PAST MASTERS 185

Sherwood Anderson
Ambrose Bierce
Ring Lardner
Edgar Wallace
John Galsworthy
Warwick Deeping
Max Brand
Rudyard Kipling
W. Clark Russell

and more

PAST MASTERS 185

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

6 Nov 2024

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1: The Forged Letter

Harvey J. O'Higgins

1876-1929

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Canadian playwright, novelist and short story writer. His private detective Duff appeared in a series of stories.

"I NEVER take divorce cases," Duff said. "I'm a detective, not a Peeping Tom. There's nothing interesting in a divorce case for anyone but a smut-hound. Take it to the Society for the Suppression of Vice."

He said it jocularly, with his most engaging smile— the smile of a jovial parish priest on the face of a fat sceptic. There was a genial astuteness about that smile. It forgave cynically all the sins of the flesh. But the man on whom it beamed and twinkled did not yield to it. He continued to regard Duff with a frown wrinkling his high legal forehead and his mouth professionally severe.

"A divorce," he protested, "is just what Dunbar doesn't want. It's to try to avoid a divorce that I've brought him to *you*. He needs help— of a kind that I can't give him."

He was a lean and keen and dark young lawyer, precociously bald and sober for his years. He looked foreign, but his name was Allan— John Glendenning Allan. He had come to Duff before, to ask aid in gathering evidence for a case in court, but Duff had never before seen him look so worried. "This Dunbar's a client of yours, is he?"

"Yes, and an old friend."

"What's he been doing?"

"Nothing at all," Allan assured him. "That's the mystery."

"Oh, there's a mystery, is there?" Duff settled back in his swivel chair, at his old office desk, in all the majesty of his bulk and muscle. "What's the mystery?"

He was a huge man, a great mastiff of a man in comparison with the slim alertness of Allan's breed; and he watched Allan, and listened ponderously to him, with a deceptive air of slow placidity. He had a feeling that Allan's manner was "off normal," as he would have said— that Alan had some secret concern in Dunbar's troubles which he was concealing. It was for the explanation of this concern that Duff watched, behind his own mask of benign composure.

THE "MYSTERY," Allan explained, came from a letter. Mrs. Dunbar had found a letter that apparently had been written by her husband to another woman— a love letter so conclusively guilty on its face that she had left him

and refused to return. He had not written the letter. No, he had *not* written it. But she would not listen to him. She would not even see him to hear what he had to say. She had gone to live with her sister, and he was afraid that she was going to move for a divorce.

"Where's the letter?" Duff asked.

Ah, that was the difficulty. The letter had been destroyed. "Her sister was visiting her when she found it," Allan explained. "She's very devoted to Dunbar— the sister is. And as soon as she saw what the letter was, she threw it in the fire, on the impulse, to protect him."

"I see," Duff said. "Who is this sister? And who is Dunbar?"

WELL, Dunbar was A. Burton Dunbar, the only child of Archibald J. Dunbar who had been a "traction magnate" in the days when electric street railways paid large dividends. The elder Dunbar had been wise enough to foresee what the automobile was likely to do to the trolley car, and he had sold out all his street-railway holdings in the early nineteen-hundreds and invested his fortune in New York real estate. Burton Dunbar had inherited that fortune. He had also inherited the services of a very loyal and clever secretary, named Beulah Root, in his father's office; and after his father's death, he had put Beulah Root in charge of the office and left to her all the business of rents, leases and repairs in connection with his property. She had under her an office force to take care of his correspondence and his book-keeping, as well as a superintendent and a staff of workmen to inspect and repair the houses and buildings that he owned. He appeared at his office, once a week or so, as a matter of form, to approve what had been done and to sign the pay checks. If anything arose that could not wait for his weekly appearance, she brought it to him at Blue Hills, New Jersey, where he lived. She had arrived on some such mission, one Saturday of the previous month, and she had stayed over Sunday, on Mrs. Dunbar's invitation. The incriminating letter was found on Sunday night, and Mrs. Dunbar— who had been Laura Root before her marriage— left with her sister Beulah on Monday morning.

"Wait a minute," Duff interrupted. "Dunbar had married his secretary's sister?"

"Yes."

"How come?"

"Well," Allan admitted, "I was a good deal mixed up in that. Dunbar and I were at Columbia together, and he used to take me with him when he went to call on the two Root girls. He'd met Laura through Beulah, I think. I know he was in love with her quite a long time before his father would let them marry. I understand the father consented to it, at last, because Burton as a married

man would be exempt from the first draft. They were married in the summer of 1917."

He had become noticeably more guarded in his manner, but Duff pretended to be unaware of it. He asked only, "How did the sister, Beulah, feel about that?— about the marriage?"

"She stood out against it as long as his father did."

Duff nodded, thoughtfully. "Bring Dunbar in," he said, "and let me have a look at him."

They were in Duff's public office, an office which he had rented as it stood— furniture and all— from a discouraged patent attorney who had retired from practice. It was a sedate and shabby office that looked as little as possible like the consulting room of a private detective, purposely. Behind it, and on the floor above, were the file rooms, the stenographers' rooms, the operatives' rooms and the rest of the office plant of a modern detective agency; but these were all concealed from the public so that Duff might, if he wished, invite "suspects" to his sanctum as a shyster lawyer, or a promoter of doubtful enterprises, or in whatever other character he chose to assume.

Allan went briskly to the door to summon his friend Dunbar from the waiting room. He went with relief and, to Duff, it seemed to be the relief of a man who was getting rid of an unpleasant responsibility. Duff watched him and narrowed his eyes in a puckered speculation.

"Burt," Allan called. "Come in here, will you?" And Dunbar entered with a large, slow diffidence.

He was a full-blown, handsome blond, dressed as if he had come direct from the links in tweeds and golf stockings, thick-soled outing shoes, a soft collar— and an all-over coat of tan that did not whiten under the thin fluff of hair on the top of his head. That hair was a dark dandelion yellow, and even where it was thinnest it had the ripple of fine wool freshly washed and carded. He looked, indeed, as chemically clean and sweet as if he had been sponged in chlorides. He had softly staring, shy blue eyes, of which the whites were a trifle bloodshot, his mouth was a little loose and he was growing somewhat heavy in the waist; but he had not the appearance of dissipation so much as an air of over indulgence— of comfortable over indulgence in too many alcoholic drinks on the verandas of country homes, looking out over flowering shrubs and garden borders to green-upholstered lawns and the shadows of well-trained trees that had spent their lives in the service of the family.

He was not the type of man whom you would expect to find involved in a mystery, for although he was silent with Duff and Allan it was the sad and innocent silence of an injured child among its helpful elders. He let Allan speak for him, trustfully; and when he had to answer a question from Duff, he

glanced at Allan first, like a younger brother looking to his natural protector. He was large, helpless, sweet, simple and direct. Obviously, he would appeal to anyone for aid, with no shame in asking for it, and no reticences.

It appeared, from his replies and Allan's, that there was no one whom Dunbar could suspect of having forged the letter; and there was no one whom his wife could definitely suspect of being the woman to whom it had been written. He had no special woman friends. He was evidently of that type of arrested development which is commonly called "a man's man"— shy with women, undoubtedly afraid of them, and consequently uncomfortable with them. He had been a good golfer and a better tennis player until an automobile accident crushed his right wrist and ended his career as an athlete. He was now secretary-treasurer and general head of the Blue Hills Country Club, and his particular hobby was collecting the "three-cent '51'", which is an American postage stamp issued from 1851 to 1856 when the plates were destroyed by a fire.

Duff had never heard of anyone collecting specimens of a single postage stamp. Allan explained how you could distinguish the issues of the various years by slight variations in the color of the stamps; how you identified a stamp as printed from one plate or another by microscopic differences in design or by little threadlike cracks that had developed in the plates; and how, in the end, if you were expert, you could say, for instance, "This stamp was printed in 1853 from plate number one, and it was the third stamp of the fourth row on the plate." Dunbar owned "one of the most complete collections in existence." There was only one larger collection, and that belonged to a man who had devoted his life to a study of the three-cent '51 and written a book about it.

DUNBAR listened to his friend's account of his stamps politely, but he did not speak. He listened to Duff's interested questions in the same silence; and if Duff had counted on a collector's enthusiasm to draw him out, Duff failed. Dunbar said nothing.

"Well," Duff said, "it sounds like good training for a detective. If you can tell where a three-cent stamp came from seventy years ago, you ought to be able to trace a letter that arrived last week."

Dunbar tried to smile but he did not quite succeed.

"The trouble is," Allan explained, "that he has never seen the letter."

"Are they sure it was in your handwriting?"

Dunbar shook his head. "It was typewritten. I don't write— not since I broke my wrist. I just sign my name— with my left hand."

"Typewritten?" Duff sat up. "Now, *that's* interesting."

"Why?"

"It makes the forgery so much easier— for the forger. And the temptation so much greater."

Dunbar nodded sadly. He seemed not so much depressed by the talk about the letter as heavily resentful when he thought of the injustice that had been done him.

"Well," Duff said, "here we are. Some unknown person, for some unknown reason, has forged a compromising letter in your name, and the letter's been destroyed. There's no evidence to prove that you're innocent. In a case of this sort, all we can do is to induce them to come again."

"Come again?" Allan asked. "What do you mean?"

"Write another letter."

"Oh, I see. How will you do that?"

"I don't know yet. That's the problem." He began to shift around the pens, the pencils, the ink and the papers on his desk, as if he were setting the problem in order before him. "We can assume that whoever wrote this letter, they intended to make trouble between you and your wife. It's our best lay to encourage them to continue. We'll have to prepare a little plant of some sort."

"Yes?"

"Yes. And for that purpose," Duff said, "I'd better be a lawyer— not a detective. You've put this difference with your wife in my hands, to arrange a separation or a divorce, or whatever else she wants— "

"Oh no!" Dunbar was horrified. "I don't— "

"No, of course. We understand that, Burt," Allan assured him. "This is just Mr. Duff's method of investigating."

"And meanwhile," Duff cut in, "you'll take Mr. Dunbar and put him on a boat to Europe, without letting him see his secretary or anybody else. He'll have to promise not to write or answer any letters or any telegrams about this business, and not to discuss it with anyone he meets on his travels. Otherwise, I'll not take the case."

"Oh, but I say!" Dunbar protested.

"All right. I'll attend to that," Allan promised.

"The important thing," Duff explained, "is not to let him see or communicate with his secretary, because anything he confides to *her* will reach his wife. You can let him make out a check to cover the office salaries and expenses for a month. After he's sailed, mail this to Miss Root with a note from him saying that he's put his affairs in my hands, as his lawyer. I'll get a housekeeper to take charge of his home during his absence, and he'll leave a note saying that she can't be discharged by Mrs. Dunbar if she comes to Blue Hills while he's away." He turned to Dunbar. "You may be the victim of a serious conspiracy— a conspiracy in which this compromising letter is only the

first step. You'll have to be very careful and absolutely silent. I'll have your house watched so that no more letters can be planted on you there. And I'll find some way, if necessary, to get an operative put in to watch your office."

Dunbar looked thoroughly alarmed and bewildered.

"Fortunately, you've got your lawyer here to rely on." He referred to Allan. "I'll report to him regularly, and I'll do nothing without his advice. Good-bye. I hope you have a pleasant voyage."

He went back to the papers on his desk. Dunbar turned helplessly to Allan.

"Come along, Burt, and reserve your stateroom," Allan said. And at Dunbar's hesitation, he added confidently: "He'll probably have the whole thing straightened out before you reach the other side."

DUNBAR went. And, in the end, he went to London. But he went with a weakly stubborn reluctance that kept Allan as busy, for several days, as a nurse-maid with a spoiled child; and he kept coming to Duff for advice and assistance as if Duff were the father or the guardian of his charge. Duff used the interviews to put together the story of Beulah and Laura Root in such detail as he could get. And he used the interval also, to establish a woman operative in authority over Dunbar's house at Blue Hills and to obtain from her such information as she could glean from the gossip of the servants.

DUFF had a peculiar way of working on a "mystery." He yawned over it. He idled on it. He gathered information about it in the lazy manner of an artist who is waiting for an idea to strike him before he begins work. He did not really think of it at all, nor try to plan out any theory of it. He loafed and waited on it, and busied himself with other routine things.

In that way he accumulated details about the Root sisters. And their story seemed simple enough. They were the daughters of a Brooklyn newspaper man who had been divorced by his wife in 1907, when the girls were still in their teens. In 1908, he disappeared in the West, to avoid paying inconvenient alimony, and Beulah went to work to support her mother and her sister. She found work in Archibald J. Dunbar's office, and she became his confidential secretary. When the mother died, in 1911, Beulah continued to support her sister Laura, six years younger than she, while Laura studied music, took singing lessons, and prepared herself for a career. Then, in 1913, when Burton Dunbar was in his final term at college, he saw a photograph of Laura Root on the desk of his father's secretary. He and Beulah were already quite friendly. He took advantage of that friendship to meet the pretty sister; and before Beulah understood what was going on, he and Laura had arrived at a secret engagement. Beulah promptly told her employer, and for four years she and

the elder Dunbar tried to break off the match. In vain. Finally, in 1917, the father developed Bright's disease; Burton threatened to enlist unless he were allowed to marry; and the elder Dunbar, facing his own decay and the probable extinction of his family, withdrew his opposition. Laura Root gave up her musical ambition to marry a fortune; Burton, when his father died, put Beulah in charge of his office at a salary of twelve thousand dollars a year; and everyone seemed settled in happiness forever after.

ALL THEIR prospects of happiness had now gone glimmering, but it was impossible to find out why. Duff's operative, planted in the house at Blue Hills as a housekeeper, discovered nothing in the gossip of the servants to explain the catastrophe. Mrs. Dunbar had been jealous, yes. She had been jealous to such a degree that Dunbar had always carefully avoided giving her any cause for it. His open indifference to women and his good looks had naturally encouraged them to plague him with mischievous attempts at country-club flirtations, but he had fled from them all. He had devoted himself to the masculine activities of the membership, arranged gymkanas and golf and tennis tournaments, organized a "good roads association" and served on a township committee of local patriots in a league for better government. His life had been apparently as dull as it was innocent. His wife danced and dined and played bridge, remodelled the house, laid out a formal English garden, and competed in the local flower show. She had been busy and popular, with nothing much to do and plenty of time and lots of money with which to do it. She had no children to worry her and no relatives. Her sister Beulah kept to herself, living alone in a Brooklyn apartment and refusing to come to Blue Hills except as a secretary, to see Dunbar. She had done this with no ill-feeling whatever. She had simply avoided the embarrassments of a complicated social situation. The sisters continued friendly, but Beulah, on her twelve thousand a year, did not propose to figure in Blue Hills as a subsidized poor relation of the Dunbars, and the Dunbars respected her independence.

The only detail of any possible significance which the housekeeper supplied to Duff was this: Allan, Dunbar's friend and lawyer, had been a frequent visitor at Blue Hills for two years after their marriage, and he had then abruptly ceased to come there. Duff put this piece of information away in the back of his mind to let it hatch if it had any life in it. And he was conscious of it hidden there when Allan came to report that he had seen Dunbar off on his Atlantic liner.

"Well," Duff said, with a yawn, "I haven't even discovered, yet, why his wife seized on this fool letter so eagerly. It may be, of course, that she found her life too placid. She may have just fastened on the letter to give herself a little

emotional excitement. In that case, we'll see if we can't provide her with enough to last her for the rest of her life."

Allan made no comment.

DUFF asked: "Did you post Dunbar's letter to his secretary?"

"Yes," he said, "I posted it on my way back from the boat."

"And I don't discover the origin of Mrs. Dunbar's continual jealousy," Duff reflected. "That sort of thing's usually due to the fact that a woman's giving her husband cause for jealousy herself and naturally suspects him of doing the same."

Allan continued mutely attentive.

