to hurt you, young lady, but since you are here I must tie you to this chair, and if you begin to scream I must gag you. I'm sure, however, that you won't compel me to do anything so unpleasant."

His voice was distinctly that of a gentleman; it had, moreover, a deep ring which sounded familiar to Grace, though she could not have told at that minute where she had heard it before.

"If you did scream," he went on, "it would not be of much use. You are alone in the house with me, and that oaf over the stables is not likely to be awakened by any noise you could make. I hope I'm not hurting you," he added quite civilly.

While he was speaking he fastened her wrists together with some broad strong binding that he drew from a pocket. They were very securely fastened, and yet the was careful that the pressure should not pain her.

She laughed a little as she glanced down at her bandaged hands.

"What are you laughing at?" he asked, sharply, staring in a puzzled way at her.

"Oh, nothing— only— I was wishing for an adventure of some sort."

"By Jove! You've got it. But it's no laughing matter, I assure you— for me, at least. And I don't think you'll find it so, either. You're Mr. Mompesson's secretary, I suppose?"

Grace nodded. The utter helplessness of her position made her feel foolish. More over, why was she talking to the man in this friendly fashion when he was a horrible midnight marauder. And yet something in his manner of handling her, his strange gentleness in the midst of his determination and barely suppressed excitement attracted Grace, and set her wondering what sort of man be really was. That he throbbed with keen inward excitement, notwithstanding his cool speech, was clearly manifest. His breath came heavily through his nostrils, and when he was speaking, his teeth were set, and his long thin fingers quivered as they adjusted the bandages on the girl's wrists.

She returned his scrutiny with interest. The mask, however, concealed the contour of his face, except part of the clean shaven chin— square, with grim downward lines about the mouth. Where had she seen a chin like that before? The piercing blue eyes were clear, and, though they bad a desperate, it was not a malevolent expression, and she felt insensibly drawn towards something— some tender human feeling that lurked in their depths.

"How long have you been able to stand life with— him?" the intruder asked suddenly.

"Six months," she answered.

"And you haven't lost pluck and spirit, I can see. What a splendid little soul you must be! It was plucky to come down all alone, and face a fellow like this. Sorry I can't allow you to put the police on my tracks, as I presume you would if I left you free to raise an alarm. How did you happen to be sitting up so late, may I ask?"

"I was trying to imagine a thrilling experience for the subject of a literary competition I wanted to write for," she answered, simply. "I was wishing l had one to make copy of."

"Trying to imagine! My God! As though there weren't enough of such things in life. Lucky girl, if you've never known any. They're not all pleasant, let me tell you. However, you shan't suffer from this one more than I can help. There, that doesn't hurt, does it?"

He slipped a finger between her bandage and the wrist, and bent over her.

"I want to make you as comfortable as I can, you know. You may have some hours to wait here."

Grace swallowed her indignation with difficulty. "I think you're perfectly horrid," she said. "You've no right to tie me up. How did you get in?"

"Never mind. I happen to have a key to the side door, that's all."

"Oh! Oh! you're nothing but a common burglar— if you are polite."

It was his turn to laugh— a queer, sardonic chuckle.

"Am I not? Well, that's all right. A burglar, you know, chooses an evening when the place is clear. I happened to be at the station when those luckless servants went off. That's how I learned there'd be nobody but a girl in the house to-night."

"Coward! So you're only equal to facing a woman."

"Perhaps— what does it matter," he retorted, his keen grey eyes taking in every line of the slender little grey-clad figure, of the flushed, appealing face. "I suppose you're right to pitch into me from your point of view," he said slowly, "and yet, somehow, I don't like to hear you say such things, for you look as though you'd a kind, sweet soul like— well, the one dear woman who ever was kind to me— the only one I wanted to face to-night."

He turned and glanced at the picture of poor dead Mrs. Mompesson who stared blankly down at them both with her pathetic eyes.

"You knew her?" asked Grace, unaccountably touched by the tone in his voice.

"I knew her— yes— years ago. She was always good to me." There came a break in the burglar's accents. He pulled himself together, and spoke rapidly.

"Look here, Miss Yarrett— you see, I— I've heard your name. I wonder whether you'd believe me if I told you the truth— believe and trust me, and give me time to get away."

"Not if you want to take that with you." Grace jerked her head towards the diamond cross. "My duty requires me to protect Mr. Mompesson's property if I can, and that cross must be his."

"It isn't— that I'll swear. I'm here tonight to restore it to the— the owner."

Grace's lip curled. "Why don't you tell me something I can believe— if you want me to trust you?"

"I do want you to trust me— I don't know why, I never cared before for any woman's faith— save hers. But you look at me kindly, though you'd scorn a thief. Yet I can't think you'd be hard on a chap who was fighting Fate, and who only meant to take a thing which can- secure him a straight future on the other side of the world."

"And what will your life be worth on the other side of the world— if the police don't catch. you before you get there— haunted by the thought that you have robbed a dead woman. And you say she was good to you! Mrs. Mompesson must have meant that jewel for her son. 'He's out in the world somewhere, I believe. He and his father quarrelled, and he may need the money more than you. He may be starving. "

The burglar's mouth twitched.

"I, too, have starved," he said.

"Oh! I can guess," Grace winced suddenly. "It must be dreadful to be so poor that one is tempted to do wrong. Don't think I don't understand. I do, quite. I'm poor myself. Would I have stayed here and worked— with that man— if I were not! But don't— don't do this. It's better to be poor and honest. Then, too, he'll make you suffer, so, if he finds you out. And he will. He's always hard— on everyone."

The burglar nodded grimly. "So I've heard. After all, I do not think that you shall know the truth. It's scarcely fair to you. But look at one once before I go. I want you to remember me if we should meet again."

He took off his mask and stood before her. The young face, though handsome, was haggard and worn with many lines. Grace's tender heart went out to it with a quick leap of sympathy.

"Are you his son?" she cried. The burglar took her hands, and began, to untie her bandages.

"Do not ask me. It is better that I should not say— now. Then you need know nothing —if he asks. Only believe that I would not take this jewel if I had no right to it. There! You are free, poor child. How could I dream of leaving you like that. Free to ring the alarm bell— as you must— and to give warning of the

loss. Good-bye. I've got my bicycle outside— I've as fair a chance as any genuine burglar might have to get off undiscovered."

He stooped and kissed her released hands twice— thrice, fervently. Then even while they quivered under the sense of his burning touch, he sprang away, took up the jewel, snapped its case, and was gone.

Grace lay back trembling, her mind in a maze, her whole girlish being swept by the new and sudden wave of emotion that flooded her. She longed to call him back; yet she longed that he might escape with the jewel. Would he— ah! would he? She guessed that he must have some very strong reason for coming like a thief in the night to steal his own— if it were his own! And she could not doubt him.

Suddenly her attention was caught by the distant sound of a motor nearing swiftly. It turned in at the gates, and came snorting and puffing up to the house. Mr. Mompesson must have returned in reality this time— and would he meet his son?

Grace sat up, struggling frantically to be calm. She heard the key inserted in the lock of the side door. She heard her employer's angry exclamation, "Hullo! hullo! what the deuce? Who's got the lights on?"

He turned instantly to the study, and came in— a great burly, well-nurtured figure, in a fur-lined motor coat, with a grim, strong face, flushed now by the night air. His eyes fell on the Chippendale bureau standing open.

"Good Lord, what's this? Has there been a burglary?"

He lurched towards the bureau, stumbling over a footstool in his haste. His hands sought passionately among its drawers and recesses. "Good Lord!" he murmured again, incoherently, "The cross! Where is it?"

But it was not to be found, and he turned, drops of perspiration standing out on his forehead.

"What are you doing there, woman? Can't you speak? Help me — I've lost a' priceless jewel— help me to find it."

But Grace stood motionless, her eyes glued to his figure, as he moved about impatiently.

"Priceless— priceless, I tell you. To me it was priceless. For it belonged to my poor wife, and she meant it for the boy. Only through a flaw in her will it came into my possession, and I swore I wouldn't give it up to him till he should come on his marrowbones to me for it. Now, someone's got hold of it. Fool, fool that I was not to send it to the bank for safe custody— a small fortune like that! Where is the cursed thief?"

"It's no use asking me," gasped Grace; "it's gone."

"Gone? Gone? How do you know? Where has it gone?"

"Someone came and took it," and she tried to jerk herself out of her employer's clutch. "Some man it was. I— I don't know who. I'd never seen him before. I heard noises, and came down— he was just going— and now he's gone."

She broke down, and wept weakly, but the furious Mr. Mompesson scarcely followed her feverish explanation. Only one word was branded on his brain.

"Gone! Do you hear that, Lenore?" he cried, turning to the pale, sad face of his dead wife on the wall above him, and lifting his hands as though to compel her attention. "Some thief has been here, and stolen your legacy to the lad— the one thing you always I asked me to let him have. And now— I shall never be able to do so— never make the boy just restitution— forgive me, forgive me, I Lenore," and to Grace's horror and amazement the strong fierce man dropped on his knees, and sobbed like a child— great, tearing sobs that were dreadful to see.

The girl I checked her own tears, and tiptoed softly towards him, half shrinking; half yearning to I tell him all she knew. But a swift footstep passed her— a strong young arm went round the broken man who knelt there.

"Never I make restitution— never give the boy back his own," Mr. Mompesson kept muttering.

"Yes, you can, father. Here— take it and I give it me with your own hands. I shall value it ever so much more," and Jack Mompesson thrust the jewel case into his father's nerveless clasp. The elder man turned bloodshot eyes upon him. At first he did not seem to recognise his visitor.

"I came like a thief, dad, to take my own, sooner than ask you for it again, because I'd spent my last shot, and there was nothing for it but a clean pair of heels and some new country. But I was ashamed, and felt I couldn't play such a mean trick. The fact is, I've found out that England holds something dearer to me than gold. So I've come back, and I want you to give me another trial. I shan't sell the gems, dad, for I've seen the only woman whom I should like to wear my mother's cross. That is, if you'll help me to win her. But you'll not discard your scapegrace son again?"

"Never again— never again," muttered Mr. Mompesson brokenly, clinging to his son's support. "Ah, Jack, you were the devil's own limb, but he's gone lame, lad, without you."

After all, Grace Yarrett was no true literary artist, for there were things said to her that night that she regarded as too sacred to turn into "copy."

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13: Concession

Annie S. Swan

1859-1943

As by "David Lyall"

Australian Christian Commonwealth 25 Feb 1910

Prolific writer of romantic novels and short stories, a best seller of her period. David Lyall was her main pseudonym.

COMBERMERE had come over from Shanghai and had been detained at Vladivostok for three whole days. It was the month of February and bitterly cold: the wind blowing from the northeast seemed to have the sting of the wintry steppes in it. Everybody was clothed in Lure, and Combermere, though a strong and hardy person, was glad to tie something over his ears, which brought back to him a memory of his Scotch nurse and the "lappets" of his childhood.

He was a mining expert, and his business in the dominion of the Czar was that fruitful and ever-widening theme "concession." Probably there is no word in the English language embodying so much high comedy, so much grim tragedy, so many of the worst passions of humanity. It is the chimera pursued by thousands of greedy seekers after wealth and power; it is the lever which great nations have used without scruple to rob lesser ones, and its pursuit and manipulation have changed many an honest man into a rogue.

Combermere was still, however, an honest man, and his mission was not much to his liking, now that he had arrived at close quarters with it. His business had not taken him to China, and finding he had to wait for what appeared to be an indefinite period at Vladivostok, on the coming of a powerful noble from the interior, with whom rested the final decision regarding the concession, he had taken a run across to see an old school friend occupying an important Government post.

He had greatly enjoyed that reunion, and had left Shanghai with regret; now he was kicking his heels in an agony of impatience, in the dullest, dreariest hole on earth.

He found no word of the Baron when he returned to Vladivostok, and was just pondering how much longer his syndicate would expect him to freeze in Russia, and incidentally envying Robert Hesseltine in his comfortable Government berth, with duties clearly defined and adequate salary assured, when the Baron arrived in great style at the hotel, wakening up the sleepy square into a semblance of life.

Combermere squared his handsome shoulders, and from the deep embrasure of the window watched with keenest interest the unburdening of

the sledge. The horses were magnificent, four sleek and noble black creatures, to which the swift drawing of the heavily weighted sledge over the frozen snow had been but play.

First alighted the Baron, an immense and awe-inspiring figure in sable robes. Combermere could see little of his face, but his eyes were terrifying enough, glaring out from under bushy brows, as he shouted his orders; not with the repose of a great noble, but as a bully might have sought to strike terror into the creatures of his will.

Suddenly, however, Combermere saw his manner change as he stepped deferentially to the side of the sledge to help therefrom the slight figure of a woman, also heavily wrapped in furs.

Combermere smiled; he had so often seen it in life, the coward and the bully held in thrall by the slender grip of a woman's hands. She appeared completely indifferent to him, and as she passed close by the window Combermere obtained a clear view of her face. It was sweet and tranquil rather than arresting, there was a lovely colour in her cheeks— a very English colour Combermere thought— and her grey eyes were thoughtful and true. Yes, certainly it was a winning face; and he wondered whether, if the Baron proved amiable, he might beg for an introduction.

He was summoned to the Baron's private sitting-room within the hour. Divested of his outward trappings, his figure now appeared lean and hard and his height enormous; his face was certainly handsome, but marred by its domineering, somewhat cruel expression. He greeted Combermere with a nice mixture of cordiality and patronage.

"I am glad to meet Your Excellency at last," said Combermere civilly, but without gush. "It is three weeks today since I first arrived at Vladivostok."

The Baron merely shrugged his shoulders. Time was of small account with him; the time of another man of no account at all.

"I have received all the communications of yourself and your firm regarding the concession asked for on the western boundaries of my estates, and my answer to them all is— No."

The Englishman stood aghast. His disappointment was overwhelming, and for the moment he desired only to curse this autocratic Russian who had kept him waiting so long, only to insult him. Happily he restrained himself, and observed with an icy and sarcastic politeness:

"If Your Excellency intended such an answer from the first, surely it would have been only courteous to have acquainted me with it earlier. Thus both my time and my purse would have been spared."

The Baron merely smiled.

"It was not convenient for me to communicate earlier. And, besides, I wished to see you. You have my permission to propound your cause, though I warn you that it will not make any difference to my decision."

Combermere expounded his cause with great deliberation and a modest eloquence which appeared to impress the Baron.

But upon its conclusion he made a remark that had no bearing whatever on the case.

"When do you propose to leave Vladivostok ? I have someone to put in your charge, an English lady, who has been an inmate of my house for the last eighteen months. She now wishes to return to her own country. Will you be introduced now? I leave the hotel in an hour's time."

Combermere was at once chagrined and angry, but reflecting that he was, figuratively speaking, against a dead wall, he replied civilly that he would be pleased to be of use to the lady, and was left kicking his heels once more while the Baron went to fetch her.

The moment Combermere's eyes fell on the sweet face of May Latimer he realized that a fresh force had come into his life, and that his visit to the wilds of Russia in dead of winter had not been in vain. They shook hands as old friends might have done, their eyes communicated a complete understanding, relief and appeal in hers were met by loyalty and assurance in his, and the deed was done.

But Combermere's extraordinary interview with the Baron was not over yet. When they were once more alone, that strange personage fired a fresh bomb at the Englishman s composure.

"She is charming, your countrywoman," he said, in his excellent French. "Very simple and quiet; but, look you, she has a great destiny in her little hands. She has been so good as to teach my motherless children for the last two years. If you can persuade her to return and mother them— indeed, to become Her Excellency the Baroness Alikoff— then, Monsieur, the concessions you so much desire will be yours."

Having thus delivered himself the Baron made his adieu.

"Dotty," muttered Combermere to himself. "Quite dotty, and, poor buffer, he doesn't know it."

Combermere and May Latimer were fellow-travellers next, day, but a good many hours elapsed, and they were far across the vast snow-clad steppes which brought them nearer to Moscow before Combermere ventured to tell her of the Baron's extraordinary speech. She smiled a little, but almost immediately grew pale.

"He is not mad at all. Generally, he is the kindest of men. I was happy there, and I loved the children dearly. All was well until—until—he began to wish to change things."

"It would be a great position," said Combermere quietly. "He is certainly one of the richest and most powerful nobles in Russia."

"Yes," she admitted. "I know that, but I would rather die."

Combermere said no more.

The rest of the journey was a dream. At Berlin he changed his route, so as to be able to accompany her, and it was on the Hamburg boat in mid-Channel that Combermere spake the words which finally sealed the fate of the Alikoff concession. But his syndicate never knew that he had held it in the hollow of his hand.

14: The Colleen

Annie S. Swan

As by David Lyall

Australian Christian Commonwealth 5 Jan 1917

IF THERE had been no War the Colleen could never have come to the Glen. But before we describe how she came it has to be told how Sholto Trafford Blair, of Creenan and Dalblair, went out with the first expeditionary force, being then an officer in the Guards, and came unscathed through its awful perils. He fought steadily for sixteen months before he received a scratch, and then he was badly wounded indeed, and for many weeks his life was despaired of.

Sholto was an only son, the heir to great estate, the idol of his parents, and of a wide connection on the Scottish side through his father, and of the Westmorland Traffords through his mother.

Never was youth more richly endowed by nature and fortune, and when at last his luck failed him, he took his dose with the cheerfulness of the man who was a sportsman and a soldier in every fibre of his being. He had come through so many hairbreadth escapes that his father and mother, watching and waiting in the Creenan fastnesses at the very head of Strathender, where the pass is gloomy and threatening, though indescribably beautiful, got hold of the belief that he would escape unscathed to the end.

The news came on a bitter March morning, in the shape of a telegram from a base hospital in France, demanding them to come at once. The laird was alone able for the journey, for his wife was much of an invalid, and had to be carried up and down the stairs for the better part of a year, though the surgeons promised that before another year closed she would be fully restored to health.

Her face was very pitiful as she bade good-bye to her husband, who tore off at once to catch an afternoon train which would land him in London in the morning, and, all being well, enable him to reach his son's bedside the following evening. All the passports were in order, for the Blairs had left nothing to chance, and all that was necessary was the visa at the French Embassy, and then the Channel passage.

Two days later Lady Blair received a cable that Sholto was still in life, and that they were hopeful about his recovery. That cheered her inexpressibly, and her sweet face lost its look of strain, and she was able to sleep for the first time since the news had come.

But during the next few weeks she was destined to pass through many vicissitudes of anxiety and despair, but at last, after a month at the French base, the laird came back.

"He's going to pull through, Emmy," he said, as he bent to kiss her with an adoring tenderness which showed that he was her lover still. "But it'll be a long business. There's a lot of patching to be done."

"But won't they bring him home here, Archie? We could nurse him here, and who could cure him better than Mr. Pringle? Look what he has done for me."

The laird shook his head and cleared his throat, and looked away. But she was not naturally suspicious, and did not probe so deeply as another might have done.

"My dear, we can't interfere with the military authorities. You can rest assured that they've got the best out there, and that nothing will be left undone for Sholto. It might give him a set-back to bring him this long journey; besides, they would never permit it. The discipline, as well as the organization,' is perfect, and they don't brook much interference from outsiders."

"Outsiders, indeed! But we are his father and mother, and now he can't fight any more for them, for a time at least, surely he belongs to us."

The laird turned clean away at that, for he knew that never again would Sholto fight in this or any other war. But he would not tell his mother just yet.

"Tell me how he looks, Archie, and what he says. Is he downhearted?"

"No," cried the laird, with a strange thunderous note in his voice; "that's the awful bit about it, the awful glorious bit. None of them are downhearted, even those who are just hulks' of men."

"But Sholto is not that, Archie?" she cried, and a note of sharp anguish awakened in her voice. "Tell me exactly what is the matter with him— where he is hurt, and how soon he will be well."

"He looks as any man would look with his head swathed in bandages, and one over his eyes. But his mouth hasn't forgotten how to smile, Emmy. Gad, it clean bowled me over, and the nurse turned me out of the ward with her two pretty hands, bless her, on my shoulders, though she was crying herself, and she said she would not let me come back until I learned to behave myself."

"What kind of wounds?" cried his mother imperiously.

"Shrapnel; he's got it all over him, he says, under his skin in a hundred places. Yes, his legs and arms are all right. Most of the wounds are in the head. But he's going on all right, and when they fetch him to England I'll take you up to see him."

"He has a nice nurse, you say, Archie?"

"A nice nurse, Emmy! She's one of the angels, I think. They call her the Colleen at the base, and she's as pretty as a picture."

"I don't mind that if she knows her business, and looks after Sholto. Do you think I might write to her and offer her a little present, just to ensure her special care?"

"You can write to her, Emmy; it might be a very good thing; but you won't offer her anything. She would resent it; every one of them would. They're not out for that sort of thing, but for whole-hearted service. I tell you if it hadn't bean on Sholto's account I had to go, I'd bless the day I made that journey. It has given me a glimpse of some things, a man is the better for knowing. We're too safe up. here, too safe and easy, and I despise, myself for an old crock of no use to my country in her time of need."

She comforted him, as she had so often done before, and they upheld one another through all the trying weeks to come. But Sholto's mother did not know that something was being kept from her. It was well kept. She only knew wheal the long-expected and longed-for day came when Sholto Trafford Blair came back to the house of his fathers, upon the beauty of which he would never again be able to look with the eyes of sense.

The Colleen came with him, and when Lady Blair heard- that she was coming something shot through her heart, the indescribable pang which tells a mother that her supreme day is over.

"Why should she come with him, Archie?" she asked sharply. "Why didn't you go to fetch him? Things are being kept from me," she added, with a most unusual touch of pettishness. She deplored that pettishness afterwards, when she saw the anguish on her husband's face. He came into her sitting-room on the afternoon of the day on which Sholto was expected back. He was going to Perth with the car to meet him, but before he went he had to unburden himself of the secret which had laid upon his heart like lead all these weeks.

"Emmy, I ought to tell you. God forgive I have shrunk from it; but you must be prepared before the boy comes back. He has lost his eyesight, my dear, and that is the reason why it was not possible for him to travel alone."

"Lost his eyesight! Sholto! My bonnie boy, with eyes like the summer morning. O, Archie! God could not be so cruel!" she said, shudderingly. "It can't be true."

The next half hour before the car came to the door the laird spent in trying to comfort his wife and to urge upon her the necessity of being brave in front of the boy. He was brave enough. He came with gallant bearing into the hall at Creenan, and groped about for a moment or so with a pathetic, wistful, wandered look, then he took the stairs two steps at a time.

"We'll leave him to his mother, my dear," said the laird, turning to the nurse, who stood by, her sweet face a little wistful, too, for this great house,

and all it stood for, laid an awe upon her and quenched the hope that had been blossoming so sweetly an hour ago.

It seemed a long time before a message came that Lady Blair would like to see Nurse Ferrard. The laird himself took her up, and when they entered the room Sholto was sitting on the end of his mother's soft rolling a cigarette. If there had been tears they were dried, but there was a tense feeling in the air, born of thoughts which cannot be uttered.

"Mother, this is the Colleen," said Sholto's gay young voice, that had hardly lost its music. "And it is to her I owe my life. They'll tell you so at Le Touquet. It's a debt that will never be paid."

His head was turned towards the door, but his sightless eyes could not see the look of appeal on the Colleen's sweet face as she stood the searching scrutiny of a jealous mother's eyes.

But the horrid moment was got over somehow, helped largely by the Colleen's natural grace and charm, and by and by they settled down and were drinking tea together happily, as if there was no shadow. Nevertheless, the shadow stalked.

"Archie," said the mother, when she had her husband to herself, "that woman has got round Sholto. She has abused her position, as lots of them do. It has got to be stopped; she must be sent away."

The laird took, a double stride across the long, narrow room. He did not know how to tell her what he had already been told, that Sholto loved the Colleen, and would make her his wife, if she were willing to share his lot, and would be content with a blind husband.

"She can't be sent away, Emmy," he said at last. "Can't you see she has saved Sholto's life, and what is left of it belongs to her?"

"To her! But who is she? Some common creature! You must be mad, Archie, to talk of what can never be."

"It will be, my dear, and nothing we can do will prevent it. Sholto has come back to us, a gift from the grave, and if this dear girl can give him happiness, have we the right to stand between? I tell you we daren't, Emmy, and I am not going to do it."

The mother's face was rebellious, and after she was left she lay long on her sofa, looking out on the stormy, windswept sky, and at last she rang the bell for her maid, and bade her go and find Mr. Sholto's nurse, and ask her to come to her room.

The Colleen came in due course, and the keen look Lady Blair cast at her was at once a question and a summing-up.

"Come and sit down here, nurse," she said, trying to speak gently. "I have something to say."

The Colleen sat down and crossed her hands on the stiff white starch of her apron, and her red lips closed rather tightly, as if she with difficulty stilled their trembling.

"You have been very good to my son, and for that I am grateful; but what is there between you?"

"He has asked me to be his wife," answered the Colleen, "And I have answered that all must depend on you."

"You care for him?"

"Care! O, yes. I have been with him at the edge of the grave. He says I pulled him back, and he is so gallant and glorious. O, yes, I care; but too much to spoil his life or break up his home."

"And you are not afraid of spending your life with a blind man?"

"Afraid!" The word fluttered from between her lips like a bird striving to escape from prison. Then quite suddenly she knelt down by the side of the sofa, and bent her pretty head over Lady Blair's folded hands, and her tears fell on them. And there was no more said till Sholto, guided by his old nurse to the door, entered too, and came and knelt down so that his mother's hands were on his head.

"I give you to one another, Sholto," said Emmy, and seeing the light on her son's sightless face learned, even as he had done, the supreme joy of sacrifice.

So that is how the Colleen came to the Glen, where already she has become a figure delightsome and well-beloved.

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15: The Pursuer

James Francis Dwyer

1874-1952

The Cavalier Aug 1909

Kangaroo Island Courier (S. Aust) 28 June 1913

EVERY TOURIST who has visited Capetown has heard of Camp Bay, the delightful little pleasure resort situated only a few miles from the city that crouches in the shadow of Table Mountain. The South African is pleased to call it 'The Brighton of the Cape,' and when the visitor has exhausted the sights of the town he is urged to visit the seaside village.

Of course the local resident goes, too. Whatever Gregory and Morrison may have thought of the curative powers of the spice-laden breeze, it seemed wondrously good to me as we three sat in a little boat about a mile from the shore, one hot afternoon in early August. It was a day when the slightest exertion proved irksome.

We had started out to fish, but fish were not plentiful, and the tropical languor had taken away the activity that was noticeable at the beginning of our quest. There was little wind, and the boat lifted lazily to an occasional snaky roller that sprawled shoreward, while the rays of mist smeared sun-painted impressionistic pictures on the oily waters stretching up toward India

Presently Gregory pulled up his line and stared quietly towards the north. Through no apparent reason I turned my eyes in the same direction, and in a few minutes Morrison followed our example.

That evening when we were discussing that uncanny happening that followed, we remembered how had stopped fishing simultaneously, and the discontinuance of our sport seemed strange when considered with the occurrence that followed.

There was absolutely nothing to attract our attention at that moment. The ocean was dead and lonely, and of all the oceans the Indian appears the most lonely when one views its bare stretches. The red and yellow daubed waste of water sloped away towards Asia, the colors of its surface reminding one of ten million snakes wriggling toward the horizon.

After a long period of silence Gregory shielded his eyes with his hand and leaned forward, and once again Morrison and I followed his example. But the silence and the silence and the peculiar, weird expectancy that seemed suddenly to fall upon us annoyed Morrison and he asked querulously what was the matter.

The oily garble of the water was the only sound that came in answer to his question, but instead of repeating his inquiry he again leaned forward and stared intently at the skyline.

'It's a boat,' he cried tremulously— 'it's a small boat!'

Gregory nodded his head, and then there settled down upon us that tense feeling of approaching mystery that gripped us for the succeeding twenty minutes. Here again, with no apparent reason for our watchfulness, we sat and watched the speck that came toward us from the spot where the rollers tumbled over the horizon. Not one of us questioned the curiosity of the others.

We sat silent and, to me at least, the nearer the boat came the more distasteful became the effort that I would have to make when speech became absolutely necessary. The few yards of sail upon the approaching boat glittered like a triangle of gold as it came nearer. It came haltingly, as if it was a live thing that viewed us with fear, and yet it came directly towards as. At times the breeze would leave it becalmed, and then it would lie pitifully expectant till another sportive puff wrapped itself in the red sail and pushed it on its way.

Morrison broke the silence. He shifted uneasily on his seat and in a throaty gurgle that reminded me of the whisper of a hunter when game is approaching, said: 'He is heading straight for us, he— he—'

The gurgling whisper was caught in a hasty swallow, and again there was silence. It was plainly evident that the little boat was bearing down upon us.

Nearer and nearer it came till, Just when my nerves seemed strained So a fearful tension by unexplained anxiety and unreasoning dread, a strong puff struck it squarely and it came rushing forward under a full sail.

Gregory sprang up and uttered an exclamation. 'He'll run the tub into us!' he cried nervously. 'Hullo, the dinghy.'

The little boat swerved as if in answer to the cry of warning, swung round, drifted slowly by, and then lay motionless as the vagrant puff of wind sped shoreward.

Morrison and I were now standing beside Gregory, and we stared in astonishment and fear at the little craft. The mystery that in some peculiar way we had sensed in the coming had arrived. The solitary occupant, whose legs were tied to the seat, had no knowledge of his route— it was a dead man.

Morrison grasped a boat-book and caught the little shell as it bobbed near, and Gregory dropped into it as it was draws alongside. The dead face looked up at us as if in wonderment, and the wasted hands that gripped the seat of the boat thrilled one with the tensity of their grip.

'We didn't move?' questioned Morrison in a quiet voice. 'I mean we didn't go to meet that?'

'No, we didn't,' answered Gregory, 'he found us.' Then, as an afterthought he added: 'It's a pretty big stretch of water to find anyone in, too.'

Morrison looked round at the oily desert, with its weird coloring of purples and strange rose reds, and he nodded slowly.

The coming of the dead stranger had a curious effect upon us all. Gregory lowered the little red sail and made the dinghy fast, then he proceeded to take an inventory of its contents, while we sat and watched him. He found an empty water-jug, two caps, and a biscuit tin, but when he opened the latter be made a discovery.

The tin contained a pocketbook wrapped round with a piece of thick paper and secured with an elastic band. Gregory handed the book up to Morrison, who examined it carefully. The first thirty pages were filled with pencilled writing that was easily decipherable, excepting occasional lines where the salt water soaked in through the paper cover and obliterated the words. But the writing had a strange effect upon Morrison.

He read a few lines and then muttered an oath that brought Gregory back from the dinghy to see the nature of the find.

'Read it out so that we can all hear it,' he cried sharply as the other stared at the book,

'What's in it?' Morrison opened his mouth us if to comply with the request, but he suddenly changed his mind and handed the book to Gregory.

'Here, you read it,' he said quietly.

Gregory took the note-book, glanced quickly over the open page, and after giving a long whistle of astonishment, started to read aloud.

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ON MY DESK at this moment is the stained book from which we heard the strange story of the man who came so mysteriously to our boat on that afternoon off Camp Bay, and here I will copy it verbatim:—

I am writing this with him watching me. I know he is watching me although I cannot see him. I can feel his presence. I never believed the nigger cook when he said he could smell shark half a mile away, but I do now. I know where this bull-nosed brute is swimming, though I cannot see him. There's his fin now. I was thinking he was about five yards astern, and his fin came up on the very spot I was looking at. And I was fool enough to laugh at the nigger cook.

He has been with us seven days and seven nights— I mean he has been with me seven days and nights. Peterson stood him four days; Melville's nerves went to pieces on the third night. He was ... and that unshipped him. But this thing has been with me all the time, and if the days are bad, the nights are worse. It was in the night that ... was the first.