"Or," Duff said, "it may come from her childhood. It may be an unconscious imitation of her mother's experience with her father. In either case, a good jolt may do her good. I'll have to see her, and I don't see how I can reach her except through her sister. Tell me: why hasn't Mrs. Dunbar consulted *you*?"

This was all given in the one tone of gossipy frankness, and Allan replied—in a good imitation of the same tone— "She did come to consult me. And I told her I couldn't advise her."

"Why not?"

"Because Dunbar had already appealed to me, and I couldn't act for both parties."

Duff yawned. He asked, indifferently: "Was that your only reason?" And he rose, fatigued and bored and heavy, from his desk, to stretch himself and walk up and down the room.

"It was the only reason I cared to give her," Allan said.

Duff asked: "And me?"

Allan glanced at him suspiciously. "I beg your pardon?"

Duff was looking out the window, his hands in his pockets. "Is that the only reason you care to give me?"

And Allan answered, cold and defensive: "Yes."

Duff nodded and walked away with his thoughts, and sat down at his desk moodily, and strummed on his blotter. "Can you tell me this: When you and Dunbar used to call on the two Root girls, which one were *you* interested in?"

"Now, look here," Allan said hotly. "There's nothing going on between me and Mrs. Dunbar and there never has been! And if you think I know anything about who forged that letter, or why, you might as well come out of it!"

HE WAS red with anger and mortification and resentment against Duff's stupidity. Duff continued to regard him as abstractedly, for all his rage, as if he were a patient who had lost his temper when the doctor asked him about his

symptoms. "I see," he said. "You were more interested in Beulah Root, were you?"

Allan swallowed his wrath, but it stuck in his throat. He said through it, thickly: "Yes."

"Did you ask her to marry you?"

"Yes."

"Did she say why she wouldn't?"

"No."

"Was that before Dunbar was engaged to the sister?"

"Yes. What the devil— ?"

"All right," Duff cut in. "I'll wait." He began to clear up the disorder of his desk, at the end of his day's work. "If either Mrs. Dunbar or her sister comes to you, refer her to me. All you know is that Dunbar's tired of the way his wife's been behaving, and he's gone abroad and left it to me, as his lawyer, to arrange a divorce or a separation or whatever else she wants."

"Who do you suppose wrote that letter?" Allan asked impatiently.

"I haven't any idea," Duff assured him. "I'll have to wait till I see his secretary."

AND he had not long to wait. The letter from Dunbar, which Allan had posted, must have reached her on the following morning, and at midday she telephoned to Duff's office to ask for an appointment to see him. He gave her three o'clock that afternoon. "And keep everyone away from me," he ordered his office manager, "phone calls and everything else, as long as she's here. I'm a divorce lawyer, on the shady side of the practice, and I don't have clients consulting me by phone or crowding in to see me at three o'clock in the afternoon. And tell the girl, out there, not to announce Miss Root. When she comes, let her walk right in."

He cleared all the correspondence off his desk, and when, after having disregarded a knock on his door, he saw a woman in brown enter slowly, he looked over his glasses at her, without raising himself from his elbows, bending his broad back above his work in a sinister sort of crouch.

"Miss Root?" he asked gruffly.

"Yes."

"Sit down." He pretended to finish scrawling out the sentences which she had interrupted.

She sat down composedly in a chair near his desk and looked around her while he wrote: "Beulah Root, age about 35, height 5 ft. 8 in., weight 145 to 150, eyes greenish grey, no glasses, hair brown turning grey, schoolteacher type, high-shouldered, long-waisted, mouth large, small wart on cheek beside

left nostril." He wrote this chiefly to appear busy while he kept her waiting. "Takes pride in hands and feet. Brown tailor-made business suit, silk stockings, patent leather pumps with sensible heels, probably pretty and expensive underclothes. Good legs. Keeps herself fit probably by long walks."

He said, occupied: "I suppose you came to see me about this Dunbar divorce?"

"Divorce?"

"Well, divorce or separation or whatever it is she wants."

"There's no question of a divorce. Nor of a separation." She sat at her ease, her knees crossed, swinging one foot, an arm outstretched to rest a hand on the old-fashioned ivory handle of a brown silk parasol. The only sign she gave of nervousness was in the swinging of the foot.

"There seems to be plenty of question of it in my client's mind," Duff said sharply, and put down his pen. "She walked out and left him— didn't she?— because of a letter that he wrote to another woman."

"Does he admit that he wrote it?"

"Naturally not. And the letter needn't enter into the case at all, for that matter. We needn't discuss it. We can arrange a divorce without going into that."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, there's a county judge up state who handles cases like this when we make it worth his while. The papers are sealed so's the evidence doesn't get into print. We provide the usual statutory grounds. There's a detective agency here that attends to *that*. It's costly, but it's cheaper than going to Reno."

"Mrs. Dunbar would never consent to it."

"What does she want then?"

"She wants him to prove that he never wrote the letter."

"I see."

WHEN Duff had first heard from Allan, how the letter had been found by Dunbar's wife and destroyed by his secretary, the detective naturally supposed that Dunbar had written it to the secretary and that she had destroyed it to protect herself as much as to shield him. But, after seeing Dunbar, it was impossible to believe him guilty of having written the letter at all; and Duff concluded that Beulah Root, out of jealousy, had probably forged the letter, placed it where Mrs. Dunbar would find it, and then destroyed it in order to get rid of any evidence of her plot. If she *had* done this, it must have been with the intention of breaking up Dunbar's marriage; and Duff had intended to lead her into a little trap by first pretending that Dunbar was willing to proceed to a

divorce and by then proposing that she should assist in manufacturing the evidence for the case.

She refused to be led.

"Why did Mr. Dunbar come to you?" she demanded. "Why didn't he go to his friend, Mr. Allan?"

"He did," Duff said suavely, "and Allan refused to handle it."

"Why?"

"Probably for the same reason that a doctor doesn't like to treat members of his own family. He knows you all, too well. Do *you* think Dunbar wrote this letter?"

"Certainly not," she said.

"Have you any idea who did write it?"

"None whatever."

"But you think it was a forgery?"

"I'm sure of it."

"And you can't convince Mrs. Dunbar?"

"No. The more I try to convince her, the more she seems to think that I'm merely trying to shield him."

"I see." Duff took off his glasses and polished them thoughtfully. "My orders were to give Mrs. Dunbar whatever she wants, a divorce, a separation, or anything else. If she wants to become convinced of Dunbar's innocence, perhaps I can arrange *that*."

"How?"

"In the same way that we'd have convinced our friend, the judge, of his guilt— by producing the necessary evidence."

"I don't understand."

"No? Well, someone has written a compromising letter and forged Dunbar's name to it. We'll have a woman write some more letters and forge his name to *them*, and then make her confess that she wrote the first one, too. The detective agency would have given us a woman to act as confidential co-respondent in the divorce suit. They'll give us someone to take the blame for the letters. That'll be easy enough."

"And do you think," she began scornfully, "that Burton Dunbar— "

"Fortunately," Duff interrupted, "Dunbar needn't know anything whatever about it. He doesn't know *now* who wrote this one letter to him. I'll never tell him who wrote the others."

"Are you joking?"

"Certainly not. Does Mrs. Dunbar know all the girls who work in her husband's office?"

"No."

"Does Dunbar?— even by sight?"

"I don't believe he does."

"Suppose, then, I tell Mrs. Dunbar that one of these girls is secretly in love with Dunbar and that she's been writing herself imaginary letters from him and signing his name to them. Suppose I tell Mrs. Dunbar that detectives have searched the girl's rooms and found a number of these letters. I produce them. I produce, also, a girl who I tell Mrs. Dunbar, is from your office, and this girl confesses that she wrote the letters— all the letters, including the one that Mrs. Dunbar found. The girl explains that this one letter, by some accident, got among the mail she gave you to take to Dunbar, and Mrs. Dunbar discovered it. You confirm the story. I confirm it. The girl begs for mercy. She begs Mrs. Dunbar not to tell her husband. The whole thing is a silly sentimental bit of girlish nonsense, for which Dunbar is in no way responsible. You insist that the girl must be discharged but you undertake to get her another position. Mrs. Dunbar, if she ever tells her husband, will never tell him who the girl was, for fear he might be tempted to hunt her up. I'll merely cable Dunbar that we've found out who forged the letter and convinced his wife of his innocence. And the whole thing will be settled."

MISS ROOT took this strange proposal in a strange way. Her foot ceased swinging. She kept her gaze fixed on Duff in a pale, defensive stare. She sat stiffly motionless. She did not betray herself by so much as the blinking of an eyelash. But, before he had finished, her forehead was moist with perspiration. She made as if to find a handkerchief in her bag, and she stopped herself guiltily.

"Don't you think we could work a scheme like that?" Duff asked.

And she answered, in a strained voice, "Yes."

"Good," he said. "Then I'll provide the girl, if you'll furnish the letters."

"Me?" The word almost died on her lips.

"Yes. Of course." He was heavily blind and unsuspecting. "You've often signed his name to business letters, haven't you? And the body of the letter, fortunately, can be typed. You can easily imagine the sort of letter a girl like that would write to herself. It needn't be very convincing— just the day-dream of a starved girl, who's never had a real love-affair in her life. It's perfectly natural that a working girl would cheat herself with dreams of the sort about a rich and handsome fellow like Dunbar. I'll bet, if we could see inside the heads of all the girls in your office, we'd find more than one who might have written herself imaginary love letters from him. The world's full of that sort of thing. A woman— a business woman's a human being. She has to have some sort of

love in her life— even if it's only imaginary. I ran across a case, the other day— "

He rose and went to his book shelves of law reports as if to find a record of the case. His back was turned to her, but he could see her reflected in the glass of an engraving that hung above the books. He watched her secretly while he took down a volume and rustled the pages. She found her handkerchief, and dabbled at her forehead with it, and pressed it against her lips, breathing as laboredly as if she had been holding her breath in the effort to conceal her agitation, and had now come to the surface, to gasp her lungs full.

"Well, it doesn't matter," Duff said, putting the book back on its shelf as if he had failed to find what he was looking for. "We don't have to have any precedent. We're going to settle this out of court." He smiled at her, conspiringly, as he sat down again.

"I don't think," she said, "that I would care to— to join in a— a forgery. I don't think it's honest."

DUFF LAUGHED, settling back comfortably in his chair. "Maybe not," he said, "but, you see, there's *this* difficulty. I'm not a lawyer. I'm a detective. And a detective's allowed to do lots of things a lawyer couldn't do."

"A detective?" Her voice cracked on it. She began to tremble again in spite of herself, watching him in an agony of apprehension that made it impossible to move or to speak.

"Yes," he said lazily. "A detective. And if I can't get the case settled for Mr. Dunbar in *this* way, I'm afraid I'll have to go to what you might call the *Root* of the matter. That might be more inconvenient for all concerned." He reached out to his office phone. "I think we'd better arrange it between ourselves as quietly as we can and say no more about it. Hello? Is Miss Kennedy there? Ask her to come here a minute."

He got up and walked to his window, to look out of it, in silence. She sat with her eyes closed, as white as despair, completely helpless. He glanced at her once and then turned away again, mercifully.

Miss Kennedy entered, behind her, from an inner door— a small dark woman with a tragic face. She worked usually in the file room, and she was dressed for the office. She closed the door behind her and stood waiting with her hand on the door knob.

"Miss Kennedy," he said, "we have a case here in which we have to work a little plant. A young woman in a downtown office under Miss Root— " He indicated Miss Root with a warning movement of the eyes— "has been forging a number of compromising letters in the name of a client of ours. We've got a confession on the promise that we'll not betray her, and we have to find a

substitute for her, to take the blame of the letters. It'll be all quite private. The only person to whom you'll have to admit having written the letters is our client's wife, Mrs. Burton Dunbar. The girl's in love with the husband. She's been writing imaginary love letters to herself from Dunbar— quite innocently, you understand— but unfortunately she lost one of them, and it came into Mrs. Dunbar's hands. Dunbar doesn't know who the girl is. You'll not be required to see him— we've sent him abroad while we fix the thing up. If you'll go with Miss Root, she'll give you the letters, and explain what you have to do, and take you to Mrs. Dunbar."

Miss Kennedy asked, in a deep and hollow voice, "What was I— a stenographer?"

"Yes, a stenographer in Dunbar's office."

They turned to the silent woman in the chair beside his desk. At the sound of Miss Kennedy's voice, she had made an effort to rise, but sank back again unable to get to her feet.

"The whole case," Duff explained, "has been very trying for Miss Root. I'm afraid it's been too much for her. You might just take her inside and let her rest while you're getting ready. Want to run out a minute and find a bite to eat. I've not had time to get my lunch."

He had the manner of a doctor who has finished a physical examination and leaves his exhausted patient to his office nurse. And Miss Kennedy, as if she were such a nurse, bent down to put an arm around Miss Root and murmured compassionately to her: "Will you come with me?"

AND LIKE the doctor who becomes insulated against his patient's pain, Duff was almost indifferent to Beulah Root's emotion. He saw what her story had probably been; and it was a terrible story; but he saw it coldly, as a case, on which he had been called in. She had undoubtedly been in love with Dunbar from her earliest days in his father's office. When the two college boys came calling on her and her sister, she must have flattered herself that the handsome young heir to the Dunbar millions was interested in *her*. She was as scornful of Allan, the clever but penniless law student from the East Side, as her sister was indifferent to the stupid son of wealth: but by a perversity of fate, it was Allan who fell in love with Beulah and Dunbar who fell in love with the sister. Allan was promptly rejected when he proposed, but a marriage with the Dunbar fortune was not to be so lightly refused by the beautiful Laura. What years of anguish must have followed for the loyal and subservient and self-sacrificing sister— those years in which Laura accepted Dunbar, though she had no illusions about him, and Beulah joined with the father to prevent the marriage, and yet tried to act unselfishly and not treacherously towards

the younger girl. And after Dunbar's marriage, what miseries of loneliness she must have suffered before she yielded to the mirage of her own imagining and wrote crazy letters to herself as if they had come from him!

Duff could see all that, even if he did not attempt to appreciate it. And he could see that Mrs. Dunbar still preferred Allan to the handsome bore who was her husband. That would account for her jealousy. It also accounted for the sudden cessation of Allan's visits to Blue Hills. And it most certainly accounted for the eagerness with which she had seized the letter, as a proof of her husband's infidelity— and for Allan's embarrassment when she, and then Dunbar, appealed to him for aid. Duff grinned to himself. Well, he was returning Laura to her husband, and Beulah to her desert, and Allan to his law without a scandal and that was all that could be expected of him.

He had no doubt that Beulah Root would provide the necessary letters. It was her only way to avoid a shameful disgrace. And he knew that his "Miss Kennedy" would play her part convincingly as the heart-broken girl who had been living a fairy-tale of love with Dunbar, in her imagination. She had been an amateur actress in her school-days; she had married a tubercular poet and tried to write, unsuccessfully; when he died, and left her with a baby boy, she was willing to do anything to keep her child from starving. She had answered an advertisement of Duff's in which he pretended to need a lady's maid— a lady's maid, however, who was to report to him the private affairs of her mistress— and she had taken the work because it was all that she could find to do. She had been with him ever since, regularly in the filing room but going out on cases whenever he needed her. He knew her ability. She would deceive Mrs. Dunbar easily.

AND YET Duff was enough of an artist to feel dissatisfied with this conclusion of his case. It was too inconclusive. It settled nothing. Mrs. Dunbar would still be dissatisfied with her husband and sentimentally inclined toward an affair with Allan. Her miserable sister would be only more miserable than before— miserable to the point of carrying her dreams of Dunbar into the borderland of insane delusions. And Allan would still be the victim of that fate which had frustrated his affection for Beulah Root. In these circumstances would the case remain closed? Or would something more serious than a forged letter come out of it?

"Well," Duff assured himself, "I'm only a detective, not a little tin god. I can't get a new deal for these people. I'm only paid to see that they play their cards without cheating."

When his Miss Kennedy reported by telephone that Beulah Root had furnished the needed letters, he said: "Good. Go to it. Let me know how you

get along with Mrs. Dunbar. Good luck." And when she came to tell him of her scene with Mrs. Dunbar— who had been at last unwillingly convinced of the origin of the forged love-letter— he congratulated her heartily. "Cheer up," he said. "You look as if you were all in. Take a week's holiday and I'll charge it on Dunbar's bill. He can afford it."

She smiled with a painful weariness. "You ought to do something for that poor woman— that Miss Root," she replied. "It's a terrible thing for her. I'm afraid it will break her down."

"I'm afraid so, too," he agreed. "We ought to get her out of that office, eh?"

"Oh, if you only could!"

"Perhaps I can," he said. "You run along. Take your boy and beat it to the seaside for a week. Put it on your expense account and I'll pay it if Dunbar doesn't." He had reached out to his office phone. "Call in Mrs. Davenport from Blue Hills," he ordered his office manager on the wire. "The Dunbar case is closed." He nodded to Miss Kennedy. "That's all right," he replied to her grateful murmur of thanks. "And call up their lawyer, Allan," he continued into the phone, "and ask him if he can get in to see me right away."

"Good-bye, girl," he said, to Miss Kennedy. "Run along now. And tell them to send in those people out there."

HE had clients to receive, letters to answer, operatives to listen to, reports to dictate; and he was busy with cases, detectives and stenographers until word was brought to him that Allan was in the waiting room. "Just a minute," he said. He took a few brisk turns up and down his room with the tread of a cheerfully preoccupied elephant. "All right," he told the girl from the outer office. "Send him in."

He was seated at his desk reading letters when Allan entered— his worries still heavy on his brow— and closed the door behind him to shut in his secret concern, and turned slowly to cross the room to Duff.

"Well!" Duff tossed aside the letter with a gesture that was a welcoming wave of the hand. "We've solved your Dunbar mystery."

"No!"

"Sure as you live! Sit down here. The letter was written by a girl in his office. She's confessed. We've had her repeat her confession to Mrs. Dunbar and *she's* now convinced of Dunbar's innocence."

"No!" His first "No!" had been half incredulous. His second was wholly relieved. "I'll send a wireless to Dunbar right away." He made as if to start for the door.

"No. Wait a minute," Duff laughed. "Not so fast. This has to be handled. Sit down."

He sat down on the edge of his chair, smiling in a way that made him look suddenly boyish and unsuspecting. And Duff proceeded to take advantage of that trusting mood in him.

"In the first place," he said, "Dunbar's not to be told who the girl was. We got her to confess on the promise that no one was to know about it except Miss Root and her sister. In the second place Miss Root doesn't know the whole truth, and I don't want her to know it. I don't even know how much I can tell *you*. Wait a minute. This is rather complicated."

He passed his hand over his forehead and rubbed the back of his head, perplexed, as if he were trying to decide how much of the story he might honorably tell the lawyer. As a matter of fact he was improvising what he would have called "a little plant."

"Anything you tell me," Allan volunteered, "can be as confidential as you please."

"Well, you see," Duff explained, frowning, "we've led Mrs. Dunbar to believe— and her sister, too— that a love-sick girl in the office was writing imaginary letters to herself as if they came from Dunbar. We've made out that one of these letters accidentally got itself into the mail that Miss Root took to Blue Hills and that this was the letter Mrs. Dunbar found."

"Yes?"

"Yes. Well, the truth is that the girl was sore at Miss Root. She's been accusing Miss Root— to the others in the office— of having an affair with Dunbar. And she forged two of the letters, and showed them to one of the other girls, as letters that she'd found in Miss Root's desk."

"The devil you say!"

"Yes." He studied Allan's sympathetic expression of distress, calculatingly. "We've kept this from Miss Root and we've kept it from Mrs. Dunbar. The situation's kind of complicated. Something else has happened that's given Miss Root a jar about Dunbar. Her position in the office is going to be impossible."

"Can't we get her out of there?"

"I wish we could. You seem to be the only friend she has in the world. Naturally, she doesn't trust me. I had to tell her I was a detective— when I found out who the girl was that wrote the letters."

"I think I'd better see her." He stood up, hesitating.

"Well, be careful what you say to her," Duff warned him. "You can say I told you that a love-sick girl wrote herself imaginary letters from Dunbar, but don't let her guess that you've heard *she* was suspected of being mixed up in them."

"No, no. Certainly not." He put that aside impatiently. "I believe I could get our firm to put her in charge of a department of the office, if she'd take it."

"Go to it," Duff rose to pat him on the shoulder. "She'll be glad, anyway, to have somebody show a little friendly interest in her, if I know her state of mind."

Allan did not seem to hear. He stood gazing into his hat as if he saw in it some sentimental secret that made him flush a little, tenderly, and slowly smile. When he looked up and caught Duff's eye, he was embarrassed. "All right. Thanks," he said. And he hurried out.

Duff thought to himself: "If she doesn't take him now, she doesn't need to go crazy— she's crazy already."

SHE took him. Before Dunbar could get back from Liverpool, Allan had married her. Duff read it in the newspapers, but that was the only word of it that he received. "We ought to put it on our bill," he told Miss Kennedy, "but I suppose we can't. It's one of the by-products of the case that has no market value. What's more, we'll lose a client by it. She'll never let Allan come near me again— not if she can prevent it. And she'll never let Dunbar. I wonder what she'll tell them."

Whatever it was, it had its effect. Dunbar paid his bill, but Duff never saw any of them again.

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2: The Blue Tulip

Warwick Deeping

1877-1950

Cassell's Magazine July 1925

TO THOUSANDS of garden enthusiasts the name of Horatio Best must be pressingly familiar.

"Best's Bulbs are the Best Bulbs."

A great advertiser, with a fine declamatory style, he had caught some of the Dutch spirit, and his genial greetings were there upon thousands of breakfast tables with the porridge and the toast. That he had no modesty goes without saying. He was modern and enterprising and sentimental, shouting succulent slush at the great public, crying up the beauties of his tulips and his hyacinths and his lilies as though he were selling Circassian beauties to hot-blooded pashas.

He had a great fondness for pretty pictures in which he cultivated the "child idea."

"No Garden is Complete Without a Child— or Best's Bulbs."

And having no young children of his own, but only one daughter— Miss Flora Irene Best— aged three-and-twenty, he imported young maidens from Kings Barton, presented them with their tea and a shilling a-piece, and had them photographed among his flowers. For his catalogues he would label the pictures "Innocence"— or "Beautiful Children grow in Beautiful gardens like Best's Beautiful Bulbs."

Now in Mr. Best's nurseries at Kings Barton there was a certain foreman named Robert Maskray, a quiet, reticent, flaxen-haired creature whom Mr. Best always considered a bit of a fool.

As the world wags these days there is no doubt that Robert Maskray had no tail. He was religious, with a dreamy and a visionary other-worldliness that moved gently among the flowers, contentedly loving them for themselves and not as children of commerce. He read a great deal. He had an austere mouth, and blue eyes that always seemed to be looking beyond the Best scheme of things; but he was reliable and very intelligent— if a little slow.

In his brisk moods, when business was booming, Mr. Best would sometimes show a teasing playfulness in his attitude to Bob Maskray. He was a facetious little man; the sort who, in the old days, wore a hard felt hat and side whiskers and shaved his long and keen and cunning upper lip.

"How's Clara Butt this year, Bob?"

Maskray would look at his employer with those slow and serene blue eyes of his, and answer with vague solemnity:

"Very well, Mr. Best, thank you."

Maskray had no sense of humour, being one of those men born with a great capacity for reverence and wonder and a feeling for the beautiful. He would have made an ideal gardener in heaven, scattering grape hyacinths over the Elysian fields and spreading over the blessed valleys legions of fragrant narcissi.

"Writing any more poetry, Bob?"

The man's slow and solemn blush was curious.

"No, sir; not exactly."

"Better do me some verses for the adverts, or the catalogue. Nice and pink and juicy, Bob."

Maskray took people seriously.

"Might try, sir."

He did not tell Mr. Best that he had written sonnets to the black hair and eyes and cottage-maid cheeks of Flora Irene, Mr. Best's daughter.

Now a wonderful thing happened to Robert Maskray in the spring of 1924. He had a cottage and a small parcel of ground beyond Kings Barton Bridge, at the back of the Mordaunt almshouses, where he lived alone, with a woman coming in occasionally to cook and wash and scrub. Even during his moments of leisure he was a gardener, experimenting with sweet peas and tulips and narcissi, and trying for new strains in violas and delphiniums.

A small greenhouse— a tenant's fixture— stood at the back of his cottage, and in this spring of 1924 it sheltered, among other things, some pots of Darwin tulips raised from some crossed seed three or four seasons back. These young bulbs had never bloomed. Maskray's interest in them was less fervent than it might have been, simply because his unsophisticated soul had sprouted the wings of a hopeless and romantic love.

These tulip bulbs were sending up their flower stalks, with the fat, green, spear-shaped buds rising a foot or more in the air, and after a day or two's sunlight the greenness began to blush— red, rose and purple.

Maskray had returned after the day's work and had had his tea. He was sad, sad as only an obscure lover can be when the great lady who was not quite so great as to be utterly beyond him, had passed mercilessly through her father's nurseries in search of flowers. Poor Robert had put himself in the way, and had been removed from it with indifferent frankness.

"I haven't come here to waste your time."

Yes, of course he was employed to help in the production of Best's bulbs, and not to select flowers for the daughter.

Egregious Bob! With pocketed hands he wandered out into the garden and into his greenhouse, looking at nothing in particular, for the snub was sore in

him. Flowers! What were flowers— after all— when the one particular and heavenly flower—?

And then his head gave a little attentive jerk. He was looking at one of the pots of tulips, the last pot in the row.

"It can't be," said the voice of the gardener in him. "It can't be. I'm dreaming."

But he wasn't. He frowned, blinked his blue eyes— and went nearer. His face expressed extreme astonishment, for one of the tulip's buds was showing a clear gentian blue.

"Someone's been fooling," was his thought.

But how could anyone fool him with a flower and turn a pot upside down and dip one bloom of the three in a pot of dye? The other flowers were a rich red, and they seemed to enhance the miraculous blueness of that other blossom.

He felt weak at the knees. He picked up the pot and scrutinized the amazing flower, while a voice prattled in him of primary colours and of the impossibility of his having produced a blue tulip by any trick of hybridization. To put it genteelly— "The thing wasn't done." But the blueness of that flower was supremely undeniable. He was not colour-blind.

And then the man's mystic bent betrayed itself. He put the pot back on the staging with a reverent carefulness and went down on his knees.

"God's given it me. Didn't I pray for something? God's sent an answer."

Now, somehow, from that very wonderful moment his blue tulip became mixed up in Robert Maskray's soul with the image of Flora Irene Best. He christened it "Irene," but no one knew. Oh, yes, no one knew. The only blue tulip bulb in the world, and it belonged to him!

Meanwhile there could be no penny press sensation. That precious bulb had to be watched and cherished like something sacred, and another year would elapse before it could bloom a second time. Yes— that would be the proof of its sincerity, a second blueness to prove that it had not played on Robert Maskray some Puckish trick. And then— its progeny, those tiny bulbils, and another two or three years of waiting till the children bloomed and assured him of their likeness to their parent.

In three years' time Robert Maskray would be thirty-seven, and Flora Irene twenty-six. A multitude of things can happen in three years. Husband, children—

Grievously was he tempted to go to Mr. Horatio Best and to whisper to him:

"I— Robert Maskray— have raised a blue tulip!"

But there was a Quakerish thoroughness in the man that held him back from seeking the immediate effect. He was cautious, conscientious; he wanted to be sure. If he had to wait for his Rachel until he could show to an astonished world a young family of blue-flowered tulips, well— that was nature and the Bible. Maskray had some of the qualities of a fanatic.

Yet the secret dominated him. He went about carrying with him the thought of that precious tulip— dried and dormant and locked away in his old oak desk. He smiled secret smiles; he had the air of a man conscious of divine favour, of being one of the chosen. Even Mr. Horatio Best noticed a change in him; the shy, reticent creature exhaled a puzzling perfume of mingled humility and arrogance.

It was so evident that Mr. Best remarked on it to his daughter.

"Bob Maskray's going soft in the head."

Miss Best was not interested in Robert Maskray. She bloomed like a rose and was as cold as a winter hellebore. Her romance— when admitted— was to be of a suitable dignity. Kings Barton was Kings Barton simply because Mr. Best's bulbs had made it a household word.

"He's a silly creature," she observed. "What has he been doing?"

"Nothing extraordinary."

Mr. Best had a second helping of roast mutton.

"Love or religious mania or something. He has got a queer smile these days, and talks like the Bible. Why, he couldn't let me by the common white lilies without quoting scripture."

" 'Solomon in all his glory?' "

"Precisely so," said her father. "Begins to make you wonder when one of your foremen starts quoting scripture."

Miss Best thought it a bad sign.

"I'd sack him. Remember Bates— who used to preach on Sundays?"

"Yes," said her father grimly; "and I caught him on the Saturday going forth with his pockets full of lilium auratum."

But Robert Maskray was not sacked. There was nothing that he could be reproached with, and a queer, seraphic, secret smile cannot be charged as a sin. He continued to worship from afar, as though he had planted Flora Irene in a pot in his greenhouse and was waiting for the great consummation. But the dear fool had some worldly wisdom.

He fitted a second and more complex lock to the door of his greenhouse, and two weeks before the miraculous bulb's annunciation was due he tacked a white calico screen round the lower part of the glazed walls. No prying eyes were to peep. But Robert Maskray and his greenhouse were of no interest to Kings Barton.

That year the blue tulip flowered true. And when the gentian blue cup had opened, Maskray carried the pot up to the little attic in his cottage, and placed it on a stool by the window. He kept the attic door locked.

Later his joy grew exultant, for the blue tulip bulb gave him two tiny bulbils.

Three years passed. Miss Best was still Miss Best, though no less than five possible partners had tried to persuade her to attempt matrimony. Meanwhile Best's Bulbs were not booming like the May-bugs; an unexplainable dullness had descended upon Mr. Best's business; and thin lipped— he pointed an accusing finger at Holland.

"Those Dutchmen!"

It occurred to him on occasions that his daughter should be thinking of getting married. Some comfortable young fellow with money to put into the business; but Flora Irene's fastidiousness seemed to increase as her father's appeals to the bulb-buying public grew more urgent and flamboyant.

No— the man she married was to be able to build a nice, new arty house on Monk's Hill, and provide her with a solid, four-seater touring car. None of your hip baths for two with a dicky not fit for a dog to ride in.

Robert Maskray, exercising a Biblical patience, became more and more obsessed by his dream, developing— simple soul though he was— a divinely inspired slyness. Flora Irene was still Flora Irene, and Best's Bulbs were not as marketable as they had been.

But he— Robert Maskray— was the possessor of a blue tulip, a miraculous flower, a living talisman with which to conjure love and fortune. He would sit in his little garden and dream. He would see himself unveiling this blue prodigy before the eyes of the amazed father, and the daughter— grown suddenly and exquisitely melting— throwing her arms about his neck. "Oh, wonderful Robert!"

The blue tulip— the only blue tulip in the world, with the whole horticultural community speechless, and nurserymen and bulb growers scrambling for one small child of it! How much would each bulb be worth? Hundreds of pounds— perhaps. And the blue Irene would be the cynosure, his peerless queen.

He sat and exulted.

For now he had three bulbs all ripe to flower, and a dozen or so bulbils of different sizes, and he could think of seed.

Yes, the great day of revelation was near. He would wait until all three flowering bulbs had proved their purity, and then he would go to Mr. Horatio Best and invite him to come and look at a novelty that waited in his greenhouse. Yes, he meant to be a little mysterious about it— dramatic. Why should he not ask Mr. Best to bring his daughter?