He came to us on the evening of the day the brig went down. Melville started to laugh when he saw him. His laugh sounded like water creeping into a

sinking ship. Poor little devil! I guess it struck him right then that this fellow knew more about the Indian Ocean than ever we knew or are likely to know, and Melville thought that the swine had pretty strong ideas about something happening, before he started to trail us. He had noticed the size of the cockle-shell, reckoned up our chances of surviving the first blow that came down from the Bay of Bengal, and then had decided to trail us for a day or two.

Melville was always looking astern after he first caught sight of him. Whenever Peterson told him to look ahead, he made that funny laugh of his. It isn't good to look astern with a thing like that on your track. I take a look occasionally but I don't laugh like Melville did. I knew Melville's laugh. When a cross-bred Spaniard chased him down the plaza at Santa Cruz he laughed just the same way he did when he saw this thing. Then he pretended he wasn't afraid. If he wasn't afraid he wouldn't have jumped ... on the third night.

I don't want to imitate Melville's trick, but lest I might forget the consequences I have strapped my legs to the seat. Peterson forgot when be was very thirsty; I'm sorry for Peterson. He hadn't a drink for two days, and two days on this ocean is a long time ... I haven't had a drink for five days

Peterson remembered when it was too late. The fool ... horror in his eyes. I saw it but it was too late to help him. I couldn't stop the boat because there was a half breeze and I might hare capsized. And besides— some fellow, I wonder who he was, says that everyone becomes a coward when they get wise. No one would have taken the risk of capsizing if they had seen the look in Peterson's eyes when he remembered. When he remembered ... a little astern. But what the devil did he want to jump out for. Couldn't he have died here in the boat? He was thirsty, of course, but so am I. The fool with that swimming ... the last I saw.

Poor little Billy Melville used to say he wouldn't mind if he would only swim in front. That's it! If he would only swim in front. When he's trailing behind like a Dyak headhunter it affects the nerves.

But I haven't written about the nights! Every time he comes to the surface to get the wind on his fin, so that he can tell how my chances stand for a capsize, he gives a wild spurt and smears the water with a phosphorescent flume. It looks as if he was trying to make a light strong enough, to see my face. 'Devil's Candles,' Melville used to say. He was right as far as he was concerned. He did his jump just ... and the moth didn't get any mercy.

Sometimes he swings right round the boat till be puts a ring of white fire round me, and then it looks as if there's only the two of us in the whole world. Only us two— me in the boat with my legs tied, and that brute watching— always watching. I said it was the white flame that upset Melville, and that's why... I don't think I'll meet any ships. He doesn't think I will, either. This Indian

Ocean is a dead place hereabouts, and I'm too far east for the steamers. And the first good wind he... but if this good weather keeps up I'll give him a long chase. I won't get—'

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THAT IS the end of the manuscript, and when Gregory had finished reading he looked at the two of us sitting white-faced and wild-eyed. Neither Morrison nor I could lay claim to an overabundance of courage.

'What is the name on the boat ?' I stammered.

'I can only make out the first three words,' answered Gregory. 'It's *The Rose of*— the last word has been scratched off. I guess she was a lumber brig, running from some West Australian port but she is somewhere at the bottom of this pond now, and the Lord only knows the spot.'

'What are you going to do?' asked Morrison.

'Tow him in,' said Gregory. 'I think after that run he has earned a burial on shore.'

Morrison moved to the stern and pulled at the rope that fastened the dinghy, and his shadow fell like a splash of ink on the claret-tinted water.

'That's the only thing we can do,' he muttered, 'and as you—'

He broke off suddenly, and, with a wild cry of astonishment, pointed astern. A black fin was moving very slowly through the oily water some five yards away

Now as I write I cannot account for the fear that seized us, but I can transplant myself to the Indian Ocean with that little boat and its passenger nearby. We did show fear— we showed arrant cowardice.

'Quick!' cried Morrison in sudden panic. 'There's a storm coming. Leave— leave— that—' Gregory looked at the little dinghy, with its silent occupant, and then at the sky overhead. 'We must leave him,' he cried; 'we cannot tow him if the wind rises.'

But I performed the most cowardly act. With a slash of my knife I cut the rope that connected us with the mystery, and then, as we strained at the oars, we gazed fearfully at the little cockle-shell that went bobbing southward before the sighing wind that came sweeping down from Asia.

THREE DAYS LATER when we were sitting in the smoking room of the Royal Hotel at Capetown, Gregory marked a paragraph in the paper he was reading and handed it across. The paragraph read:

Nothing has yet been heard of the three-masted brig, The Rose of Kalgoorlie*, that left Albany, Western Australia, on May 24, laden with jarrah logs for Durban.'*

'We were cowards to desert him,' I said; 'we—'

'Oh, don't talk about it again,' interrupted Morrison, 'I dream of that black fin every night.'

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16: A Distillery Ghost

Julie Closson Kenly

1869-1943

Northern Argus (Clare, S.Aust.) 13 July 1900

IT IS NOT NECESSARY to this story that I conjugate my verb 'to be' in the past tense. In fact, it is a painful subject to me. so I will merely say that I am a tramp, of interest to no one, except by chance to the farmer's dog or to the police.

On the particular day of which I speak I had been walking since sunrise along roads where the hot dust spurted under my shuffling steps, and where the sight of a solitary blotch of shade was as grateful as the clink of ice to the thirsty. I carried a companion in my pocket, a little flat, black companion, and every now and then, when the prospect became unusually dry and my hunger too insistent, I raised to my lips that mouth which alone of all others had been constant to me— the mouth of the bottle.

Towards afternoon, as I marched doggedly on, I became aware of a sudden cool lapping of shadow over my shoulder, and glancing about I saw that a storm was beating up behind me.

By some malevolent inspiration I remembered having heard that on this very road stood a disused distillery, a favourite resting-place for travellers of my description. Not far ahead was a clump of pine trees, and behind them rose the outlines of an old chimney. I hurried towards the place, plunging through a tangle of dusty weeds, and, sure enough, there stood the building of which I was in search, its sagging roof and bursting walk green with age.

There were two holes ripped in the roof, staring deep and empty as the eyes of a skull. I crawled under the door just in time, for the next moment ;the rain came roaring down straight as melted lead. It must have been a dismal place at best, but now, under the thick sky and drumming rain-drops, it was particularly dispiriting. There were two rooms on the lower floor with no visible means of communication but a wide windows set in the wall. The glass panes were unbroken, and the room behind was perfectly dark. Connecting these rooms with the attic was a rickety staircase. The earthen floor was covered with a dank mesh of pale grass blades. I cowered against the wall while the storm boomed and crackled over my head, closing my eyes from time to time against the shock of white fire that darted through the chinks and under the door.

Presently, as I sat with my hot lids drawn down. I felt a startling sense of someone looking at me; I turned quickly towards the window of which I have spoken, and there, pressed against the dark glass, was a face, peering at me steadily. Oh, the horror of that face! for, as I looked, the outlines began to

change and grow, like some great colourless jelly— a soft, human jelly oozing and spreading across the panes. I shut my eyes, and my heart battered my ribs. Again I looked, still the face was there, only this time the slack mouth drew back in a sickening smile, and it ran out its blue tongue, licking its loose lips quietly. I started to my feet with a cry. and as I did so the window began to slide up.

I dropped to the floor weak with fear, and the sash fell into place again. Then I realised that I must lie there, absolutely still, for if I rose, the window rose too— lie there and look, while that face peered at me from behind the glass. By-and-by it began to move with a flaccid, gelatinous swaying. I saw it bend over, and raise something from the floor, something that had been a man, but now hung quite limply in its mouth. It pressed the body against the window, laughing silently, and I saw— myself! God help me! for the first time in this world I looked into my own face. My own face did I say? No, no! Some bloated animal, purple, pimpled, with eyeballs so bloodshot that they seemed to-be staring through a web of red lace.

How long I lay there I cannot tell. At last I moved, and my hand touched something cold; it was my bottle, the companion of my wanderings. I held it up and saw that there was still a drop or two in it. I drained it to the dregs, and the glad fire warmed me and made me strong.

At that moment the Thing began to raise its pallid, terrible feelers, twisting them about the body it held, snapping the limbs off and dropping them into its mouth, where the blue tongue caressed them hungrily.

It had finished its meal, but it still kept its vague eyes on me, and then I realised that I was moving, slipping quietly towards it! I clutched at the rotting steps, and they crumbled to brown powder in my hands. I ground my fingers into the earth until there was a trail of bloody mud after me. Then I made one superhuman effort, dashed up the swaying staircase, and broke into the attic.

I slammed the door and threw myself against it, for I had seen that accursed window dart up with a crash as I leaped, and I knew that the Thing would follow me, and tear me to pieces, and plunge me into its mouth, and mash and mangle me between its toothless gums! The room where I found myself was dita and wet. Between the cracks in the wall a flaming strip of sunset glowed like a forge in the twilight.

Every breath of Nature was hushed now; the rain came only in loosely-blown gusts, and the thunder had shuddered away into silence; my hair rose and my flesh grew rough and icy, for on the stairway was a soft creaking sound, then a steady pushing against the door.

I howled aloud in my anguish, and the sound of my voice set the place bellowing with echoes. My arm*! were torn, and the bones nearly snapping from the pressure, and still I felt the door opening, opening!

There was a crunch— one rusty hinge dropped clattering to the floor, another and for a moment the door tottered and fell forward, nearly crushing me: but no, I was too quick, I was mad with fear. One instant only we stood looking at each other, the Thing framed in the empty door space, and I— a wild beast crazed with the fiercest race instinct; then I plunged forward and out through a rent in the torn boarding. I felt the wood snap and give, and the awful swoop of my fall, and knew that the Thing had hurled itself after me. I scrambled to my feet and went rushing flying down the empty road.

The wet bushes slapped my face and clung, clammy as dead hands that would have stopped my flight, and all the time I heard the Thing behind me— heard the plash of the paddles as it trailed through them and the beat of Its formless steps.

The moon was rising across the road, a great swollen disk, sanguine and threatening. I remember every scene: the jerky flitting of a bat, the dark spray of some hanging vine, and the pounding of my own steps. I remember catching my ragged shoe in a root that had crawled out from the hedge, and hearing a deep, horrible chuckle; then I fell forward— and remember nothing more.

II was midnight when I became conscious again. The moon had shrunk into the zenith, and was looking at me with its little white eye. I was very weak, and my hands were stiff with dry blood.

There was not a living thing in sight, only the pale ribbon of the deserted road and the gray fields stretching away to the sky.

Far on my left stood a clump of pine trees; behind them rose the outlines of an old chimney, and, sick as I was, I went hobbling through the night till the place was lost to view. Then I crawled into a damp hayrick— and slept.

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17: Doc Mellhorn and the Pearly Gates

Stephen Vincent Benét

1898-1943

The Saturday Evening Post, 24 Dec 1938

DOC MELLHORN had never expected to go anywhere at all when he died. So, when he found himself on the road again, it surprised him. But perhaps I'd better explain a little about Doc Mellhorn first. He was seventy-odd when he left our town; but when he came, he was as young as Bates or Filsinger or any of the boys at the hospital. Only there wasn't any hospital when he came. He came with a young man's beard and a brand-new bag and a lot of newfangled ideas about medicine that we didn't take to much. And he left, forty-odd years later, with a first-class county health record and a lot of people alive that wouldn't have been alive if he hadn't been there. Yes, a country doctor. And nobody ever called him a man in while or a death grappler that I know of, though they did think of giving him a degree at Pewauket College once. But then the board met again and decided they needed a new gymnasium, so they gave the degree to J. Prentiss Parmalee instead.

They say he was a thin young man when he first came, a thin young man with an Eastern accent who'd wanted to study in Vienna. But most of us remember him chunky and solid, with white hair and a little bald spot that always got burned bright red in the first hot weather. He had about four card tricks that he'd do for you, if you were a youngster— they were always the same ones— and now and then, if he felt like it, he'd take a silver half dollar out of the back of your neck. And that worked as well with the youngsters who were going to build rocket ships as it had with the youngsters who were going to be railway engineers. It always worked. I guess it was Doc Mellhorn more than the trick.

But there wasn't anything unusual about him, except maybe the card tricks. Or, anyway, he didn't think so. He was just a good doctor and he knew us inside out. I've heard people call him a pigheaded, obstinate old mule— that was in the fight about the water supply. And I've heard a weepy old lady call him a saint. I took the tale to him once, and he looked at me over his glasses and said, "Well, I've always respected a mule. Got ten times the sense of a— horse." Then he took a silver half dollar out of my ear.

Well, how do you describe a man like that? You don't— you call him up at three in the morning. And when he sends in his bill, you think it's a little steep.

All the same, when it came to it, there were people who drove a hundred and fifty miles to the funeral. And the Masons came down from Bluff City, and the Poles came from across the tracks, with a wreath the size of a house, and

you saw cars in town that you didn't often see there. But it was after the funeral that the queer things began for Doc Mellhorn.

The last thing he remembered, he'd been lying in bed, feeling pretty sick, on the whole, but glad for the rest. And now he was driving his Model T down a long straight road between rolling, misty prairies that seemed to go from nowhere to nowhere.

It didn't seem funny to him to be driving the Model T again. That was the car he'd learned on, and he kept to it till his family made him change. And it didn't seem funny to him not to be sick any more. He hadn't had much time to be sick in his life— the patients usually attended to that. He looked around for his bag, first thing, but it was there on the seat beside him. It was the old bag, not the presentation one they'd given him at the hospital, but that was all right too. It meant he was out on a call and, if he couldn't quite recollect at the moment just where the call was, it was certain to come to him. He'd wakened up often enough in his buggy, in the old days, and found the horse was taking him home, without his doing much about it. A doctor gets used to things like that.

All the same, when he'd driven and driven for some time without raising so much as a traffic light, just the same rolling prairies on either hand, he began to get a little suspicious. He thought, for a while, of stopping the car and getting out, just to take a look around, but he'd always hated to lose time on a call. Then he noticed something else. He was driving without his glasses. And yet he hadn't driven without his glasses in fifteen years.

"H'm," said Doc Mellhorn. "I'm crazy as a June bug. Or else— Well, it might be so, I suppose."

But this time he did stop the car. He opened his bag and looked inside it, but everything seemed to be in order. He opened his wallet and looked at that, but there were his own initials, half rubbed away, and he recognized them. He took his pulse, but it felt perfectly steady.

"H'm," said Doc Mellhorn. "Well."

Then, just to prove that everything was perfectly normal, he took a silver half dollar out of the steering wheel of the car.

"Never did it smoother," said Doc Mellhorn. "Well, all the same, if this is the new highway, it's longer than I remember it."

But just then a motorcycle came roaring down the road and stopped with a flourish, the way motor cops do.

"Any trouble?" said the motor cop. Doc Mellhorn couldn't see his face for his goggles, but the goggles looked normal.

"I am a physician," said Doc Mellhorn, as he'd said a thousand times before to all sorts of people, "on my way to an urgent case." He passed his hand across his forehead. "Is this the right road?" he said.

"Straight ahead to the traffic light," said the cop. "They're expecting you, Doctor Mellhorn. Shall I give you an escort?"

"No; thanks all the same," said Doc Mellhorn, and the motor cop roared away. The Model T ground as Doc Mellhorn gassed her.

"Well, they've got a new breed of traffic cop," said Doc Mellhorn, "or else—"

But when he got to the light, it was just like any light at a crossroads. He waited till it changed and the officer waved him on. There seemed to be a good deal of traffic going the other way, but he didn't get a chance to notice it much, because Lizzie bucked a little, as she usually did when you kept her waiting. Still, the sight of traffic relieved him, though he hadn't passed anybody on his own road yet.

Pretty soon he noticed the look of the country had changed. It was parkway now and very nicely landscaped. There was dogwood in bloom on the little hills, white and pink against the green; though, as Doc Mellhorn remembered it, it had been August when he left his house. And every now and then there'd be a nice little white-painted sign that said TO THE GATES.

"H'm," said Doc Mellhorn. "New State Parkway, I guess. Well, they've fixed it up pretty. But I wonder where they got the dogwood. Haven't seen it bloom like that since I was East."

Then he drove along in a sort of dream for a while, for the dogwood reminded him of the days when he was a young man in an Eastern college. He remembered the look of that college and the girls who'd come to dances, the girls who wore white gloves and had rolls of hair. They were pretty girls, too, and he wondered what had become of them. "Had babies, I guess," thought Doc Mellhorn. "Or some of them, anyway." But he liked to think of them as the way they had been when they were just pretty, and excited at being at a dance.

He remembered other things too— the hacked desks in the lecture rooms, and the trees on the campus, and the first pipe he'd ever broken in, and a fellow called Paisley Grew that he hadn't thought of in years— a rawboned fellow with a gift for tall stories and playing the jew's-harp.

"Ought to have looked up Paisley," he said. "Yes, I ought. Didn't amount to a hill of beans, I guess, but I always liked him. I wonder if he still plays the jew's-harp. Pshaw, I know he's been dead twenty years."

He was passing other cars now and other cars were passing him, but he didn't pay much attention, except when he happened to notice a license you

didn't often see in the state, like Rhode Island or Mississippi. He was too full of his own thoughts. There were foot passengers, too, plenty of them— and once he passed a man driving a load of hay. He wondered what the man would do with the hay when he got to the Gates. But probably there were arrangements for that.

"Not that I believe a word of it," he said, "but it'll surprise Father Kelly. Or maybe it won't. I used to have some handsome arguments with that man, but I always knew I could count on him, in spite of me being a heretic."

Then he saw the Wall and the Gates, right across the valley. He saw them, and they reached to the top of the sky. He rubbed his eyes for a while, but they kept on being there.

"Quite a sight," said Doc Mellhorn.

No one told him just where to go or how to act, but it seemed to him that he knew. If he'd thought about it, he'd have said that you waited in line, but there wasn't any waiting in line. He just went where he was expected to go and the reception clerk knew his name right away.

"Yes, Doctor Mellhorn," he said. "And now, what would you like to do first?"

"I think I'd like to sit down," said Doc Mellhorn. So he sat, and it was a comfortable chair. He even bounced the springs of it once or twice, till he caught the reception clerk's eye on him.

"Is there anything I can get you?" said the reception clerk. He was young and brisk and neat as a pin, and you could see he aimed to give service and studied about it. Doc Mellhorn thought, "He's the kind that wipes off your windshield no matter how clean it is."

"No," said Doc Mellhorn. "You see, I don't believe this. I don't believe any of it. I'm sorry if that sounds cranky, but I don't."

"That's quite all right, sir," said the reception clerk. "It often takes a while." And he smiled as if Doc Mellhorn had done him a favor.

"Young man, I'm a physician," said Doc Mellhorn, "and do you mean to tell me—"

Then he stopped, for he suddenly saw there was no use arguing. He was either there or he wasn't. And it felt as if he were there.

"Well," said Doc Mellhorn, with a sigh, "how do I begin?"

"That's entirely at your own volition, sir," said the reception clerk briskly. "Any meetings with relatives, of course. Or if you would prefer to get yourself settled first. Or take a tour, alone or conducted. Perhaps these will offer suggestions," and he started to hand over a handful of leaflets. But Doc Mellhorn put them aside.

"Wait a minute," he said. "I want to think. Well, naturally, there's Mother and Dad. But I couldn't see them just yet. I wouldn't believe it. And Grandma— well, now, if I saw Grandma— and me older than she is— was— used to be— well, I don't know what it would do to me. You've got to let me get my breath. Well, of course, there's Uncle Frank— he'd be easier." He paused. "Is he here?" he said.

The reception clerk looked in a file. "I am happy to say that Mr. Francis V. Mellhorn arrived July 12, 1907," he said. He smiled winningly.

"Well!" said Doc Mellhorn. "Uncle Frank! Well, I'll be— well! But it must have been a great consolation to Mother. We heard— well, never mind what we heard— I guess it wasn't so.... No, don't reach for that phone just yet, or whatever it is. I'm still thinking."

"We sometimes find," said the reception clerk eagerly, "that a person not a relative may be the best introduction. Even a stranger sometimes— a distinguished stranger connected with one's own profession— "

"Well, now, that's an idea," said Doc Mellhorn heartily, trying to keep his mind off how much he disliked the reception clerk. He couldn't just say why he disliked him, but he knew he did.

It reminded him of the time he'd had to have his gall bladder out in the city hospital and the young, brisk interns had come to see him and called him "Doctor" every other word.

"Yes, that's an idea," he said. He reflected. "Well, of course, I'd like to see Koch," he said. "And Semmelweiss. Not to speak of Walter Reed. But, shucks, they'd be busy men. But there is one fellow— only he lived pretty far back—"

"Hippocrates, please," said the reception clerk into the telephone or whatever it was. "*H* for horse—"

"No!" said Doc Mellhorn quite violently. "Excuse me, but you just wait a minute. I mean if you can wait. I mean, if Hippocrates wants to come, I've no objection. But I never took much of a fancy to him, in spite of his oath. It's Aesculapius I'm thinking about. George W. Oh, glory!" he said. "But he won't talk English. I forgot."

"I shall be happy to act as interpreter," said the reception clerk, smiling brilliantly.

"I haven't a doubt," said Doc Mellhorn. "But just wait a shake." In a minute, by the way the clerk was acting, he was going to be talking to Aesculapius. "And what in time am I going to say to the man?" he thought. "It's too much." He gazed wildly around the neat reception room— distempered, as he noticed, in a warm shade of golden tan. Then his eyes fell on the worn black bag at his feet and a sudden warm wave of relief flooded over him.

"Wait a minute," he said, and his voice gathered force and authority, "Where's my patient?"

"Patient?" said the reception clerk, looking puzzled for the first time.

"Patient," said Doc Mellhorn. "*P* for phlebitis." He tapped his bag.

"I'm afraid you don't quite understand, sir," said the reception clerk.

"I understand this," said Due Mellhorn. "I was called here. And if I wasn't called professionally, why have I got my bag?"

"But, my dear Doctor Mellhorn—" said the reception clerk.

"I'm not your dear doctor," said Doc Mellhorn. "I was called here, I tell you. I'm sorry not to give you the patient's name, but the call must have come in my absence and the girl doesn't spell very well. But in any well-regulated hospital—"

"But I tell you," said the reception clerk, and his hair wasn't slick any more, "nobody's ill here. Nobody can be ill. If they could, it wouldn't be He—"

"Humph," said Doc Mellhorn. He thought it over, and felt worse. "Then what does a fellow like Koch do?" he said. "Or Pasteur?" He raised a hand. "Oh, don't tell me," he said. "I can see they'd be busy. Yes, I guess it'd be all right for a research man. But I never was... Oh, well, shucks, I've published a few papers. And there's that clamp of mine— always meant to do something about it. But they've got better ones now. Mean to say there isn't so much as a case of mumps in the whole place?"

"I assure you," said the reception clerk, in a weary voice. "And now, once you see Doctor Aesculapius—"

"Funny," said Doc Mellhorn. "Lord knows there's plenty of times you'd be glad to be quit of the whole thing. And don't talk to me about the healer's art or grateful patients. Well, I've known a few... a few. But I've known others. All the same, it's different, being told there isn't any need for what you can do."

"*A* for Ararát," said the reception clerk into his instrument. "*E* for Eden."

"Should think you'd have a dial," said Doc Mellhorn desperately. "We've got 'em down below." He thought hard and frantically. "Wait a shake. It's coming back to me," he said. "Got anybody named Grew here? Paisley Grew?"

"*S* for serpent..." said the reception clerk. "What was that?"

"Fellow that called me," said Doc Mellhorn. "G-r-e-w. First name, Paisley."

"I will consult the index," said the reception clerk.

He did so, and Doc Mellhorn waited, hoping against hope.

"We have 94,183 Grews, including 83 Prescotts and one Penobscot," the reception clerk said at last. "But I fail to find Paisley Grew. Are you quite sure of the name?"

"Of course," said Doc Mellhorn briskly. "Paisley Grew. Chronic indigestion. Might be appendix— can't say— have to see. But anyhow, he's called." He

picked up his bag. "Well, thanks for the information," he said, liking the reception clerk better than he had yet. "Not your fault, anyway."

"But— but where are you going?" said the reception clerk.

"Well, there's another establishment, isn't there?" said Doc Mellhorn. "Always heard there was. Call probably came from there. Crossed wires, I expect."

"But you can't go there!" said the reception clerk. "I mean—"

"Can't go?" said Doc Mellhorn. "I'm a physician. A patient's called me."

"But if you'll only wait and see Aesculapius!" said the reception clerk, running his hands wildly through his hair. "He'll be here almost any moment."

"Please give him my apologies," said Doc Mellhorn. "He's a doctor. He'll understand. And if any messages come for me, just stick them on the spike. Do I need a road map? Noticed the road I came was all one way."

"There is, I believe, a back road in rather bad repair," said the reception clerk icily. "I can call Information if you wish."

"Oh, don't bother," said Doc Mellhorn. "I'll find it. And I never saw a road beat Lizzie yet." He took a silver half dollar from the doorknob of the door. "See that?" he said. "Slick as a whistle. Well, good-by, young man."

But it wasn't till he'd cranked up Lizzie and was on his way that Doc Mellhorn really felt safe. He found the back road and it was all the reception clerk had said it was and more. But he didn't mind— in fact, after one particularly bad rut, he grinned.

"I suppose I ought to have seen the folks," he said. "Yes, I know I ought. But— not so much as a case of mumps in the whole abiding dominion! Well, it's lucky I took a chance on Paisley Grew."

After another mile or so, he grinned again.

"And I'd like to see old Aesculapius' face. Probably rang him in the middle of dinner— they always do. But shucks, it's happened to all of us."

Well, the road got worse and worse and the sky above it darker and darker, and what with one thing and another, Doc Mellhorn was glad enough when he got to the other gates. They were pretty impressive gates, too, though of course in a different way, and reminded Doc Mellhorn a little of the furnaces outside Steeltown, where he'd practiced for a year when he was young.

This time Doc Mellhorn wasn't going to take any advice from reception clerks and he had his story all ready. All the same, he wasn't either registered or expected, so there was a little fuss. Finally they tried to scare him by saying he came at his own risk and that there were some pretty tough characters about. But Doc Mellhorn remarked that he'd practiced in Steeltown. So, after he'd told them what seemed to him a million times that he was a physician on a case, they finally let him in and directed him to Paisley Grew. Paisley was on

Level 346 in Pit 68,953, and Doc Mellhorn recognized him the minute he saw him. He even had the jew's-harp, stuck in the back of his overalls.

"Well, Doc," said Paisley finally, when the first greetings were over, "you certainly are a sight for sore eyes! Though, of course, I'm sorry to see you here," and he grinned.

"Well, I can't see that it's so different from a lot of places," said Doc Mellhorn, wiping his forehead. "Warmish, though."

"It's the humidity, really," said Paisley Grew. "That's what it really is."

"Yes, I know," said Doc Mellhorn. "And now tell me, Paisley; how's that indigestion of yours?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Doc," said Paisley. "When I first came here, I thought the climate was doing it good. I did for a fact. But now I'm not so sure. I've tried all sorts of things for it— I've even tried being transferred to the boiling asphalt lakes. But it just seems to hang on, and every now and then, when I least expect it, it catches me. Take last night. I didn't have a thing to eat that I don't generally eat— well, maybe I did have one little snort of hot sulphur, but it wasn't the sulphur that did it. All the same, I woke up at four, and it was just like a knife. Now..."

He went on from there and it took him some time. And Doc Mellhorn listened, happy as a clam. He never thought he'd be glad to listen to a hypochondriac, but he was. And when Paisley was all through, he examined him and prescribed for him. It was just a little soda bicarb and pepsin, but Paisley said it took hold something wonderful. And they had a fine time that evening, talking over the old days.

Finally, of course, the talk got around to how Paisley liked it where he was. And Paisley was honest enough about that.

"Well, Doc," he said, "of course this isn't the place for you, and I can see you're just visiting. But I haven't many real complaints. It's hot, to be sure, and they work you, and some of the boys here are rough. But they've had some pretty interesting experiences, too, when you get them talking— yes, sir. And anyhow, it isn't Peabodyville, New Jersey," he said with vehemence. "I spent five years in Peabodyville, trying to work up in the leather business. After that I bust out, and I guess that's what landed me here. But it's an improvement on Peabodyville." He looked at Doc Mellhorn sidewise. "Say, Doc," he said, "I know this is a vacation for you, but all the same there's a couple of the boys— nothing really wrong with them of course— but— well, if you could just look them over—"

"I was thinking the office hours would be nine to one," said Doc Mellhorn.

So Paisley took him around and they found a nice little place for an office in one of the abandoned mine galleries, and Doc Mellhorn hung out his shingle.

And right away patients started coming around. They didn't get many doctors there, in the first place, and the ones they did get weren't exactly the cream of the profession, so Doc Mellhorn had it all to himself. It was mostly sprains, fractures, bruises and dislocations, of course, with occasional burns and scalds— and, on the whole, it reminded Doc Mellhorn a good deal of his practice in Steeltown, especially when it came to foreign bodies in the eye. Now and then Doc Mellhorn ran into a more unusual case— for instance, there was one of the guards that got part of himself pretty badly damaged in a rock slide. Well, Doc Mellhorn had never set a tail before, but he managed it all right, and got a beautiful primary union, too, in spite of the fact that he had no X-ray facilities. He thought of writing up the case for the State Medical Journal, but then he couldn't figure out any way to send it to them, so he had to let it slide. And then there was an advanced carcinoma of the liver— a Greek named Papadoupolous or Prometheus or something. Doc Mellhorn couldn't do much for him, considering the circumstances, but he did what he could, and he and the Greek used to have long conversations. The rest was just everyday practice— run of the mine— but he enjoyed it.

Now and then it would cross his mind that he ought to get out Lizzie and run back to the other place for a visit with the folks. But that was just like going back East had been on earth— he'd think he had everything pretty well cleared up, and then a new flock of patients would come in. And it wasn't that he didn't miss his wife and children and grandchildren— he did. But there wasn't any way to get back to them, and he knew it. And there was the work in front of him and the office crowded every day. So he just went along, hardly noticing the time.

Now and then, to be sure, he'd get a suspicion that he wasn't too popular with the authorities of the place. But he was used to not being popular with authorities and he didn't pay much attention. But finally they sent an inspector around. The minute Doc Mellhorn saw him, he knew there was going to be trouble.

Not that the inspector was uncivil. In fact, he was a pretty high-up official— you could tell by his antlers. And Doc Mellhorn was just as polite, showing him around. He showed him the free dispensary and the clinic and the nurse— Scotch girl named Smith, she was— and the dental chair he'd rigged up with the help of a fellow named Ferguson, who used to be an engineer before he was sentenced. And the inspector looked them all over, and finally he came back to Doc Mellhorn's office. The girl named Smith had put up curtains in the office, and with that and a couple of potted gas plants it looked more homelike than it had. The inspector looked around it and sighed.

"I'm sorry, Doctor Mellhorn," he said at last, "but you can see for yourself, it won't do."

"What won't do?" said Doc Mellhorn, stoutly. But, all the same, he felt afraid.

"Any of it," said the inspector. "We could overlook the alleviation of minor suffering— I'd be inclined to do so myself— though these people are here to suffer, and there's no changing that. But you're playing merry Hades with the whole system."

"I'm a physician in practice," said Doc Mellhorn.

"Yes," said the inspector. "That's just the trouble. Now, take these reports you've been sending," and he took out a sheaf of papers. "What have you to say about that?"

"Well, seeing as there's no county health officer, or at least I couldn't find one—" said Doc Mellhorn.

"Precisely," said the inspector. "And what have you done? You've condemned fourteen levels of this pit as unsanitary nuisances. You've recommended 2136 lost souls for special diet, remedial exercise, hospitalization— Well— I won't go through the list."

"I'll stand back of every one of those recommendations," said Doc Mellhorn. "And now we've got the chair working, we can handle most of the dental work on the spot. Only Ferguson needs more amalgam."

"I know," said the inspector patiently, "but the money has to come from somewhere— you must realize that. We're not a rich community, in spite of what people think. And these unauthorized requests— oh, we fill them, of course, but—"

"Ferguson needs more amalgam," said Doc Mellhorn. "And that last batch wasn't standard. I wouldn't use it on a dog."

"He's always needing more amalgam!" said the inspector bitterly, making a note. "Is he going to fill every tooth in Hades? By the way, my wife tells me I need a little work done myself— but we won't go into that. We'll take just one thing— your entirely unauthorized employment of Miss Smith. Miss Smith has no business working for you. She's supposed to be gnawed by a never-dying worm every Monday, Wednesday and Friday."

"Sounds silly to me," said Doc Mellhorn.

"I don't care how silly it sounds," said the inspector. "It's regulations. And, besides, she isn't even a registered nurse."

"She's a practical one," said Doc Mellhorn. "Of course, back on earth a lot of her patients died. But that was because when she didn't like a patient, she poisoned him. Well, she can't poison anybody here and I've kind of got her out

of the notion of it anyway. She's been doing A-1 work for me and I'd like to recommend her for—"

"Please!" said the inspector. "Please! And as if that wasn't enough, you've even been meddling with the staff. I've a note here on young Asmodeus—Asmodeus XIV—"

"Oh, you mean Mickey!" said Doc Mellhorn, with a chuckle. "Short for Mickey Mouse. We call him that in the clinic. And he's a young imp if I ever saw one."

"The original Asmodeus is one of our most prominent citizens," said the inspector severely. "How do you suppose he felt when we got your report that his fourteenth great-grandson had rickets?"

"Well," said Doc Mellhorn, "I know rickets. And he had 'em. And you're going to have rickets in these youngsters as long as you keep feeding 'em low-grade coke. I put Mickey on the best Pennsylvania anthracite, and look at him now!"

"I admit the success of your treatment," said the inspector, "but, naturally— well, since then we've been deluged with demands for anthracite from as far south as Sheol. We'll have to float a new bond issue. And what will the taxpayers say?"

"He was just cutting his first horns when he came to us," said Doc Mellhorn reminiscently, "and they were coming in crooked. Now, I ask you, did you ever see a straighter pair? Of course, if I'd had cod liver oil— My gracious, you ought to have somebody here that can fill a prescription; I can't do it all."

The inspector shut his papers together with a snap. "I'm sorry, Doctor Mellhorn," he said, "but this is final. You have no right here, in the first place; no local license to practice in the second—"

"Yes, that's a little irregular," said Doc Mellhorn, "but I'm a registered member of four different medical associations— you might take that into account. And I'll take any examination that's required."

"No," said the inspector violently. "No, no, no! You can't stay here! You've got to go away! It isn't possible!"

Doc Mellhorn drew a long breath. "Well," he said, "there wasn't any work for me at the other place. And here you won't let me practice. So what's a man to do?"

The inspector was silent.

"Tell me," said Doc Mellhorn presently. "Suppose you do throw me out? What happens to Miss Smith and Paisley and the rest of them?"

"Oh, what's done is done," said the inspector impatiently, "here as well as anywhere else. We'll have to keep on with the anthracite and the rest of it.

And Hades only knows what'll happen in the future. If it's any satisfaction to you, you've started something."

"Well, I guess Smith and Ferguson between them can handle the practice," said Doc Mellhorn. "But that's got to be a promise."

"It's a promise," said the inspector.

"Then there's Mickey— I mean Asmodeus," said Doc Mellhorn. "He's a smart youngster— smart as a whip— if he is a hellion. Well, you know how a youngster gets. Well, it seems he wants to be a doctor. But I don't know what sort of training he'd get—"

"He'll get it," said the inspector feverishly. "We'll found the finest medical college you ever saw, right here in West Baal. We'll build a hospital that'll knock your eye out. You'll be satisfied. But now, if you don't mind—"

"All right," said Doc Mellhorn, and rose.

The inspector looked surprised. "But don't you want to— " he said. "I mean my instructions are we're to give you a banquet, if necessary— after all, the community appreciates— "

"Thanks," said Doc Mellhorn, with a shudder, "but if I've got to go, I'd rather get out of town. You hang around and announce your retirement, and pretty soon folks start thinking they ought to give you a testimonial. And I never did like testimonials."

All the same, before he left he took a silver half dollar out of Mickey Asmodeus' chin.

When he was back on the road again and the lights of the gates had faded into a low ruddy glow behind him, Doc Mellhorn felt alone for the first time. He'd been lonely at times during his life, but he'd never felt alone like this before. Because, as far as he could see, there was only him and Lizzie now.

"Now, maybe if I'd talked to Aesculapius— " he said. "But pshaw, I always was pigheaded."

He didn't pay much attention to the way he was driving and it seemed to him that the road wasn't quite the same. But he felt tired for a wonder— bone-tired and beaten— and he didn't much care about the road. He hadn't felt tired since he left earth, but now the loneliness tired him.

"Active— always been active," he said to himself. "I can't just lay down on the job. But what's a man to do?"

"What's a man to do?" he said. "I'm a doctor. I can't work miracles."

Then the black fit came over him and he remembered all the times he'd been wrong and all the people he couldn't do anything for. "Never was much of a doctor, I guess," he said. "Maybe, if I'd gone to Vienna. Well, the right kind of man would have gone. And about that Bigelow kid," he said. "How was I to know he'd hemorrhage? But I should have known.

"I've diagnosed walking typhoid as appendicitis. Just the once, but that's enough. And I still don't know what held me back when I was all ready to operate. I used to wake up in a sweat, six months afterward, thinking I had.

"I could have saved those premature twins, if I'd known as much then as I do now. I guess that guy Dafoe would have done it anyway— look at what he had to work with. But I didn't. And that finished the Gorhams' having children. That's a dandy doctor, isn't it? Makes you feel fine.

"I could have pulled Old Man Halsey through. And Edna Biggs. And the little Lauriat girl. No, I couldn't have done it with her. That was before insulin. I couldn't have cured Ted Allen. No, I'm clear on that. But I've never been satisfied about the Collins woman. Bates is all right— good as they come. But I knew her, inside and out— ought to, too— she was the biggest nuisance that ever came into the office. And if I hadn't been down with the flu...

"Then there's the flu epidemic. I didn't take my clothes off, four days and nights. But what's the good of that, when you lose them? Oh, sure, the statistics looked good. You can have the statistics.

"Should have started raising hell about the water supply two years before I did.

"Oh, yes, it makes you feel fine, pulling babies into the world. Makes you feel you're doing something. And just fine when you see a few of them, twenty-thirty years later, not worth two toots on a cow's horn. Can't say I ever delivered a Dillinger. But there's one or two in state's prison. And more that ought to be. Don't mind even that so much as a few of the fools. Makes you wonder.

"And then, there's incurable cancer. That's a daisy. What can you do about it, Doctor? Well, Doctor, we can alleviate the pain in the last stages. Some. Ever been in a cancer ward, Doctor? Yes, Doctor, I have.

"What do you do for the common cold, Doctor? Two dozen clean linen handkerchiefs. Yes, it's a good joke— I'll laugh. And what do you do for a boy when you know he's dying, Doctor? Take a silver half dollar out of his ear. But it kept the Lane kid quiet and his fever went down that night. I took the credit, but I don't know why it went down.

"I've only got one brain. And one pair of hands.

"I could have saved. I could have done. I could have.

"Guess it's just as well you can't live forever. You make fewer mistakes. And sometimes I'd see Bates looking at me as if he wondered why I ever thought I could practice.

"Pigheaded, opinionated, ineffective old imbecile! And yet, Lord, Lord, I'd do it all over again."

He lifted his eyes from the pattern of the road in front of him. There were white markers on it now and Lizzie seemed to be bouncing down a residential street. There were trees in the street and it reminded him of town. He rubbed his eyes for a second and Lizzie rolled on by herself— she often did. It didn't seem strange to him to stop at the right house.

"Well, Mother," he said rather gruffly to the group on the lawn. "Well, Dad.... Well, Uncle Frank." He beheld a small, stern figure advancing, hands outstretched. "Well, Grandma," he said meekly.

Later on he was walking up and down in the grape arbor with Uncle Frank. Now and then he picked a grape and ate it. They'd always been good grapes, those Catawbas, as he remembered them.

"What beats me," he said, not for the first time, "is why I didn't notice the Gates. The second time, I mean."

"Oh, that Gate," said Uncle Frank, with the easy, unctuous roll in his voice that Doc Mellhorn so well remembered. He smoothed his handle-bar mustaches. "That Gate, my dear Edward— well, of course it has to be there in the first place. Literature, you know. And then, it's a choice," he said richly.

"I'll draw cards," said Doc Mellhorn. He ate another grape.

"Fact is," said Uncle Frank, "that Gate's for one kind of person. You pass it and then you can rest for all eternity. Just fold your hands. It suits some."

"I can see that it would," said Doc Mellhorn.

"Yes," said Uncle Frank, "but it wouldn't suit a Mellhorn. I'm happy to say that very few of our family remain permanently on that side. I spent some time there myself." He said, rather self-consciously. "Well, my last years had been somewhat stormy. So few people cared for refined impersonations of our feathered songsters, including lightning sketches. I felt that I'd earned a rest. But after a while— well, I got tired of being at liberty."

"And what happens when you get tired?" said Doc Mellhorn.

"You find out what you want to do," said Uncle Frank.

"My kind of work?" said Doc Mellhorn.

"Your kind of work," said his uncle. "Been busy, haven't you?"

"Well," said Doc Mellhorn. "But here. If there isn't so much as a case of mumps in—"

"Would it have to be mumps?" said his uncle. "Of course, if you're aching for mumps, I guess it could be arranged. But how many new souls do you suppose we get here a day?"

"Sizable lot, I expect."

"And how many of them get here in first-class condition?" said Uncle Frank triumphantly. "Why, I've seen Doctor Rush— Benjamin Rush— come back so

tired from a day's round he could hardly flap one pinion against the other. Oh, if it's work you want— And then, of course, there's the earth."

"Hold on," said Doc Mellhorn. "I'm not going to appear to any young intern in wings and a harp. Not at my time of life. And anyway, he'd laugh himself sick."

" 'Tain't that," said Uncle Frank. "Look here. You've left children and grandchildren behind you, haven't you? And they're going on?"

"Yes," said Doc Mellhorn.

"Same with what you did," said Uncle Frank. "I mean the inside part of it— that stays. I don't mean any funny business— voices in your ear and all that. But haven't you ever got clean tuckered out, and been able to draw on something you didn't know was there?"

"Pshaw, any man's done that," said Doc Mellhorn. "But you take the adrenal—"

"Take anything you like," said Uncle Frank placidly. "I'm not going to argue with you. Not my department. But you'll find it isn't all adrenalin. Like it here?" he said abruptly. "Feel satisfied?"

"Why, yes," said Doc Mellhorn surprisedly, "I do." He looked around the grape arbor and suddenly realized that he felt happy.

"No, they wouldn't all arrive in first-class shape," he said to himself. "So there'd be a place." He turned to Uncle Frank. "By the way," he said diffidently, "I mean, I got back so quick— there wouldn't be a chance of my visiting the other establishment now and then? Where I just came from? Smith and Ferguson are all right, but I'd like to keep in touch."

"Well," said Uncle Frank, "you can take that up with the delegation." He arranged the handkerchief in his breast pocket. "They ought to be along any minute now," he said. "Sister's been in a stew about it all day. She says there won't be enough chairs, but she always says that."

"Delegation?" said Doc Mellhorn. "But—"

"You don't realize," said Uncle Frank, with his rich chuckle. "You're a famous man. You've broken pretty near every regulation except the fire laws, and refused the Gate first crack. They've got to do something about it."

"But—" said Doc Mellhorn, looking wildly around for a place of escape.

"Sh-h!" hissed Uncle Frank. "Hold up your head and look as though money were bid for you. It won't take long— just a welcome." He shaded his eyes with his hand. "My," he said with frank admiration, "you've certainly brought them out. There's Rush, by the way."

"Where?" said Doc Mellhorn.

"Second from the left, third row, in a wig," said Uncle Frank. "And there's— "

Then he stopped, and stepped aside. A tall grave figure was advancing down the grape arbor— a bearded man with a wise, majestic face who wore robes as if they belonged to him, not as Doc Mellhorn had seen them worn in college commencements. There was a small fillet of gold about his head and in his left hand. Doc Mellhorn noticed without astonishment, was a winged staff entwined with two fangless serpents. Behind him were many others. Doc Mellhorn stood straighter.

The bearded figure stopped in front of Doc Mellhorn. "Welcome, Brother," said Aesculapius.

"It's an honor to meet you, Doctor," said Doc Mellhorn. He shook the outstretched hand. Then he took a silver half dollar from the mouth of the left-hand snake.

18: Barber Shop Adventure

O. Henry

William Sydney Porter, 1862-1910

Mail (Adelaide) 30 Dec 1939

"THE young lady leaned back in the chair and closed her eyes.

"I dipped my brush in the lather and ran it across her upper lip. As soon as I did so she sprang to her feet, her eyes flashing with rage.

" 'How dare you insult me!' she stormed, looking as if she would like to eat me up. 'Leave the house, immediately,' she went on.

"I was dumbfounded. I thought perhaps she was a trifle flighty, so I put up my utensils and started for the door. When I got there, I recovered my presence of mind enough to say: 'Miss, I am sure I have done nothing to offend you. I always try to act a gentleman whenever it is convenient. In what way have I insulted you?'

" 'Take your departure.' she said angrily. 'I guess I know when a man kisses me.'

"And so I left. Now, what do you think of that?" asked the barber, as he pushed about an ounce of soap into the postman's mouth with his thumb.

"I think that's a pretty tough story to believe," said the postman summoning up his courage.

The barber stopped shaving and bent a gaze of such malignant and cool ferocity upon his victim that the postman hastened to say:

"But no doubt it occurred as you have stated."

"It did," said the barber. "I don't ask you to take my word for it. I can prove it. Do you see that blue mug on the shelf, the third from the right? Well, that's the mug I carried with me that day. I guess you'll believe it now.

"SPEAKING of bald heads." went on the barber, although no one had said a word about bald heads, "reminds me of how a man worked a game on me once right here in Houston. A man came into my shop one day last fall and had a shave. His head was as bald and smooth as a tea cup. All the tonics in the world couldn't have started one hair growing there. The man was a stranger to me, but said he ran a truck garden out on the edge of town. He came in about three times and got shaved and then he struck me to fix him up something to make his hair grow."

The barber here reached back upon a shelf and got a strip of sticking plaster. Then he cut a gash along the postman's chin and stuck the plaster over it.

"When a man asks for a hair tonic," continued the barber, "in a barber shop he always gets it. You can fix up a mixture that a man may use on his head for a

long time before he finds it is doing him no good. In the meantime he continues to shave in your shop.

"I told my customer that I had invented a hair tonic that if its use were persisted in would certainly cause the hair to grow on the smoothest head. I sat down and wrote him out a formula and told him to have it prepared at a drug store and not to give away the information, as I intended after a while to have it patented and sell it on a large scale. The recipe contained a lot of harmless stuff, some salts of tartar, oil of almonds, bay rum, rose water, tincture of myrrh, and some other ingredients. I wrote them down at random just as they came into my head, and half an hour afterwards I couldn't have told what it was composed of my-self. The man took it, paid me a dollar for the formula and went off to get it filled at the drug store.

"He came back twice that week to get shaved, and he said he was using it faithfully. Then he didn't come any more for about two weeks. He dropped in one afternoon and hung his hat up, and it nearly knocked me down when I saw that the finest kind of a suit of hair had started on his head. It was growing splendidly, and only two weeks before his head had been as bald as a door knob.

"HE said he was awfully pleased with my tonic, and well he might be. While I was shaving him I tried to think what the ingredients were that I had written down for him to use, but I couldn't remember the quantities or half the things I had used. I knew that I had accidentally struck upon a tonic that would make the hair grow, and I knew furthermore that the formula was worth a million dollars to any man if it would do the work. Making hair grow on bald heads, if it could be done, would be better than any gold mine ever worked. I made up my mind to have that for-mula. When he was about to start away I said carelessly:

" 'By the way, Mr. Plunket, I have mislaid my memorandum book that has the formula of my tonic in it and I want to have a bottle or two prepared this morning. If you have the one I gave you I'd like to make a copy of it while you are here.'

"I must have looked too anxious, for he looked at me for a few minutes and then broke out into a laugh.

" 'By Jiminy,' he said. 'I don't believe you've got a copy of it anywheres. I believe you just happened to hit on the right thing and you don't remember what it was. I ain't half as green as I look. That hairgrower is worth a fortune, and a big one, too. I think I'll just keep my recipe and get somebody to put the stuff up and sell it.'

"He started out, and I called him into the back room and talked to him half an hour.

"I finally made a trade with him and bought the formula back for 250 dollars cash. I went up to the bank and got the money which I had there saving up to build a house. He then gave me back the recipe I had given him and signed a paper relinquishing all rights to it. He also agreed to sign a testi-monial about the stuff having made his hair grow out in two weeks."

THE barber began to look gloomy and ran his fingers inside the postman's shirt collar, tearing out the bottom hole, and the collar button flew out the door across the sidewalk into the gutter.

"I went to work next day," said the barber, "and filed application at Washington for a patent on my tonic and arranged with a big drug firm in Houston to put it on the market for me. I had a million dollars in sight. I fixed up a room where I mixed the tonic— for I wouldn't let the druggists or any body else know what was in it— and then the druggists bottled and labelled it.

"I quit working in the shop and put all my time into my tonic.

"Mr. Plunket came into the shop once or twice within the next two weeks and his hair was still growing finely. Pretty soon I had about 200 dollars worth of tonic ready for the market, and Mr. Plunket was to come in town on Saturday and give me his testimonial to print on advertising dodgers and circulars with which I was going to flood the coun-try. "I was waiting in the room where I mixed my tonic about 11 o'clock Saturday when the door opened and Mr. Plunket came in. He was very much excited and very angry.

" 'Look here," he cried, 'what's the matter with your infernal stuff?'

"He pulled off his hat, and his head was as shiny and bare as a china egg.

" 'It all came out," he said roughly. It was growing all right until yes-terday morning, when it commenced to fall out, and this morning there wasn't a hair left.'

"I examined his head and there wasn't the ghost of a hair to be found anywhere.

" 'What's the good of your stuff,' he asked angrily, 'if it makes your hair grow and then all fall out again?'

" 'For heaven's sake, Mr. Plunket,' I said, 'don't say anything about it or you'll ruin me. I've got every cent I've got in the world invested in this hair tonic, and I've got to get my money back. It made your hair grow, give me the testimony and let me sell what I've got put up, anyway. You are 250 dollars ahead on it, and you ought to help me out of it.'

HE was very mad and cut up quite roughly and said he had been swindled and would expose the tonic as a fraud and a lot of things like that. Finally he agreed that if I would pay him 100 dollars more he would give me the testimonial to the effect that the tonic made his hair grow and say nothing about its having fallen out again. If I could sell what I had put up at one dollar per bottle I would come out about even.

"I went out and borrowed the money and paid it to him and he signed the testimonial and left."

"Did you sell your tonic out?" asked the postman, trying to speak in a tone calculated to give offence. The barber gave him a look of derisive contempt and then said in a tone of utmost sarcasm:

"Oh, yes. I sold it out. I sold exactly five bottles, and the purchasers, after using the mixture faithfully for a month came back and demanded their money. Not one of them that used it ever had a new hair to start on his head."

"How do you account for its having made the hair grow on Mr. Plunket's head?" asked the postman.

"How do I account for it?" repeated the barber in so dangerous a tone that the postman shuddered. "How do I account for it? I'll tell you how I account for it. I went out one day to where Mr. Plunket lived on the edge of the town and asked for him.

"Which Mr. Plunket?' asked a man who came out to the gate. ''Come off.' I said, 'the Plunket that iives here.'

" 'They've both moved.' said the man.

" 'What do you mean by 'both?' I said, and then I began to think, and I said to the man:

" 'What kind of looking men were the Plunkets?''

" 'As much alike as two peas,' said the man. 'They were twins, and no body could tell 'em apart from their faces or their talk. The only differ-ence between 'em was that one of 'em was as bald-headed as a hen egg and the other had plenty of hair.'

"Now." said the barber as he poured about 2 oz. of bay rum down the postman's shirt front, "that's how I account for it. The bald headed Plunket would come in my shop one time and the one with hair would come in another, and I never knew the difference."

When the barber finished the postman saw the African with the whisk broom waiting for him near the front door, so he fled by the back entrance, climbed a brick wall, and escaped by a side street.

———————

19: Foolproof!

Anonymous

Port Lincoln Times (S. Aust) 7 Dec 1934

IT WAS Matt Harker's brainwave. Matt, having matriculated with considerable honors out of the Chicago School for Crookery, believed in brain rather than brawn. Especially one brain. His own.

He wasn't the son to play second fiddle. A man of Matt's professional standing could scarcely be expected to do anything less dignified than wave, so to speak, a conductor's baton. He'd insisted on that, in effect, when he linked up with us on the Continent. Because we'd been so glad to have him join us, we hadn't disputed his leadership. And the results, so far, had been quite satisfactory, if not too brilliant. But this latest idea promised put us all on velvet, for quite a long time.

We'd arrived at the hydro by the merest accident a couple of days before, something having gone wrong with our car. We put up for the night. Then— at Matt's suggestion— we stayed on. For after dinner on the first evening, it was quite clear to all of us that something had to by done about the place and the people.

The hydro, originally an old priory, was a tall, squarish, compact building, standing in its own grounds on a height at the back of Seahaven, and some way out of the town. Anything might happen there in the middle of the night without the neighborhood knowing anything about it. There just wasn't a neighborhood.

And the guests were an unusually choice lot for our purpose. Mostly bits of Old Mayfair, with some retired Stock Exchange, stage, and Divorce Court relics thrown in. All elderly people still trying to be young. There they were, the dear old things, positively asking for trouble. The way they made you feel how nice it was to have plenty of money, and not care if it rained jewellers' shops, was enough to make your mouth water.

There was one dame I noticed in particular so hung about with diamonds that when she was walking with her husband on the terrace in the dark she looked like a lighthouse on the move. The women were all pretty decorative that way; and the men mostly carried good bulging wallets when they went to the bar.

Manna from heaven, as Matt put it. The only remaining question to answer was how that manna was to be collected.

'Getting out of here with the swag isn't going to be too easy,' said big Tom Martin.

'Easy as kissing your hand!' shrugged Matt.

'That's what the manager here was trying to do with mine last evening!' laughed Saidie. 'And I let him, because I was trying to wheedle one or two things out of him that might oe useful to know.'

'So I guessed, sister!' nodded Matt approvingly. 'The more you cultivate the manager the better for us. I was glad to see you on the job. Did he tell you anything useful?'

'Ask yourself, Matt! It seems they've a most ingenious system of burglar-alarms here, and he went to the trouble of showing me just how it worked.'

'Waste of good time!' Matt surprised us by saying tersely.

'How's that?'

Big Tom Martin was sweet on Saidie and didn't like having Matt belittle anything she'd done, so he snapped out the question a bit angrily.

'Just because burglar-alarms aren't going to bother us when we clean up here,' said Matt. 'That's where the waste of time comes in, troubling about them. And that's where these hydro people have made their mistake. So busy thinking about catching burglars, they've been, that they've paid no attention to what's even more likely to happen at any minute.'

'What's that?' demanded Tom.

'Fire!' Matt looked round at us, with a little smile. 'Maybe you haven't noticed there isn't an extinguisher in the whole building. I've been making inquiries. If there was a fire at this hydro they'd have to look for help from the town brigade,! half an hour away, and slow-motion at that.

'Fire?' Try as I might, I couldn't see the least connection. 'What's that to do with what we're discussing, Matt?'

'We're going to provide one, brother,' he said. 'And that fire's going to be the open sesame to this choice little Aladdin's cave of ours.'

For a minute we thought he'd taken leave of his senses. Then he begin to explain. He knew just the right chemicals to make that hydro look like Dante's Inferno without doing any real harm. Meantime, under cover of it, we were to get busy with good effect. As Matt argued, people on the look-out for a fire engine wouldn't have time or sense to realise they were merely being robbed, till it was too late for them to do more than complain. The very daring of the plan seemed to make its success as good as certain.

Matt, however, wasn't having that success anything but definitely certain.

'This thing's got to be absolutely foolproof!' he insisted time and again, till the saying got on niy nerves.

Each of us had his— or her— special tasks to carry out, both before and after the curtain went up, so to speak. Saidie had to still further beguile the infatuated manager. One of my jobs was to find out at what hours the police came round the hydro way at nights, so that we could fix our zero hour by contrary. Everything, in short, was done to ensure that the machinery should be well oiled at ths word 'go.'

Meantime, we had made ourselves so popular with our intended victims that they simply fed from our hands. Consequently, when the evening of the show arrived, they hailed with the greatest enthusiasm Matt's proposal to organise a species of 'treasure hunt.' It provided a sort of dress rehearsal for us, gave us an excuse for a complete survey of the bedrooms, which would be useful later when the real treasure hunt began.

The evening finished fairly late, and both guests and staff went to bed happy and sleepy, because there'd been a good deal of drink about— the hydro had a club licence— and we'd all of us seen to it that everybody had had plenty. Especially the hydro manager, whom Saidie had conjured with dope and kisses into a deep and lasting sleep in his private room behind the office, the keys of which she had also conjured out of him so that Matt could go through it for any available cash.

'And now to it, folks!' Matt chuckled, when two o'clock struck. Everything was ready— the chemicals were hidden about the place awaiting to be fired, and the telephone wired had all been cut, so that, whatever happened, the hydro was safe from outside help till we'd got clear.

It was the easiest walk-over imaginable. In spite of Matt's assurance, l'd all along been doubtful if these peopie would fall for things quite so swiftly as he had believed. He'd made no mistake at all, however. Of course, the acrid stench of burning from the chemicals, with glimpses of yellow-and-red flame flickering and dancing here and there amid the dense clouds of stifling smoke, made them more or less helpless with fright. As we hurried round the rooms, waking them quietly and hurrying them downstairs as fast as possible, they were like sheep being led to the slaughter. They were so eager to get downstairs to safety that they scarcely even waited to put on anything over their night clothes. And a pretty sight they looked in the smoke-fogged electric light— a dithering procession of nightshirts and pyjamas, bald heads and hair-curlers!

Downstairs Matt was waiting for them, pacifying them, kidding them that the brigade was already on its way from the town. The fire wasn't really very bad, he assured them, and pretended that the manager, and the staff were busy keeping it under control till the engine came.

In the dense smoke they could see nothing, and they just took his word for it. Finally they were shepherded into the trap Matt had already for them, and he locked the ball-room door behind the last of them. They were safe there—there was no other way out. It took us a very short time to ransack those unoccupied bedrounisr each of us tackling a prearranged floor and bringing down our swag to the office which Matt had cleared out of cash.

We found him waiting for us, with a small open suitcase standing on the table to receive our spoils.

'Could you beat it for a slick piece of work?' he was chuckling, when Saidie joined us. She had been getting the car ready, and looked anxious.

'There's a car-load of people on the lower raad,' she told us breathlessly. 'They look to me like cops, and they're staring up at the hydro as if they guess something's wrong. The lights are all on, you know?'

We piled into the car, and got away by the upper gate on to the higher road just in the nick of time, running the car without lights at first, so as not to be seen. For we could see through the trees, looking back, the car Saidie had mentioned, driving in through the lower gate and making fast for the hydro. The people in it certainly did look like police.

But that didn't worry us at all. We knew we'd be beyond all possibility of pursuit before they could even begin to try to trace us. We slipped into London just as dawn was breaking, along with a stream of vegetable and milk lorries, and made for the quiet little West End mews where our car was garaged in town, with the flat above which belonged to Matt.

'Say,' he laughed, as we got out, feeling cramped after the long drive and glad to stretch our legs, 'If we just haven't put it over those hydro folk well and good I don't know anything! We should have come away with enough to keep us in clover for months to come! Let's have that case of loot upstairs in the flat, boys! We'll give it the once over and work out what it's worth!'

In the dim morning light of the garage Tom began searching among the baggage in the back of the car put there during the evening all in readiness. He peered out suddenly, looked puzzled.

'Where did you put that case, Matt?' he demanded, anxiety in his eyes. 'Is it in the front with you?'

Matt was staring at him puzzled. 'I? I've got no darned case in front! What are you getting at? Last time I saw that case it was on the office table in that hydro, with you guys putting the swag in it. You aren't going to tell me, Tom, that case isn't—?'

He made a headlong dive towards the car, as did the rest of us, pulling out every bit of baggage till nothing was left to pull out. And then the truth

dawned on us all at the same moment. Matt's brainwave had come to worse than nothing.

We hadn't, after all, cleaned out that hydro. Nobody had been told off to carry that case of swag from the office table to the car. Consequently it had stayed behind on the table, while we—

Foolproof? I ask you!

———————

20: The Gold Brick

Brand Whitlock

1869-1934

The American Magazine Nov 1908

TEN thousand dollars a year! Neil Kittrell left the office of the Morning *Telegraph* in a daze. He was insensible of the raw February air, heedless of sloppy pavements; the gray day had suddenly turned gold. He could not realize it all at once; ten thousand a year— for him and Edith! His heart swelled with love of Edith; she had sacrificed so much to become the wife of a man who had tried to make an artist of himself, and of whom fate, or economic determinism, or something, had made a cartoonist. What a surprise for her! He must hurry home.

In this swelling of his heart he felt a love not only of Edith but of the whole world. The people he met seemed dear to him; he felt friendly with every one, and beamed on perfect strangers with broad, cheerful smiles. He stopped to buy some flowers for Edith— daffodils, or tulips, which promised spring, and he took the daffodils, because the girl said:

"I think yellow is such a spirituelle color, don't you?" and inclined her head in a most artistic manner.

But daffodils, after all, which would have been much the day before, seemed insufficient in the light of new prosperity, and Kittrell bought a large azalea, beautiful in its graceful spread of pink blooms.

"Where shall I send it?" asked the girl, whose cheeks were as pink as azaleas themselves.

"I think I'll call a cab and take it to her myself," said Kittrell.

And she sighed over the romance of this rich young gentleman and the girl of the azalea, who, no doubt, was as beautiful as the young woman who was playing *Lottie, the Poor Saleslady* at the Lyceum that very week.

Kittrell and the azalea bowled along Claybourne Avenue; he leaned back on the cushions, and adopted the expression of ennui appropriate to that thoroughfare. Would Edith now prefer Claybourne Avenue? With ten thousand a year they could, perhaps— and yet, at first it would be best not to put on airs, but to go right on as they were, in the flat. Then the thought came to him that now, as the cartoonist on the *Telegraph*, his name would become as well known in Claybourne Avenue as it had been in the homes of the poor and humble during his years on the *Post*. And his thoughts flew to those homes where tired men at evening looked for his cartoons and children laughed at his funny pictures. It gave him a pang; he had felt a subtle bond between himself and all those thousands who read the *Post*. It was hard to leave them. The *Post* might be yellow, but, as the girl had said, yellow was a spiritual color, and the

Post brought something into their lives— lives that were scorned by the *Telegraph* and by these people on the avenue. Could he make new friends here, where the cartoons he drew and the *Post* that printed them had been contemned, if not despised? His mind flew back to the dingy office of the *Post*; to the boys there, the whole good-natured, happy-go-lucky gang; and to Hardy— ah, Hardy!— who had been so good to him, and given him his big chance, had taken such pains and interest, helping him with ideas and suggestions, criticism and sympathy. To tell Hardy that he was going to leave him, here on the eve of the campaign— and Clayton, the mayor, he would have to tell him, too— oh, the devil! Why must he think of these things now?

After all, when he had reached home, and had run up-stairs with the news and the azalea, Edith did not seem delighted.