The wonderful day arrived. It was sunny, as it should be, and Robert Maskray, making a sedate entry into the nursery office, asked for Mr. Horatio. Shown in by a girl clerk, he found Mr. Best looking rather thin and pinched about the upper lip.

His glance was irritable.

"What d'you want, Bob?"

Maskray seethed with the delicious secret.

"I have a flower I should like you to see."

"Oh— what sort?"

"Tulip. Might interest you, sir."

"Busy. Bring a bloom in."

"Too precious to cut, sir."

"Oh, all right—"

He gave a push to his chair, but the foreman checked such useless haste.

"Not in the nursery, sir; but in my greenhouse. Perhaps you will come down and drink a cup of tea with me, sir, and look at the flower. It's worth looking at, though I did raise it."

Mr. Best stared. He seemed suspicious.

"Rather busy, Bob. But might manage it."

He was aware of a seraphic smile.

"And perhaps Miss Best would come too. I would be honoured. I have christened the flower Irene, sir. No impertinence intended."

Mr. Best stared still harder, and on going home to lunch informed his daughter of Robert Maskray's apparent madness.

"Balmy, my dear! Raised some sort of tulip, and called it 'Irene.' Wants me to go and have tea and look at it. You too."

"Me!" said Miss Best sharply.

"Yes— you."

"I have something better to do," said the lady. "Silly fool! A fool like that— with calf's eyes."

About five o'clock Mr. Best strolled down over Kings Barton Bridge and, turning past the almshouses, came to Robert Maskray's cottage. The dreamer had arrived there half-an-hour before him, having stopped to buy a bag of fancy cakes at Bowdens just above the bridge.

The tea-table had been laid in the morning, with a pink-and-white check cloth and Robert's best china, and there were flowers— white narcissi in an old blue vase. The queen should have her cakes and flowers. Mr. Best came to the cottage door and knocked, and Maskray, peering through the window, saw that Mr. Horatio was alone. His dream face fell a little.

"Come in, sir. Sorry Miss Irene—"

"Got a bun-party or something," said the father, who seemed gruff and worried.

He was fidgety and absent all through the meal. A silly business this, sitting down with a foreman at a tea-table. And flowers and fancy cakes! Not for him obviously! Now what had this fool of a fellow got in his bonnet?

"What about this thing of yours, Bob?"

Maskray rose with the air of a high priest about to unveil sacred mysteries.

"In the greenhouse, sir. If you will come through into the garden."

When Mr. Best saw those three tulips with their gentian blue cups open to the sunlight he did not believe them to be what they appeared to be. It was impossible. This fool Maskray was playing some silly trick on him. The flowers could not be real.

"Nice imitation, Bob. Never tried dyeing flowers before. Or they're not paper, are they?"

Maskray flushed.

"Do you think I'm that sort of man, Mr. Best? I'm showing you a blue tulip, the first blue tulip—"

Mr. Best put out a sudden hand towards one of the pots; but Maskray, with a quick eagerness that was almost mistrustful, interposed, and taking a pot in his hands, held the flower within a foot of Mr. Horatio's face.

"Real, sir. Gives you a shock, doesn't it? It gave me one the first time I saw it four years ago."

Mr. Best seemed to be squinting down his predaceous nose.

"By Jove!" he said; and then: "Where the devil did you get—"

"Came in a lot, sir, I bought from De Vries. No; it didn't come from your nursery."

"A sport. But does it come true?"

"It has flowered true four years— and the other two in bloom were bulbils from it."

The bulb merchant stood amazedly yet intelligently silent. His little eyes glimmered. He stroked his long upper lip.

"How many of them have you, Bob?"

"These three full-sized bulbs and a dozen or so youngsters. I wanted to be sure, sir, and to work up a small stock."

"By Jove!" said Mr. Best in a whisper, and again, "By Jove!"

And suddenly their eyes met. Those of the bulb merchant were watchful, glinting with business; Maskray's seemed to be looking through Mr. Best at something beyond him.

"Say, Bob, this is going to be the sensation of the century. What about it?"

He saw Maskray smile.

"I take these bulbs up to my bedroom at night—"

"Jove, man! They're more valuable than bullion."

"I know. Is it— is it— a question of business between us, sir?"

"Well— what's your idea?" said the cautious one.

"I'm in love with your daughter," said Maskray with abrupt quietness. "I have been in love with her for years."

Another shock! Mr. Best sat down on the greenhouse staging, half off and half on a box of mustard and cress.

"Well— I'm—!"

But he did not damn himself. The possibilities of the situation were too extraordinary. He stared at one of the blue tulips.

"Began as a working-man myself," he said; and then, "What's the exact idea, Robert?"

Maskray, standing with one of the precious pots in his hand, and with a queer, luminous shine on his face, seemed to speak to the blue tulip.

"I called it 'Irene,' the first blue tulip. Yet it isn't so wonderful as she is. I'm a plain man, but there's nothing I wouldn't do to make her happy. Money— oh— yes! I'd want her to live as she has always lived. I'm not a man for mere money, Mr. Best, but there is money in this flower— and I want the gold to throw at your daughter's feet."

Mr. Best observed his foreman's transfigured face. Talk about miracles! And all this devotion prayerfully on its knees before Flora Irene! Miss Best might be his daughter, but Mr. Horatio knew his daughter's limitations. Wonderful! Was she? Poor Robert! But, chiefly, he was concerned with the business proposition, for he had no doubt at all that Maskray had opened a floral gold-mine.

"A partnership, Bob. Is that your idea?"

"In a way, sir, on the understanding—"

"That you marry my daughter? But, come, come, she has to be considered."

Maskray answered with quiet humility:

"Of course, sir. I'm no more than a plain man at her feet. I have got to work and fit myself, and all I ask is that I may have my chance with her."

He raised his head and smiled suddenly.

"But the Maskray who raised the blue tulip. Maskray of Best and Maskray. Not plain Bob."

Mr. Horatio understood him.

"Ah— that's it. There's a fortune in that flower-pot. By Jove, the sensation, the splash! Saved any money, Robert?"

"About three hundred pounds."

"Well— well, not so bad. Supposing you were to bring your money and the tulip into the business, and take a third share. We could talk about the details later."

Maskray looked at his tulip.

"Something comes before that, sir. I want to be allowed to speak to Miss Irene, to tell her what's in my heart. I want to show her her tulip. Maybe— she'll be willing to let me hope."

Mr. Best concealed a business man's impatience. Hang it all, was not business good enough without importing a young woman into it?

"Quite so, Robert, quite so. Supposing I give my daughter a hint. And supposing you come up this evening— and bring that flower."

Robert Maskray's face seemed to see heaven opened.

"Thank you, sir. Tell her I'm a plain man and know it; but, as sure as God has given me this flower, I'll try to be worthy of her."

Mr. Horatio shook hands with Maskray and hurried home. Diplomacy— yes, diplomacy was needed, for his daughter was a young woman who could go off like a Chinese cracker. Obviously she must be persuaded to smile, even if the smile were only temporary. The thing was to get control of that tulip. Mr. Best had foresight and a quick sense of smell. The horticultural sensation of the century! What a coup! His brain seethed with the possibilities of it.

He found his daughter at home, amusing herself with a cross-word puzzle.

"My dear, I have had a surprise, the surprise of my life."

He declaimed, and she listened with a perfectly expressionless yet attentive face. So, fool Bob Maskray— a working man— was in love with her! No new news that. And he was hoping to climb to her favour like a Jack-of-the-Beanstalk up the stem of a monstrous tulip!

She kept a quiet face, but inwardly she raged, for it so happened that on this very day life had hurt her and humiliated her, and she was no gentle creature. Her raw young spirit raged to pass on the pain.

"So he's coming up?"

"Yes, my dear. Now, sentiment apart, it's a business proposition."

"Quite so," said she. "I'll see him."

When the critical hour and Robert Maskray and his tulip arrived, Mr. Horatio withdrew himself to the dining-room and lit a cigar and straddled in front of the fire. Rum business this! But then— Flora Irene should be able to handle it successfully.

But— good heavens— what was that? A smashing of glass? Investigation was needed, and when Mr. Best opened the drawing-room door he beheld an open window, and his daughter standing by the sofa and laughing hysterically.

"My dear—"

He went to the window, and pulling it down, found one of the big panes smashed.

"How— who—? Where's Maskray?"

Her laughter frightened him.

"He— oh, he went out of the window after I had thrown his tulip— pot and all— through the glass."

Mr. Best's upper lip quivered. He stared for a moment, and then rushed to the door and, going out into the garden, shouted to Robert Maskray; but no one answered him. On the path in front of the drawing-room window he was able to discover a few broken pieces of pot.

"Oh— women, women!"

He went in again, snatched a hat, and hurried down the road in the direction of Kings Barton. It took him a quarter of an hour to reach Maskray's cottage, and he calculated that the tulip grower could not have been very far ahead of him. There was a light in the cottage. He knocked.

"Who's that?" said a voice.

Mr. Best tried the door and it opened to him, but he paused on the threshold of Maskray's room, for Robert Maskray was sitting all hunched up on a Windsor chair in front of the fire with a coal shovel in his hand. He was staring at the fire.

"Bob," said Mr. Horatio softly, but suddenly afraid.

Maskray did not turn his head, but continued to stare at the fire.

"The tulips?"

"I have burnt them," said the man.

And then he added:

"God gave it me. 'Twas a beautiful thing, and I was for selling the soul of a flower. But the Devil spoke the word. Yes, I have burnt the lot."

_____

3: Crazy Rhythm

Max Brand

Frederick Schiller Faust, 1892-1944

Argosy, 2 March 1935

Back from Prison

WHEN JIMMY GEARY came in sight of Yellow Creek again, he sat down on a pine log beside the road and stared at his hometown, from the old mill at one end to the house of the Bentons on the hill, with its thin wooden spires pointing up above the trees. Best of all, he could mark the roof of Graham's Tavern beyond the rest of the houses. It was still painted red, but the wave of climbing vines had thrown a spray of green across the shingles since he had last sat in the cool of the bar room and smelled the pungencies of whiskey and the pleasant sour of beer.

Behind him, following taller than the mountains, around him thicker than the trees, before him more obscuring than the morning mist, he felt his eight years of prison. Eight years out of twenty-six is a long time. Prison monotony had made everything about those years dim except their length; the distinct moments of his life, so clear that he felt he could mark them in every day of his past, continued to that moment when he had seen the card come out of Tony Spargo's sleeve. Of course, he knew that there were card cheats, but it had seemed impossible that big, beautiful Tony Spargo, so rich in eye and color and song, could actually be doing dirt for the sake of a fifteen-dollar pot. Gus Warren, at the same table, too magnificent of brow and manner, or the Mexican with the wide face of a Chinese idol, might have been suspected, but never Tony.

He had shouted in a voice that tore his throat and cast a redness over his eyes, then he had grabbed the Colt that Tony had flashed and pulled his own gun. The weight of two bullets jarred Tony Spargo in his chair like two blows of a fist. But they were all in cahoots, the three of them. Oñate came in with a knife; Gus Warren's gun had stuck and came out only with a sound of tearing cloth. He turned his shoulder to the knife thrust and got Warren right in the middle of the face. Afterward, he had to shift the gun to his left hand to settle with Oñate. But Oñate and Spargo didn't count very much; he got fifteen years for Gus Warren, and murder in the third degree. But the warden was a fine fellow, and for good behavior there is time off.

Thinking of the past cleared the mist from his mind so that he began to see what was around him and found that his hand was stroking the smooth of the log on which he sat. There were a lot of those barkless logs waiting to be dragged away, and they were still yellow-white with the blaze of axe strokes

glittering like metal here and there. He looked about at the standing trees— the lower trunks mossed over on the north side and spiked with the stubs of broken branches, then came ragged, down-hanging boughs, and finally the fresh green of the top. On the opposite slope all he could see was the ranged and compacted mass of the treetops.

Men were like that, for the daily crowds of them seemed strong and happy, and it was only when one got underneath the first impression that the mold of time and the scars and the breakings of the years could be seen.

Something disturbed Jimmy Geary. He found that it was the noise of wind in the trees and water in the creek, both exactly the same and both trying to hurry him away, as it seemed, into some unknown expectancy of action. He looked along the scattering line of logs that so many hand strokes of labor had laid there, and down the hills he stared again into the valley. There was plenty of open country with little rusty spots of color scattered over the green. Those were the cattle.

"You've got a good, clean pair of eyes in your head," the warden had told him, "but the only way for a man to keep clean is to work. In the old days you worked with a gun. You'd better find different tools now." Well, he knew the feel of the tools he wanted to manage— the rough of a forty-foot rope and the braided handle of a quirt and the oily sleekness of bridle reins. He knew cows pretty well, and now he would work with them. Finally, he would have a herd of his own, and on the fat of this land the cattle would multiply.

"I'm going to punch cows," he had told the warden, who had answered: "That's good. Anything's good, but don't try it at home. You'd better not go back there. Hometowns are bad for bad boys, Jimmy. You know what I mean by that. It's bad to get a wheel into an old rut."

The warden was a wise man, and he meant that it was best for a man with a past to try a new deal at a new table. Now the eyes of Jimmy Geary were taking hold on the picture of Yellow Creek so confidently that he felt a sort of kind recognition shining back to him from the whole valley.

He got up and walked on with the loose and easy action of a very strong man whose weight has not yet become a burden. He could feel his strength pull up the calf of his leg and bulge along his thighs, and he kept partially gripping his hands to set his arm muscles in action. His eyes shone with the glory of his fitness. Fifteen years of hard labor had been his sentence, but eight years of daily companionship with a sledgehammer had been enough. He had been pretty soft in the old days, and now he felt that softness of the body was like poison in the belly or fool ideas in the head— a thing to be purged away. As he swung down into Yellow Creek, he realized that from his sixteenth to his

eighteenth year he had never dared to enter any town without at least the weight of one gun under his coat. Now his hands would have to do.

He went happily down the main street's windings. The roar of the creek was off to the left, the music for which he had wakened and harkened vainly through the dark of so many nights. Slater's barn was there near the road, the brown-red of the paint peeling off it in larger patches than ever. The building was a grim outline to him because he had had that half-hour fight with Jeff Wiley behind the barn till Mexican Charlie was frightened by the great splattering of blood and ran yelling to bring grown-ups to end the battle. From that great, crimson moment, Jeff and he had felt that they were set off from the rest of the boys in Yellow Creek with a greater destiny in promise for them. It was a sign and perhaps a prophecy, when Jeff was thrown by a bucking horse and broke his neck on a Monday; for on Friday there had occurred the triple killing in Graham's Tavern that sent Jimmy up the river for eight years.

Beyond the barn, the houses were closer together. He knew them all by their own faces and the faces, the voices, the characters of the people who passed through the front doors. Another twist of the way brought him in view of the central section of Yellow Creek, the irregular "square," the flagpole in the middle of it, the boardwalk that ran around the square in front of the buildings. Everything in Yellow Creek was here, from the newspaper office to the HAY, GRAIN, AND COAL sign of Thomas Masters, the old crook. Not very many people were moving about. There never were many people in Yellow Creek, except for holidays, and it was hardly strange that no one noticed young Jimmy Geary when he returned at last, not until after the sheriff had greeted him.

It was the same sheriff, on the same roan horse. The sheriff had been quite an old man of forty, those eight years ago, but by a strange chance he seemed younger than before to Jimmy Geary. He pulled up his mustang so hard that the water jounced and squeaked in the belly of the broncho. He waved a silent greeting; Jimmy's salute was just as still.

"Staying or passing through?" asked the sheriff, and all the calm virtue of Jimmy vanished at a stroke.

"Whichever I damn' please!" he replied. The sheriff said nothing. He simply took in Jimmy with a long look, then jogged on down the street.

Right after that a shrill sound approached Jimmy Geary. It was almost like the barking of a dog, but it came from the lips of a thirteen-year-old boy who was capering and yelling: "Hey, everybody! Hey, turn out and look sharp! Jimmy Geary's back! Jimmy Geary's back!"

Other boys heard the cry. They came in swirls of dust. As they gathered in numbers they got closer to Jimmy. They began to laugh because crowds of

boys have to do something, and that laughter was acid under the skin of Jimmy. The youngest of children can make the oldest of sages wince, if it keeps on laughing long enough.

Someone burst through the crowd. He was in such a hurry to get to Jimmy that he kept on sidling and prancing after he reached him. This fellow represented the *Morning Bugle*, he said. But he could not have represented it long, because he had been in the West only long enough for its sun to redden the end of his nose. He looked incomplete and wrinkled and uncomfortable like a man on a picnic. He wanted, he said, a few good bits from Jimmy Geary.

"I'm not talking," said Jimmy. He had learned at the penitentiary to say that.

"You're not talking?" cried the reporter. "But you've *got* to talk! Outside of the waterfalls and the lumber mill, you're the only thing in Yellow Creek that's worth writing up. If you don't talk for yourself, other people are going to talk for you."

"How do you know me?" asked Jimmy.

"Hey, look at the spread we gave you five days ago," said the reporter. He was so proud of that spread that he carried it around with him, and now unfolded the front sheet of the *Bugle*. It was not a very big paper, but the headline could be read easily right across the square.

JIMMY GEARY FREED

Underneath it ran the long article. Jimmy's eye picked out bits of it and put the bits away in his memory. He was the hero of the famous triple killing at Graham's Tavern. He was dangerous; he was a youthful and a smiling killer. But above all, the question was, what would his career be when he got free from the prison to his hometown? Or did he intend to return to it?

"What're you gonna do?" asked the reporter. "What's the career ahead of you?"

"Cattle," said Jimmy. Then he turned his eyes from the sunburned nose of the other and went off down the street. He had a vast desire to take the yipping boys, two at a time, and knock their heads together. He had been almost overcome by an intense need to punch out the red nose of the reporter.

People were hard to take, and that was perfectly certain. In a prison one's fellow humans are not so free to be annoying.

When he came to the HAY, GRAIN, AND COAL sign of Thomas Masters, he got away from the growing crowd by stepping into the office. Old Masters sat in his usual corner with the same white whiskers bulging out of the same red

face. It looked like a picture surrounded with the smoke of an explosion. He put out a fat hand, tentatively, for Jimmy Geary to grasp.

"Well, James," said Masters, "what can I do for you today?"

"Tell me where to find a job," said Jimmy.

"There are only a few good jobs, and there are a lot of good men," said Masters.

"Sure there are," admitted Jimmy. "I don't care what I get so long as there are horses and cows in it."

"And guns?" asked Masters.

"I'm traveling light," smiled Jimmy.

"You try the Yellow Creek air on yourself for a week, and then come in to see me," answered Masters, and raised his pen over a stack of bills.

Jimmy went out without a good-bye because a good-bye was not wanted. When he reached the sidewalk, Reuben Samuels got hold of him out of the increasing mob of boys and took him into the Best Chance saloon. He said: "I'm going to do something for you, Jimmy"— and sat him down at a small table in the back room. Samuels ordered two whiskies. Jimmy changed his to beer and then looked across the foam past the red length of Samuels's nose into the brightness of his little eyes.

"I've got a good break to offer you, and you're going to have it," said Samuels. "I've got a place up the line that used to make big business for me. Faro, roulette, or anything the boys want. But I had some trouble up there. Some of the roughs thought the faro layout was queer one night, and they started smashing things up. What I need is a headliner to draw the crowd, and a bouncer well enough known to throw a chill into the boys that go around packing hardware. Well, you're the man for both places, so I could pay you double. I mean something big, Jimmy. I mean fifty or sixty a week."

Jimmy Geary shook his head. "Not interested," he said.

"Or seventy," said Samuels.

"I'm not carrying any hardware myself," said Jimmy.

"Make it eighty, then, for your health."

"Not for me."

"Ninety dollars a week for an easy job, a sitting job, most of the time . . . and, when the work comes, it's the sort of thing that's play for you. Don't say no. I'm not pinching pennies. I'll call it a hundred flat!"

Jimmy looked hard into the little eyes. "Aw, to hell with you!" he said, and arose.

"Wait a minute," said Samuels hastily. "How did I know what you are taking in your coffee? Don't run away in a huff. I'm going to do you good, I said, and I

meant it. Sit here for five minutes. My cousin Abe is right here in town. One of the smartest men you ever met, Jimmy. He wants to see you."

Abe was like Reuben in the face, but his clothes were fitted to the sleek of his body more carefully. They seemed to be painted on him. His collar was so tight that his neck overflowed it and rubbed a dark spot of sweat or grease onto the knot of his tie. At the same time that his fat fingers took possession of Jimmy's hand, his eyes took brotherly possession of Jimmy's heart and soul.

"It's something big," he said to Jimmy. "I got the idea, when I heard that you were turned loose. I burned up the wires to New York. You see, I know Lew Gilbeck of Gilbeck and Slinger. They've put over some of the hottest shots that ever burned a hole in Broadway. They're reaching around for a big musical comedy spectacle to put out this fall, and I shoot them this idea over the wires. Jimmy Geary, hero of a three-man killing eight years ago, just out of prison. Big, handsome, loaded with it. Did his shooting eight years ago, when the phonograph record was playing 'Crazy Rhythm.' Give him a number where he does the thing over again. 'Crazy Rhythm' for a title. Booze. A girl or two. A real Western gunfight in the real Western way done by one who's done it before. I shoot this idea to Lew Gilbeck and he wires back... 'Yes, yes, yes... get him.' I wire back... 'How much? This baby won't be cheap.' He hands me back… 'Offer one fifty a week.' And there you are, Jimmy, with one foot already on Broadway and the other ready to step...."

Jimmy Geary went with lengthening strides out of the cool shadows of the Best Chance saloon. In the dazzling brightness of the outer sun, he fairly ran into the stalwart form of Lowell Gerry, the rancher.

"Mister Gerry," he said, blocking the way, "you've always got a place for a man out on your ranch. Let me go out there and try to earn my keep until I'm worth real pay, will you?"

The sun-lined and squinting face of Lowell Gerry did not alter a great deal; one expression had been cut into that brown steel long before and it could not change. "Step aside a minute, will you, Jimmy?" he asked quietly.

Jimmy stepped aside, and Gerry walked straight past him down the street with an unhurrying stride.

Time was needed before the fullness of that affront could be digested. Jimmy was still swallowing bitterness, when he got across Yellow Creek to Graham's Tavern. Even the trees around the tavern threw shadows ten degrees cooler than those that fell in any other part of Yellow Creek. Ivy grew around the watering troughs; ampelopsis bushed up around the wooden columns of the verandah, swept over the roof of it, almost obscured the windows of the second story, and so poured up in thinner streaks across the red shingles above. It was all just as pleasant as before, but there was more of

it. Therefore, it was rather a shock when he found in the saloon an unfamiliar face behind the bar, instead of the fat, pale, amiable hulk of Charlie Graham. This fellow was the red-copper that a man picks up on the open range. He looked as if he had exchanged chaps for a bar-apron hardly the day before. In the old days the hearty voice of Charlie was always booming, making the echoes laugh, but the new man had reduced his conversation with three or four patrons to a mere rumble.

"Where's Charlie?" asked Jimmy.

"He's in hell with Tony Spargo," said the lean bartender, and his eyes fixed as straight as a leveled gun on Geary's face.

"They don't have the same hell for men and rats," answered Geary. "Give me a beer, will you?"

The bartender paused as though about to take offense. Slowly he drew the beer and carved off the rising foam as he placed the glass on the perforated brass drain. Slowly he picked up Geary's money and made the change.

"Have one yourself," said Jimmy.

"Yeah?" queried the other, in doubt. But he saved the change and took a small beer.

"The Grahams are out of this, are they?" asked Jimmy.

"The girl's got it. Kate runs it," answered the bartender. He gave a somber nod of recognition and swallowed half of his drink. Jimmy rushed his down with a certain distaste. He wished it had been whiskey, because coming into this room had brought about him all the past and all its appetites.

"Where's Kate now?" he asked, thinking back to her. At eighteen, a lad cherishes his dignity. He had only a dim memory of red hair and spindling body, for Kate had been only about sixteen and, therefore, hardly worthy of a glance.

She was out back, said the bartender, so Jimmy went through to the rear. He stopped in the small card room. It was just the same. The little phonograph stood on the corner table where it had played "Crazy Rhythm" eight years before. The same pair of colored calendars decorated the walls. On a chair rose the pile of newspapers from which men helped themselves when they were tired of cards or growing a little world-conscious. Then he crossed to the table at which he had sat. It was even covered with the same green felt. He could remember the V-shaped cut on one edge of the cloth. Behind the chair where Tony Spargo had sat, there was a half-inch hole bore into the wall. Until he saw it, he had forgotten that the first bullet had drilled right through Tony's powerful body. It was strange that life could be knocked out by a flash of fire and a finger's end of lead.

Then he went out behind the house and saw a red-headed girl of twenty-three or four, peeling potatoes. She had three pans for the unpeeled, the peelings, and the peeled. She wore rubber gloves through which the flesh appeared duskily. She should have been very pretty, but there was no smile about her. What a man sees first is the light behind a picture; after that he sees the picture itself. Well, you had to look closely at this girl before you saw that she was pretty.

"You're Kate Graham?" he asked.

"Hello, Jimmy," said the girl. "Welcome home. I've got your old room fixed up. Want it?" She slid the pan of peelings onto a chair and stood up. She had plenty of jaw and plenty of shoulders, but her strength remained inside the sense of her femininity as in a frame. She had a smile, too, but it was no glare for heavy traffic—there were dimmers on it. It invited you close and promised to keep shining, for a long time. A door opened in Jimmy, and something like a sound moved through him.

"Yes, I want the room," he said, looking at her. "Tell me how about Charlie, if you don't mind?"

"A whiskey bat and pneumonia did the rest," she answered.

"Whiskey's hard on the eyes, all right," said Jimmy. "I was mighty fond of Charlie."

"Were you?" asked the girl.

"Yeah, I sure was."

He kept hesitating until it suddenly occurred to him that he had no words for what he wanted to say. He hardly knew what he wanted, either, except he wished to see that faint brightening about the eyes and mouth. He said he could find the way to the old room, so he left her and went off up the stairs that creaked in all the familiar places. It was wonderful that he should remember everything so well. From sixteen to eighteen he had written himself "man" and kept a room here and lived— well, without too much labor.

When he got up to the room, he heard snoring inside it. He backed off and looked at the number to make sure. It was Number Seventeen, all right, so he opened the door softly and looked in. A long man with a jag of beard on the chin and a sweep of mustaches across his mouth was lying on the bed with his mouth open. It was Doc Alton.

That sight brought up the past on galloping hoofs. He crossed the room. Doc opened his eyes and shut his mouth.

"Hello, Jimmy," he said quietly. Doc was always quiet. Perhaps that was why he had been able to open so many safes without bringing on the vengeance of the law. He had been one of those aging men of forty, eighty

years ago. Now he looked to the altered eye of Jimmy Geary even younger than in the other days, as the sheriff had. Doc sat up and shook hands.

"How's everything?" he asked.

"All right," said Jimmy. "Thanks for the letters and the cash."

"They wouldn't let me send much," answered Doc. "Feeling like work?"

"Listen to me!" said Jimmy fiercely. "Wake up and listen! When I brace people around here for an honest job, they give me the eye and walk straight past. But the thugs come and hunt me up... Samuels, and that sort, and a safe-cracker comes and waits in my room. I say... what the hell?"

Doc Alton yawned. "You feel that way about it? All right. I'll take a snooze here. I'm kind of tired. If you ain't changed your mind before you're ready to go to bed, I won't argue with you any, but I've got a sweet layout fixed up. It's a two-man job, and it's fat. There ought to be fifteen, twenty thousand in it."

"No, and be damned to you!" said Jimmy. "I'm going out to get an honest man's job."

"Take a gun along with you, then," said Doc Alton. "Let me tell you something. A lot of people around here remember Tony Spargo."

"A dirty louse of a cardsharper!" answered Jimmy Geary. "To hell with him, too, and the crooks that remember him." He strode from the room and had sight, from the door, of Doc Alton yawning again, his eyes already closing for more sleep. At the stable he hired a saddle horse and hit out over the rough trails to the ranches. He put in the rest of that day getting to eight ranch houses, and he collected eight refusals.

Two of them stood out. Old Will Chalmers said to him: "What sort of a plant are you aiming to fix on me out here? No, I don't want you or any three like you, either." At the Morgan place, the girl he had known as Ruth Willet opened the kitchen door for him. He had gone to school with Ruth, and he put out his hand in a pleased surprise. She simply slammed the door in his face, and screeched from behind it: "I've got men in this house, Jimmy Geary. You get out of here, or I'm gonna call 'em! I got men and guns here. You get off this place!"

That was his last try. He got off the place and went slowly back to Graham's Tavern, letting the cowpony dog-trot or walk, letting the evening gather off the hills and slide unheeded about him. Darkness, also, was rising out of his heart across his eyes.

He put up the horse in the barn and went into the saloon. There was no one in it except the bartender, although voices were stirring in the back room.

"Whiskey!" he said, looking down at his watery reflection in the bar varnish.

"How's things?" asked the bartender cheerfully.

Jimmy Geary lifted his eyes with deliberation across the shining white of the bar-apron and over the lean face of the other. There he rested his glance for a moment, drank the whiskey, and lowered the glass to the bar again without changing his gaze. "You take a run and a jump and a guess at how things are," said Jimmy Geary.

"Yeah?" said the bartender. But he worked a smile back onto his face. "Look here," he murmured, "there's somebody to see you. Right out there on the back verandah. Been waiting for you."

"With a gun, eh?" sneered Jimmy Geary.

The Ambush

BUT THE whiskey had hit through his blood, and the sour fume of it was in his nose and his brain. He had eaten nothing since morning. So the danger of guns meant little to the vastness of his gloom, with this red fire blowing up in it. He knocked the rear door of the bar open. Three men were playing poker at the table that was placed most clearly in his memory. A pair of them had dark faces.

"Take a hand, brother?" said this man cheerfully.

"I've got nothing but chicken feed," said Jimmy.

"Yeah? All we're spending is time."

"I'll be back, then."

He stepped onto the rear verandah, letting the screen door bang behind him. A woman got up from a chair and came slowly toward him. As she moved through the light that slanted out of a window, he recognized Juanita Allen. She was the half-breed daughter of Mac Allen.

"Hello, Jimmy," she said. "I heard you were here. I came on over. That all right? I wanted to see you."

"And knife me, too, eh?" said Jimmy. "You used to be Tony Spargo's girl, didn't you?"

"Tony Spargo? That's so long ago, I wouldn't remember!"

She put back her head a little and smiled at him with professional ease. True, he had been eight years out of the world, but he knew that gesture. She backed up into the light, and he saw what the years had done to her. Well, the Mexican blood fades fast.

"How do I look, Jimmy?" she said. "Like hell, eh? Come here and let me take a slant at you, too."

She pulled him forward into the light. That would be easy for an accomplice lodged in the dark of the brush.

"My God, the time's only made a man of you," said Juanita. "But look how it's socked me eight times in the face. You remember, Jimmy? I'm just your age. My birthday comes on Monday before yours. Take a look and tell me what I'm good for now, will you?"

There were some straight lines up and down on her lip. Her smile pulled her face all out of shape and let him see the blanched whiteness of some false teeth. And soap and water would never help her; there was grime in her soul.

"You don't have to tell me... I'll tell you... I'm done," said Juanita. "I don't mind about the men. To hell with them! But I can't even get a job slinging hash. You'd think I might get a finger in the soup, or something. I'm not good enough for the people around here. Listen to me, Jimmy."

"Yeah. All right. I'm listening," said Jimmy. "Quit crying, will you? I like you fine, Juanita. Please don't cry."