"But, dearie, business is business," he argued, "and we need the money!"

"Yes, I know; doubtless you're right. Only please don't say 'business is business;' it isn't like you, and—"

"But think what it will mean— ten thousand a year!"

"Oh, Neil, I've lived on ten thousand a year before, and I never had half the fun that I had when we were getting along on twelve hundred."

"Yes, but then we were always dreaming of the day when I'd make a lot; we lived on that hope, didn't we?"

Edith laughed. "You used to say we lived on love."

"You're not serious." He turned to gaze moodily out of the window. And then she left the azalea, and perched on the flat arm of his chair.

"Dearest," she said, "I am serious. I know all this means to you. We're human, and we don't like to 'chip at crusts like Hindus,' even for the sake of youth and art. I never had illusions about love in a cottage and all that. Only, dear, I have been happy, so very happy, with you, because— well, because I was living in an atmosphere of honest purpose, honest ambition, and honest desire to do some good thing in the world. I had never known such an atmosphere before. At home, you know, father and Uncle James and the boys— well, it was all money, money, money with them, and they couldn't understand why I—"

"Could marry a poor newspaper artist! That's just the point."

She put her hand to his lips.

"Now, dear! If they couldn't understand, so much the worse for them. If they thought it meant sacrifice to me, they were mistaken. I have been happy in this little flat; only—" she leaned back and inclined her head with her eyes asquint—"only the paper in this room is atrocious; it's a typical landlord's selection— McGaw picked it out. You see what it means to be merely rich."

She was so pretty thus that he kissed her, and then she went on:

"And so, dear, if I didn't seem to be as impressed and delighted as you hoped to find me, it is because I was thinking of Mr. Hardy and the poor, dear, common little *Post*, and then— of Mr. Clayton. Did you think of him?"

"Yes."

"You'll have to— to cartoon him?"

"I suppose so."

The fact he had not allowed himself to face was close to both of them, and the subject was dropped until, just as he was going down-town— this time to break the news to Hardy— he went into the room he sarcastically said he might begin to call his studio, now that he was getting ten thousand a year, to look for a sketch he had promised Nolan for the sporting page. And there on his drawing-board was an unfinished cartoon, a drawing of the strong face of John Clayton. He had begun it a few days before to use on the occasion of Clayton's renomination. It had been a labor of love, and Kittrell suddenly realized how good it was. He had put into it all of his belief in Clayton, all of his devotion to the cause for which Clayton toiled and sacrificed, and in the simple lines he experienced the artist's ineffable felicity; he had shown how good, how noble, how true a man Clayton was. All at once he realized the sensation the cartoon would produce, how it would delight and hearten Clayton's followers, how it would please Hardy, and how it would touch Clayton. It would be a tribute to the man and the friendship, but now a tribute broken, unfinished. Kittrell gazed a moment longer, and in that moment Edith came.

"The dear, beautiful soul!" she exclaimed softly. "Neil, it is wonderful. It is not a cartoon; it is a portrait. It shows what you might do with a brush."

Kittrell could not speak, and he turned the drawing-board to the wall.

When he had gone, Edith sat and thought— of Neil, of the new position, of Clayton. He had loved Neil, and been so proud of his work; he had shown a frank, naïve pleasure in the cartoons Neil had made of him. That last time he was there, thought Edith, he had said that without Neil the "good old cause," as he called it, using Whitman's phrase, could never have triumphed in that town. And now, would he come again? Would he ever stand in that room and, with his big, hearty laugh, clasp an arm around Neil's shoulder, or speak of her in his good, friendly way as "the little woman?" Would he come now, in the terrible days of the approaching campaign, for rest and sympathy— come as he used to come in other campaigns, worn and weary from all the brutal opposition, the vilification and abuse and mud-slinging? She closed her eyes. She could not think that far.

Kittrell found the task of telling Hardy just as difficult as he expected it to be, but by some mercy it did not last long. Explanation had not been necessary;

he had only to make the first hesitating approaches, and Hardy understood. Hardy was, in a way, hurt; Kittrell saw that, and rushed to his own defense:

"I hate to go, old man. I don't like it a little bit— but, you know, business is business, and we need the money."

He even tried to laugh as he advanced this last conclusive reason, and Hardy, for all he showed in voice or phrase, may have agreed with him.

"It's all right, Kit," he said. "I'm sorry; I wish we could pay you more, but— well, good luck."

That was all. Kittrell gathered up the few articles he had at the office, gave Nolan his sketch, bade the boys good-by— bade them good-by as if he were going on a long journey, never to see them more— and then he went.

After he had made the break it did not seem so bad as he had anticipated. At first things went on smoothly enough. The campaign had not opened, and he was free to exercise his talents outside the political field. He drew cartoons dealing with banal subjects, touching with the gentle satire of his humorous pencil foibles which all the world agreed about, and let vital questions alone. And he and Edith enjoyed themselves: indulged oftener in things they loved; went more frequently to the theater; appeared at recitals; dined now and then down-town. They began to realize certain luxuries they had not known for a long time— some he himself had never known, some that Edith had not known since she left her father's home to become his bride. In more subtle ways, too, Kittrell felt the change: there was a sense of larger leisure; the future beamed with a broader and brighter light; he formed plans, among which the old dream of going ere long to Paris for serious study took its dignified place. And then there was the sensation his change had created in the newspaper world; that the cartoons signed "Kit," which formerly appeared in the *Post*, should now adorn the broad page of the *Telegraph* was a thing to talk about at the press club; the fact of his large salary got abroad in that little world as well, and, after the way of that world, managed to exaggerate itself, as most facts did. He began to be sensible of attentions from men of prominence— small things, mere nods in the street, perhaps, or smiles in the theater foyer, but enough to show that they recognized him. What those children of the people, those working-men and women who used to be his unknown and admiring friends in the old days on the *Post*, thought of him— whether they missed him, whether they deplored his change as an apostasy or applauded it as a promotion— he did not know. He did not like to think about it.

But March came, and the politicians began to bluster like the season. Late one afternoon he was on his way to the office with a cartoon, the first in which he had seriously to attack Clayton. Benson, the managing editor of the *Telegraph*, had conceived it, and Kittrell had worked on it that day in sickness

of heart. Every lying line of this new presentation of Clayton had cut him like some biting acid; but he had worked on, trying to reassure himself with the argument that he was a mere agent, devoid of personal responsibility. But it had been hard, and when Edith, after her custom, had asked to see it, he had said:

"Oh, you don't want to see it; it's no good."

"Is it of— him?" she had asked.

And when he nodded she had gone away without another word. Now, as he hurried through the crowded streets, he was conscious that it was no good, indeed; and he was divided between the artist's regret and the friend's joy in the fact. But it made him tremble. Was his hand to forget its cunning? And then, suddenly, he heard a familiar voice, and there beside him, with his hand on his shoulder, stood the mayor.

"Why, Neil, my boy, how are you?" he said, and he took Kittrell's hand as warmly as ever. For a moment Kittrell was relieved, and then his heart sank; for he had a quick realization that it was the coward within him that felt the relief, and the man the sickness. If Clayton had reproached him, or cut him, it would have made it easier; but Clayton did none of these things, and Kittrell was irresistibly drawn to the subject himself.

"You heard of my— new job?" he asked.

"Yes," said Clayton, "I heard."

"Well—" Kittrell began.

"I'm sorry," Clayton said.

"So was I," Kittrell hastened to say. "But I felt it— well, a duty, some way— to Edith. You know— we— need the money." And he gave the cynical laugh that went with the argument.

"What does *she* think? Does she feel that way about it?"

Kittrell laughed, not cynically now, but uneasily and with embarrassment, for Clayton's blue eyes were on him, those eyes that could look into men and understand them so.

"Of course you know," Kittrell went on nervously, "there is nothing personal in this. We newspaper fellows simply do what we are told; we obey orders like soldiers, you know. With the policy of the paper we have nothing to do. Just like Dick Jennings, who was a red-hot free-trader and used to write free-trade editorials for the *Times*— he went over to the *Telegraph*, you remember, and writes all those protection arguments."

The mayor did not seem to be interested in Dick Jennings, or in the ethics of his profession.

"Of course, you know I'm for you, Mr. Clayton, just exactly as I've always been. I'm going to vote for you."

This did not seem to interest the mayor, either.

"And, maybe, you know— I thought, perhaps," he snatched at this bright new idea that had come to him just in the nick of time, "that I might help you by my cartoons in the *Telegraph*; that is, I might keep them from being as bad as they might—"

"But that wouldn't be dealing fairly with your new employers, Neil," the mayor said.

Kittrell was making more and more a mess of this whole miserable business, and he was basely glad when they reached the corner.

"Well, good-by, my boy," said the mayor, as they parted. "Remember me to the little woman."

Kittrell watched him as he went on down the avenue, swinging along in his free way, the broad felt hat he wore riding above all the other hats in the throng that filled the sidewalk; and Kittrell sighed in deep depression.

When he turned in his cartoon, Benson scanned it a moment, cocked his head this side and that, puffed his brier pipe, and finally said:

"I'm afraid this is hardly up to you. This figure of Clayton, here— it hasn't got the stuff in it. You want to show him as he *is*. We want the people to know what a four-flushing, hypocritical, demagogical blatherskite he is— with all his rot about the people and their damned rights!"

Benson was all unconscious of the inconsistency of having concern for a people he so despised, and Kittrell did not observe it, either. He was on the point of defending Clayton, but he restrained himself and listened to Benson's suggestions. He remained at the office for two hours, trying to change the cartoon to Benson's satisfaction, with a growing hatred of the work and a disgust with himself that now and then almost drove him to mad destruction. He felt like splashing the piece with India ink, or ripping it with his knife. But he worked on, and submitted it again. He had failed, of course; failed to express in it that hatred of a class which Benson unconsciously disguised as a hatred of Clayton, a hatred which Kittrell could not express because he did not feel it; and he failed because art deserts her devotees when they are false to truth.

"Well, it'll have to do," said Benson, as he looked it over; "but let's have a little more to the next one. Damn it! I wish I could draw. I'd cartoon the crook!"

In default of which ability, Benson set himself to write one of those savage editorials in which he poured out on Clayton that venom of which he seemed to have such an inexhaustible supply.

But on one point Benson was right: Kittrell was not up to himself. As the campaign opened, as the city was swept with the excitement of it, with meetings at noon-day and at night, office-seekers flying about in automobiles, walls covered with pictures of candidates, hand-bills scattered in the streets to

swirl in the wild March winds, and men quarreling over whether Clayton or Ellsworth should be mayor, Kittrell had to draw a political cartoon each day; and as he struggled with his work, less and less the old joy came to cheer and spur him on. To read the ridicule, the abuse, which the *Telegraph* heaped on Clayton, the distortion of facts concerning his candidature, the unfair reports of his meetings, sickened him, and more than all, he was filled with disgust as he tried to match in caricature these libels of the man he so loved and honored. It was bad enough to have to flatter Clayton's opponent, to picture him as a noble, disinterested character, ready to sacrifice himself for the public weal. Into his pictures of this man, attired in the long black coat of conventional respectability, with the smug face of pharisaism, he could get nothing but cant and hypocrisy; but in his caricatures of Clayton there was that which pained him worse— disloyalty, untruth, and now and then, to the discerning few who knew the tragedy of Kittrell's soul, there was pity. And thus his work declined in value; lacking all sincerity, all faith in itself or its purpose, it became false, uncertain, full of jarring notes, and, in short, never once rang true. As for Edith, she never discussed his work now; she spoke of the campaign little, and yet he knew she was deeply concerned, and she grew hot with resentment at the methods of the *Telegraph*. Her only consolation was derived from the Post, which, of course, supported Clayton; and the final drop of bitterness in Kittrell's cup came one evening when he realized that she was following with sympathetic interest the cartoons in that paper.

For the *Post* had a new cartoonist, Banks, a boy whom Hardy had picked up somewhere and was training to the work Kittrell had laid down. To Kittrell there was a cruel fascination in the progress Banks was making; he watched it with a critical, professional eye, at first with amusement, then with surprise, and now at last, in the discovery of Edith's interest, with a keen jealousy of which he was ashamed. The boy was crude and untrained; his work was not to be compared with Kittrell's, master of line that he was, but Kittrell saw that it had the thing his work now lacked, the vital, primal thing— sincerity, belief, love. The spark was there, and Kittrell knew how Hardy would nurse that spark and fan it, and keep it alive and burning until it should eventually blaze up in a fine white flame. And Kittrell realized, as the days went by, that Banks' work was telling, and that his own was failing. He had, from the first, missed the atmosphere of the *Post*, missed the *camaraderie* of the congenial spirits there, animated by a common purpose, inspired and led by Hardy, whom they all loved— loved as he himself once loved him, loved as he loved him still— and dare not look him in the face when they met!

He found the atmosphere of the *Telegraph* alien and distasteful. There all was different; the men had little joy in their work, little interest in it, save

perhaps the newspaper man's inborn love of a good story or a beat. They were all cynical, without loyalty or faith; they secretly made fun of the *Telegraph*, of its editors and owners; they had no belief in its cause; and its pretensions to respectability, its parade of virtue, excited only their derision. And slowly it began to dawn on Kittrell that the great moral law worked always and everywhere, even on newspapers, and that there was reflected inevitably and logically in the work of the men on that staff the hatred, the lack of principle, the bigotry and intolerance of its proprietors; and this same lack of principle tainted and made meretricious his own work, and enervated the editorials so that the *Telegraph*, no matter how carefully edited or how dignified in typographical appearance, was, nevertheless, without real influence in the community.

Meanwhile Clayton was gaining ground. It was less than two weeks before election. The campaign waxed more and more bitter, and as the forces opposed to him foresaw defeat, they became ugly in spirit, and desperate. The *Telegraph* took on a tone more menacing and brutal, and Kittrell knew that the crisis had come. The might of the powers massed against Clayton appalled Kittrell; they thundered at him through many brazen mouths, but Clayton held on his high way unperturbed. He was speaking by day and night to thousands. Such meetings he had never had before. Kittrell had visions of him before those immense audiences in halls, in tents, in the raw open air of that rude March weather, making his appeals to the heart of the great mass. A fine, splendid, romantic figure he was, striking to the imagination, this champion of the people's cause, and Kittrell longed for the lost chance. Oh, for one day on the *Post* now!

One morning at breakfast, as Edith read the *Telegraph*, Kittrell saw the tears well slowly in her brown eyes.

"Oh," she said, "it is shameful!" She clenched her little fists. "Oh, if I were only a man I'd—" She could not in her impotent feminine rage say what she would do; she could only grind her teeth. Kittrell bent his head over his plate; his coffee choked him.

"Dearest," she said presently, in another tone, "tell me, how is he? Do you— ever see him? Will he win?"

"No, I never see him. But he'll win; I wouldn't worry."

"He used to come here," she went on, "to rest a moment, to escape from all this hateful confusion and strife. He is killing himself! And they aren't worth it— those ignorant people— they aren't worth such sacrifices."

He got up from the table and turned away, and then, realizing quickly, she flew to his side and put her arms about his neck and said:

"Forgive me, dearest, I didn't mean— only—"

"Oh, Edith," he said, "this is killing me. I feel like a dog."

"Don't dear; he is big enough, and good enough; he will understand."

"Yes; that only makes it harder, only makes it hurt the more."

That afternoon, in the car, he heard no talk but of the election; and down-town, in a cigar store where he stopped for cigarettes, he heard some men talking mysteriously, in the hollow voice of rumor, of some sensation, some scandal. It alarmed him, and as he went into the office he met Manning, the *Telegraph's* political man.

"Tell me, Manning," Kittrell said, "how does it look?"

"Damn bad for us."

"For us?"

"Well, for our mob of burglars and second story workers here— the gang we represent." He took a cigarette from the box Kittrell was opening.

"And will he win?"

"Will he win?" said Manning, exhaling the words on the thin level stream of smoke that came from his lungs. "Will he win? In a walk, I tell you. He's got 'em beat to a standstill right now. That's the dope."

"But what about this story of—"

"Aw, that's all a pipe-dream of Burns'. I'm running it in the morning, but it's nothing; it's a shine. They're big fools to print it at all. But it's their last card; they're desperate. They won't stop at anything, or at any crime, except those requiring courage. Burns is in there with Benson now; so is Salton, and old man Glenn, and the rest of the bunco family. They're framing it up. When I saw old Glenn go in, with his white side whiskers, I knew the widow and the orphan were in danger again, and that he was going bravely to the front for 'em. Say, that young Banks is comin', isn't he? That's a peach, that cartoon of his to-night."

Kittrell went on down the hall to the art-room to wait until Benson should be free. But it was not long until he was sent for, and as he entered the managing editor's room he was instantly sensible of the somber atmosphere of a grave and solemn council of war. Benson introduced him to Glenn, the banker, to Salton, the party boss, and to Burns, the president of the street-car company; and as Kittrell sat down he looked about him, and could scarcely repress a smile as he recalled Manning's estimate of Glenn. The old man sat there, as solemn and unctuous as ever he had in his pew at church. Benson, red of face, was more plainly perturbed, but Salton was as reserved, as immobile, as inscrutable as ever, his narrow, pointed face, with its vulpine expression, being perhaps paler than usual. Benson had on his desk before him the cartoon Kittrell had finished that day.

"Mr. Kittrell," Benson began, "we've been talking over the political situation, and I was showing these gentlemen this cartoon. It isn't, I fear, in your best style; it lacks the force, the argument, we'd like just at this time. That isn't the *Telegraph* Clayton, Mr. Kittrell." He pointed with the amber stem of his pipe. "Not at all. Clayton is a strong, smart, unscrupulous, dangerous man! We've reached a crisis in this campaign; if we can't turn things in the next three days, we're lost, that's all; we might as well face it. To-morrow we make an important revelation concerning the character of Clayton, and we want to follow it up the morning after by a cartoon that will be a stunner, a clencher. We have discussed it here among ourselves, and this is our idea."

Benson drew a crude, bald outline, indicating the cartoon they wished Kittrell to draw. The idea was so coarse, so brutal, so revolting, that Kittrell stood aghast, and, as he stood, he was aware of Salton's little eyes fixed on him. Benson waited; they all waited.

"Well," said Benson, "what do you think of it?"

Kittrell paused an instant, and then said:

"I won't draw it; that's what I think of it."

Benson flushed angrily and looked up at him.

"We are paying you a very large salary, Mr. Kittrell, and your work, if you will pardon me, has not been up to what we were led to expect."

"You are quite right, Mr. Benson, but I can't draw that cartoon."

"Well, great God!" yelled Burns, "what have we got here— a gold brick?" He rose with a vivid sneer on his red face, plunged his hands in his pockets, and took two or three nervous strides across the room. Kittrell looked at him, and slowly his eyes blazed out of a face that had gone white on the instant.

"What did you say, sir?" he demanded.

Burns thrust his red face, with its prognathic jaw, menacingly toward Kittrell.

"I said that in you we'd got a gold brick."

"You?" said Kittrell. "What have you to do with it? I don't work for you."

"You don't? Well, I guess it's us that puts up—"

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" said Glenn, waving a white, pacificatory hand.

"Yes, let me deal with this, if you please," said Benson, looking hard at Burns. The street-car man sneered again, then, in ostentatious contempt, looked out the window. And in the stillness Benson continued:

"Mr. Kittrell, think a minute. Is your decision final?"

"It is final, Mr. Benson," said Kittrell. "And as for you, Burns," he glared angrily at the man, "I wouldn't draw that cartoon for all the dirty money that all the bribing street-car companies in the world could put into Mr. Glenn's bank here. Good evening, gentlemen."

It was not until he stood again in his own home that Kittrell felt the physical effects which the spiritual squalor of such a scene was certain to produce in a nature like his.

"Neil! What is the matter?" Edith fluttered toward him in alarm.

He sank into a chair, and for a moment he looked as if he would faint, but he looked wanly up at her and said:

"Nothing; I'm all right; just a little weak. I've gone through a sickening, horrible scene—"

"Dearest!"

"And I'm off the *Telegraph*— and a man once more!"

He bent over, with his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands, and when Edith put her calm, caressing hand on his brow, she found that it was moist from nervousness. Presently he was able to tell her the whole story.

"It was, after all, Edith, a fitting conclusion to my experience on the *Telegraph*. I suppose, though, that to people who are used to ten thousand a year such scenes are nothing at all." She saw in this trace of his old humor that he was himself again, and she hugged his head to her bosom.

"Oh, dearest," she said, "I'm proud of you— and happy again."

They were, indeed, both happy, happier than they had been in weeks.

The next morning after breakfast, she saw by his manner, by the humorous, almost comical expression about his eyes, that he had an idea. In this mood of satisfaction— this mood that comes too seldom in the artist's life— she knew it was wise to let him alone. And he lighted his pipe and went to work. She heard him now and then, singing or whistling or humming; she scented his pipe, then cigarettes; then, at last, after two hours, he called in a loud, triumphant tone:

"Oh, Edith!"

She was at the door in an instant, and, waving his hand grandly at his drawing-board, he turned to her with that expression which connotes the greatest joy gods or mortals can know— the joy of beholding one's own work and finding it good. He had, as she saw, returned to the cartoon of Clayton he had laid aside when the tempter came; and now it was finished. Its simple lines revealed Clayton's character, as the sufficient answer to all the charges the *Telegraph* might make against him. Edith leaned against the door and looked long and critically.

"It was fine before," she said presently; "it's better now. Before it was a portrait of the man; this shows his soul."

"Well, it's how he looks to me," said Neil, "after a month in which to appreciate him."

"But what," she said, stooping and peering at the edge of the drawing, where, despite much knife-scraping, vague figures appeared, "what's that?"

"Oh, I'm ashamed to tell you," he said. "I'll have to paste over that before it's electrotyped. You see, I had a notion of putting in the gang, and I drew four little figures— Benson, Burns, Salton and Glenn; they were plotting— oh, it was foolish and unworthy. I decided I didn't want anything of hatred in it— just as he wouldn't want anything of hatred in it; so I rubbed them out."

"Well, I'm glad. It is beautiful; it makes up for everything; it's an appreciation— worthy of the man."

When Kittrell entered the office of the *Post*, the boys greeted him with delight, and his presence made a sensation, for there had been rumors of the break which the absence of a "Kit" cartoon in the *Telegraph* that morning had confirmed. But, if Hardy was surprised, his surprise was swallowed up in his joy, and Kittrell was grateful to him for the delicacy with which he touched the subject that consumed the newspaper and political world with curiosity.

"I'm glad, Kit," was all that he said. "You know that."

Then he forgot everything in the cartoon, and he showed his instant recognition of its significance by snatching out his watch, pushing a button, and saying to Garland, who came to the door in his shirt-sleeves:

"Tell Nic to hold the first edition for a five-column first-page cartoon. And send this up right away."

They had a last look at it before it went, and after gazing a moment in silence Hardy said:

"It's the greatest thing you ever did, Kit, and it comes at the psychological moment. It'll elect him."

"Oh, he was elected anyhow."

Hardy shook his head, and in the movement Kittrell saw how the strain of the campaign had told on him. "No, he wasn't; the way they've been hammering him is something fierce; and the *Telegraph*— well, your cartoons and all, you know."

"But my cartoons in the *Telegraph* were rotten. Any work that is not sincere, not intellectually honest—"

Hardy interrupted him:

"Yes; but, Kit, you're so good that your rotten is better than 'most anybody's best." He smiled, and Kittrell blushed and looked away.

Hardy was right. The "Kit" cartoon, back in the *Post*, created its sensation, and after it appeared the political reporters said it had started a landslide to Clayton; that the betting was 4 to 1 and no takers, and that it was all over but the shouting.

That night, as they were at dinner, the telephone rang, and in a minute Neil knew by Edith's excited and delighted reiteration of "yes," "yes," who had called up. And then he heard her say:

"Indeed I will; I'll come every night and sit in the front seat."

When Kittrell displaced Edith at the telephone, he heard the voice of John Clayton, lower in register and somewhat husky after four weeks' speaking, but more musical than ever in Kittrell's ears when it said:

"I just told the little woman, Neil, that I didn't know how to say it, so I wanted her to thank you for me. It was beautiful in you, and I wish I were worthy of it; it was simply your own good soul expressing itself."

And it was the last delight to Kittrell to hear that voice and to know that all was well.

But one question remained unsettled. Kittrell had been on the *Telegraph* a month, and his contract differed from that ordinarily made by the members of a newspaper staff in that he was paid by the year, though in monthly instalments. Kittrell knew that he had broken his contract on grounds which the sordid law would not see or recognize and the average court think absurd, and that the *Telegraph* might legally refuse to pay him at all. He hoped the *Telegraph* would do this! But it did not; on the contrary, he received the next day a check for his month's work. He held it up for Edith's inspection.

"Of course, I'll have to send it back," he said.

"Certainly."

"Do you think me quixotic?"

"Well, we're poor enough as it is— let's have some luxuries; let's be quixotic until after election, at least."

"Sure," said Neil; "just what I was thinking. I'm going to do a cartoon every day for the *Post* until election day, and I'm not going to take a cent. I don't want to crowd Banks out, you know, and I want to do my part for Clayton and the cause, and do it, just once, for the pure love of the thing."

Those last days of the campaign were, indeed, luxuries to Kittrell and to Edith, days of work and fun and excitement. All day Kittrell worked on his cartoons, and in the evening they went to Clayton's meetings. The experience was a revelation to them both— the crowds, the waiting for the singing of the automobile's siren, the wild cheers that greeted Clayton, and then his speech, his appeals to the best there was in men. He had never made such speeches, and long afterward Edith could hear those cheers and see the faces of those working-men aglow with the hope, the passion, the fervent religion of democracy. And those days came to their glad climax that night when they met at the office of the *Post* to receive the returns, in an atmosphere quivering with excitement, with messenger boys and reporters coming and going, and in

the street outside an immense crowd, swaying and rocking between the walls on either side, with screams and shouts and mad huzzas, and the wild blowing of horns— all the hideous, happy noise an American election-night crowd can make.

Late in the evening Clayton had made his way, somehow unnoticed, through the crowd, and entered the office. He was happy in the great triumph he would not accept as personal, claiming it always for the cause; but as he dropped into the chair Hardy pushed toward him, they all saw how weary he was.

Just at that moment the roar in the street below swelled to a mighty crescendo, and Hardy cried:

"Look!"

They ran to the window. The boys up-stairs who were manipulating the stereopticon, had thrown on the screen an enormous picture of Clayton, the portrait Kittrell had drawn for his cartoon.

"Will you say now there isn't the personal note in it?" Edith asked.

Clayton glanced out the window, across the dark, surging street, at the picture.

"Oh, it's not me they're cheering for," he said; "it's for Kit, here."

"Well, perhaps some of it's for him," Edith admitted loyally.

They were silent, seized irresistibly by the emotion that mastered the mighty crowd in the dark streets below. Edith was strangely moved. Presently she could speak:

"Is there anything sweeter in life than to know that you have done a good thing— and done it well?"

"Yes," said Clayton, "just one: to have a few friends who understand."

"You are right," said Edith. "It is so with art, and it must be so with life; it makes an art of life."

It was dark enough there by the window for her to slip her hand into that of Neil, who had been musing silently on the crowd.

"I can never say again," she said softly, "that those people are not worth sacrifice. They are worth all; they are everything; they are the hope of the world; and their longings and their needs, and the possibility of bringing them to pass, are all that give significance to life."

"That's what America is for," said Clayton, "and it's worth while to be allowed to help even in a little way to make, as old Walt says, 'a nation of friends, of equals.' "

21: The Black King's Curse

Marcus Clarke

1846-1881

Adelaide Observer 9 and 16 Aug 1884

Short fiction from the author of "For the Term of His Natural Life". I can't discover if this story was ever reprinted.

"ALICK! do you hear that noise?" was cried in earnest tones to the sleeper on the other side of the hut by a man sitting erect in bed in a fixed listening attitude.

It was dark. The noise of rushing waters without drowned all other sounds.

The sleeper awoke with a start.

"Eh, what?" in a moment he was wide awake. "It's the sound of water rushing. The creek is rising. It has forked its banks. I shall see how high it is," and Thomas Clark leaped out of bed and went splashing into half a foot of water.

"Good heavens!" he cried, "we are flooded. Hear how it roars."

Tom and his chum, Alexander Black, thought they had placed their hut in a secure position, but they had never seen a wall of water come crashing down a creek, nor had they seen a dry thirsty country flooded in one short hour. They had built their little hut by the Bendigo Creek on a rising bit of ground fully twenty feet above the level of the stream. When they retired to rest shortly after sundown there was no appearance of the creek rising.

After their surprise and horror had somewhat abated they struck a light. In the first glimmer they could hardly believe their eyes. There was the water rushing and roaring through the tent as if it meant to carry it away. The first thing Black saw was the legs of his trousers, which had escaped from under the mattress where he usually placed them, waving about in the surging flood. Some of their clothes were following each other round the hut with amazing rapidity; and even the camp-oven, as if made of cork, swirled in the eddies.

Both looked in mute amazement at the state of their hut. They used to pride themselves on its neatness.

At length Alick Black said— "Tom, this cooks us, but let us save what we can."

In silence both rescued their clothes and some blankets and hung them up on the ridge-pole out of reach of the water.

The noise outside continued unabated. The roaring, hissing, dashing, and struggling of the flood, as some new impediment came in its way or as the debris of fallen trees blocked up the way for a time in its progress down the

creek, was so great that the two chums could only exchange words by shouting at each other.

Both procured sticks and sounded the depth of the water. It rose rapidly by bounds. The sticks registered ten inches. Every eddy of the angry water tipped the bottom of the beds, composed of sheets of dry bark of the gum-tree perched on pegs, and it still rose. Shivering in the cola damp air, the two men did not speak, but silently watched the rising flood and occasionally peered through the canvas screen to eaten the first streak of dawn. But no hope. If the sun rose at all he would rise behind a black, deep, impenetrable bank of clouds.

Although the sun shed no friendly beams upon the imprisoned pair daylight came, and they peered into the dispersing gloom.

The valley was now a lake, and there was no hut to be seen save old Jake Wood's. They dimly saw that on the hill-side, firm as ever, and far above the roaring torrent. As the gloom dispersed the rain ceased to fall, and the haze that enshrouded the district disappeared as if by enchantment. The clouds in the east broke, and, rolling away, helped to cheer those within the hut.

They looked towards Jake Wood's hut. He and his wife were standing at the door looking on the scene and occasionally pointing to the hut of our unfortunates.

The water ceased to rise, but it still rushed with great force and noise. Firm and deep as the posts had been fixed into the ground the hut felt shaky and might give way at any moment.

It was decided to leave at once and make for the hill, to reach which they would have to cross at least twenty feet of water, but it could not be very deep. The creek side must have been at least thirty feet deep.

Tom led the way with his clothes on his head.

Jake Woods gave a shout of pleasure when he saw them, and ran down the hill to meet them.

"The wife and I tho't you were done for," said he, with an honest tear of joy in the corner of his eye as he shook the hands of both. He had never spoken to them before; there is nothing like calamity and danger for striking up a friendship!

As they dressed themselves Jake said "She's got some coffee and tea ready for ye. You'll want it too, and warm."

The old woman could not sit still; she busied herself with this and with that, and frequently applied her apron to her face. The wet weather always so affected her, she said.

"Hoot, toot, Kate, ye greet as much as if the lads were drooned," Bald Jake. He laughed, but it was a forced one.

Tom Clark and Alexander Black rose from their breakfast completely restored. They went to the door of the hut. The sun shone brightly. The air was clear, cool, and invigorating. The noise of the creek thundered on its course. The water was subsiding rapidly— as rapidly as it rose— and the crest of the little knoll on which their hut was built became visible. The hut, however, was gone.

Four posts alone remained; one partially removed.

"It's gone," said Alick, "and all."

They looked over the wide expanse that a few days ago had been covered by several thousand busy miners. Whatever they felt they did not give utterance to disappointment or vexation. The keen air and the glorious sunshine seemed to lift them above their circumstances, and the kindness of Jake and his wife filled them with pleasant feelings; they thanked God they were not worse.

"Thank God, Tom, we have health and I have the dust. Let's go on the wallaby."

"But we won't give up the digging."

ii

THE GRANITE between Castlemaine and Bendigo kept the prospectors from advancing further north; but their enterprise and perseverance, brought to a sticking point by the number of diggers at Castlemaine and the lessening of the finds, crossed that belt of granite and came upon the low rounded hills composed of clay, cement, and rounded pebbles of white quartz, containing such rich deposits of the precious ore as were found at Bendigo Flat, Eaglehawk Gully, Adelaide Gully, and others.

That happened some time in November, 1861.

Tom Clark was among the first who entered Bendigo, and a few months later he met his old friend and schoolfellow Sandy Black. They resolved to chum together, and since they had not parted.

Tom had the spirit of a prospector. Bold, adventurous, persevering, hardy, and self-reliant, but unsettled and discontented, he had never been able to stay in one place for more than a few months, and then only under the most favourable circumstances.

Sandy Black was a bold, independent man, but his nature was largely qualified by caution; bold enough to roam when once on the wallaby path, he was quite content to remain in the one spot so long as he could earn a fair living.

A slight change in the regulations of the diggings had raised Tom's ire and made him feel discontented with Bendigo. The sore had rankled within him for some months, and every renewal of the right raised his slumbering wrath. A month after the rush to Bendigo the miner's right was raised to £3 a month, a regulation that Tom stigmatized as a mean piece of extortion.

The old tub and the cradle began to give place to the puddling machine and long-tom, from California; the two chums had contemplated getting them in place of their cradle, but since their property had been swept away they gave up the idea.

Clark had an idea of likely land further north, and strongly recommended a move in that direction. Sandy Black said it was "all one" to him.

Before noon they were facing the north, and Bendigo with its teeming mass of miners was left behind. As they proceeded, all trace of the hills disappeared, and the vast plains so familiar to the Australian traveller were just beginning to show themselves.

Looking back from the edge of this plain, the land undulated slightly, then it germinated into hillocks, and finally grew into the distant hills.

As they went on their way there was positively nothing to interest them. Their-prospect was confined, and the occasional outlook from a tree-top did not throw more light as to the nearness of the reputed hills.

On the evening of the third day they reached the Murray, which was high and running rapidly at the spot where they struck it. To cross was impossible. In making up the river for a crossing they came upon the Murrayvale Station. They were welcomed with the usual hospitality, and asked to stay overnight.. Here they learned from a station hand that the plain extended for a long distance on the other side of the Murray.

Alick would have accepted the employment offered to them by the squatter, but Tom scorned the idea. Toil like a slave for a miserable pittance when by a lucky find a fortune might be got in a few hours !

Tom again prevailed. Alick was not sanguine, but he still retained a lingering idea that gold might make his fortune. His "might" was a large one, and the dream of his youth was well nigh over.

At daybreak they, with six others, crossed the Murray in the station punt. The river was about three hundred yards wide at this spot, with a lovely fringe of willows drooping to the water's edge.

As they left the river, vegetation almost entirely ceased. Trees were seen in clumps here and there, but for miles there was no shade from the burning sun. On, on, over a dreary, trackless waste, where no grass grew—the scorching sun had months ago burnt it up— every thing hot and fiery. On the horizon, trees seemed to grow out or water, and they saw a horse which seemed galloping

on glass. The objects seen were a small distance below the horizon, and appeared above it by the refraction of the sun's rays.

Between one clump of trees and another progress seemed to be slow, and travelling of the most tiresome description. A song, now and again, from some of the party enlivened and cheered them on, but, in the main, silence and dogged resolve to go on prevailed. A humorous member of the party remarked between one of these clumps of trees that they seemed to be getting farther from.

A few emus, native companions, and plain turkeys were seen occasionally, and parrots and cockatoos were plentiful.

After travelling a distance of nearly sixty miles in a northerly direction another large river was reached, a billybong of the Murray called the Edwards. Here the majority of the party resolved to camp, and refused to stir a step further until some definite news could be got of the country still farther north.

The plains were exhausting and without shade, the want of water might be fatal, and there was little likelihood of striking a river like the Edwards. There was no chance of finding gold in such plain country, the soil being clayey, quite free from stone, and shells scattered all over it, especially by the banks of the rivers.

Tom chafed under the delay, and would have pushed on. Alick, however, wanted a halt, and urged that definite news might b got of the district further north.

Four of the six men with whom Tom and Alick now camped were evil characters. Utterly without principle they were the outcome of the state of society that then existed. In the daytime men walked warily, and at night seldom went abroad without arms. The natural sequence was a class of men familiar with the revolver and knife.

These four men had left the diggings from fear of the consequences of their crimes. Their names were Spiers, Blair, Smith, and Rettie. The other two men were reckless, but not devoid of principle.

Four weeks slipped gently away. The white men ceased to be objects of interest to the natives who had a camp several stone throws off. A few white people had settled on the north side of the river, but they could give no accurate information as to the character of the country farther north— except a belief that it was all plain. One man alone said it was plain for more than one hundred miles.

Black and Clark were walking down the south bank of the Edwards.

"Alick, I don't like these fellows," referring to their companions.

"Nor do I"

"I think we should move on and chance the country."

"I rather think we should follow the example of Harvey over there, and settle down. I'm tired of this wandering."

Tom did not speak for a few minutes, but stood looking, looking into the clear water. At last, "You have so far gone with me, and little has come of it. I don't mind if I go with you and give it a fair trial."

" Good!"

The word of these men was as good as their bond.

They had a little dust with them, and Harvey had offered assistance. They sauntered back to the camp, and told the other six they would leave next day.

No one answered. They smoked in sullen silence over the camp fire ; but a significant glance passed between Spiers and Rettie.

Next morning Black said in a friendly spirit "Well, lads, we're going now; goodby."

"Where to?" asked Rettie, while the others looked on,

"You know already— there to select," answered Black, pointing to the other side of the river.

"Select! Be blowed, you've got some secret. Don't try to get at Bill Rettie. Black, you're not the man to sit down selecting."

"I've told you the truth."

"You've got some dust with you."

"We have a little."

"Shell out the little. We're all one, and, now you're leaving, a fair divide, and no skulking."

The sharp click of a revolver followed this demand. Seven other smart clicks— six against two. The odds were heavy.

Black and Clark both dived into the thick scrub that bordered the camp, and lined the river bank.

Several random shots were fired into the scrub but without effect. Spiers, Rettie, Smith, and Blair rushed into the scrub after Clark. They made sure he had the dust. Spiers and Blair kept well up to the noise made by Clark as he pushed aside the undergrowth, In an open part— what a few months ago had been a billybong— at the foot of a bank they came in sight of Clark as he made for the river. Both fired; Clark fell. But the wound was not fatal, for he instantly rose on his knee, and as Blair emerged from the scrub fired, and the latter fell and remained motionless.

Spiers rushed forward and shouted to Clark as he fell to the ground after having risen.

"Now for the dust. Look sharp," and seizing a heavy branch he swung it over his head. It descended on Clark and he fell insensible.

The victor uttered a fiendish laugh, and approached the prostrate body. He knelt down and examined the seeming dead man's pockets, and with an anathema on all and sundry he turned the body on the other side.

A whirring noise suddenly rang in his ear, a blow fell on his skull with irresistible force, and Spiers lay motionless beside his victim.

iii

THE NATIVES around the Murray and its billybongs were a finer class than those who lived on the plains inland and away from the invigorating effects of bathing, and the healthy sport of fishing as exercised by them. This may have been brought about by their mode of living. Those by the river enjoyed the sports of fishing, canoeing, &c., on the water, as well as hunting on land, while the inland tribes were confined to hunting and sports on land alone.

The food of the former was, obviously, more varied, while that of the latter was comparatively limited. Again, it must occur to every one that during severe droughts the inland tribes must have suffered much both from hunger and thirst. All that, combined with the absence of water for the necessary purification of the skin of the body, must have told upon their physique.

Under the peculiar and somewhat marvellous law of the Papuan race, the whole continent of Australia was divided among the various tribes, and no tribe could trespass on the land of its neighbour without committing a serious breach of the land laws.

This division among the tribes, and their strict confinement to their own section, was possibly carried out on the principle that each tribal section contained within it the means of sustaining its people without encroaching on the neighbouring territory— in other words, it was self-supporting— and if it did not fulfil its object their wants would spur the people to exert their ingenuity to make it do so. This was no doubt the enactment of some wise corroborree assembled for the government and administration of the whole of Australia and the adjacent islands. But, alas for the enactments of men, they cannot make a nation.

Here was a race of men that should have been great, but the thoughts that prompt the enactment and the object of the lawgiver must be found in the hearts of the people.

Low as the natives may have fallen from the condition which such an act denotes, there still lingered, at the time when this was written, in the calm and foreboding look of many of the natives a feeling of confidence, and high dignity, and contempt for the intruding whites who eagerly swarmed across their country.

As the water rises in the creek and covers the country, but soon melts away: as the giant gums are uprooted and spread across the river; as the sun dries up the grass, but it grows again ; so, may not the same power that does all this sweep away this inundation of white men— this spoilator— and give the Papuan his own again? These were some of the feelings of the King of the tribe that inhabited the country around the billybong of the Murray— the Edwards River.

The King was tall and well built; the tallest man many whites ever saw. Like all of his race he showed no opposition to the encroachments of the white man, but passively held aloof, so that few whites came much in contact with him.

Not so his brother, "Big Bill," as the whites called him. He enjoyed the alien's friendship, and still more his grog and tobacco. Big Bill was the counterpart of the King in form, and size, and immense strength, but no further; otherwise they differed as the poles are asunder.

The King constantly thought of the wrongs of his country and his people. Their immemorial rights he had seen in others, and now in his own case, ruthlessly trampled down as if they had never existed; and, worse than that even, he saw with regret the physical and moral degradation of all who had the slightest intercourse with the whites.

Although the King held aloof from the whites, he was singularly interested in them and their mode of living. He heard of the number of white men who had settled down In his district. As the sun rose on the morning when the concluding incident in the last chapter occurred, he was on the wallaby alone, and rapidly reached the camp of the eight white men. He remained in the bush unseen and narrowly scanned the features of the newcomers.

The preparation of their breakfast and their other movements interested him, and when Black and Clark were about to leave he saw the strange scene of what appeared to him to be perfect friendship suddenly break out into active hostility. He did not understand it. He remained quiet, however, but, as luck would have it, Clark ran in the direction in which he was concealed, and he saw Rettie fell Clark with the branch of a tree.

When Rettie began to pick his late comrade's pockets, all the indignation within the King rose turbulently within him, and, before he could restrain himself, he had bounded lightly over the intervening space and his nullah descended with terrific force on the exulting robber.

The sound of the shots in rapid succession brought the other five in that direction, and the King raised the unconscious body of Clark in his arms and sprang back into the scrub.

A little water dashed into Clark's face, and, after lying a few minutes in the shade, signs of consciousness returned, and he soon sat up. His first sensible impression was the native King, whose height and evident enormous strength almost terrified him; but a warning gesture from the King repressed his hurried intentions, and he was silent. The King left the wounded man for some time, and returning with Black made signs to them to stop where they were and he would return.

Before Black could thank the King for his kindness he had disappeared in the scrub. It was not long before a native was seen paddling down the river. He seemed to be looking for some one. At length, when opposite the thicket in which the wounded man lay, he ran his canoe into a clump of willows and leapt lightly on to the sandy bank.

The native was Big Bill and Black had seen him before, so he advanced from the thicket, and Big Bill at once bounded over the sand and told him in broken English that his brother had sent him down to convey a "sick" man across the river.

In the meantime Black had examined his disabled friend, but could find no bullet marks. His ankle, however, was much swollen, and they concluded it had got sprained in running over the uneven ground. He was unable to walk. Leaning on the shoulders of Big Bill and Black, he got into the canoe and both were landed safely on the opposite bank.

Big Bill refused to take any present for his services; when offered a revolver for his brother, he replied the King had told him not to accept any presents; and with a good-natured laugh he pushed from the bank and paddled up stream.

iv

AFTER a few days of complete rest, the sprained ankle recovered its strength, and Clark was able to join his friend in their new enterprise.

With the kindness common to most people in outlying districts, Mr. Harvey helped his new neighbours in the management of their selection and gave them valuable advice in attending to their laud and preparing it for wheat and other crops.'

Nothing occurred to Black and Clark beyond the daily routine of their work.

Not so with their late companions on the other side of the river. Idlers as they were, and having no duties to perform, they still managed to put in the time, and even to create for themselves a notoriety which has outlived them.

Riverina was attracting attention and prospectors of a different kind from the old gold prospector'— squatters and selectors— began to frequent the

district. Travellers were frequently stuck up and money and provisions, extorted from them. Strangely enough Clark and Black were not favoured by a visit from their old companions, and they were not displeased.

Smith and his friends were getting notorious, and, as their camp was within sight of those on the north side of the river, many of their dark deeds were witnessed. All these outrages upon travellers and others were followed by drunken carousals, in which many of the natives joined.

Various petty acts of tyranny and injustice irritated the natives, and they would have exacted revenge, but the love for their newly learnt and acquired taste for the luxuries of civilization and fear of the dangerous revolvers kept them quiet.

The months bad been passing rapidly. It was now May and no rain had yet fallen. The Edwards was growing thin and sickly, and long ago the little billybongs were exhausted. Six months ago it was a noble river— fit to float a good snip— now, at some places, it was not a yard wide, and flowed slowly over the sand. On the plains there was no grass— not a vestige could be seen— they were dry and barren; and, in the early morning, and in the evening when the sun went down, the cold wind swept across the plains piercing the very marrow.

It was on one of these cold nights that a corroborree was being held by the natives about half a mile up the river. Rettie and his companions drank heavily that night, and in the midst of their loud outbursts of drunken jollity Smith proposed they should load up and go to the corroborree. The proposal jumped, with the humour of the hour.

As they approached, some of the natives endeavoured to prevent their going further. With an oath, Smith drew his revolver and shot the nearest native. The others drew back and would have gone away, but the groans and wild cries of the wounded man reached the ears of the King and his brother, Big Bill, above the noise of the corroborree. They instantly leaped to their feet, and, grasping their spears and clubs, rushed into the bush from whence the noise came.

The King looked at the struggling native writhing in agony on the ground, and then at the drunken white men. His teeth set firmly, and with a determined look he advanced towards Smith, and pointed to the native with an enquiring look. Smith understood the look, and replied, "Yes, and you, too, old blackskin, if you ain't civil."

Smith raised his revolver and aimed at the King: but, before he could fire, the King's club descended with terrific force upon him, and he fell at the King's feet without a moan.

The others were so intimidated by this sudden act and by the appearance of the King that they slank into the bush utterly cowed and returned to their camp.

A liberal number of potations served to raise their courage, but they sank into a maudlin state, and finally went to sleep around the fire. As the embers blackened yet struggled to keep up the old fire and cast a flickering uncertain light over the camp, the tall figure of a native cautiously advanced to the sleeping circle and looked upon the sleeping men. A grim smile passed over his face as his eye fell on the bottles of liquor that lay around. He picked up one, and, with a look of detestation, threw it violently into the fire.

The sparks leaped high and fell in a shower. The fire was utterly out, and all was dark. Too dark to see even the sleeping men. Their short spasmodic breathing alone was heard, and the keen sense of smell possessed by the native detected the fumes of the grog, which annihilated the odour of the gumtrees.

v

MAY WAS near its close, still no rain had fallen in Riverina. The plains looked drearier than ever, and cattle had a hard struggle to live. It was only by the continuous efforts of Black and Clark that the few cattle they possessed had not died. The river was very low in some places, but the large pools that still remained seemed inexhaustible. Of water, therefore, there was no scarcity, and it materially helped to keep the animals alive.

There was a little patch of grass here and there on the south side of the river, and the cattle used frequently to cross the water to reach the tempting tit-bits. In the early morning, before the sun had risen, the cattle were on the move. The monotonous ringing of the bells suspended round their necks could be heard a long way off by the half-awake selectors, and gave an air of dreariness to the country life that is quite at variance with the rushing and bustling of wealth-seekers in the city. The chattering of parrots and cockatoos, or the merriment of the laughing jackass, and sometimes the quacking of ducks as they rose from the river, or the shrill cry of the native companion soaring high aloft, alone joined in disturbing the utter stillness in the air.

At times the cattle strayed far from the selection, and it was usual for Clark and Black to ride out in the afternoon and drive them back to the north side of the river.

"They haven't struck camp yet," said Black, as they came within sight of their old associate's camp.

"We could give them a little ring-barking if they cared for the job."

"These fellows won't work, Alick, depend on it."

"I dare say, not so long as they can stick up travellers and get a few more hauls."

"It's a blessing, this river," said Clark, as the horses ran down the bank and plunged into the water and baited for a drink.

There was no rise in the opposite bank, a : characteristic of the Murray as well as its billabongs, no doubt easily accounted for by the action of large volumes of water in flood; time bearing stronger on the outside bend of the river than the inside.

The two horsemen were leisurely getting over a bed of sand, when the reports of several revolver shots, immediately followed by a series of piercing shrieks as from a young gin in pain, came from the direction of the camp. Patting their horses to a gallop, in a few minutes they were beside the camp.

The camp presented a peculiar though familiar sight. Big Bill lay insensible— overcome by the liquor he had drunk— and several natives were in the bush, sick from the same cause that made Big Bill insensible, and freely giving vent to the protests of their abused stomachs. Rettie and Blair were rolling together on the ground mad with rage and intoxication. The other two white men were not to be seen, and from that time were never heard of.

The screams that attracted their attention were now silent, but a young native girl lay in a pool of blood a little beyond the camp.

The King, who seemed as if he had just come up, was looking down at the dead girl with a look of sorrow that was painful to behold. He raised his eyes when ne heard the noise made by the horses pushing through the undergrowth of small gumtrees that bordered the camp, and fringed the riverside here, and when he recognised the man whose life he had saved, he rose, and lifting a revolver from the ground, pointed to the white men rolling in their drunken fury, and from them to the dead girl. When he looked round from the pitying sight the deep sorrow and sympathy that had marked his noble features were gone, and there was a look of unwonted energy and determination, even of cruelty, as he clutched his club firmly, and, pointing to the rolling mass of brutal humanity before him, stepped forward, and with a single blow from his club shattered the skull of the uppermost. Another moment and Blair would have met the same fate, but Clark sprang forward and arrested the impending blow.

The King was pacified, and the blow did not fall; but his anger was terrible to look upon. It resembled the almost everlasting blue of the sky above his own country, when the clouds gather and darken, and nature bursts into a rage with thunder and lightning, and the wind howls and roars, and the rain falls heavily.

Relaxing into his former state of compassion for the murdered girl and for his degraded people, the King turned from the scene.

Standing over the lovely but inanimate form of the murdered girl, the King, with an intuition of a higher power than any beneath that cloudless sky, and with sublimity and veneration in his sorrowful eyes, looked above, and with the gestures of a born orator, heightened and intensified by .the splendid physique of the man, called, in his own language, upon the unknown power to curse the spot on which the best of his tribe had fallen before the white man's evil influence.

The sun had set, and as the two white men silently disappeared into the scrub they left the King alone in the swiftly gathering darkness.

vi

IT IS THIRTY years since the events that have been narrated briefly and with an uncertain hand made their little splash in the sea of time.

The smallest stone cast into the Pacific Ocean, it is said, makes a ripple on its placid bosom or on any billow that may be rolling across its troubled surface. But earthquakes have been known to trouble these mighty waters and to shake them to their depths. Islands have disappeared, and islands nave come where no islands ever were.

What is this in the continent of Australia that is happening in our time and beneath our eyes? Is it a mere stone cast into the history of man or nations that will scarcely be felt; or is it an earthquake, sudden and calamitous in its effects?

Here things native to Australia are being extinguished and others from a different clime are being substituted. Many things that used to be well known a few generations ago are now only known to the scientist and the curious. Will all this in the least affect the economy of nature, will it ruffle it in the

Again, we have a race of people displaying— and exercising more than displaying— all the virtue of sympathy and kindness, who are disappearing from this globe like snow before the midday sun. The Great Papuan race— can no hand avert its utter extinction, and prevent its name from being blotted out of the Book of Life?

THIRTY YEARS SINCE. In a new country a world of things may have happened. If the squatter, or the selector, or the bushman, or the swagman wishes to see the spot where all this happened let him not go into the bush. It is now the site of a populous town, and on the very spot where the King called down the curse of an unknown power a colossal building had been erected.

But it stands on cursed ground.

The elements have been at work. A few years ago you might have seen its crumbling walls, and still later, some human beings carried from its ruins, blackened and burnt by the dreadful conflagration that startled those who lived around, and brought back the remembrance that this was the fatal spot cursed thirty years ago by the Black King.

The walls were crumbling and the sun and the wind and the rain invaded the ruins. The verandah, or pieces that once had been the verandah, lay in confusion in an unfrequented side-way, the roof had decayed and partly fallen in, and the lintel above the door was broken.

Of all the actors who have been mentioned in these pages none are alive except Black and Clark. The two unknown associates of Rettie and his companions disappeared and were never heard of. Blair was taken before a duly constituted Court of Justice of his countrymen,' tried, and convicted for crimes he had committed, and received the penalty of death ordained by the laws under which he lived.

The natives have dwindled away to a miserable remnant, and there are now not twelve of the tribe remaining, and these have so degenerated from the fine physique of their ancestors that -they are scarcely recognisable as of the same race.

Black and Clark are neighbours. They are wealthy squatters, and their lands are extensive and fruitful. They were and are friends of the natives, and the King found in them true councillors and bounteous benefactors in the day of his and his people's adversity.

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22: The Ghostly Door

Henry Lawson

1867-1922

In: *Joe Wilson and his Mates*, 1901

DAVE AND I WERE tramping on a lonely Bush track in New Zealand, making for a sawmill where we expected to get work, and we were caught in one of those three-days' gales, with rain and hail in it and cold enough to cut off a man's legs. Camping out was not to be thought of, so we just tramped on in silence, with the stinging pain coming between our shoulder-blades— from cold, weariness, and the weight of our swags— and our boots, full of water, going splosh, splosh, splosh along the track. We were settled to it— to drag on like wet, weary, muddy working bullocks till we came to somewhere— when, just before darkness settled down, we saw the loom of a humpy of some sort on the slope of a tussock hill, back from the road, and we made for it, without holding a consultation.

It was a two-roomed hut built of waste timber from a sawmill, and was either a deserted settler's home or a hut attached to an abandoned sawmill round there somewhere. The windows were boarded up. We dumped our swags under the little verandah and banged at the door, to make sure; then Dave pulled a couple of boards off a window and looked in: there was light enough to see that the place was empty. Dave pulled off some more boards, put his arm in through a broken pane, clicked the catch back, and then pushed up the window and got in. I handed in the swags to him. The room was very draughty; the wind came in through the broken window and the cracks between the slabs, so we tried the partitioned-off room— the bedroom— and that was better. It had been lined with chaff-bags, and there were two stretchers left by some timber-getters or other Bush contractors who'd camped there last; and there were a box and a couple of three-legged stools.

We carried the remnant of the wood-heap inside, made a fire, and put the billy on. We unrolled our swags and spread the blankets on the stretchers; and then we stripped and hung our clothes about the fire to dry. There was plenty in our tucker-bags, so we had a good feed. I hadn't shaved for days, and Dave had a coarse red beard with a twist in it like an ill-used fibre brush— a beard that got redder the longer it grew; he had a hooked nose, and his hair stood straight up (I never saw a man so easy-going about the expression and so scared about the head), and he was very tall, with long, thin, hairy legs. We must have looked a weird pair as we sat there, naked, on the low three-legged stools, with the billy and the tucker on the box between us, and ate our bread and meat with clasp-knives.

'I shouldn't wonder,' says Dave, 'but this is the "whare"* where the murder was that we heard about along the road. I suppose if any one was to come along now and look in he'd get scared.' Then after a while he looked down at the flooring-boards close to my feet, and scratched his ear, and said, 'That looks very much like a blood-stain under your stool, doesn't it, Jim?'

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** 'Whare', 'whorrie', Maori name for house.*

I shifted my feet and presently moved the stool farther away from the fire— it was too hot.

I wouldn't have liked to camp there by myself, but I don't think Dave would have minded— he'd knocked round too much in the Australian Bush to mind anything much, or to be surprised at anything; besides, he was more than half murdered once by a man who said afterwards that he'd mistook him for some one else: he must have been a very short-sighted murderer.

Presently we put tobacco, matches, and bits of candle we had, on the two stools by the heads of our bunks, turned in, and filled up and smoked comfortably, dropping in a lazy word now and again about nothing in particular. Once I happened to look across at Dave, and saw him sitting up a bit and watching the door. The door opened very slowly, wide, and a black cat walked in, looked first at me, then at Dave, and walked out again; and the door closed behind it.

Dave scratched his ear. 'That's rum,' he said. 'I could have sworn I fastened that door. They must have left the cat behind.'

'It looks like it,' I said. 'Neither of us has been on the boose lately.'

He got out of bed and up on his long hairy spindle-shanks.

The door had the ordinary, common black oblong lock with a brass knob. Dave tried the latch and found it fast; he turned the knob, opened the door, and called, 'Puss— puss— puss!' but the cat wouldn't come. He shut the door, tried the knob to see that the catch had caught, and got into bed again.

He'd scarcely settled down when the door opened slowly, the black cat walked in, stared hard at Dave, and suddenly turned and darted out as the door closed smartly.

I looked at Dave and he looked at me— hard; then he scratched the back of his head. I never saw a man look so puzzled in the face and scared about the head.

He got out of bed very cautiously, took a stick of firewood in his hand, sneaked up to the door, and snatched it open. There was no one there. Dave took the candle and went into the next room, but couldn't see the cat. He came back and sat down by the fire and meowed, and presently the cat

answered him and came in from somewhere— she'd been outside the window, I suppose; he kept on meowing and she sidled up and rubbed against his hairy shin. Dave could generally bring a cat that way. He had a weakness for cats. I'd seen him kick a dog, and hammer a horse— brutally, I thought— but I never saw him hurt a cat or let any one else do it. Dave was good to cats: if a cat had a family where Dave was round, he'd see her all right and comfortable, and only drown a fair surplus. He said once to me, 'I can understand a man kicking a dog, or hammering a horse when it plays up, but I can't understand a man hurting a cat.'

He gave this cat something to eat. Then he went and held the light close to the lock of the door, but could see nothing wrong with it. He found a key on the mantel-shelf and locked the door. He got into bed again, and the cat jumped up and curled down at the foot and started her old drum going, like shot in a sieve. Dave bent down and patted her, to tell her he'd meant no harm when he stretched out his legs, and then he settled down again.

We had some books of the 'Deadwood Dick' school. Dave was reading 'The Grisly Ghost of the Haunted Gulch', and I had 'The Dismembered Hand', or 'The Disembowelled Corpse', or some such names. They were first-class preparation for a ghost.

I was reading away, and getting drowsy, when I noticed a movement and saw Dave's frightened head rising, with the terrified shadow of it on the wall. He was staring at the door, over his book, with both eyes. And that door was opening again— slowly— and Dave had locked it! I never felt anything so creepy: the foot of my bunk was behind the door, and I drew up my feet as it came open; it opened wide, and stood so. We waited, for five minutes it seemed, hearing each other breathe, watching for the door to close; then Dave got out, very gingerly, and up on one end, and went to the door like a cat on wet bricks.

'You shot the bolt *outside* the catch,' I said, as he caught hold of the door— like one grabs a craw-fish.

'I'll swear I didn't,' said Dave. But he'd already turned the key a couple of times, so he couldn't be sure. He shut and locked the door again. 'Now, get out and see for yourself,' he said.

I got out, and tried the door a couple of times and found it all right. Then we both tried, and agreed that it was locked.

I got back into bed, and Dave was about half in when a thought struck him. He got the heaviest piece of firewood and stood it against the door.

'What are you doing that for?' I asked.

'If there's a broken-down burglar camped round here, and trying any of his funny business, we'll hear him if he tries to come in while we're asleep,' says

Dave. Then he got back into bed. We composed our nerves with the 'Haunted Gulch' and 'The Disembowelled Corpse', and after a while I heard Dave snore, and was just dropping off when the stick fell from the door against my big toe and then to the ground with tremendous clatter. I snatched up my feet and sat up with a jerk, and so did Dave— the cat went over the partition. That door opened, only a little way this time, paused, and shut suddenly. Dave got out, grabbed a stick, skipped to the door, and clutched at the knob as if it were a nettle, and the door wouldn't come!— it was fast and locked! Then Dave's face began to look as frightened as his hair. He lit his candle at the fire, and asked me to come with him; he unlocked the door and we went into the other room, Dave shading his candle very carefully and feeling his way slow with his feet. The room was empty; we tried the outer door and found it locked.

'It muster gone by the winder,' whispered Dave. I noticed that he said 'it' instead of 'he'. I saw that he himself was shook up, and it only needed that to scare me bad.

We went back to the bedroom, had a drink of cold tea, and lit our pipes. Then Dave took the waterproof cover off his bunk, spread it on the floor, laid his blankets on top of it, his spare clothes, &c., on top of them, and started to roll up his swag.

'What are you going to do, Dave?' I asked.

'I'm going to take the track,' says Dave, 'and camp somewhere farther on. You can stay here, if you like, and come on in the morning.'

I started to roll up my swag at once. We dressed and fastened on the tucker-bags, took up the billies, and got outside without making any noise. We held our backs pretty hollow till we got down on to the road.

'That comes of camping in a deserted house,' said Dave, when we were safe on the track. No Australian Bushman cares to camp in an abandoned homestead, or even near it— probably because a deserted home looks ghostlier in the Australian Bush than anywhere else in the world.

It was blowing hard, but not raining so much.

We went on along the track for a couple of miles and camped on the sheltered side of a round tussock hill, in a hole where there had been a landslip. We used all our candle-ends to get a fire alight, but once we got it started we knocked the wet bark off 'manuka' sticks and logs and piled them on, and soon had a roaring fire. When the ground got a little drier we rigged a bit of shelter from the showers with some sticks and the oil-cloth swag-covers; then we made some coffee and got through the night pretty comfortably. In the morning Dave said, 'I'm going back to that house.'

'What for?' I said.

'I'm going to find out what's the matter with that crimson door. If I don't I'll never be able to sleep easy within a mile of a door so long as I live.'

So we went back. It was still blowing. The thing was simple enough by daylight— after a little watching and experimenting. The house was built of odds and ends and badly fitted. It 'gave' in the wind in almost any direction— not much, not more than an inch or so, but just enough to throw the door-frame out of plumb and out of square in such a way as to bring the latch and bolt of the lock clear of the catch (the door-frame was of scraps joined). Then the door swung open according to the hang of it; and when the gust was over the house gave back, and the door swung to— the frame easing just a little in another direction. I suppose it would take Edison to invent a thing like that, that came about by accident. The different strengths and directions of the gusts of wind must have accounted for the variations of the door's movements— and maybe the draught of our big fire had helped.

Dave scratched his head a good bit.

'I never lived in a house yet,' he said, as we came away— 'I never lived in a house yet without there was something wrong with it. Gimme a good tent.'

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23: The Mummy of Thompson-Pratt

C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne

1866-1944

Cassell's Magazine, Aug 1898

GARGRAVE was a fellow of Clare with rooms in College, who lectured twice a week on Constructive Egyptology, as a rule to empty benches. He was one of the most profound Egyptologists of the day, and had a clever knack of keeping all interesting items to himself, and discoursing the dry bran of theory only. At the beginning of each October term he had quite a crowd to hear him. The undergraduate who thought he ought to do something up at Cambridge on which to report progress to parent or guardian, would run his eye down the list, and pitch upon Construc tive Egyptology as a subject likely to be of the light fiction order, and one which would probably offer him pleasant entertainment. But one hearing of Gargrave soon knocked this notion on the head, and that undergraduate in future wasted no more time drawing caricatures on lectureroom foolscap with spluttering lecture-room quills, whilst Gargrave prosed about the true significance of an accidental scratch on a scarabeus, but spent his mornings in bed, or on the river, or merely playing poker, as Nature had originally intended. And the lecture-room benches remained vacant till the next batch of green freshmen arrived in the succeeding October.