"Take hold of my arm," she said.

He could feel the two bones of the forearm.

"Look at," said Juanita. "I'm sunk... I'm done. I've gotta get a break or something, and pull out of here. Jimmy, you were always a good kid. Give me a break, will you?"

"I'll give you a break," he heard himself say. "Will you quit crying, Juanita, please? I'm going to give you a break. What d'you need?"

She stopped the crying and started gasping, which was worse. She held him by the wrists with shuddering hands. "I wouldn't need much. There's a little bill over at the boarding house. It's only forty dollars, Jimmy. They'd sock me in jail, if I didn't pay that. And then a little bit more. Car fare, some place. Jimmy, you were always kind. I was sorry, when they slammed you for those three crooks. I knew Tony was a crook. He was a dirty crook to me, too. You see how it is, Jimmy. I wouldn't need the money, if only..."

"You wait here," said Jimmy Geary. "I'm coming back."

She kept a grip on him all the way across the verandah. "I'm going to wait right out here for you," she kept saying. "I'll be expecting you back. I'll wait right here... if it takes you all night, I'll be waiting right here."

He got away through the outside door and up the stairs to Number Seventeen. When he got inside, he wanted a drink.

"Hey, Al!" he said to the snorer. He lighted a lamp. Electricity had not been brought out to Graham's Tavern.

"Yeah?" said Alton, turning on the bed. "What time is it?"

"Time for a drink. Where's your flask?"

"Under the pillow."

Jimmy put his hand under and found a gun. Then he found the flask and pulled it out. He unscrewed the top, poured a long shot down his throat. The

whiskey horrors choked him. He took another drink to kill them and put the flask down.

"Want some?" he panted.

"Not till I eat."

"Got any money?"

Doc sat up, suddenly. "Yeah, sure," he said. "Sure I've got some money. Help yourself."

He pulled out a wallet. Alton's wallet was always full. Now the bills were packed into a tight sheaf. He pulled out some fifties. There were seven of them. "Three hundred and fifty," he said.

"Sure, kid, sure," said Doc. "Take some more. Take all you want." He took two more.

"A lot of dirty bums is all I've been able to find since you stepped out of the picture," said Alton. "A lot of dirty, yellow-faced rats. You and me will burn up the highway, kid."

Jimmy looked down from the long mustaches of Doc and saw the face of the warden in the shadows at his feet. He saw the prison yard, and the pale eyes of Barney Vane, the lifer who was head trusty. Even the best warden in the world has to use trusties, and a trusty is, you know what. So Jimmy reached for the flask and unscrewed the top of it again.

"You sure you want that?" asked Doc.

"Aw, shut up," said Jimmy, and drank.

"Sure," said Doc Alton. "I'll get on my boots. I'll be waiting for you, while you spend that stuff. I suppose that's what you want to do?"

Jimmy said nothing. He got out of the room and down to the back verandah. He heard the girl rise— the whisper of her clothing and the sound of her drawn breath, but she kept back against the wall. He went to her and stood over her, looking down at her.

"Aw, Jimmy," she moaned suddenly. "Don't say you couldn't get anything. Don't turn me down flat. I swear to God, I haven't eaten. I'm hungry. Give me the price of a square meal, will you, Jimmy?"

"Here, here," said Jimmy Geary. "I've got enough for you. Where's that bag? Here, open it. There's three hundred and fifty in that bag, now. You pay the damned board bill and get out to a better part of the world. This is the rottenest part of creation. Nobody can go straight here."

Juanita caught her breath, started to laugh, choked, sobbed, and then uttered a queer screaming sound that was sob and laughter in one. She wobbled like a hopeless drunk, staggering with hysterics. Well, a man can't very well handle a thing like that. He took her down to the kitchen door and

threw it open. Kate was inside drying dishes that a big Negress was washing and putting out on the drain.

"Here, Kate," said Jimmy Geary. "Juanita's hysterical. Get her a drink or something. Quiet her down, will you?"

The face of Kate Graham smiled, as stone might smile. The Negress turned slowly and put her chin up into the air. "That thing!" she said.

Jimmy wanted to kill Kate Graham. Instead, he took Juanita across the room to her and caught her by the wrist and shook her arm.

"You… take this girl... and be good to her! Haven't you got any more heart than a toad? Take her... now... and let me see you!"

Kate, with a look of fear and wonder, took that weeping burden in her arms. Jimmy got out of the room onto the verandah. He leaned against a pillar there for a moment, and the stars wavered a little in the sky. Afterward, he went up to Seventeen and found Doc Alton pulling on his second boot.

"Ready, old son?" asked Doc, smiling till his mustaches spread out thin.

Jimmy lifted the pillow, took the gun, and passed it out of view under his coat. "Wait here a while," he said, and went down again. He would play a round or two of that poker, as he had promised to do, for that would show whether or not luck intended to favor him in the old ways.

The three were not impatient. Instead, they greeted him with three different sorts of smiling, so that he had a very odd and vivid feeling that he had known them before. They opened with a round of jackpots, the man with the lofty brow dealing. The Mexican had openers. Jimmy held up a pair of nines and drew another. He won that pot and six dollars, but it wasn't the money that made him feel better and better. He had a genuine kindness for these strangers.

"I haven't met you people before, have I?" he asked.

They had not had that luck, they said.

"I've taken on a little liquor," apologized Jimmy. "You know how it is."

They knew how it was, and it was all right. Two more hands went by before the dark-faced, handsome fellow opposite Jimmy got up, revealing the bullet hole in the wall. He said they ought to have a bit of music, so he wound up the squeaking phonograph and put on a disk. The very first bars of the tune poured the consciousness of Jimmy far into the past.

"You know," he said, when the fellow with the big black eyes sat down, "it seems as though I've been right here before, with all of you. It's a queer feeling."

The three exchanged glances quietly, and Jimmy made sure that he was quite drunk. If that were the case, he ought not to be sitting in at a poker game, but the music from the scratched and cracked old record on the

phonograph held him fascinated, not because it was pleasant but because it hurt like the ache of old wounds.

It was like air-hunger, the sickness of Jimmy. It was like wakening from a nightmare with the vision gone but the fear remaining. He could feel the eyes of the three on him. The game ought to go on, of course, but they seemed to understand a mystery that was closed to him, and they remained half smiling, watchful.

Jimmy looked up, not out of the past but deeper into it. Time closed like water over his head. He leaned a bit forward, and the three leaned the same trifle toward him. They were not smiling, now— not with their eyes, at least.

The music went on. It thrust a knife pain into his right shoulder, into his heart, although he was not following the words just then.

He pointed with his forefinger. "You're Oñate's brother!" he said to the Mexican.

The man nodded and smiled like a Chinese idol.

"You're the brother of Tony Spargo!" said Jimmy Geary to the man across the table.

"I'm his kid brother," sneered Spargo.

"And you're the brother of Gus Warren?"

"Sorry. I'm only his cousin. But maybe I'll do to fill out the hand?"

"Aye," said Jimmy Geary, "you make the three of a kind."

The needle was scratching with every whirl of the disk, and, yet, Jimmy wanted the record to continue endlessly, for he knew that he was to die before the song ended. Spargo had out a gun and laid it on the edge of the table, leaning so far forward that Jimmy could see, over his shoulder, the hole in the wall. He had an insane feeling that his own soul would be drawn through that same gap in the wall and whistled away into nothingness. There would be nothing in the way of an inquiry, even, for the gun of Doc Alton would be found on him. Perhaps that was Alton's part in the plot— to see that the victim went heeled to the fight. But there would be no fight. The music poured icy sleep over his hands.

They were going to get him on the down strain of that weary sing-song. He could see the murder tightening in the hand and the eyes of Spargo. Then Kate Graham spoke out of the doorway, deliberately, as though she did not realize that the song was running swiftly to its end: "The thing's off. He hasn't got a gun. It's murder, if you turn loose on him... and I'll give the testimony to hang you."

The Mexican uttered a little soft, musical cry of pain. Spargo's lips kept stretching thinner over his teeth. He said the words through Jimmy to the girl: "Are you gonna be the blonde rat? Are you gonna run out?"

"You fixed this job and got us here!" cried the cousin of Gus Warren. "Now what's the idea?"

"Look!" moaned Oñate. "I have the same knife for him. Look, *señorita*! It is the same!"

"What did I care about your brother, Oñate?" asked the girl calmly. "Or about four-flushing Gus Warren? And I've just been getting some news about Tony Spargo. It made me send for the sheriff. Are you three going to be here to shake hands with him?"

They were not going to be there. They stood up, with young Spargo running the tips of his fingers absently over the bullet hole in the wall. They all looked at Kate as they went out, but they said nothing to her.

That silence continued in the room until after the first pounding and then the departing ripple of the hoofbeats. Jimmy stood up.

"The sheriff's not coming, if that's what you mean," said the girl.

"Sit down here," said Jimmy. The whiskey was gone. Inside him there was only emptiness, with a throb in it.

"There's no good talking," said the girl, but she came to the table and slipped into the chair where Tony Spargo had once sat. She was only calm from a distance. At close hand he could see the tremor as he leaned across the table.

"You were only a kid," said Jimmy. "That's what I don't understand."

The song had ended; the needle was scratching steadily in the last groove. A nick in the disk struck the needle point at greater and still greater intervals.

"It was Tony Spargo, was it?" said Jimmy.

"I was nearly sixteen," she said. "He used to talk to me and look at me with his greasy eyes. I never saw the grease in them until this evening. I didn't know till after she'd talked to me." She folded her hands. The fingers were smooth and slender. She wore rubber gloves around the kitchen and that was why. But in spite of her double grip, the hands would not stop quivering.

"What are you afraid of?" asked Jimmy.

"You know what I'm afraid of. You're going to say something. Go on and say it and get it over with. I can take that, too."

"Hello," said the voice of Doc Alton from the doorway.

"Go on away, Doc," said Jimmy. "Wait a minute, though. Come and take this."

He kept holding the girl with his eyes as he held out the gun to the side. Doc Alton took it.

"I owe you some money," said Jimmy Geary, "and I'm going to keep on owing it for a while."

"That's all right," said Doc Alton. "Are you... are you staying around here, Jimmy?"

The mournful wistfulness of his voice left Jimmy untouched.

"I'm staying around here," he answered. "So long, Doc."

Doc Alton went out.

"I mean," said Jimmy, "I'm staying around unless you say no."

She drew in a breath and closed her eyes. "Wait a minute," she whispered. "In a minute... I'll be able to talk."

He knew that, if he put his hand over hers, he would stop their trembling, but he sat up straight and waited. The needle bumped for the last time on the disk and the scratching ended. Another sound rose and moved forward in Jimmy, a rushing and singing like wind or like mountain waters that go on forever.

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4: The Tiger's Luck-Bone

Alice Perrin

1867-1934

In: *Rough Passages* (1926)

THE GOVERNMENT HOUSE ball was nearly over. Captain Mowbray had danced half the night with Mrs. Rivington, though this was nothing unusual; for the last few weeks he had, to quote public opinion, been making a fool of himself over Mrs. Rivington. A pity, it was agreed, when he was quite in a position to marry, and if he wanted to fall in love there were so many nice girls up at Pahari this season. Stella Dare for example— charming, unaffected, quick-witted, exceptionally pretty; the man who won that girl for his wife would be lucky! It was a marvel she hadn't been snapped up before now— not that she lacked eligible suitors; Mr. Walpole among others, a rising civilian, made no secret of his hopes and intentions, and was for ever at the Dares' big bungalow, attended all their "shows"— and they entertained freely, Mr. Dare being a mightily senior official, almost next in importance to the Governor himself.

But apparently Miss Dare did not wish to marry Mr. Walpole, or anyone else, as far as gossips could discover; and none of them guessed that the only man she had yet met who attracted her seriously was Ronald Mowbray.

At the beginning of the season a friendship had sprung up between the two; they had ridden, danced, played games light-heartedly together, until Mrs. Rivington arrived, straight from London, to astonish Pahari with her wonderful wardrobe and artistic ideas, her beguiling dark eyes, skin like white velvet, and her voice. Someone who posed as an authority on voices declared that she sang better than Melba and Clara Butt rolled into one!

In no time she had turned the heads of half the men in the station; they pronounced her "divine." This infatuated crowd included young Mowbray, and him she quickly appointed her vassal-in-chief.

Colonel Rivington, by the way, commanded a cavalry regiment somewhere in the plains; those who knew (and disliked) him, said he was an ugly, morose individual, and that it was no wonder his wife went home, or escaped to hill stations, whenever she had the chance.

Stella Dare showed no sign of disconsolation when Ronald Mowbray deserted her for Mrs. Rivington. If they met she greeted him naturally without hint or question of reproach in her sea-blue eyes— never seemed to notice that he looked shame faced, apologetic; for, despite Mrs. Rivington's allurements, he felt humbled, mortified by the girl's attitude towards him; and often he hankered for her society, could not resist making for her side, when Mrs. Rivington wasn't looking, always with a lurking hope that Stella might

betray some faint symptom of pique. Had she done so it was probable that Mrs. Rivington would have been forced to select a new head slave.

To-night he had asked Miss Dare for a dance, half apprehending a snub, but she allotted him one readily, low down on the programme, and now as they left the ballroom together, their dance over, he thought with a pang at his heart how angelic the girl looked in her white frock, with her crown of golden curls and delicately cut little face.

They had danced in silence, and in silence they wandered to a seat outside in the garden. All around bloomed honeysuckle, jessamine, roses; the air was heavy with scent. A full moon shed its glory over the vast Indian landscape, irradiating range upon range of mountains, bridging the deep valleys, glistening on the everlasting snow peaks that towered so high as to appear almost overhead.

Away, on the top of the opposite hill, among the ilex and oak and rhododendron trees there gleamed a white patch, the whitewashed walls of a forest rest-house that was a favourite honeymoon refuge when weddings took place at Pahari. And irresistibly, drawn by the golden magic of the night, by the pure sweet presence of the girl at his side, the knowledge stole trembling into the young man's heart of all it would have meant to him, could he have hoped to find himself in that solitary bungalow with Stella as his bride. What an unutterable fool he had been! A distress so great overcame him that he could have knelt in an agony of contrition and entreaty at her feet, beseeching her forgiveness, her understanding, her love.

As in a dream he heard her say: "What a night! Isn't it wonderful? Just look at the snows. One can hardly believe they are real."

Then, because he made no answer, she turned to him with a little laugh: "Why, I believe you're asleep!"

"I'm not!" he burst out. "I'm only miserable, wretched— I could shoot myself!"

"Dear, dear! Is it as bad as all that?" There was an impersonal note of concern in her voice. "I'm so sorry. Why don't you try going away for a bit; shoot tigers or something? Anything but yourself."

Bitterly he realized that she attributed his plight to a hopeless passion for Mrs. Rivington! He must indeed have sunk low in her sight if she could imagine him capable of an attempt to confide such a reason to her— of all people. In any case, he had lost her friendship, destroyed all chance of ever gaining her love by his own weak yieldance to a passing temptation. And although it was true that the whole affair had merely been a matter of flattered vanity, silly senses bewitched for the time being, it came to the same thing as if it had been more wicked than foolish. Nothing could make any difference now.

"Stella!" he cried piteously, unable to control himself.

At that moment the band struck up within the big building; also at that moment another couple came strolling along the path— Mrs. Rivington with her last partner. She floated towards them, like a siren in her flame-coloured draperies; and Miss Dare stood up.

"Hark! There's the next dance," she said briskly. "And here comes Mrs. Rivington."

She and that lady exchanged polite platitudes on the beauty of the night, and the four of them moved together towards the veranda. Suddenly Stella stopped short, her hand to the front of her dress.

"My brooch!" she exclaimed. "I've lost my brooch!"

"Oh! What a bore for you," sympathized Mrs. Rivington. "What kind of a brooch was it, anything valuable?"