This result was pointed out clearly to Gargrave by candid friends. But this made no difference in the discourses. He held to the solid Cam bridge theory that 'Varsity lectures were not intended to amuse, or teach anything that was useful; but merely to educate; which was a very different matter. " D'ye think I'm a music hall?" Gargrave would say. " Or is it a damned board-school you take me for?" The rest of the Clare fellows wished Gargrave would take orders, and then they could give him a college living and get rid of him. But Gargrave refused to do this thing, on the plea of religious scruples; and rumour got about in Cambridge that his creed was that of the ancient gods of Egypt.

Of the same college, and the bye-term senior to Gargrave, was Thompson-Pratt, Demonstrator in Chemistry at the Cavendish laboratories. He was not a Fellow of Clare, or even likely to be made one. Why he had ever got a first class in the National Science tripos was an abstruse mystery. He was not a man of brilliant intellect, nor did he, in his undergraduate days, ever resort to excessive reading. When he graduated at the end of his third year, he tried school-mastering for a twelve-month, disliked it, and stumbled into this demonstratorship in chemistry which was then vacant. Envious people said he got it by sheer favouritism. He himself suggested that it was a just reward for his powers of blarney.

Thompson-Pratt always had matches and strong tobacco ready in his pocket for any one who needed them, and in the waiting spaces during a lingering experiment he could re-spin a yarn from back numbers of the Pink 'Un as deftly as one could wish to hear it. He was a distinctly popular man in a small way, and got asked out more than was good for his health.

Gargrave dined daily at the high table in hall, drank two glasses of port and ate four walnuts in the Combination Room afterwards, and then returned to his own rooms on the Don's staircase and worked till 2 A.M. Thompson-Pratt kept in Green Street, dined at the Hoop, and spent his evenings at threepenny-rise poker with four other Bachelors who entertained one another in turn and sat up till daylight. He knew Gargrave and disliked him candidly, and Gargrave despised Thompson-Pratt. So here are the men, and these are the relations between them.

Gargrave brought home the mummy himself by long sea from Alexandria in a P. & O. boat, and as I happened to be on board, and was a man of his own year and college, he looked upon me as his especial prey and bored me accordingly. I told him at the outset that except as fuel I was not interested in mummies in any degree whatever. But that did not choke him off in the least; and he poured conversational mummy-dust into my ears all down the Mediterranean, and through the Straits, and across the Bay, and down Channel till we fetched up in Southampton. I gave him the slip there in the Custom-House, and hoped he'd get run over by a cab in the street.

Two years later I went up to Cambridge to take my M.A. degree. I was paying my fees in the butteries, when in came Gargrave and passed the time of day. " Look here," he said, "I wish you'd come round to my rooms after you've finished your business in the Senate House. I've got an experiment I want you to be in at."

"What sort of experiment?" I asked. " Not mummies?"

"It has to do with a mummy. The one you saw me bring home from Egypt."

"No, thanks, old man," I said. " I hate the whole breed of them. Besides, I've another engagement."

He pawed my coat sleeve. " I know you hate them. That's just the very reason I want you. You'll be an unprejudiced witness. Now do stay. You needn't put up at the Bull. I've got a spare bed, and I'll tell my gyp to make it up for you. I believe I've got hold of the finest thing that was ever hit upon since Egyp tology started, and I want you to be there to confirm my notes."

"But I should be no good at taking down notes. I'm merely a novelist. I haven't climbed as far as being a reporter yet. Shorthand is clean beyond me."

"I've got a phonograph to take it all down," he said. Writing would be no use even though you knew the language, which you don't. The accent we use

now is probably quite wrong. You wouldn't be able to catch hold of one word in ten."

"I wish you wouldn't talk hieroglyphics."

"I can't explain it more to you here," he said. "You must come and see for yourself, and I can promise you the entertainment will be exciting enough and suit even your lively tastes. If you stay away, you'll regret it all the rest of your life."

"Why?"

He was getting exasperated. " You'll see why, you fool, when my book comes out in a year's time."

It was really cheering to see Gargrave human enough to lose his temper. " All right," I said, "I'll come after I've been through the mill in the Senate House and can smoke in Cambridge streets at night without danger of being proctorised and fined the gentle six-and-eight. Solong," I said, and turned into the butteries to talk over past undergraduate high-jinks with my old gyp.

Now if anything better had turned up, it is more than possible that I should have forgotten my engagement with Gargrave and gone else where. I had had a very excellent three years in Cambridge some time before, as an irrespon sible undergraduate, and was by no means averse to having a short retaste of the old lively scenes. But I could find no one that I knew who seemed at all interesting; the current undergraduates, looked at from the light of after years, seemed mere schoolboys; and in fact the larger part of my acquaintance seemed to consist of gyps, bedmakers, or tradesmen's assistants; and so faute de mieux, after I had been raised to the sublime degree of Magister Artium, I restored my borrowed hood, cap, gown, and bands to the tailor's, and strolled across to Gargrave's staircase.

I went in without knocking, more Cantab. He was fitting a new wax cylinder to a phonograph, and as he leaned over the machine and I saw the curves of his head, I thought of what a thousand pities it was that a man with such a magnificent brain should fritter it on such a useless life-work. The mummy case stood open against one of the walls, the mummy in it stripped of its swathings. The air was full of the sickly flavour of spices. I pulled out a cigar and lit it.

"Don't smoke," said Gargrave. " I must have the air here quite clear."

"Then open the window," I said. " The place stinks."

"You'll be used to the atmosphere directly.

There's the mummy. What do you think of him?"

"Toughish biltong. Newer meat for me. He's well tattooed about the chest and arms, though."

"Those are not tattoo marks. Look closer. They are a pattern in the grain of the epidermis."

"So they are. Mr. Menen-Ra isn't that his name? is a curious beast."

"Curious! He's unique. Or at least he and his descendants are."

"Oh, those markings would not pass on to his son."

"So you say. But it appears they did."

"Have you got another mummy here, then?"

"I've got more than that. I've got one of his living descendants, he's due in this room almost directly."

Humbug."

"You shall judge for yourself. You know the very man. He's Thompson-Pratt, of the byeterm above us."

"What, the demonstrator in the labs?"

"That same man. He's the lineal descendant of this mummy, as I've been at infinite pains to find out."

"And has he got the strawberry mark, or whatever you call it?"

"He has, line for line, pustule for pustule."

"Did he see your mummy and come up and claim it as a cousin?"

"He did not. I discovered his markings for myself long before I saw the mummy. It was the term after you had gone down. He'd been on this staircase here to see the Dean, who was out. He slipped in coming down, and took a header, and got all the sense knocked out of him. I heard the noise. I was the only man in. So I went and picked him up, and brought him in here. He lay so still I thought he was dead, so I ripped open his shirt to see if I could feel his heart beating; and it was then that incidentally I came across the markings. I got him back to his senses again soon afterwards, and whilst he was lying on my sofa getting his nerves straight again, I told him what I had seen and asked him how they came there.

"He was furiously angry and said I'd taken a great liberty.

"'My good man,' I said, 'I didn't look for the things. I merely stumbled across them by accident.'

"{ They are the curse of my life,' said he. ' I love swimming, and yet I daren't bathe in pub lic. People hoot at me if I do. Look,' he said, and pulled back his shirt, and showed me his chest and the tops of his arms. ' I'm marked like the spotted man at the fair. I'm a blooming spectacle. My father's the same way, and so's the grand gov'nor, and so was his father before him. I suppose it's a sort of family curse, or some such rot as that, only we're too ashamed of the whole thing to have any yarn about it.' And then he pinned me not to tell about him, and then he went. I didn't worry my head more about the matter. Biology's outside my line, and Thompson-Pratt was not a man I had any special interest in at that period.

"Well, then, of course I went on with my work, and in time went to Egypt and got this mummy of Menen-Ra. I brought it home in its swathings, and didn't open it out till I got here. I'd procured it, as you know, for a certain purpose connected with one of my theories. But when I'd had the first glance at those markings on its skin, I let my original ideas go to the winds for the time being. So far as I could remember, they were the exact repetition of those carried by Thompson-Pratt.

"Here was a strange thing! I sat and thought of it hour after hour, and day after day. I tell you theories fairly bubbled out of me. At last I made up my mind what was to be done. But before I went further, I had got to know if the markings were exactly the same as Thompson- Pratt's. He made a big difficulty about it, and for a man who pretends to be scientific, I must say he was absurdly prejudiced. But he gave in at last, and let me take a photograph. I tell you it was simply marvellous: line for line, pus tule for pustule, his markings were the same as the mummy's.

"Well, that was strong evidence, you'll say, but I wanted to go deeper. I've put an enor mous amount of work into it; I've had scores of genealogy experts working for me; and I've had amazing luck. I've worked out the chain of descent in Egypt, Italy, France, England, Scot land, and England again without a break; and I've learned for an absolute certainty that Thompson-Pratt is the direct descendant of the Egyptian Menen-Ra, whose mummy you see against the wall yonder.

"And now," he went on, I'll explain to you what I intend to do." But he did not explain to me then. The door opened and Thompson-Pratt came into the room. He nodded curtly enough to Gargrave, but he greeted me kindly. " Hullo, old man. How's the world using you? Heard you were up taking out your M.A. Staying up long?"

"Going down to-morrow. I've just come in here because Gargrave wanted to show me some tricks with his mummy."

"Damnation," said Thompson-Pratt to the owner of the rooms, "you haven't been talking about er secrets, have you?"

"No secrets will be given away unless you do it yourself," said Gargrave, oracularly. " I've just asked him in to be an independent witness."

"Oh, I see," said Thompson-Pratt, getting into a chair. But look here, you know. I don't half like this experiment of yours."

"It's in the cause of science."

"Science be sugared." He stared thoughtfully into the fire and then turned round and faced Gargrave squarely. " Look here, sir, if you are going to make use of me, I'm going to share some of the profits. You say that wrinkled, smelly person in the coffin yonder is my ancestor, and you are going to make me to

talk his thoughts. Well, you may do it, or you mayn't. But if it does come off, it's just on the cards the old boy may let slip something in the natural science line which is strange to us to-day. I've a notion those old Egyptians were a lot ahead of us in some branches of chemistry, and if I could get hold of the way of making some new dye, for instance, to use with alizerene "

"You shall have a copy of every word that's said," Gargrave promised.

"From the phonograph? Yes, I see. But it'll be in what-d'you-call-em language hiero glyphics, isn't it? Ancient Egyptian, I mean."

"You shall overlook my translation as I make it. Man, I mean to do fairly by you."

Oh, all right," said Thompson-Pratt. Don't get shirty. Only, a man must look after his own interests, y' know, that's all; and besides, it's a hundred to one the whole thing's a fizzle."

Gargrave set his teeth. " Have you any more to say?" he inquired.

"No," said Thompson-Pratt, with a bored yawn. Wire in."

Now from where I sat on the table, I was watching the proceedings pretty carefully; and it struck me that Gargrave merely got a hypnotic influence over Thompson-Pratt in the usual way. He has told me since that he did something more, and perhaps this may be so; but anyway the patient seemed to go to sleep and to wake up again, and be entirely under the control of Gargrave's will. He made him lie down on the hearthrug in front of the fire, and then he took the mummy out of its case and laid that down on the hearthrug also, side by side with its living descendant. Then he told me to go out of the room.

"Whatever for?" I asked. " I thought you invited me here to see an experiment?"

"So I did. And you shall see it when the time comes. But I have one or two more prep arations to make first, which I don't choose to be overlooked. You must go into my inner room."

"I have a rare big mind to go out of the place altogether."

"You can do it if you like, of course, but you are a fool if you do."

Well, perhaps it was undignified, but I shrugged my shoulders, and swallowed my pride, and marched off into the inner room. I will own I was getting curious as to what was coming next.

Gargrave came after me, and had the imperti nence to lock the door on my heels. So there I was anyway, and as he seemed to have a dislike for smoking, I lit a pipe and filled the room with heavy reek.

I will give him credit for one thing, though. He did not keep me waiting long. He opened the door in a minute or so and said: " Sorry, old man, but I must keep my processes secret at any cost. Come in."

I went in. Thompson-Pratt and the man who had predeceased him some 3000 years were lying side by side on the hearthrug, to all appearance exactly as I had left them.

Evening was come on, the lamps had not been lit, and only the dancing, uncanny firelight illumi nated the faces; and as I gazed a little closer, a curious thrill went through me. It was Thorn pson-Pratt's which seemed to be the dead face now. Behind the shrivelled mask of the mummy there was surely some flicker of life. Gargrave was bending down, arranging the mouthpiece of the phonograph over the mummy's lips, and as he moved aside I could have sworn I saw the longdead limbs twitch. I took out a handkerchief and wiped my forehead. Gargrave saw me do it.

"Now don't be an idiot," he said. " There's nothing to be scared of. Just keep cool, and take accurate mental notes of all you see and hear." He tried to talk calmly, but I saw he was quivering with excitement for all that. He turned to the mummy and said something in a tongue I could not understand, enunciating each syllable most distinctly. I distinguished the word Menen-Ra," but could make out nothing else.

Neither the mummy nor Thompson-Pratt gave any sign of having heard.

He repeated the sentence again, varying the pronunciation of the words, and this time got a reply.

"You must speak English if you wish me to understand," came the answer in a stifled, dusty voice directly from the mummy's lips.

Gargrave started, and I think he swore. "Why?" he asked savagely.

"Because I have forgotten the other the old tongue."

"If I am being played with," said Gargrave, "there is one man here who will carry out of this room my marks on him for life."

There was no answer. He went on: Do you know your name?"

"Menen-Ra."

Where buried?"

"Thebes."

"You were not."

"I was buried at Thebes; but I should be taken afterwards to our family vault on the estate by Koorkoor, according to our custom."

"It was in the desert by the oasis of Koorkoor I found you. In what manner of grave?"

"Rock-hewn, with my titles carved above me."

Alone?"

"No, my four uncles, killed in war, would be with me."

"Were they all sound men?"

"No, my uncle Nepo, the last buried and so the next to me, had his right arm lopped off at the elbow: an old wound."

Gargrave broke off his questioning and hit the table excitedly. " That settles it," he cried. No living soul knows what the grave was like except myself, and no one could have guessed it. And it's all absolutely exact. It's a miracle, but I've done it. The soul of Thompson-Pratt has gone back to its old abiding-place, and now I shall be told the history of 3000 years ago exactly as it happened, and I can give that history to the modern world. When he spoke English I thought there was fraud; but there isn't; it's just part of the natural lapse." He rubbed his hands. " Lord! how simple it is, and I'm the only man that's got the key." He turned again to the mummy. " Menen-Ra, I command you that you lift up your voice now in history, and tell us of the Government of Egypt, and of Pharaoh, and of Pharaoh's inner life, and the daily life you lived yourself, and the daily life of the people."

And the mummy in its dusty tones began to speak. There was no doubt about the genuineness of it all, that I can vouch for. The phra seology was certainly that of Thompson-Pratt, reader of the Pink 'Uh, and Demonstrator in Chemistry at the Cavendish Labs. But the sen timents were those of ancient Egypt, spoken as no other men now living (except Gargrave and myself) ever heard them, but startlingly fresh and real. Not even the most imaginative stu dent, redolent in the lore of that long-dead land, could have invented them. They were marvel lous in their vivid truth. They were nothing short of a revelation.

But Gargrave cursed as he listened. He had looked for a dissertation on history, and he was getting chroniques scandaleuses; he had expected talk about Kings' policies, and he was hearing the tales of flirtations with their housemaids. He wanted descriptions of Council Chambers, and he got the dimensions of wine-shops. He had fallen into the error of thinking that all the men of bygone Egypt were as thoughtful and ponderous as the hoary few whose scribings have remained; and when he found that the ancient land contained devil-may-care pleasure-eaters like those that live in this land of ours to-day, he could have beaten himself in the fury of his disappointment.

For myself, as I listened whilst Menen-Ra prattled on, I laughed till the tears came, and my only regret a professional one was that I could not use up that unmatchable subjectmatter hereafter. I was listening to the talk of a man-about-town, who lived in Thebes 3000 years ago, and learning in detail exactly how he wasted his days and how he enjoyed his nights. He told us of his bets, his bouts, his light loves, and his serious entanglements. Every third sen tence referred to a long-dead Chloe, evidently the Thais of her day in that far-forgotten Thebes. Even allowing for Menen-Ra's obvious partiality, Chloe must

have been a lady of wonderful powers, albeit she was a mere dancer by recognised profession. It was a gorgeous piece of description. But as it was given to us it would not publish; no, not even inside a yellow cover. And though I did note down a few items to make into future copy, I think I shall give them as my own. They are quite new, and no one will accuse me of lifting them; and, besides, it is merely foolishness to offer unasked-for explanations which no one will believe.

But I cannot say I heard as much as I wished. It was evident that Menen-Ra, after his silence of 3000 years, was equal to going on till midnight. But his was a mouth which could only speak on its own topic. Again and again Gargrave tried to lead this wanderer from a long-forgotten past on to the more weighty matters of state, and time after time he got back to talk about cock fights, and dicing bouts, and ape-racing on the dry Nile banks; or else he would speak to us of Chloe and his other loves with a freedom which is quite obsolete to-day. He brimmed with these reminiscences. But he had no others of a graver sort. This Menen-Ra had lived for nothing but his own personal pleasure, and beyond the limits of that he knew no more than we moderns did about the larger affairs of his country.

Gargrave tried him on every topic. He asked about the army. Menen-Ra started off loud in the praises of his favourite gladiator, and gave us the latest betting on his approaching fight. Gargrave asked for some song of the priests of Osiris, and this faded roysterer promptly trolled forth a drinking chant that nearly split his dusky throat.

And at last, seeing the futility of getting what he wanted, Gargrave savagely put an end to the inquisition. He clapped a large sponge over the still white face of Thompson-Pratt, and took a green powder from the mantelpiece and threw it on the sponge. There was a paff of streaky flame, and Thompson-Pratt sprang up choking and spluttering.

"I say, good Lord, Gargrave, what devil's game have you been up to now? What have you been putting me to bed on the hearthrug with that old image for? Here! I say, have you got a whisky-and-soda? Get me some whisky, for heaven's sake. I'm nearly parched to death."

I mixed a drink, and handed it to him. He gulped half of it thirstily. Then he bethought him of a toast. He nodded towards the mummy on the floor. " Here's to you, old cock," said he, and emptied his tumbler to the dregs. "I wonder what the equivalent of whisky was in your benighted day? I bet you had your share of it, if you are ancestor of mine."

You're a Goth," I said.

"I know," said Thompson-Pratt, " and I had a far better time of it than say a Construc tive Egyptologist has. Come along to the Hoop and have some dinner. We'll leave Gargrave to go on thumbing at my unpleasant forefather."

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24: The Horror-Horn

E. F. Benson

1867-1940

Hutchinson's Magazine, Sep 1922

For the past ten days Alhubel had basked in the radiant midwinter weather proper to its eminence of over 6,000 feet. From rising to setting the sun (so surprising to those who have hitherto associated it with a pale, tepid plate indistinctly shining through the murky air of England) had blazed its way across the sparkling blue, and every night the serene and windless frost had made the stars sparkle like illuminated diamond dust. Sufficient snow had fallen before Christmas to content the skiers, and the big rink, sprinkled every evening, had given the skaters each morning a fresh surface on which to perform their slippery antics. Bridge and dancing served to while away the greater part of the night, and to me, now for the first time tasting the joys of a winter in the Engadine, it seemed that a new heaven and a new earth had been lighted, warmed, and refrigerated for the special benefit of those who like myself had been wise enough to save up their days of holiday for the winter.

But a break came in these ideal conditions: one afternoon the sun grew vapour-veiled and up the valley from the north-west a wind frozen with miles of travel over ice-bound hill-sides began scouting through the calm halls of the heavens. Soon it grew dusted with snow, first in small flakes driven almost horizontally before its congealing breath and then in larger tufts as of swansdown. And though all day for a fortnight before the fate of nations and life and death had seemed to me of far less importance than to get certain tracings of the skate-blades on the ice of proper shape and size, it now seemed that the one paramount consideration was to hurry back to the hotel for shelter: it was wiser to leave rocking-turns alone than to be frozen in their quest.

I had come out here with my cousin, Professor Ingram, the celebrated physiologist and Alpine climber. During the serenity of the last fortnight he had made a couple of notable winter ascents, but this morning his weather-wisdom had mistrusted the signs of the heavens, and instead of attempting the ascent of the Piz Passug he had waited to see whether his misgivings justified themselves. So there he sat now in the hall of the admirable hotel with his feet on the hot-water pipes and the latest delivery of the English post in his hands. This contained a pamphlet concerning the result of the Mount Everest expedition, of which he had just finished the perusal when I entered.

"A very interesting report," he said, passing it to me, "and they certainly deserve to succeed next year. But who can tell, what that final six thousand feet may entail? Six thousand feet more when you have already accomplished

twenty-three thousand does not seem much, but at present no one knows whether the human frame can stand exertion at such a height. It may affect not the lungs and heart only, but possibly the brain. Delirious hallucinations may occur. In fact, if I did not know better, I should have said that one such hallucination had occurred to the climbers already."

"And what was that?" I asked.

"You will find that they thought they came across the tracks of some naked human foot at a great altitude. That looks at first sight like an hallucination. What more natural than that a brain excited and exhilarated by the extreme height should have interpreted certain marks in the snow as the footprints of a human being? Every bodily organ at these altitudes is exerting itself to the utmost to do its work, and the brain seizes on those marks in the snow and says 'Yes, I'm all right, I'm doing my job, and I perceive marks in the snow which I affirm are human footprints.' You know, even at this altitude, how restless and eager the brain is, how vividly, as you told me, you dream at night. Multiply that stimulus and that consequent eagerness and restlessness by three, and how natural that the brain should harbour illusions! What after all is the delirium which often accompanies high fever but the effort of the brain to do its work under the pressure of feverish conditions? It is so eager to continue perceiving that it perceives things which have no existence!"

"And yet you don't think that these naked human footprints were illusions," said I. "You told me you would have thought so, if you had not known better."

He shifted in his chair and looked out of the window a moment. The air was thick now with the density of the big snow-flakes that were driven along by the squealing north-west gale.

"Quite so," he said. "In all probability the human footprints were real human footprints. I expect that they were the footprints, anyhow, of a being more nearly a man than anything else.

"My reason for saying so is that I know such beings exist. I have even seen quite near at hand--and I assure you I did not wish to be nearer in spite of my intense curiosity--the creature, shall we say, which would make such footprints. And if the snow was not so dense, I could show you the place where I saw him."

He pointed straight out of the window, where across the valley lies the huge tower of the Ungeheuerhorn with the carved pinnacle of rock at the top like some gigantic rhinoceros-horn.

On one side only, as I knew, was the mountain practicable, and that for none but the finest climbers; on the other three a succession of ledges and precipices rendered it unscalable. Two thousand feet of sheer rock form the

tower; below are five hundred feet of fallen boulders, up to the edge of which grow dense woods of larch and pine.

"Upon the Ungeheuerhorn?" I asked.

"Yes. Up till twenty years ago it had never been ascended, and I, like several others, spent a lot of time in trying to find a route up it. My guide and I sometimes spent three nights together at the hut beside the Blumen glacier, prowling round it, and it was by luck really that we found the route, for the mountain looks even more impracticable from the far side than it does from this.

"But one day we found a long, transverse fissure in the side which led to a negotiable ledge; then there came a slanting ice couloir which you could not see till you got to the foot of it. However, I need not go into that."

The big room where we sat was filling up with cheerful groups driven indoors by this sudden gale and snowfall, and the cackle of merry tongues grew loud. The band, too, that invariable appanage of tea-time at Swiss resorts, had begun to tune up for the usual potpourri from the works of Puccini. Next moment the sugary, sentimental melodies began.

"Strange contrast!" said Ingram. "Here are we sitting warm and cosy, our ears pleasantly tickled with these little baby tunes and outside is the great storm growing more violent every moment, and swirling round the austere cliffs of the Ungeheuerhorn: the Horror-Horn, as indeed it was to me."

"I want to hear all about it," I said. "Every detail: make a short story long, if it's short. I want to know why it's your Horror-Horn?"

"Well, Chanton and I (he was my guide) used to spend days prowling about the cliffs, making a little progress on one side and then being stopped, and gaining perhaps five hundred feet on another side and then being confronted by some insuperable obstacle, till the day when by luck we found the route. Chanton never liked the job, for some reason that I could not fathom.

"It was not because of the difficulty or danger of the climbing, for he was the most fearless man I have ever met when dealing with rocks and ice, but he was always insistent that we should get off the mountain and back to the Blumen hut before sunset. He was scarcely easy even when we had got back to shelter and locked and barred the door, and I well remember one night when, as we ate our supper, we heard some animal, a wolf probably, howling somewhere out in the night.

"A positive panic seized him, and I don't think he closed his eyes till morning. It struck me then that there might be some grisly legend about the mountain, connected possibly with its name, and next day I asked him why the peak was called the Horror-Horn. He put the question off at first, and said that, like the Schreckhorn, its name was due to its precipices and falling stones; but

when I pressed him further he acknowledged that there was a legend about it, which his father had told him. There were creatures, so it was supposed, that lived in its caves, things human in shape, and covered, except for the face and hands, with long black hair. They were dwarfs in size, four feet high or thereabouts, but of prodigious strength and agility, remnants of some wild primeval race. It seemed that they were still in an upward stage of evolution, or so I guessed, for the story ran that sometimes girls had been carried off by them, not as prey, and not for any such fate as for those captured by cannibals, but to be bred from. Young men also had been raped by them, to be mated with the females of their tribe. All this looked as if the creatures, as I said, were tending towards humanity. But naturally I did not believe a word of it, as applied to the conditions of the present day. Centuries ago, conceivably, there may have been such beings, and, with the extraordinary tenacity of tradition, the news of this had been handed down and was still current round the hearths of the peasants. As for their numbers, Chanton told me that three had been once seen together by a man who owing to his swiftness on skis had escaped to tell the tale.

"This man, he averred, was no other than his grand-father, who had been benighted one winter evening as he passed through the dense woods below the Ungeheuerhorn, and Chanton supposed that they had been driven down to these lower altitudes in search of food during severe winter weather, for otherwise the recorded sights of them had always taken place among the rocks of the peak itself. They had pursued his grandfather, then a young man, at an extraordinarily swift canter, running sometimes upright as men run, sometimes on all-fours in the manner of beasts, and their howls were just such as that we had heard that night in the Blumen hut. Such at any rate was the story Chanton told me, and, like you, I regarded it as the very moonshine of superstition.

"But the very next day I had reason to reconsider my judgment about it.

"It was on that day that after a week of exploration we hit on the only route at present known to the top of our peak. We started as soon as there was light enough to climb by, for, as you may guess, on very difficult rocks it is impossible to climb by lantern or moonlight. We hit on the long fissure I have spoken of, we explored the ledge which from below seemed to end in nothingness, and with an hour's stepcutting ascended the couloir which led upwards from it.

"From there onwards it was a rock-climb, certainly of considerable difficulty, but with no heart-breaking discoveries ahead, and it was about nine in the morning that we stood on the top. We did not wait there long, for that side of the mountain is raked by falling stones loosened, when the sun grows

hot, from the ice that holds them, and we made haste to pass the ledge where the falls are most frequent. After that there was the long fissure to descend, a matter of no great difficulty, and we were at the end of our work by midday, both of us, as you may imagine, in the state of the highest elation.

"A long and tiresome scramble among the huge boulders at the foot of the cliff then lay before us. Here the hill-side is very porous and great caves extend far into the mountain. We had unroped at the base of the fissure, and were picking our way as seemed good to either of us among these fallen rocks, many of them bigger than an ordinary house, when, on coming round the corner of one of these, I saw that which made it clear that the stories Chanton had told me were no figment of traditional superstition.

"Not twenty yards in front of me lay one of the beings of which he had spoken. There it sprawled naked and basking on its back with face turned up to the sun, which its narrow eyes regarded unwinking. In form it was completely human, but the growth of hair that covered limbs and trunk alike almost completely hid the sun-tanned skin beneath. But its face, save for the down on its cheeks and chin, was hairless, and I looked on a countenance the sensual and malevolent bestiality of which froze me with horror. Had the creature been an animal, one would have felt scarcely a shudder at the gross animalism of it; the horror lay in the fact that it was a man. There lay by it a couple of gnawed bones, and, its meal finished, it was lazily licking its protuberant lips, from which came a purring murmur of content. With one hand it scratched the thick hair on its belly, in the other it held one of these bones, which presently split in half beneath the pressure of its finger and thumb. But my horror was not based on the information of what happened to those men whom these creatures caught, it was due only to my proximity to a thing so human and so infernal. The peak, of which the ascent had a moment ago filled us with such elated satisfaction, became to me an Ungeheuerhorn indeed, for it was the home of beings more awful than the delirium of nightmare could ever have conceived.

"Chanton was a dozen paces behind me, and with a backward wave of my hand I caused him to halt. Then withdrawing myself with infinite precaution, so as not to attract the gaze of that basking creature, I slipped back round the rock, whispered to him what I had seen, and with blanched faces we made a long detour, peering round every corner, and crouching low, not knowing that at any step we might not come upon another of these beings, or that from the mouth of one of these caves in the mountain-side there might not appear another of those hairless and dreadful faces, with perhaps this time the breasts and insignia of womanhood. That would have been the worst of all.

"Luck favoured us, for we made our way among the boulders and shifting stones, the rattle of which might at any moment have betrayed us, without a repetition of my experience, and once among the trees we ran as if the Furies themselves were in pursuit. Well now did I understand, though I dare say I cannot convey, the qualms of Chanton's mind when he spoke to me of these creatures. Their very humanity was what made them so terrible, the fact that they were of the same race as ourselves, but of a type so abysmally degraded that the most brutal and inhuman of men would have seemed angelic in comparison."

The music of the small band was over before he had finished the narrative, and the chattering groups round the tea-table had dispersed. He paused a moment.

"There was a horror of the spirit," he said, "which I experienced then, from which, I verily believe, I have never entirely recovered. I saw then how terrible a living thing could be, and how terrible, in consequence, was life itself. In us all I suppose lurks some inherited germ of that ineffable bestiality, and who knows whether, sterile as it has apparently become in the course of centuries, it might not fructify again. When I saw that creature sun itself, I looked into the abyss out of which we have crawled. And these creatures are trying to crawl out of it now, if they exist any longer. Certainly for the last twenty years there has been no record of their being seen, until we come to this story of the footprint seen by the climbers on Everest. If that is authentic, if the party did not mistake the footprint of some bear, or what not, for a human tread, it seems as if still this bestranded remnant of mankind is in existence."

Now, Ingram, had told his story well; but sitting in this warm and civilised room, the horror which he had clearly felt had not communicated itself to me in any very vivid manner.

Intellectually, I agreed, I could appreciate his horror, but certainly my spirit felt no shudder of interior comprehension.

"But it is odd," I said, "that your keen interest in physiology did not disperse your qualms.

"You were looking, so I take it, at some form of man more remote probably than the earliest human remains. Did not something inside you say 'This is of absorbing significance'?"

He shook his head.

"No: I only wanted to get away," said he. "It was not, as I have told you, the terror of what according to Chanton's story, might--await us if we were captured; it was sheer horror at the creature itself. I quaked at it."