"Only of value to me— a tiger's luck-bone, my mascot. I should hate to lose it. I'm almost sure it was all right when I left the ballroom just now."

She turned towards the seat she had just left, and Ronald Mowbray turned with her; Mrs. Rivington turned too, keeping close to them.

"We'll help you look for it," she volunteered; and for a space they all stooped and peered, searching beneath and around the seat, up and down the pathway, but without success.

"Never mind," said Stella at last, "perhaps, after all, it dropped off in the ballroom."

"What on earth is a tiger's luck-bone?" Mrs. Rivington inquired.

"It's the little curved bone that is found in the muscles of a tiger's shoulder," explained her partner, a person addicted to big-game shooting, "and no one quite knows what's the use of it. Natives think the bone awfully lucky, a sort of charm, and they always bag it if they get half a chance, just as they will the claws and whiskers as well. One has to supervise the skinning business carefully after killing a tiger. If a native picks up your brooch, Miss Dare, I'm afraid you're not likely to see it back."

"I'll offer a good reward," said Stella. "I'd give anything, I'm so fond of that brooch. But it can't be helped now; we must go back to the ballroom."

She led the way, and Ronald Mowbray had no further speech with her that night. He was engaged to Mrs. Rivington for the rest of the programme, but he felt a wild desire to get away, to hide himself, no matter where or how, provided he could escape from her wiles.

Stella's words echoed in his mind: "Why don't you try going away for a bit, shoot tigers or something—" He thought of her distress at the loss of her mascot, the luck-bone brooch; and then and there he determined to spend the rest of his leave in the jungle after tiger.

At least he might gain the small satisfaction of sending her a new brooch; he visioned it, mounted in purest gold, studded with diamonds. That would be the main object of his expedition; and possibly the excitement of sport would ease his heartache, help him to bear the hard punishment for his folly.

But afterwards? He made no attempt to face that question. Tiger hunting on foot was a dangerous game; perhaps he would never return. Just as well if he didn't!

IN DESPERATION he lied, told Mrs. Rivington he had a touch of fever, said he felt rotten (which at any rate was true), and thought he had better clear out and go to bed. She regarded him with covert attention, noted that his eyes were following a slim white figure that swung round the ballroom in the arms of Mr. Walpole. Not for a moment did she believe in the touch of fever; of late she had had her suspicions, and now she felt positive that, given the opportunity, he would once more devote himself to Stella Dare. She had no notion of permitting this to happen. Her pride was at stake.

"I'm tired, too," she said. "Come and have supper before you go; some champagne will do us both good."

Relieved, he assented; in the supper-room they would not be alone, and a drink might steady his nerves, brace his decision to announce that he intended to go to the plains, though he knew this would sound absurd. People did not leave the hills in the middle of the hot weather for the good of their health! But he lacked courage to tell her the truth, and he could think of no other excuse.

Mrs. Rivington looked exquisite, seated opposite to him at the little table they had chosen in a corner of the brilliantly lit supper-room; and again for the moment her enchantment laid hold of his senses as she gazed at him caressingly, said in her low, seductive voice: "Poor dear boy! You certainly don't look quite the thing. Ah! if only, if only I could take you in hand and look after you!"

With an effort he resisted her spell, avoided her eyes. He was on the point of blurting out his decision when she sighed, and went on sadly: "How difficult life can be. I never realized it before. I suppose because"— her voice trembled— "because I never really cared—" She paused, then smiled, a wistful, pathetic little smile, and he felt a despicable, dishonest brute. This wonderful woman loved him, believed that he loved her, while for his part he only yearned to escape from an awkward and painful situation.

"There!" she murmured tenderly. "Don't look so miserable. Who knows what the future may hold for us? It's only when I see other people—" She cast

her eyes round the room. "Look at those two, for instance; they are clearly in love, and nothing stands in the way of their happiness!"

He followed her gaze, to see Stella and Mr. Walpole seating themselves at a table. The pair looked content in each other's company, and the sight proved too much for the nerve-racked young man. He rose.

"My head feels queer," he muttered; and, indeed, the lights of the room seemed to spin round him. "If you don't mind I will slip away."

Mrs. Rivington laid her hand on his arm as he stood, hesitating, beside her.

"Yes, do go," she said softly. "I shall be all right; don't worry about me. Come and see me to-morrow if you're better; if not, let me know. I shall feel so anxious, so unhappy until I see you again."

Unsteadily he left the room amid the babel of voices and the clatter of service, thankful that she could not read his thoughts. By this time to-morrow he would be well away from Pahari, far from her toils, free from the torture of witnessing Walpole's successful courtship of Stella Dare.

"SAHIB, sahib, sahib—"

The low, monotonous summons roused Mowbray from a heavy sleep, to see the wizened countenance of the old tracker he had engaged peering into the single-poled tent. Dawn had broken, a hot, dry dawn, and already the sun blazed fiercely over the parched tract of country stretching to the dark line of the forest in the distance.

"What is it?" he asked, still hardly awake.

The answer dispelled his drowsiness, and he listened eagerly as in primitive patois the old man related how, the previous evening, one of a party of villagers driving home cattle had been struck down by a tiger and carried off into a patch of jungle close to the forest. A number of the villagers had arrived at the camp with the object of imploring the sahib to set forth at once and destroy the enemy.

As Mowbray left his tent, having dressed hurriedly, he was assailed by a pitiful crew, almost naked, half starved, who crawled embarrassingly at his feet to make their petition. The spokesman poured forth a terrible tale; for weeks past, he said, the village had been at the mercy of a man-eating tiger, a malignant devil of fearful appearance and size, who had power to render himself invisible, and was doubtless protected by the spirits of his numerous victims.

At nights the people barricaded themselves into their huts; they dared not go forth except in large bodies, and even then the fiend had more than once held up parties while he rolled and purred in the dust, or would walk round them deliberately, making his choice.

Work was almost at a standstill, cattle and crops were suffering grievously from enforced neglect; a neighbouring village had been altogether deserted by the inhabitants on account of the tiger's depredations, and until the beast was killed no human being could feel safe. As it was, they had journeyed to the sahib's camp at the risk of their lives; but so far as was known the murderer was still concealed in the patch of jungle into which he had borne his last prey; he had not been seen to leave it, though his cunning was such that none could be sure of his movements. One hour he might be heard of as having killed a man or woman miles away; the next he would be prowling round the village.

Mowbray was ready, and they all started for the scene of the tragedy. Arrived on the outskirts of the forest they advanced cautiously step by step until a point was gained, protected by a clump of bushes, from which a view could be commanded of the fatal patch of scrub. Just outside the patch lay a torn, blood-stained piece of cloth, a sickening token of what had happened.

Mowbray stood, rifle in hand, his pulses athrob with excitement as the tracker threw a clod of hard soil into the cover, but there came no stir, no rustle, nothing happened. Was the tiger still in his ambush, or had he gone to seek water and lie up beside a pool digesting the ghastly meal?

Suddenly the tracker touched his arm and pointed. Something was moving along the edge of the forest, something as yet indistinct, but in a few moments there was no mistaking the long striped body and square head of a very large tiger, creeping, crouching stealthily, then sinking flat on his belly, like a cat stalking a bird. What was he stalking, on what was he so intent?

Mowbray raised his rifle, yet he felt reluctant to fire, it was too long a shot for certain aim; and as he hesitated one of the villagers cried out: "My child, my son!" and threw himself face downwards on the ground. Instantly the tiger slid back into the undergrowth, disappeared, and next moment Mowbray saw, with horror, what the tiger had been watching, understood why the man had cried out. A little naked child was straying fearlessly across the open space from whence the tiger had vanished. Truly a helpless tempting bait!

He started forward.

"Wait, sahib, wait!" cautioned the tracker.

But regardless of the warning, Mowbray raced over the rough ground, leaping tummocks of dry grass, brushing through thorny scrub, making for the child, which now stood still, finger in mouth, startled by the sight of the strange apparition bounding towards him, shouting. Then with a squeal of terror, the mite took to his heels in the direction of the forest, and fell down.

Exactly what followed Mowbray could never afterwards remember very clearly. He knew he reached the scrap of humanity screaming on the ground; that he was standing astride of it when, with a hissing, growling roar, the tiger

sprang out, ears flat, eyes glaring, fangs bared, a frightful spectacle of ferocity; that he fired both barrels, saw the beast leap into the air. The huge body seemed to rise above him, and he went down beneath it, crushed to the hard, baked earth.

Next he found himself in what he took to be a species of oven, dark, malodorous, stifling. He tried to rise, but sank back, overcome with agony in his right shoulder. Dimly he perceived a crowd of lean, brown forms, surrounding him, jabbering, keeping the air from his lungs. Were they devils! Where was he? With his left arm he struck out, gasping, swearing, and the demons melted away, only to gather again.

Someone held a vessel to his lips, and he drank greedily of water that was tepid, none too sweet, but the draught revived him, and slowly he became aware that he was lying on a rude string bedstead that sagged beneath his weight; the "devils" were merely hapless villagers who, long ages ago, had besought him to rid them of a man-eating tiger. Since then, where had he been?

His mind wandered again. He was groping in the moonlight for something he had lost, something he held dear. He could not recollect what it was, only that he had lost it through his own fault. It had been spirited away, far off, to where a white patch showed on the slope of a distant hill. He made an effort to reach the spot, but some being in flame-coloured draperies held him back, mocking him, weighting his limbs with golden chains. He struggled on; now a little brown child lay in his way, a child in hideous danger. Nothing could save it but a mascot, a tiger's luck-bone— tiger, tiger— bursting from the jungle, ears flat, eyes glaring red— with a roar like thunder!

"Sahib, sahib, sahib!"

With difficulty Mowbray turned his racking head, and beheld his old tracker, distraught with anxiety, squatting beside the bedstead. There he was, quite distinct and in the flesh, backed by an agitated cluster of jungle people.

"Where is the child?" he inquired, his brain clearing.

A small brown object was pushed forward, reluctant, terrified, but living, safe. A quavering grateful voice reached Mowbray's hearing.

"By thine honour's favour, the little one be here, and unhurt."

The quaint speech made him laugh weakly, but the laugh ended in a groan, for the pain in his back and shoulder was excruciating.

"And the tiger," went on the voice, "the evil one lieth dead without— also by thine honour's favour."

"That is well," he muttered, endeavouring desperately to keep hold of his senses; not that he minded if he was to die of his injuries, or from blood poisoning, but he should prefer to die in his camp rather than in this

suffocating hole, where every breath was a torture. Also, there was something he wanted— the little bone from the tiger's shoulder. Surely the villagers would not grudge him the treasure. And if only he could retain strength to get back to the camp, there to pencil a message—

Feebly he beckoned to the tracker, gasped out his wishes, and, in consequence, as the sun sank in a haze of red dust, a little procession started for the sahib's camp. In front, hoisted bier fashion on men's shoulders, a string bedstead on which lay a helpless, unconscious form; walking beside it the tracker, carrying a pith hat and a couple of rifles; behind, a crowd of people who no longer glanced about them in terror, for in their midst, slung on a pole, was a skin roughly peeled from the carcase of a huge tiger.

STELLA DARE sat idle and unhappy in the verandah of the hill bungalow. Her sweet face was troubled, but not because she had just refused Mr. Walpole's proposal of marriage. A few moments ago he had left her, had ridden resignedly down the hill-side, and she knew she had done right in telling him she could never marry a man she did not love; he knew it, too, and had taken her answer in the right spirit. For that she was grateful to him, and, perhaps in different circumstances, her answer might not have been quite so decisive. As it was, she could think of no one but Ronald Mowbray. Where was he? What had become of him? Would she ever see him again?

And then, as though in miraculous reply to her distressful queries, a coolie came toiling up the path, bearing a note that presently was handed to her by the orderly on duty. It was from the matron of the station hospital, who wrote that Captain Mowbray had been brought up, very ill, from the plains the previous evening. He was asking for Miss Dare.

In less than half an hour Stella was at the hospital.

"He was mauled by a tiger in the jungle," the matron told her, "and his servants only got him into the nearest station just in time. He all but died. When he was strong enough the doctors sent him up here, and he has stood the journey well enough, but we can hardly tell yet—" She paused, sympathizing with the girl's obvious tribulation. "Anyway, come and see him. It can't do him any harm. He keeps saying he has something he wants to give you."

Dumbly Stella followed the neat, blue-gowned figure up the staircase and into a large, airy room, where lay what looked like the ghost of Ronald Mowbray. He opened his eyes, smiled at her weakly.

"It's here," he whispered, with feeble triumph, and tried to grope beneath the pillow.

The matron came to his aid, produced something wrapped in a piece of rag that smelt evilly as Stella unwound it and saw a small curved bone, scraps of dry flesh still sticking to it— a tiger's luck-bone!

Tears rushed to her eyes. She could not speak as she knelt beside the man she loved, the little bone with its wrappings in her hand, and he added pitifully:

"It isn't set in gold, with diamonds, as I meant— your brooch—"

She laid her hand in his, and as though all in a moment she had given him strength, his fingers tightened on hers, his eyes, dimmed and sunken with sickness, lit up.

"I did what you said— Stella!"

At this point the matron intervened with some draught in a cup, and ordered the visitor away, but gave permission for her return next morning, provided the patient had passed a good night. The patient looked volumes of promises, and next morning had so far progressed that when the visitor arrived, he was practically sitting up, looked a different being, and for a precious space the two found themselves alone.

Then Stella made a confession.

"I can never forgive myself," she said humbly, tearfully, "and perhaps you won't forgive me either. I didn't lose a brooch. I made it all up. I never had a tiger's luck-bone till now!"

"Then why— what—" he began, bewildered.

"Oh, don't you see?" she interrupted. "That night at the ball, when you said 'Stella' like that, I suddenly understood. And then that horrid woman came along the path and I felt desperate. I thought, if I pretended that I'd lost a brooch, we could have gone back and hunted for it, you and I alone together. But she stuck to us. I'm sure she did it on purpose. I don't know why I said it was a luck-bone brooch, except that you'd said something stupid about shooting yourself, and I'd said something about tigers, so it just came into my head. And then you went away. I didn't know where—"

She broke down and cried, her head beside his on the pillow, and with tender words he stilled her sobs, his wasted arms about her.

Later he said: "The natives must be right about tigers' luck-bones. You see, even the very thought of one brought us luck!"

"But at what a price! Oh, Ronnie, get well quickly!"

"I'm well now," he boasted. "Take care of that blessed bone, darling, till I can send it down to Calcutta to be set in gold and diamonds— my first gift to you."

"No, no; not when it was my fault that it nearly cost you your life. I'll keep it as it is, though at present it does smell horrid. Unless," she added slyly, "you'd like to send it to Simla?"

"To Simla? Why Simla?"

"Well, you see, Mrs. Rivington's gone there, and she's not coming back—"

"Thank the Lord!" he exclaimed, with astonishing vigour. "Another piece of luck!"

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5: The Isle of Pines

Ambrose Bierce

1842-1914?

San Francisco Examiner, 26 August 1888

FOR MANY YEARS there lived near the town of Gallipolis, Ohio, an old man named Herman Deluse. Very little was known of his history, for he would neither speak of it himself nor suffer others. It was a common belief among his neighbors that he had been a pirate— if upon any better evidence than his collection of boarding pikes, cutlasses, and ancient flintlock pistols, no one knew. He lived entirely alone in a small house of four rooms, falling rapidly into decay and never repaired further than was required by the weather. It stood on a slight elevation in the midst of a large, stony field overgrown with brambles, and cultivated in patches and only in the most primitive way. It was his only visible property, but could hardly have yielded him a living, simple and few as were his wants. He seemed always to have ready money, and paid cash for all his purchases at the village stores roundabout, seldom buying more than two or three times at the same place until after the lapse of a considerable time. He got no commendation, however, for this equitable distribution of his patronage; people were disposed to regard it as an ineffectual attempt to conceal his possession of so much money. That he had great hoards of ill-gotten gold buried somewhere about his tumble-down dwelling was not reasonably to be doubted by any honest soul conversant with the facts of local tradition and gifted with a sense of the fitness of things.