The snowstorm and the gale increased in violence that night, and I slept uneasily, plucked again and again from slumber by the fierce battling of the

wind that shook my windows as if with an imperious demand for admittance. It came in billowy gusts, with strange noises intermingled with it as for a moment it abated, with flutings and moanings that rose to shrieks as the fury of it returned. These noises, no doubt, mingled themselves with my drowsed and sleepy consciousness, and once I tore myself out of nightmare, imagining that the creatures of the Horror-Horn had gained footing on my balcony and were rattling at the window-bolts. But before morning the gale had died away, and I awoke to see the snow falling dense and fast in a windless air. For three days it continued, without intermission, and with its cessation there came a frost such as I have never felt before. Fifty degrees were registered one night, and more the next, and what the cold must have been on the cliffs of the Ungeheuerborn I cannot imagine. Sufficient, so I thought, to have made an end altogether of its secret inhabitants: my cousin, on that day twenty years ago, had missed an opportunity for study which would probably never fall again either to him or another.

I received one morning a letter from a friend saying that he had arrived at the neighbouring winter resort of St. Luigi, and proposing that I should come over for a morning's skating and lunch afterwards. The place was not more than a couple of miles off, if one took the path over the low, pine-clad foot-hills above which lay the steep woods below the first rocky slopes of the Ungeheuerhorn; and accordingly, with a knapsack containing skates on my back, I went on skis over the wooded slopes and down by an easy descent again on to St. Luigi. The day was overcast, clouds entirely obscured the higher peaks though the sun was visible, pale and unluminous, through the mists. But as the morning went on, it gained the upper hand, and I slid down into St. Luigi beneath a sparkling firmament. We skated and lunched, and then, since it looked as if thick weather was coming up again, I set out early about three o'clock for my return journey.

Hardly had I got into the woods when the clouds gathered thick above, and streamers and skeins of them began to descend among the pines through which my path threaded its way. In ten minutes more their opacity had so increased that I could hardly see a couple of yards in front of me. Very soon I became aware that I must have got off the path, for snow-cowled shrubs lay directly in my way, and, casting back to find it again, I got altogether confused as to direction.

But, though progress was difficult, I knew I had only to keep on the ascent, and presently I should come to the brow of these low foot-hills, and descend into the open valley where Alhubel stood. So on I went, stumbling and sliding over obstacles, and unable, owing to the thickness of the snow, to take off my skis, for I should have sunk over the knees at each step. Still the ascent

continued, and looking at my watch I saw that I had already been near an hour on my way from St. Luigi, a period more than sufficient to complete my whole journey. But still I stuck to my idea that though I had certainly strayed far from my proper route a few minutes more must surely see me over the top of the upward way, and I should find the ground declining into the next valley. About now, too, I noticed that the mists were growing suffused with rose-colour, and, though the inference was that it must be close on sunset, there was consolation in the fact that they were there and might lift at any moment and disclose to me my whereabouts. But the fact that night would soon be on me made it needful to bar my mind against that despair of loneliness which so eats out the heart of a man who is lost in woods or on mountain-side, that, though still there is plenty of vigour in his limbs, his nervous force is sapped, and he can do no more than lie down and abandon himself to whatever fate may await him...And then I heard that which made the thought of loneliness seem bliss indeed, for there was a worse fate than loneliness. What I heard resembled the howl of a wolf, and it came from not far in front of me where the ridge--was it a ridge?--still rose higher in vestment of pines.

From behind me came a sudden puff of wind, which shook the frozen snow from the drooping pine-branches, and swept away the mists as a broom sweeps the dust from the floor.

Radiant above me were the unclouded skies, already charged with the red of the sunset, and in front I saw that I had come to the very edge of the wood through which I had wandered so long.

But it was no valley into which I had penetrated, for there right ahead of me rose the steep slope of boulders and rocks soaring upwards to the foot of the Ungeheuerhorn. What, then, was that cry of a wolf which had made my heart stand still? I saw.

Not twenty yards from me was a fallen tree, and leaning against the trunk of it was one of the denizens of the Horror-Horn, and it was a woman. She was enveloped in a thick growth of hair grey and tufted, and from her head it streamed down over her shoulders and her bosom, from which hung withered and pendulous breasts. And looking on her face I comprehended not with my mind alone, but with a shudder of my spirit, what Ingram had felt. Never had nightmare fashioned so terrible a countenance; the beauty of sun and stars and of the beasts of the field and the kindly race of men could not atone for so hellish an incarnation of the spirit of life. A fathomless bestiality modelled the slavering mouth and the narrow eyes; I looked into the abyss itself and knew that out of that abyss on the edge of which I leaned the generations of men had climbed. What if that ledge crumbled in front of me and pitched me headlong into its nethermost depths?...

In one hand she held by the horns a chamois that kicked and struggled. A blow from its hindleg caught her withered thigh, and with a grunt of anger she seized the leg in her other hand, and, as a man may pull from its sheath a stem of meadow-grass, she plucked it off the body, leaving the torn skin hanging round the gaping wound. Then putting the red, bleeding member to her mouth she sucked at it as a child sucks a stick of sweetmeat. Through flesh and gristle her short, brown teeth penetrated, and she licked her lips with a sound of purring. Then dropping the leg by her side, she looked again at the body of the prey now quivering in its death-convulsion, and with finger and thumb gouged out one of its eyes. She snapped her teeth on it, and it cracked like a soft-shelled nut.

It must have been but a few seconds that I stood watching her, in some indescribable catalepsy of terror, while through my brain there pealed the panic-command of my mind to my stricken limbs "Begone, begone, while there is time." Then, recovering the power of my joints and muscles, I tried to slip behind a tree and hide myself from this apparition. But the woman--shall I say?--must have caught my stir of movement, for she raised her eyes from her living feast and saw me. She craned forward her neck, she dropped her prey, and half rising began to move towards me. As she did this, she opened her mouth, and gave forth a howl such as I had heard a moment before. It was answered by another, but faintly and distantly.

Sliding and slipping, with the toes of my skis tripping in the obstacles below the snow, I plunged forward down the hill between the pine-trunks. The low sun already sinking behind some rampart of mountain in the west reddened the snow and the pines with its ultimate rays. My knapsack with the skates in it swung to and fro on my back, one ski-stick had already been twitched out of my hand by a fallen branch of pine, but not a second's pause could I allow myself to recover it. I gave no glance behind, and I knew not at what pace my pursuer was on my track, or indeed whether any pursued at all, for my whole mind and energy, now working at full power again under the stress of my panic, was devoted to getting away down the hill and out of the wood as swiftly as my limbs could bear me. For a little while I heard nothing but the hissing snow of my headlong passage, and the rustle of the covered undergrowth beneath my feet, and then, from close at hand behind me, once more the wolf-howl sounded and I heard the plunging of footsteps other than my own.

The strap of my knapsack had shifted, and as my skates swung to and fro on my back it chafed and pressed on my throat, hindering free passage of air, of which, God knew, my labouring lungs were in dire need, and without pausing I slipped it free from my neck, and held it in the hand from which my

ski-stick had been jerked. I seemed to go a little more easily for this adjustment, and now, not so far distant, I could see below me the path from which I had strayed.

If only I could reach that, the smoother going would surely enable me to outdistance my pursuer, who even on the rougher ground was but slowly overhauling me, and at the sight of that riband stretching unimpeded downhill, a ray of hope pierced the black panic of my soul. With that came the desire, keen and insistent, to see who or what it was that was on my tracks, and I spared a backward glance. It was she, the hag whom I had seen at her gruesome meal; her long grey hair flew out behind her, her mouth chattered and gibbered, her fingers made grabbing movements, as if already they closed on me.

But the path was now at hand, and the nearness of it I suppose made me incautious. A hump of snow-covered bush lay in my path, and, thinking I could jump over it, I tripped and fell, smothering myself in snow. I heard a maniac noise, half scream, half laugh, from close behind, and before I could recover myself the grabbing fingers were at my neck, as if a steel vice had closed there. But my right hand in which I held my knapsack of skates was free, and with a blind back-handed movement I whirled it behind me at the full length of its strap, and knew that my desperate blow had found its billet somewhere. Even before I could look round I felt the grip on my neck relax, and something subsided into the very bush which had entangled me. I recovered my feet and turned.

There she lay, twitching and quivering. The heel of one of my skates piercing the thin alpaca of the knapsack had hit her full on the temple, from which the blood was pouring, but a hundred yards away I could see another such figure coming downwards on my tracks, leaping and bounding. At that panic rose again within me, and I sped off down the white smooth path that led to the lights of the village already beckoning. Never once did I pause in my headlong going: there was no safety until I was back among the haunts of men. I flung myself against the door of the hotel, and screamed for admittance, though I had but to turn the handle and enter; and once more as when Ingram had told his tale, there was the sound of the band, and the chatter of voices, and there, too, was he himself, who looked up and then rose swiftly to his feet as I made my clattering entrance.

"I have seen them too," I cried. "Look at my knapsack. Is there not blood on it? It is the blood of one of them, a woman, a hag, who tore off the leg of a chamois as I looked, and pursued me through the accursed wood. I--".Whether it was I who spun round, or the room which seemed to spin round me, I knew not, but I heard myself falling, collapsed on the floor, and the next time that I

was conscious at all I was in bed. There was Ingram there, who told me that I was quite safe, and another man, a stranger, who pricked my arm with the nozzle of a syringe, and reassured me...

A day or two later I gave a coherent account of my adventure, and three or four men, armed with guns, went over my traces. They found the bush in which I had stumbled, with a pool of blood which had soaked into the snow, and, still following my ski-tracks, they came on the body of a chamois, from which had been torn one of its hindlegs and one eye-socket was empty. That is all the corroboration of my story that I can give the reader, and for myself I imagine that the creature which pursued me was either not killed by my blow or that her fellows removed her body...Anyhow, it is open to the incredulous to prowl about the caves of the Ungeheuerhorn, and see if anything occurs that may convince them.

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25: The Bodymaster

Harold Ward

1879-1950

Weird Tales, April, 1923

Foreword

PERHAPS I have been suffering from an hallucination. Possibly during the weary months that I was lost to family and friends I was wandering about the country, my brain in the ferment which afterward developed into the attack of brain fever from which I have just recovered.

Yet the maggots of madness inside my skull could not have created all that I have seen. The proof of my sincerity lies in the fact that within these pages I have confessed complicity in crimes for which the law can hang me if it so desires. I am willing to admit that to the man of science my tale bristles with errors— errors of interpretation, but not of fact— for I am a detective, not a scientist.

Did such a man as The Bodymaster really exist? Or was it only the writhing of my tortured imagination which transformed Doctor Darius Lessman, theologist and philanthropist, into a fiend incarnate? His lair is gone. A pile of charred ruins now occupies the place where it stood. Its inmates died with it. The Bodymaster is no more. But is he really dead?

Time alone will tell. The records of the police department of the City of New York will bear out my story up to a certain point. From there on the affair is a puzzle to me. It is from this that the reader must draw his own deductions. I can give only the facts.

i

THROUGH THE THICK tangle of underbrush and trees, which surrounded Doctor Darius Lessman's private sanitarium just outside the city of New York, dashed a young man, coatless, hatless, his shirt and trousers torn to shreds by the thorns and brambles.

With blood streaming from a hundred scratches on his face and hands, he presented a savage, almost inhuman, aspect as he leaped before the automobile rapidly coming down the smooth asphalt pavement.

His face was drawn, haggard, contorted; and the snow-white hair, which crowned his youthful face, was matted and unkempt. His eyes bulged from their sockets like those of a maniac as he glared at the oncoming machine.

The afternoon, which was just drawing to a close, had been unusually hot; the storm, hovering over the countryside, filled the air with a strange

foreboding— an unusual degree of sultriness. The sky was dull save when an occasional flash of lightning tore through the lowering heavens. Not a breath of wind. Not the rustle of a leaf. Yet the teeth of the man in the roadway rattled like castanets, and upon his clammy brow the cold sweat of terror stood out in beads.

The driver of the big machine brought it to a stop with a sharp grinding of brakes. As he caught a glimpse of the ghastly face of the man before him he involuntarily hunched his body back further into his seat.

"What the hell!" he exclaimed.

The other leaped to the side of the machine and fumbled clumsily— his fingers shaking like those of a man with the palsy— at the catch of the door.

"Quick!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "He— the Bodymaster— is after me! Get me to the police station. I must— Oh, my God! I *must* tell my story before he seizes me again!"

He managed to open the door and stumble into the machine. The driver turned to him.

"All right, old man," he said in the soothing tone that one uses in addressing a lunatic. "We'll get you there in a jiffy. Are you from the big house up yonder?" He jerked his thumb in the direction of the sanitarium.

An involuntary shudder ran through the young man. His eyes dilated. He shrank away from the motorist.

"My God! Not there! Not there again!" he implored. "Please don't take me back to that den! You think that I'm a madman. I can see that you do. I'm sane— as sane as you. But heavens knows why— after the hell I've been through!"

He turned to the driver and grasped him by the arm.

"Give her the gas!" he exclaimed. "Can't you see that I'm doomed? But no. You know nothing of the Bodymaster and the strange hold he has over his subjects. He is after me— he, the Bodymaster! It is to save others from the same fate that I must tell what I know!"

With a sudden bound he leaped forward, his eyes wild, his hair in a tousled mass, his hands stretched out, the fingers clawing wildly, his whole body quivering. Then he dropped to the floor of the machine as if hurled by unseen hands.

"He is *here*! *The Bodymaster is here!*" he shrieked. "Drive— for the love of God, dr—"

The words ended in a dull, throaty gurgle as he writhed upon the floor of the machine at the other's feet. The driver, bewildered by the strange scene, threw in the clutch, and the machine dashed madly down the pavement.

The young man was on his back now, his knees drawn up, his face ghastly and twisted, his eyes bulging, his fingers clawing as if unseen hands were gripping at his throat. His mouth was open— gaping as he fought for breath.

With a wild yell of terror, the driver leaped from the machine. The automobile swerved, skidded— then hurled its weight against a nearby tree.

Summoning his courage, he rose to his feet from the side of the road, where his fall had thrown him among the brush and brambles, and approached the wreck.

In the bottom of the car the stranger lay dead!

And upon his white throat were the black marks of fingers!

ii

JOHN DUNCAN was arrested, charged with the murder of the unknown young man.

He had no defense. The evidence was all against him. The body of the stranger had been found in his damaged car. Death was the result of strangulation. The marks of fingers were upon the dead man's throat.

The defendant admitted that the deceased had been alive when he entered the machine. And the story he told was so strange, so unbelievable, that even his own attorney scoffed at it. How, then, could a judge believe his tale?

Doctor Darius Lessman was called upon to testify at the preliminary hearing. Tall, gaunt, saturnine, his raven hair, slightly tinged with gray, brushed back from his high forehead, he looked the student, the man of research, and as such he impressed the jury.

Carefully, painstakingly, he made an examination of the body. To the best of his knowledge and belief, he testified, he had never seen the man in life. How he chanced to be wandering about the grounds of the Lessman sanitarium he did not know. He added to the already favorable opinion formed of him by the judge and jury by asking that he be allowed to pay the funeral expenses of the ragged stranger.

One man alone believed the tale told by John Duncan. He was Patrick Casey, captain in command of the homicide squad of the Metropolitan Police Department.

The alleged murder had happened outside of Casey's jurisdiction; but the captain chanced to be present at the hearing. Immediately afterward he sought an interview with the defendant.

For a second time he heard the story, questioned Duncan closely and, at the close of his visit, advised the accused to retain the private inquiry agency of

which I am the head. He even interested himself to the extent of calling me up, telling me of what he had done and asking that I take the case as a personal favor to him.

John Duncan, being a wealthy man, accepted the policeman's advice. And thus I became a figure in what I am forced to believe was the strangest series of happenings that ever fell to mortal man.

I admit that I am ashamed of the part fate forced me to play. The reader will probably term me either a fool or a lunatic. I am certain that I am not a fool. As for being a lunatic— as I have stated in my foreword, I do not know. But I digress.

Three days later, armed with letters of introduction from some of the most celebrated alienists in the city, all vouching for my character and ability, I applied to Doctor Darius Lessman for a position as attendant.

I secured the position.

AN UNCANNY, eerie, ghost-like place, this sanitarium of Doctor Lessman's.

My first glimpse of it recalled to mind a description I had read somewhere of a ruined castle "from whose tall black windows came no ray of light and whose broken battlements showed a jagged line against the moonlit sky." It had been built— some half century before— for a mad-house. Its owner, a better physician than a business man, had lost his all before its completion, and it had fallen badly into decay when Lessman purchased it.

It stood in the midst of an arid thicket of oaks, cedars and stunted pines. Lessman, evidently, had done little to improve the place or its surroundings save to finish that part that had been left uncompleted by the former owner, and year after year it had grown more gloomy and less habitable. The state highway ran a scant half mile away, crowded on both sides by the stunted forest, a macadamized driveway which wound about through the trees, leading to the house. The nearest habitation was several miles away.

How such a place could be approved by the state as a hospital for the cure of nervous disorders has always been a question to me. Yet investigation proved that Lessman had a state license, although to the best of my knowledge his institution had no patients, nor did it seek them. It was a sanitarium in name only.

In my character of a man seeking employment, I thought it best to walk the last lap of the journey. Dismissing my chauffeur at the edge of the forest, lest some one from the house discover my means of transportation, I sent him home and trudged down the pathway toward the ancient pile.

I must digress long enough to state that this was the last time I was seen until I made my reappearance months afterward, to all appearances a raving maniac. Naturally, after several weeks had passed and nothing was heard from me, my family and friends commenced an investigation. Doctor Lessman was able to prove to them that I had never reached his place, in spite of the statement made by Hopkins, the chauffeur. The latter was arrested and would probably have been held for my murder had it not been for my timely reappearance. But more of this later.

I approached the great door, studded with iron nails and set in a doorway of massive brick and stone. There was no sign of a bell, and I was finally forced to resort to my knuckles to hammer a tattoo on the weather-beaten panel.

I had almost decided to try the door in the rear, when I heard the approach of a heavy step. There came a sound of rattling chains and the clanking of massive bolts. Then a key was turned with a grating noise, and the big door swung back.

Something told me to flee; but I shook off the feeling as unworthy a man of my profession and stood my ground. Had I but obeyed that impulse Had I but obeyed that impulse I would have been a happier man today!

Doctor Lessman, clad in a faded bathrobe, his forefinger between the pages of the volume he had been reading, greeted me. For an instant his gaze traveled over me from head to foot, then went past me as if seeking my means of approach. Apparently satisfied with his inspection, he took my letters of introduction and read them carefully, questioning me on several points.

With a gesture of his slender hand he invited me to enter— *the lair of the Bodymaster*!

Iii

WHAT better proof that I was not insane during those horrible months than that during my rational periods I kept a diary? Fragmentary though it is, showing as it does the awful strain under which I was placed, the detective instinct must have been uppermost at all times.

I remember nothing of writing it. Yet here it is in my own handwriting. Evidently so deeply impressed upon my subconscious mind must have been my mission— the fact that I was there to save an innocent man from the gallows— that, like a man in his sleep, I wrote, not knowing that I did, obsessed with the one idea— to preserve the evidence which I was accumulating against Darius Lessman. Why he did not destroy the diary I do not know. Possibly I had it too well hidden. Or he may not have thought it worth while, believing that I would never escape.

THE DIARY.

"THE ragged stranger was right. Lessman *is* a Bodymaster. Already he holds me in his power. My body is his to do with as he wills. Those into whose hands this writing may fall will probably think me demented, for the human mind declines to believe that which it can not understand. And while I am under his uncanny power I may do some act— commit some deed— which, under happier circumstances, would fill me with loathing. Do not judge me too harshly. Remember that Lessman's is the will which forces me."

ANOTHER ENTRY IN THE DIARY.

"LAST NIGHT I killed a man. Of this I am almost certain. I, a man sworn to avenge crime and to track down criminals, have the brand of Cain upon my brow. My hands are dripping with blood. I should be in a cell in murderers' row, waiting for an avenging law to hang me, instead of breathing the air of freedom. But am I free? No! A thousand times no! I am as much a prisoner as I would be behind the bars of a felon's cage.

"As one watches a motion picture thrown upon the silver screen, I see myself with Meta by my side.... We cross a darkened thoroughfare.... The details are fragmentary— occasional. I know that we are near a house. A window is open. We enter. At her command, I approach the safe placed in the wall. It seems to open to my touch.... Meta is holding a flashlight— And yet it is not Meta! It is another— a girl, fair-haired, sweet of face— yet her will is the will of Meta. Meta's is the driving force behind her actions, just as my body is driven onward by the iron will of the Bodymaster....

"Some one is approaching. We step behind the curtain. He enters and snaps on the light. At sight of the open safe, he turns. He is about to give the alarm.... There is a knife in my hand.... I strike! God in Heaven! *I have killed him!*... We seize the jewels from the safe and escape...."

"There was the stain of blood on my hand when I awoke this morning. I am a murderer! Oh God! I pray that it was all a dream. Yet it was so realistic that I am forced to believe that it is true.

"I have discovered the evidence which I set out to find. But what a terrific price I have paid for what I have learned. Under his will, my brain is a vacuum, rattling around within its pan like a pebble in a tin bucket, functioning only when he so commands. But wait! This can not be entirely so. I must still have some reasoning power left, else I would not be writing these lines. Thank God for that!

"Yet even as I write I know that The Bodymaster is planning my death. He has it within his power to drive my soul from out my body— to usurp this tenement of clay with his own polluted brain. How he works his wonders I will describe later if I am able. It is hard for me to think consecutively.

"Lessman's is the greatest brain, his the most wonderful intellect, the world has ever known. His is the accumulated wisdom of the centuries— since Jesus of Nazareth trod this earth there has been none who could accomplish the wonders he has performed. Think what a power for good he might have been!

"I must publish his devilishness to the world. John Duncan lies festering in a felon's cell, perhaps to stretch a hempen rope for a crime that Lessman committed. I must save him if I can. Yet who will believe me? Wise judges and learned counsel scoffed and jeered at what Duncan had to tell. What, then, will they say when they read these lines? I see them smile derisively and tap their bulging brows in token of my madness.

"Meta is the lure he used to hold me in his power. My instinct told me to flee the minute I crossed the threshold. Would to heaven I had! Lessman must have read my thoughts, for he pressed the bell which summoned her to his side.

"One glimpse of Meta Vinetta and I was lost.

"Lessman introduced me to her as his sister. I know now that she is more to him than that— that she is his soul mate, his affinity. She is his accomplice in all the devilish schemes which incubate within his wondrous brain.

"Together they can rule the world. Lessman holds that the body is a shell, a house built only to hold the soul, deriving its power from the spirit, the will. To him there is no crime in murder, for his theology holds that the snapping of the thread of life is merely the release of the soul which soars away to realms on high. His is the belief that might is right. He needs the bodies of his victims in order to practice his devilish arts. He has the power to take them, and he uses it to the utmost. He holds that the body is not a prison house, but a slave to will. In his philosophy, it is simply a useful tool over which the spirit possesses absolute control. He is neither a spiritualist nor a theosophist. His is a theory all by itself and of itself.

"*Lessman has elected to live forever!* Of that I am certain. He and Meta— the woman he loves."

ANOTHER ENTRY.

"THERE ARE other poor dupes here— at least a dozen of them. Some of them are maniacs; and Lessman is holding them, I think, with the hope that he

can cure their awful malady. For, as I understand it, he has no power over a diseased brain. It is only those that are normal that bow to his bidding.

"We have compared notes. Collins, of Chicago, has rational streaks during which he is able to talk freely. He, like myself, was a detective. I remember reading of his strange disappearance over a year ago. He was on a robbery case, and certain clews led him to New York. Instead of reporting to the police, he thought to take all the credit and capture the criminals himself. He trailed them to Doctor Lessman's place. He, like myself, fell a victim to the wiles of Meta. Now he is at intervals a jibbering idiot.

"Several of the poor devils, Collins tells me, were placed here by distant relatives. Lessman, wearing the garb of sanctity, talks of his desire to cure them of their nervous disorder, and their relatives, poor fools, glad to rid themselves of the millstones around their necks, turn the wretched creatures over to him. He charges a low rate for their board and medical treatment.

"To one and all he is known as 'The Bodymaster.' He teaches them to call him that. They fear him like the very devil. They talk occasionally of a revolt. But when he is near they tremble at his frown. His hold over them is absolute— complete."

iv

EVIDENTLY several weeks elapsed between the last entry in the diary and what follows. This is to be inferred from the fact that several things are mentioned as having happened of which there is no record. In all probability, I was in a semi-somnambulic state during the interval, as a result of Lessman's strange power over me. During my entire incarceration there were times when everything was a blank; at other times, I remember, there were dim, hazy vistas of things into which I peered. They seem like dreams. Yet, if they were dreams, of what was their substance? A dream must have some foundation.

FROM THE DIARY.

"THE unforeseen has come to pass. That which I have just witnessed God never intended that mortal eyes should see. At the very thought of it my body trembles and every nerve tingles as if from electric shock.

"Where is Lessman? Did the Bodymaster and his female accomplice perish in the ruins of their own diabolical art? I hope so. It is better that I— that all of us— die of starvation, locked as we are in this horrible den, than that others should share the fate which has been meted out to us.

"*Last night I am almost certain that we exchanged bodies— the Bodymaster and I!*

"At least, my waking consciousness tells me that we did. Yet it is all so hazy that I can remember only fragments of what happened. Perhaps I only dreamed. I tell only what I can remember.

"At his command, I slunk from my narrow cell like a mangy, half-starved, dope-filled circus lion from its cage. And, like the king of beasts, beaten into servitude in the arena, I fawned at my master's feet, ready to do his bidding. Such is the state that I have reached. For my body is not my own. It is his— his to do with as he wills. Fight as I may, an unseen force compels me to do his bidding.

"They were together, he and Meta. From another door entered a girl— young, beautiful, fair-haired. She is, I am certain, the woman who accompanied me on that other occasion of which I have a recollection— the night I found the blood upon my hand and knew that I had killed a man. I dream of her nightly. She is Meta's dupe. Like me, her mind is not yet a blank. She entered slowly, reluctantly, as if every fiber in her body rebelled against the awful crime in which she was to take a part, her great blue eyes staring straight ahead.

"Like a woman who walks in her sleep, she approached Meta's side. For an instant they stood there— the fair-haired girl and the beautiful, raven-tressed woman. Lessman's hands hovered over them.

"She screamed! God in heaven, how she shrieked! Then the body of Meta staggered to a nearby chair and dropped into its recesses.

"*And from the throat of the fair-haired girl with the angel's face came the voice of Meta!*

"'*It is done!*'

"He, the Bodymaster, turned to me. My whole being fought within me against the sacrilege which was being committed. As well attempt to stem the oncoming tide. I felt my body in a convulsion. Something seemed to be tearing at my very vitals. My mind reeled. My brain was filled with fire. The face— the devilish, diabolical, mocking face of the Bodymaster appeared before me. I could see nothing else. His baleful, gleaming eyes seemed to burn into my very core. My body seemed to be hurled through space.... Then came oblivion.

"I must have been unconscious but an instant. I stood leaning against the table, my fingers pressed against my aching brow. Dazed, I passed my hand across my face. I was bearded. *It was the face of Lessman, the Bodymaster!*

"The clothes were his. *I was inhabiting his body!*

"My startled gaze turned across the room. To all intents and purposes it was I who stood there, my arm about the waist of the golden-haired girl.

"I knew that it was not I— that it was Lessman, the Bodymaster, who offered his foul caresses to the beautiful face upraised to his. I knew that the rich red lips were not those of the girl whose slender body he had defiled. It was Meta— Meta and Lessman, not the girl and I....

"A burst of rage swelled up within me. Something snapped. For an instant a flood of red appeared before my eyes. I leaped forward, the lust for killing within my brain.

"Lessman's body is fat with nourishment, his muscles fed by good living, while mine is half famished, ill-nourished, weak as a result of worry and nerve strain.

"It was my own body I was punishing. Yet Lessman's was the soul that inhabited it. As a man sees his face in a mirror, so did I see my face before me. I hurled my stolen body to the floor. Screaming with rage, I showered blow after blow upon it. It writhed with pain.

"And all the time, within me, there was being waged a terrible struggle for mastery. I felt the will of Lessman commanding me to desist. Yet the love of a woman was stronger than his power. I gouged at the gleaming eyes which stared up into mine, the while I choked at the throat— *my throat*— which lay beneath my fingers.

"The woman was screaming. I knew that it was Meta who was cursing me, who sought to pull me from my victim. Yet it was the body of the unnamed girl I loved, her face contorted into a frenzy of malignancy, who showered blow after blow upon my bared head....

"I awoke to find myself here in my cell again. My head aches. My face is covered with bruises. My hair is matted with blood. Lessman must have conquered. I wonder how fared the girl with the mass of shimmering, golden hair. Surely, with all these bruises, it could not have been a dream."

v

MORE FROM THE DIARY.

"SHE LOVES ME! We met today for the first time, unfettered by the insidious chains the Bodymaster has woven about us. Her name is Avis— Avis Rohmer. She has told me all.

"Perhaps it is a part of his diabolical plan to allow us to see each other. He knows that I will never seek to escape until I can take her with me. Since my rebellion of the other night— I know not how long ago it was, for time is as nothing in a brain that is partly dead— he has been more careful.

"She, Avis and I, alone of all those who have fallen under his supernatural power, still retain our minds. The others are mental wrecks, their skulls mere empty shells in which their addled brains sizzle and froth like half-worked wine in kegs. She has begged me to protect her. And I have sworn to take her from this den of iniquity, although God alone knows how I can ever keep my promise. For I am as completely under his power as she.

"Victory makes him careless, while failure makes him redouble his efforts. That is why this narrative appears piecemeal. I am like a man sleeping the sleep of the exhausted, waking up occasionally for food, then dropping off again. What he is doing during the intervals when I am not myself I can only imagine."

ANOTHER ENTRY.

"I MUST work fast if I am to save Avis. I care not for myself now— since I have felt love. She is an orphan. She came here from a western state, determined to make her fortune on the stage. Like thousands of others, she found that her talent was mediocre. She sought to make a living in other ways when she found that all that was open to her was the downward path. Meta— again it was Meta who served as the lure— read her advertisement. Meta appeared before her as the Good Samaritan— a woman, wealthy, refined, seeking a companion. She brought her here.

"Lessman allows me to see her every day now. What devilish plan has he in view that he should torture me with her sufferings?"

vi

Occasionally through the clouds of obscurity there appears some incident which I remember distinctly. Strange as it may appear, there is no record of these occasions in my diary. I can explain this only by the supposition that at such times Lessman withdrew his power over me, while on all other occasions I was, as I have said before, in a semi-somnambulic state.

THE DIARY CONTINUES.

"I AWOKE as one awakens from a horrible nightmare. My brain was as clear as a crystal. For an instant I imagined that I was in my own apartment— that the suffering I had gone through were but the conjurings of my own mind.

"A single glance at the barred window brought me back to a sudden realization of my condition. But my mind was my own. I was freed from the horrible thing that had obsessed me.

"On the table in one corner of the room was food. I ate ravenously. I do not remember how long it had been since I had eaten. My meal completed, I looked about me for some means of escape. Once I could find a way out of the accursed place— some weapon with which to defend myself— I would return, free Avis and flee.

"It must have been midnight. Outside, the rain was falling in torrents. It beat a regular tattoo upon the window. Cautiously, lest I be heard, I tiptoed to the door and tried the knob.

"The door was unlocked!

"In an exultation of excitement, I peered out. There was no one in sight. My mood was detached, strange, vague— marked by an indescribable something I could not explain. Save for the single kerosene lamp, which burned low in its bracket at the end of the long hallway, the place was in darkness.

"Removing my shoes, I tiptoed my way across the floor. Avis' room was the fourth door from mine. That much she had told me. Reaching it, I tried the knob. It was locked. I tapped softly against the panel. Receiving no answer, I rapped more loudly. I dared not raise my voice. Failing to arouse her, I was forced to leave her for a moment to continue my exploration.

"In one corner of the hallway stood a huge stick— evidently a cane that had been carried by one of the keepers in the days when the place was used as an asylum for maniacs. With this in my hand, I felt more secure.

"Where was Lessman? Had he made his escape while I slept, leaving my door open? Had he forced Avis and the other poor creatures who were under his command to accompany him? The thought startled me. Grasping the cudgel more firmly, I took the lamp from its bracket and started on a tour of investigation. All of the doors opening into the hallway, with the exception of my own, were locked. The silence was tomblike, uncanny.

"At the end of the long corridor a pair of stairs wound upward. Mounting them, I found myself in a long passage similar to that which I had just quitted. One or two of the rooms near the end were open. There was nothing in them except old furniture, moth-eaten and dusty with age. The entire floor seemed deserted.

"Continuing onward, I came to a door which, though it seemed to be locked, seemed to give a little under the pressure of my knee. Setting my lamp upon the floor, I put my shoulder against it and gave a long, steady shove. Under this force it opened quite readily.

"My stockinged feet made no noise, while the ease with which I was able to force the door showed that the hinges had been recently oiled. Inside, a lamp was burning.

"I hesitated in the doorway. Then my startled gaze made out a second room, partitioned from the first by curtains, pushed partly back.

"Across my field of vision moved the gaunt figure of The Bodymaster. He was clad in the faded bathrobe in which I had first seen him, and he held a lamp in his hand. The light shone upon his thin, cruel face. He approached the side of the bed and stood gazing down upon its occupant.

"Something seemed to draw me closer. Upon the bed lay a corpse— a blond-haired giant— stripped to the waist. As Lessman, his evil gaze still upon the mammoth figure, held the lamp a trifle aloft, *the dead man writhed and twisted as if in mortal agony*!

"The Bodymaster stretched forth one thin hand. The man upon the bed stiffened— then sat bolt upright, his bloodshot eyes glaring!

"Involuntarily I took a step backward.

"*As God is my judge, the eyes were those of a corpse— glassy, unseeing!* And while I still looked, the body slipped backward, the curious writhing movements ceased, and that which lay upon the bed was only insensate clay.

"Now or never was the time to strike. Grasping my cudgel more firmly, I raised it over my head. The back of the Bodymaster was turned toward me. I had him off his guard. I was about to bring the club down across his head when, without turning his gaze, he spoke:

" 'Sit down, my friend, and throw your cane aside. You can not strike. Your arm is palsied.'

"The cane dropped from my fingers. I attempted to lower my arm to recover it. Impossible. I was unable to move. My arm was held aloft as by an unseen hand.

"The Bodymaster turned toward me with a smile.

" 'Sit down!' he commanded.

"My arm dropped to my side. Like a drunken man I staggered to a chair."

vii

"SEATING himself opposite me, Lessman pushed a box of cigars across the table.

" 'Help yourself,' he smiled, selecting one for himself. 'You are some sixty seconds ahead of time. I hardly expected you to be so prompt.'

" 'Expected me!' I ejaculated.

"He nodded. 'Naturally,' he responded. 'How else do you suppose you got here? You certainly did not expect that I would make so great an oversight as to leave your door unlocked? I wanted you— wanted to have a talk with you. My mind willed that you should come, and you are here.'

"He waved his hand with a slight gesture as if dismissing the entire subject. For a second there was silence. Then he resumed:

" 'Our little fracas of the other night taught me that you are a man of more than ordinary mental ability; in fact, you are the first who has ever disobeyed my unspoken commands. And, more than that, you showed me that you are the man I have been seeking all these years.'

"His eyes burned with enthusiasm as he continued.

" 'Man,' he went on, 'my experiments have been a success. True, lives have been destroyed. But what is life! Your man-made theology teaches you that life is but a span of a few years in eternity; you snap the cord which binds you to this earth, and immediately you enter the paradise which your God has prepared for you. Why, then, prolong matters? I, rather than being the monster you think me to be, am a benefactor to the human race. Every man who dies in my hands before his allotted time has that much longer to spend in heaven.'

"He leaned back in his chair and laughed mirthlessly for an instant.

" 'I am not here to argue the right or wrong of the thing, however,' he continued. 'I am a man born to rule; I would rather be a big devil in hell than a little angel in heaven— if there be such places as heaven and hell, which I greatly doubt.

" 'I need help in my work— my experiments. True, I have Meta— but she is only a weak woman. I need others— men whom I can teach— men whom I can trust— men with the will to conquer. You have proved to me that you are such a man. The world is yours— the world and all that it contains— if you accept.'

"He stopped suddenly and gazed into my eyes as if trying to read my very soul. In fact, I believe that he did read my mind, for he answered my unspoken thoughts before I had voiced them:

" 'Yes, the devil took Christ upon the mountain and offered him everything,' he exclaimed, his eyes blazing. 'Call me the devil if you like— I care not a rap what you term me— I offer you the same. I said before, and I say again, the world is yours— money, power, pleasure and—'

"As he spoke, as if in obedience to some rehearsed cue, the door opened. A vague perfume assailed my nostrils— a faint, elusive scent— a zephyr from the East. Through the opening Meta stepped. She wore a kimona— a soft, silken, figured affair reminiscent of the Orient. I can only remember that beneath its folds protruded a glimpse of tiny, bare feet clad in the smallest of sandals.

"There are silences more eloquent than words. For an instant my eyes sought hers— deep, dark, lustrous, glowing like great pools of liquid fire.

"She smiled. Then, suddenly, she sprang forward, her arms from which the folds of the kimona had slipped, bared— outstretched toward me, her rich red lips upraised to mine.

"I leaped to my feet. My mind was filled with wild, insane thoughts. I took a half step toward her. Like a frightened bird, she darted backward. Then, as if filled with a wild abandon, she tore open the neck of her kimona, revealing to my startled gaze a glimpse of transparent white skin.

"Stretching forth one rounded arm, she displaced the curtain, discovering to my view a room opposite that in which lay the body of the man from the grave.

"My God! Crouched in a corner like a frightened animal was Avis! Her dress was torn, her golden hair matted and unkempt. She shrunk away from the light as one who fears its rays. Her big blue eyes gazed into mine. They were wide with fear. Yet her lips moved. It seemed to me that they were trying to form some message— to convey something to me.

"She held up her hands appealingly. They were fastened together with chains.

"From behind me came the voice of Lessman:

" 'Choose!' he commanded. 'On one hand wealth, luxury, power, beautiful women; on the other— *this*!

" '*Choose!*' "

ANOTHER EXTRACT FROM THE DIARY.

"I AWOKE in my own bed. I have the word of Avis for what happened. She says that when Lessman made his terrible offer to me that I stood for an instant like a man too astounded for utterance. Suddenly I turned and struck him squarely in the face. Meta screamed. Lessman, however, merely dropped back a step and stretched forth his hand. I had my arm drawn back to strike him again. I wavered, staggered for a second like a drunken man, then my knees gave way under me and I fell forward on my face.

"That is all she knows. She was hurried back to her own room by Meta, where she fell in a swoon."

viii

A MAN suffering from amnesia has, upon his return to normal, no recollection of what happened while he was in that condition. While I do not say that I was amnestic in every sense of the word, yet my condition must have resembled that peculiar malady to a certain degree. I can positively state that I have absolutely no remembrance of the events which are described below. Yet they are in my own handwriting in my diary. My own idea of the subject is that I was in a sort of twilight sleep, as it were— not completely under Lessman's influence, yet partly so. I give the contents of my diary just as they were written, venturing the assertion, however, that they must have been put down several days after the events of the previous chapter:

"A strange thing has come to pass. The Bodymaster evidently bears me no ill will, for last night Avis and I dined with him. Ordinarily, we are fed like animals, the food served out to us by a deaf and dumb mulatto who shoves the edibles through the bars to those who are too dangerous to be allowed outside their cells, while such of us as Lessman evidently considers harmless are occasionally permitted to dine at a long, bare table in the hallway. Here we sit and wolf our food like swine, our only thought being to fill our bellies quickly, lest the others get more than their share of the meal.

"Imagine, then, my surprise last night when, an hour before time for eating the mulatto brought to my room— for I am not yet confined to a cell, probably because I am not yet stark mad— a dress suit. Everything was there— even down to the studs. With it was a shaving outfit. Laying the things carefully upon my cot, he handed me a note. It read:

"

'*Let us forget our troubles for tonight. Dine with me. I have a surprise in store for you.*

" '*Lessman*'."

"I was shaved and cleaned and feeling like a new man by the time the dumb servant called for me. Following him down the stairs, I was ushered into the large parlor. Lessman, in full dress, seized me by the hand and greeted me warmly, while an instant later Meta, looking truly regal in an elaborate décolleté, stood before me. But the real surprise came a minute later.

"Avis was ushered in!

"Attired in some fancy gown— what man can describe a woman's dress?— she looked like an angel from heaven. I pinched myself to see whether I was awake or dreaming. What object had the Bodymaster in this masquerade?

"How can I describe the dinner which followed? For weeks we had been on a diet of little more than bread and soup. And now we sat down to a feast. Lessman was the perfect host; Meta the perfect hostess. Under their deft manipulations we forgot ourselves— forgot that they were monsters— remembered only that we were honored guests. Never have I met as charming a conversationalist as he. The man is a veritable storehouse of knowledge, with the added ability of imparting it to others. He has been everywhere, seen everything.

"He is far too subtle for me, for I have fallen a victim to his insidious wiles. Yet it is for another that I have sold myself, body and soul, to this monster.

"He knows that I love Avis. My every look shows it. And he is wise enough to seize the golden opportunity. That is the reason for all these courtesies, the dinner, the clothes, the brilliant conversation.

"Meta and Avis left the room, leaving Lessman and myself to our cigars. For weeks I have been without the solace of nicotine. Under the soothing influence of the weed and the charm of his conversation, I settled back in my chair, at peace with all the world. Lessman sensed my mood. He turned to me, his black eyes dancing with energy.

"'You are the first who has ever been able to combat my power,' he said slowly. 'And instead of being angered, I think the more of you for it. I need you— need you badly. Without a man of your caliber my work— my experiments— must temporarily halt.

"'You love the golden-haired girl in yonder— and if I am not greatly mistaken, she loves you. She is yours— yours if you agree to my demands. Otherwise—'

"At a gesture the door opened. Into the room came the mulatto dragging a woman— a mere slip of a girl. In her eyes shone the light of insanity. Her hair was matted, her clothes in tatters and covered with vermin. Her talonlike fingers worked spasmodically as she babbled meaninglessly. I shrank back from her in horror.

"The Bodymaster stepped across the room and with a sweeping movement of his hand, drew back the curtain. In the further corner of the adjoining room sat Avis— a veritable queen among women, in conversation with Meta. He withdrew his hand and the curtain fell again. He stepped back to his chair and reseated himself. The mute withdrew, dragging the poor insane creature with him.

"For a moment there was silence. Then Lessman turned to me again.

"'Within a fortnight,' he said, 'she— the girl in yonder— the girl you love— will be like *that*! I know the symptoms. Her mind is on the verge. It is for you to say whether she goes over the abyss.

"'Obey my commands, give me the assistance I demand, and the girl you love stays as she is now— the companion of Meta. Luxury, clothes, good food— everything that a woman cares for— will be hers. Refuse, and she goes back to her cell— to the squalor and dirt and vermin from which came the poor wretch you have just seen.

"'You and you alone can save her!'

"He stopped dramatically. There was but one answer. May God in Heaven have mercy on my soul! I have become Lessman's partner in crime— an accomplice of that foul thing, the Bodymaster— I who have sworn to bring him to justice!

"But I have saved Avis."

ix

I judge that several weeks must have elapsed between the time the foregoing was written and what follows:

"WHAT does mankind know about psychic phenomena? I remember reading the attempts of various novelists to exploit the subject. Combining a smattering of psychology with a vivid imagination, they succeed in knocking together a readable, though unreliable, story, trusting to the general lack of knowledge to cover their untruthfulness. And who can blame them? Secure behind the ramparts of the grave's grim silence, they can defy the world to prove them wrong. Their weird hypotheses bring them gold, power and position in the world of letters. And I— I, the only man who ever sent his soul hurtling through the realms of space to explore the mysteries of the great unknown— I must keep silent.

"The human mind refuses to believe what it does not understand. Were I to make public what I *know*— even if it were possible— I would be derided, held up to ridicule by press and public. For, despite our vaunted civilization, we are still slaves to superstition and ignorance, ever ready like those of old, to strike down one who dares utter the truth.

"Who among the millions on this globe would believe that I have spent days— weeks— months— in the dim past? As a man looks upon a motion picture of himself thrown upon the screen, so I have seen myself in the ages gone by. In shining armor, a plumed lance in my hand, I have ridden with the crusaders, or fought with the devil-may-care gallantry of the times for the favor of a damsel's smile. I have been the head of as bloody a gang of cutthroats as ever slit a weasand or scuttled a craft.

"I smile when I think of the things that I have been— I who am now the head of a modern detective agency, hired to run down the man whose gigantic brain has made these things all possible. I have been among the best and the worst of them in days gone by. Yet who would believe such a story? Lessman is too far in advance of his time. Yet there is a possibility that a few centuries hence some eye may read these lines and wonder how the men of today could be so dense.

"I am no longer afraid of death. I know now that such fear is only a superstitious idea. There is no such thing as death. That which we term death is but a step from one life to another. Lessman has taught me that life is a cycle and that when we leave it we enter into another existence, better or worse than the one we are quitting in accordance with our own actions.

"Lessman! Ah, there is the intellect! It is he who has made it possible for me to view wonders which no man ever looked upon before. I wonder how I could have doubted him.

"Lessman is a scientist— a thinker ahead of his time. Now that he has shown me that there is no death I feel no compunction about taking life, for by taking life we merely assist nature by a few years, leaving the body for us to experiment on. He has promised me that some day he will publish the results of his conclusions in order that the world may know and study. When he does, I will occupy a star part on the pages. For it is I who, at the command of Lessman, have explored the realms unknown, bringing back to him the fruits of my knowledge.

"And I have met Avis again and again. I have found that she has been with me through the ages— my loved one, my affinity. In every period of the past she has accompanied me— just as she will in the future, until the time comes where Divine Intelligence brings all things to an end.

"Let me start at the beginning. No more do I live in a cell-like room, eating like an animal with the cattle whose brain power is not as great as mine. With Avis by my side, I dine in state with Lessman and Meta.

"The next evening, immediately after dinner, The Bodymaster summoned me to his library. He was anxious to commence his experiments. At the beginning I was nervous, keyed up to the highest pitch, regretting the bargain I had made with him. But within five minutes he had wrought a change in my mind, and under the mastery of his words I soon reached a point where I was as enthusiastic as he.

"Remember, I have dabbled in philosophy to a certain extent myself. I took a degree at Princeton before I took up the business of crime detection. But my knowledge is elementary compared with that of Lessman. But I am getting away from my subject.

"Under the spell of his eloquence, I forgot that I was the servant and he the master— that I was merely a prisoner, subservient to my jailor's will. For an hour we discussed the subject; I was as interested as he. There is, he claims, no heights to which man can not climb, providing he so wills. To him man is— or should be— absolutely the master of his own body and soul.

"His is a mind that has reached on where others stopped. Hypnotism, to him, is child's play. Soul transference, the exchange of bodies— these are the things that this man dabbles with. But he has his limit. He can go so far and no farther.

"However, with my will submissive to his— with my mind attuned to his— he believed that he could send me hurling through space. In other words, he was to be the power station which would furnish me the energy to make the voyages of exploration.

"I was like wet clay in his hands. With the enthusiasm of a youngster, I gave myself over to him. Leaning back in my chair, at his command I made my mind as nearly as possible an absolute vacuum. It was probably but for an instant— but enough. There was none of the pain that I felt before on that never-to-be-forgotten occasion when my soul was divorced from my body. Instead, I felt my soul— my mental being— leave my body. I stood beside myself sitting there in the chair. There was no fear— nothing except a feeling of buoyancy...."

x

I MUST digress from my diary again.

AS I HAVE stated elsewhere, I have a recollection of certain things which transpired while I was in Lessman's power, although the greater part of the time that I passed with him is but a blank.

There is nothing in my diary which touches upon my trips into the unknown under his strange influence, aside from an occasional vague mention. I am certain that the greater part of the time I was in a sort of daze, imagining myself in a perfectly normal condition, yet held by The Bodymaster in a state where I would respond immediately to his will.

Yet even now I can recall, vaguely, incidents which happened to me on these trips. I remember meeting Avis on numerous occasions and under many names. Had my adventures happened consecutively, and could I remember them, they would be interesting food for thought for the men of science. But, unfortunately, they jump here and there, the story, oft-times, remaining unfinished.

There are so many, many adventures, the details of which I can not recall, that I will make no attempt to set them down. Suffice to say that all the time my brain was steadily growing weaker while I, poor dupe that I was, imagined that I was again normal.

During my lucid intervals I was constantly troubled by a gnawing conscience. Here was I, an officer of the law, lending myself to the worst form of outlawry. I attempted to reconcile myself with the thought that I was a prisoner, yet I was ever obsessed with the idea that I had proved a traitor to myself and to my oath. My only recompense was the feeling that by becoming a traitor I was saving the life and reason of the woman I loved.

I wonder now why I did not kill Avis and then commit suicide. So great was Lessman's influence over me that I sincerely believed that death was a myth. My own adventures beyond the pale had proved to me the correctness of his theory. Why, then, I did not end it all is something that can not be explained, especially when one recollects that from my warped viewpoint death would have been the easiest solution of the dilemma. My only explanation is that my mind was not functioning properly. As I have remarked again and again the reader must form his own conclusions, draw his own deductions, for I am dealing in facts, not surmises.

Lessman allowed me the freedom, to a certain extent, of the house. With Avis by my side, I wandered up and down the long, dusty corridors, exploring, searching. I told myself that I was looking for evidence— that sooner or later I would make my escape and bring The Bodymaster to justice. And I found none— nothing but the poor wretches locked in their cells, mad— all of them. And who would believe a maniac? No, there was absolutely nothing that could be used against the monster. It would be my word and that of Avis against that of Lessman and Meta. Such a case as that would be laughed out of court.

Why did I not make my escape? I could not. I only know that with the door wide open an invisible hand seemed to keep me from crossing the threshold.

xi

AGAIN I must resort to my diary:

"I know now how the stranger was killed— the man for whose death John Duncan is being held. Who the medium was through whom Lessman worked I do not know. I imagine that it was Collins, the Chicago detective. I have questioned him, and he does not remember anything about the affair, so far gone is his mind. Yet he has a hazy recollection of having at one time done

Lessman's bidding. Nor have I learned the name of the poor fellow who met death in the heroic attempt to unmask The Bodymaster.

"The dean of Daggett College is dead— murdered! Another professor has been arrested as the murderer. Lessman showed me the paper this morning, chuckling over the gruesome details. There is absolutely no hope for the poor wretch who has been seized by the police, for the evidence is all against him. They will hang him, and the law will consider itself satisfied. I laughed with Lessman at the newspaper account. Is he not right when he states that both of them are merely being ushered into paradise ahead of their time?

"I am certain that I killed Professor Ormsby!

"Years before he and Professor Jacobs had been teachers in the same college where Lessman held a chair. To them Lessman, then a young man, presented some of his astonishing theories. They turned upon him with ridicule, rebuked him, and then reported him as a heretic to the head of the university. It was their testimony which caused Lessman's dismissal in disgrace. He swore to get revenge.

"Two nights ago Lessman hurled my ego— my spirit— through space. I am certain of it, although my memory is indistinct and is growing weaker every hour. At his command I went to Ormsby's apartments. Jacobs was seated with his old friend engaged in a heated discussion, for both were argumentative men.

"Before the eyes of Professor Jacobs, Dean Ormsby shrieked as an invisible hand struck him down— then fell writhing to the floor, the purple marks of fingers upon his throat.

"They arrested Jacobs for the murder. Others had heard them arguing. Vainly he tried to tell them the truth— that the argument had been a friendly one and that his friend had been killed by some unseen force.

"They scoffed at his story— for the marks of fingers showed too plainly upon the dead man's neck."

ANOTHER ENTRY IN THE DIARY.

"I WONDER if my mind is weakening? I seem to do Lessman's bidding too easily. I fall in with his every suggestion. I know that he is using me in his crimes— that he is getting rich as a result of my efforts— and I do not seem to recollect what transpires, as I used to. Everything is hazy, with here and there some specially vivid remembrance standing out amidst the chaos.

"Occasionally he reads me the papers, or hands them to me after calling my attention to some mysterious crime of which there is an account. Often he tells me, with a sneer, that he is the author and I the perpetrator of these

horrible affairs. Innocent men are being made to suffer for things that I have done.

"The police are on the lookout for a mysterious woman who has been seen often where strange crimes have been committed. Can it be that they— Lessman and Meta— are using Avis as they are using me? They both deny it. And Avis tells me that she has no recollection of such things.... I wonder...."

xii

MORE REMARKABLE THINGS FROM THE DIARY.

"THEY hanged John Duncan today for the murder of the unknown young man. And I, the man who swore to save him from the gallows, could do nothing.

"I am an accomplice— an accessory after the fact. Lessman is a fiend, and if Meta is any better it is only because she lacks his scientific ability. I am beginning to hate them both.

"I have been tricked. I am but a dupe. My brain is steadily growing weaker. When they have sucked me dry they will cast me aside, as they have Collins and the others. I realize this when I am alone, but when I am with Lessman I do his bidding gladly, happily.

"The papers are often filled with accounts of his work among the poorer classes. They say that he gives thousands of dollars away yearly. Little do they suspect that it is money that he has secured through crime— that he interests himself among the poor only because he occasionally is able to secure some new type of human brain upon whom he can work his nefarious experiments."

ANOTHER EXTRACT.

"DAMN the Bodymaster! I hate him! His hold over me is absolute— supreme.

"Vile as I have become, degraded as he has made me, my very being revolts at the thought of what he has forced me to do. It were better that I were dead— a thousand times better. But I can not even die. For he, curse him, will not let me. He owns my body and my soul.

"Yesterday I am certain that I killed another man. It was Johnston, the broker— a man I knew well in my other days— as kind-hearted an old fellow as ever lived. Many is the favor that he has done for me. Yet, at the dictation of Lessman, I took the poor old fellow's life.

"God in Heaven! What a mixup it was! Lessman planned it all. He might have made it different— easier for those left behind to bear. But no— that is not his way. He loves the dramatic, the theatrical. But let me tell it just as it happened:

"Together, we went to Johnston's house— Lessman and I. The poor old fellow has been under the weather for several days, but he has not allowed his illness to interfere with his philanthropic work. Lessman, in his guise of a worker among the poor and afflicted, had no trouble in gaining entrance. He introduced me as another laborer in the vineyard. I have changed so much as a result of what I have been through that Johnston failed to recognize me.

"Alone in the room with the old man, Lessman commanded me to do his bidding. I swear that I tried to withhold my hand, but I was powerless. It was not I, but another, who seized the scrawny neck in my muscular fingers and pressed— pressed— pressed against the windpipe until the haggard white face turned black and the gray eyes bulged forth under their shaggy white brows like glass beads.

"He tried to fight back— to defend himself— but what was his puny strength compared to mine? His efforts only incensed me the more. I shook him as a terrier roughs a rat. And the agonized expression on his face! It was awful. He tried to shriek for help, but so firm was my hold upon him that he could only splutter and gurgle.

"Lessman watched it all. He chuckled with glee at the feeble old man's weak gasps and urged me to further efforts. Then, when I had laid the old fellow down upon his couch, it was The Bodymaster who, with a tremendous show of hypocrisy, shouted for help and jerked frantically at the bell which summoned family and servants.

"Never shall I forget the look of pathetic grief upon the face of the dead man's aged helpmate. Liar that he is, Lessman told her a story of the old fellow's sudden choking and of his death before we could summon help. The servants carried her swooning from the room."

A FURTHER ENTRY.

"MRS. Johnston is dying, they say, from grief. Lessman chuckles over it, thinking it a huge joke. When I am with him, I laugh, too. Away from him, I can see the horror— the devilish horror of it all.

"Lessman is richer by thousands of dollars. Mrs. Johnston, if she lives, will be almost a pauper. The sum of which she was filched represented practically their all— the savings of a lifetime. For Lessman presented a forged will in

which almost everything, except a small amount for the widow, was left to charity *with Lessman as the administrator*."

xiii

FOLLOWING the above, my diary is filled for several pages with meaningless, childlike scrawls. I seem to have tried to write, but evidently my brain and hand failed to co-ordinate. Here and there I can make out a curse against The Bodymaster, but nothing else can be read. From this I take it that several weeks passed between the time the last entry was written and that which now follows. During that time I was probably in one of my trancelike states, so deeply under Lessman's influence that I had no control over my actions. At the same time the fact that I even attempted to write shows that, deep within my subconscious brain, there was ever that desire to give the horrible truth to the world.

FROM THE DIARY.

"I HAVE denied the truth. I have betrayed those in whose pay I am, and now I know the remorse of Judas.

"Can it be that The Bodymaster seeks my Avis? Are those glances which he darts at her from beneath his half-closed lids intended to be messages of love?

"Of late she has appeared distracted and filled with a vague melancholy when I am around. Does she wish to tell me something, yet fears to open her lips?

"She knows my cataclysmic temper. She has seen me throw off the baleful influence of The Bodymaster when a wild fit of passion seized me. She probably fears that I will again rise against him and that he will blast me where I stand.

"My hands are tied. In turning myself over to The Bodymaster I have betrayed the woman I love. May Heaven have mercy on my soul!"

ANOTHER ENTRY.

"IN PROWLING about the ruins of the old building today I found the remains of an ancient chapel. In one end was an altar, tumbling to ruin. In a little niche, dust covered, was a bottle of Holy Water. I have seized upon it and have hidden it in my room. Perhaps it will save us both.

"I wonder if The Bodymaster has sold himself to the devil? I have heard of such things. No one would believe that such a thing is possible. Yet who would

believe that the happenings which I have recorded in my diary could have taken place? They sound like witchcraft, so strange, so diabolical are they. I never believed in such things, but now I am ready to believe anything."

A SUBSEQUENT EXTRACT.

"MY MIND is made up. I talked with Avis again today. She practically admitted that Lessman has been annoying her with his attentions. Who knows to what steps he will go while she is under his devilish influence?

"Meta, too, is showing her teeth at poor Avis. Heretofore she has shielded the innocent girl to a certain extent. Of that I am certain, and Avis also believes it. But of late she has acted strangely, even showing her temper on several occasions. Lessman treats her at such times with amused contempt. He knows the absolute hold that he has over her.

"But she may injure my loved one. How, I do not know. She is a woman capable of anything. And the 'green-eyed monster' has neither brains nor conscience.

"I am going to be a man at last. I am summoning all of my will power for the battle which is sure to come within a few days. I must— I will— break the bonds which he has placed about me. Just as I arose in rebellion against him on those other occasions, so will I rise against him again for the sake of the woman I love. But this time there will be no surrender. I will conquer him and save her, or die in the attempt.

"To die for Avis may mitigate my sin in the eyes of God.

"I feel The Bodymaster summoning me.... My every nerve tingles.... These may be the last lines I will ever write.... I wonder if these pages will ever be read by other eyes than mine?... I go now to answer to his call.... *God help me....*"

xiv

THE remainder of my tale is from memory, for the preceding lines are the final entry in my diary. As I have stated elsewhere, I can recall certain things which occasionally happened during my trance-like periods. Remember your dreams— vague, indistinct, hazy— leaping here and there? So are my recollections of that last hour with The Bodymaster. Probably many things happened of which I have no memory. In my desire to stick to facts, I give only that which I remember, leaving the blank places to the reader's imagination.

IT MUST have been immediately after making the final entry in my diary that Lessman summoned me, for the book was in my pocket when I eventually found myself.

Of this, however, I have no memory. My first recollection is of floating through space on one of those strange exploring expeditions in the Great Beyond on which The Bodymaster so often sent me, several of which are described in my diary. Whether I was just returning, or was on my way, I do not know. I only recall that something seemed to be dragging me back— that my whole thought— if thought I could be said to have had— was to get back to my own body as soon as possible.

My next recollection is of being in the room with Lessman. My body lay back in an easy chair, cold, stark and deathlike. I attempted to enter it. But the will of Lessman held me back.

I could see, I could hear, yet I had no visibility. I was but a wraith— an ego as it were— a thought— a spirit— a vapor!

And I was controlled wholly by the brain of Lessman. Just as the invisible current sent out by a central station causes the tiny submarine miles away to hurl itself here and there, so was his magnetic brain master of my actions.

I knew then— or *felt* rather than knew, for I do not believe that a wraith is able to think— I felt that it was Lessman's will that I should never return to my body shell. Something— it was his thought— seemed to hurl me back into space. And at the same time another— an even stronger thought— seemed to hold me transfixed.

It was the will power that I had concentrated for weeks past, aided by the desire for help from Avis. Her whole being was calling out for me.

She was in the beast's arms. For once in his career his terrible will had no effect upon his victim. Her golden hair was torn from its coils and lay in a shimmering cloud about her shoulders. Her tiny fists beat a tattoo upon his face; his black, lustful eyes gazed, snakelike, into hers, seeking to charm her with their power.

It was awful! I knew that she was calling me— calling me with every bit of her being. And I was helpless, chained to the floor, unable to regain the cold form which was myself.

Suddenly, she tore herself from his grasp. Her clothing was hanging in shreds; across her cheek was an ugly scratch; upon one white, rounded arm stood a livid red welt where his cruel fingers had seized her. She was screaming madly. The furniture was overturned.

Now he had her cornered. But she fought herself away from him, striking him across the head with the leg of a chair that had been broken in the fray.

He pursued her across the room.... Once more she was in his grasp. I could hear her breath come gaspingly as she put every ounce of her strength into a final effort to free herself....

The door opened. Meta entered. Her black eyes were blazing. Her mouth worked convulsively. She was a raging demon— a woman scorned— cast aside for another. Like a devil from hell, she threw herself into the fray. Lessman swept her aside with a single motion of his muscular arm.

For an instant she lay there stunned.... She dragged herself to her knees, her lips mouthing curses.... She half rose to her feet and staggered toward them as Lessman dragged his shrieking victim toward the door which led to the other room. He turned toward her, his fiery eyes snapping with uncontrolled anger.

For the moment I was forgotten.... Something snapped. I found myself again within my own body, the lust for battle raging within me.... Lessman, surrounded by his enemies, turned like a stag at bay.... I felt the currents of his powerful mind surge around me again like great waves beating against a rock-bound coast.

Every bit of energy I possessed was necessary to hold myself together. He caught me within the power of his will! I felt myself slipping— slipping— *slipping*! Everything grew black before me. I could see nothing save his eyes— burning— *burning* into my very soul.

Like a man who is fighting an overdose of chloral, I strove to free myself from the web which his mind was weaving about me. It was of no avail. Again I felt a wave of fire shoot through my veins.

I lurched against the table. Seizing the lamp, with a final effort, I hurled it straight at the face of the mocking demon before me.

I KNEW no more until I awoke in the hospital.

They say that the place Lessman called his sanitarium was burned to the ground the night before they found me wandering, almost a maniac, several miles away.

As I stated in the beginning, I am unable to distinguish between the truth and the wanderings of my diseased brain. The reader must draw his own conclusions.

What happened? Did I kill Lessman? Did he and Meta and Avis perish in the fire with the other poor unfortunates? Nobody knows.

I HAVE JUST learned that a woman— a golden-haired woman— was found a week ago in a demented condition in a far distant town. The reports say that she mumbles something about "The Bodymaster!" Can it be Avis? I leave

tonight for the hospital where she is confined. If it be she, perhaps my presence will recall her to herself.

End