On the 9th of November, 1867, the old man died; at least his dead body was discovered on the 10th, and physicians testified that death had occurred about twenty-four hours previously— precisely how, they were unable to say; for the *post-mortem* examination showed every organ to be absolutely healthy, with no indication of disorder or violence. According to them, death must have taken place about noonday, yet the body was found in bed. The verdict of the coroner's jury was that he "came to his death by a visitation of God." The body was buried and the public administrator took charge of the estate.

A rigorous search disclosed nothing more than was already known about the dead man, and much patient excavation here and there about the premises by thoughtful and thrifty neighbors went unrewarded. The administrator locked up the house against the time when the property, real and personal, should be sold by law with a view to defraying, partly, the expenses of the sale.

The night of November 20 was boisterous. A furious gale stormed across the country, scourging it with desolating drifts of sleet. Great trees were torn

from the earth and hurled across the roads. So wild a night had never been known in all that region, but toward morning the storm had blown itself out of breath and day dawned bright and clear. At about eight o'clock that morning the Rev. Henry Galbraith, a well-known and highly esteemed Lutheran minister, arrived on foot at his house, a mile and a half from the Deluse place. Mr. Galbraith had been for a month in Cincinnati. He had come up the river in a steamboat, and landing at Gallipolis the previous evening had immediately obtained a horse and buggy and set out for home. The violence of the storm had delayed him over night, and in the morning the fallen trees had compelled him to abandon his conveyance and continue his journey afoot.

"But where did you pass the night?" inquired his wife, after he had briefly related his adventure.

"With old Deluse at the 'Isle of Pines,' " was the laughing reply; "and a glum enough time I had of it. He made no objection to my remaining, but not a word could I get out of him."

Fortunately for the interests of truth there was present at this conversation Mr. Robert Mosely Maren, a lawyer and *littérateur* of Columbus, the same who wrote the delightful "Mellowcraft Papers." Noting, but apparently not sharing, the astonishment caused by Mr. Galbraith's answer this ready-witted person checked by a gesture the exclamations that would naturally have followed, and tranquilly inquired: "How came you to go in there?"

This is Mr. Maren's version of Mr. Galbraith's reply:

"I saw a light moving about the house, and being nearly blinded by the sleet, and half frozen besides, drove in at the gate and put up my horse in the old rail stable, where it is now. I then rapped at the door, and getting no invitation went in without one. The room was dark, but having matches I found a candle and lit it. I tried to enter the adjoining room, but the door was fast, and although I heard the old man's heavy footsteps in there he made no response to my calls. There was no fire on the hearth, so I made one and laying [*sic*] down before it with my overcoat under my head, prepared myself for sleep. Pretty soon the door that I had tried silently opened and the old man came in, carrying a candle. I spoke to him pleasantly, apologizing for my intrusion, but he took no notice of me. He seemed to be searching for something, though his eyes were unmoved in their sockets. I wonder if he ever walks in his sleep. He took a circuit a part of the way round the room, and went out the same way he had come in. Twice more before I slept he came back into the room, acting precisely the same way, and departing as at first. In the intervals I heard him tramping all over the house, his footsteps distinctly audible in the pauses of the storm. When I woke in the morning he had already gone out."

Mr. Maren attempted some further questioning, but was unable longer to restrain the family's tongues; the story of Deluse's death and burial came out, greatly to the good minister's astonishment.

"The explanation of your adventure is very simple," said Mr. Maren. "I don't believe old Deluse walks in his sleep— not in his present one; but you evidently dream in yours."

And to this view of the matter Mr. Galbraith was compelled reluctantly to assent.

Nevertheless, a late hour of the next night found these two gentlemen, accompanied by a son of the minister, in the road in front of the old Deluse house. There was a light inside; it appeared now at one window and now at another. The three men advanced to the door. Just as they reached it there came from the interior a confusion of the most appalling sounds— the clash of weapons, steel against steel, sharp explosions as of firearms, shrieks of women, groans and the curses of men in combat! The investigators stood a moment, irresolute, frightened. Then Mr. Galbraith tried the door. It was fast. But the minister was a man of courage, a man, moreover, of Herculean strength. He retired a pace or two and rushed against the door, striking it with his right shoulder and bursting it from the frame with a loud crash. In a moment the three were inside. Darkness and silence! The only sound was the beating of their hearts.

Mr. Maren had provided himself with matches and a candle. With some difficulty, begotten of his excitement, he made a light, and they proceeded to explore the place, passing from room to room. Everything was in orderly arrangement, as it had been left by the sheriff; nothing had been disturbed. A light coating of dust was everywhere. A back door was partly open, as if by neglect, and their first thought was that the authors of the awful revelry might have escaped. The door was opened, and the light of the candle shone through upon the ground. The expiring effort of the previous night's storm had been a light fall of snow; there were no footprints; the white surface was unbroken. They closed the door and entered the last room of the four that the house contained— that farthest from the road, in an angle of the building. Here the candle in Mr. Maren's hand was suddenly extinguished as by a draught of air. Almost immediately followed the sound of a heavy fall. When the candle had been hastily relighted young Mr. Galbraith was seen prostrate on the floor at a little distance from the others. He was dead. In one hand the body grasped a heavy sack of coins, which later examination showed to be all of old Spanish mintage. Directly over the body as it lay, a board had been torn from its fastenings in the wall, and from the cavity so disclosed it was evident that the bag had been taken.

Another inquest was held: another *post-mortem* examination failed to reveal a probable cause of death. Another verdict of "the visitation of God" left all at liberty to form their own conclusions. Mr. Maren contended that the young man died of excitement.

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6: The Lost Novel

Sherwood Anderson

1876-1941

Scribner's Magazine, Sep 1928

HE said it was all like a dream. A man like that, a writer.

Well, he works for months and, perhaps, years on a book, and there is not a word put down. What I mean is that his mind is working. What is to be the book builds itself up and is destroyed.

In his fancy figures are moving back and forth.

But there is something I neglected to say. I am talking of a certain English novelist who has got some fame, of a thing that once happened to him.

He told me about it one day in London when we were walking together. We had been together for hours. I remember that we were on the Embankment of the Thames when he told be about his lost novel.

He had come to see me early in the evening at my hotel. He spoke of certain stories of my own. "You almost get at something, sometimes," he said.

We agreed that no man ever quite got at— the thing.

If some one once got at it, if he really put the ball over the plate, you know, if he hit the bull's-eye.

What would be the sense of any one trying to do anything after that?

I'll tell you what, some of the old fellows have come pretty near.

Keats, eh? And Shakespeare. And George Borrow and DeFoe.

We spent a half-hour going over names.

We went off to dine together and later walked. He was a little black, nervous man with ragged locks of hair sticking out from under his hat.

I began talking of his first book.

But here is a brief outline of his history. He came from a poor farming family in some English village. He was like all writers. From the very beginning he wanted to write.

He had no education. At twenty he got married.

She must have been a very respectable, nice girl. If I remember rightly, she was the daughter of a priest of the Established English Church.

Just the kind he should not have married. But who shall say whom any one shall love— or marry? She was above him in station. She had been to a woman's college; was well educated.

I have no doubt she thought him an ignorant man.

"She thought me a sweet man, too. The hell with that," he said, speaking of it. "I am not sweet. I hate sweetness."

We had got to that sort of intimacy walking in the London night, going now and then into a pub to get a drink.

I remember that we each got a bottle, fearing the pubs would close before we got through talking.

What I told him about myself and my own adventures I can't remember.

The point is he wanted to make some kind of a pagan out of his woman, and the possibilities weren't in her.

They had two kids.

Then suddenly he did begin to burst out writing— that is to say, really writing.

You know a man like that. When he writes he writes. He had some kind of a job in his English town. I believe he was a clerk.

Because he was writing he, of course, neglected his job, his wife, his kids.

He used to walk about the fields at night. His wife scolded. Of course she was all broken up— would be. No woman can quite bear the absolute way in which a man who has been her lover can drop her when he is at work.

I mean an artist, of course. They can be first-class lovers. It may be they are the only lovers. And they are absolutely ruthless about throwing direct personal love aside.

You can imagine that household. The man told me there was a little bedroom up-stairs in the house where they were living at that time. This was while he was still in the English town.

The man used to come home from his job and go up-stairs. Up-stairs he went and locked his door. Often he did not stop to eat, and sometimes he did not even speak to his wife.

He wrote and wrote and wrote and threw away.

Then he lost his job. "The hell," he said when he spoke of it.

He didn't care, of course. What is a job?

What is a wife or child? There must be a few ruthless people in this world.

Pretty soon there was practically no food in the house.

He was up-stairs in that room behind the door, writing. The house was small and the children cried. "The little brats," he said, speaking of them. He did not mean that, of course. I understood what he meant. His wife used to come and sit on the stairs outside the door back of which he was at work. She cried audibly and the child she had in her arms cried.

"A patient soul, eh?" the English novelist said to me when he told me of it. "And a good soul, too," he said. "To hell with her," he also aid.

You see, he had begun writing about her. She was what his novel was about, his first one. In time it may prove to be his best one.

Such tenderness of understanding— of her difficulties and her limitations, and such a casual, brutal way of treating her— personally.

Well, if we have a soul that is worth something, eh?

It got so they were never together a moment without quarreling.

And then one night he struck her. He had forgotten to fasten the door of the room in which he worked. She came bursting in.

And just as he was getting at something about her, some understanding of the reality of her. Any writer will understand the difficulty of his position. In a fury he rushed at her, struck her and knocked her down.

And then. Well, she quit him then. Why not? However, he finished the book. It was a real book.

But about his lost novel. He said he came up to London after his wife left him and began living alone. He thought he would write another novel.

You understand that he had got recognition, had been acclaimed.

And the second novel was just as difficult to write as the first. It may be that he was a good deal exhausted.

And, of course, he was ashamed. He was ashamed of the way in which he had treated his wife. He tried to write another novel so that he wouldn't always be thinking. He told me that, for the next year or two, the words he wrote on the paper were all wooden. Nothing was alive.

Months and months of that sort of thing. He withdrew from

people. Well, what about his children? He sent money to his wife and went to see her once.

He said she was living with her father's people, and he went to her father's house and got her. They went to walk in the fields. "We couldn't talk," he said. "She began to cry and called me a crazy man. Then I glared at her, as I had once done that time I struck her, and she turned and ran away from me back to her father's house, and I came away."

Having written one splendid novel, he wanted, of course, to write some more. He said there were all sorts of characters and situations in his head. He used to sit at his desk for hours writing and then go out in the street and walk as he and I walked together that night.

Nothing would come right for him.

He had got some sort of theory about himself. He said that the second novel was inside him like an unborn child. His conscience was hurting him about his wife and children. He said he loved them all right but did not want to see them again.

Sometimes he thought he hated them. One evening, he said, after he had been struggling like that, and long after he had quit seeing people, he wrote his second novel. It happened like this.

All morning he had been sitting in his room. It was a small room he had rented in a poor part of London. He had got out of bed early, and without

eating any breakfast had begun to write. And everything he wrote that morning was also no good.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, as he had been in the habit of doing, he went out to walk. He took a lot of writing-paper with him.

"I had an idea I might begin to write at any time," he said.

He went walking in Hyde Park. He said it was a clear, bright day, and people were walking about together. He sat on a bench.

He hadn't eaten anything since the night before. As he sat there he tried a trick. Later I heard that a group of young poets in Paris took up that sort of thing and were profoundly serious about it.

The Englishman tried what is called "automatic writing."

He just put his pencil on the paper and let the pencil make what words it would.

Of course the pencil made a queer jumble of absurd words. He quit doing that.

There he sat on the bench staring at the people walking past.

He was tired, like a man who has been in love for a long time with some woman he cannot get. Let us say there are difficulties. He is married or she is. They look at each other with promises in their eyes and nothing happens.

Wait and wait. Most people's lives are spent waiting.

And then suddenly, he said, he began writing his novel. The theme, of course, was men and women— lovers. What other theme is there for such a man? He told me that he must have been thinking a great deal of his wife and of his cruelty to her. He wrote and wrote. The evening passed and night came. Fortunately, there was a moon. He kept on writing. He said it was the most intense writing he ever did or ever hoped to do. Hours and hours passed. He sat there on that bench writing like a crazy man.

He wrote a novel at one sitting. Then he went home to his room.

He said he never was so happy and satisfied with himself in his life.

"I thought that I had done justice to my wife and to my children, to every one and everything," he said.

He said that all the love he had in his being went into the novel.

He took it home and laid it on his desk.

What a sweet feeling of satisfaction to have done— the thing.

Then he went out of his room and found an all-night place where he could get something to eat.

After he got food he walked around the town. How long he walked he didn't know.

Then he went home and slept. It was daylight by this time. He slept all through the next day.

He said that when he woke up he thought he would look at his novel. "I really knew all the time it wasn't there," he said. "On the desk, of course, there was nothing but blank empty sheets of paper."

"Anyway," he said, "this I know. I never will write such a beautiful novel as that one was."

Of course when he said it he laughed.

I do not believe there are too many people in the world who will know exactly what he was laughing about.

7: The Smile

John Galsworthy

1867-1933

The Red Book Magazine, Jan 1923

MR. JUSTICE BELLIVER, divested of wig, sat in the armchair of his retiring room, at close of his day's work, twisting up one of his still dark eyebrows between his thumb and finger. He usually sat for ten minutes in this manner, reviewing the case in hand before throwing it off his mind till after dinner. His pepper-and-salt knees were crossed, and his other hand, thin, with darkish hair on it, rubbed them without seeming purpose. About sixty-five, and if not handsome, at least impressive, he still had on his face the somewhat dehumanized look of the last six hours. Owing to the pressure of divorce proceedings, he had been dissolving marriages all the week— it was not his general game, and he had rather enjoyed it for a change; but today there was a point of irritation in his mind, such as a hair unlocated causes in a mouth. He had just pronounced decree nisi in a suit where Counsel had made an appeal that, in spite of her guilt, the respondent should be allowed to keep the child of the marriage. In his judgment he had made it plain that no talk of temptation, no throwing of the blame on the co-respondent, was to the point; she was a married woman who had been false to her vows, and he had felt no hesitation in following the usual practice, giving custody of the child to the party not in error.

He had no doubt about his judgment, but he was uneasy, because he could not, as it were, put his finger on that vague spot of irritation. And, searching for it, his mental eye reviewed the figures of the parties: the petitioner, cold and well-dressed; the respondent, in black, perhaps twenty-six, slim, pretty, fair-haired, seated beside a tall, large woman with a full-blown face, also in black, and evidently her mother.

He rose impatiently, and, going to a drawer, took out some brushes and began brushing his gray hair vigorously.

Ah! He had it! Somebody had smiled while he was delivering judgment. His tongue had found the hair— a sort of contempt of court. But who—where? In the gallery— body of the court— Counsels bench? No— no! That large woman with the full-blown face— the mother— she had smiled! Hardly the moment for a mother to smile; and the smile itself— his mental eye isolated it on those full lips and swimming blue eyes; it had a queer, concentrated meaning, a sort of threatening quizzicality, a— yes, altogether, a piece of infernal impertinence! If it had occurred again, he would have had the court cleared of— h'm— well!— a smile!

He opened his toilet cabinet and washed his face and hands, as if rubbing off a smear. Then, taking his top hat, with a few words to his attendant, he made his way out of the Law Courts. It was fine weather, and, beckoning up his chauffeur, he sent the car away— he would walk.

While he was turning out of Lincoln's Inn Fields into Long Acre, a closed car passed him, moving very slowly. Mr. Justice Belliver looked up. The window space was filled by a lady's face under a large black hat. So slowly was the car moving, that for almost half a minute the face, full-colored, full-blown, with blue swimming eyes, was turned toward him, and on the face was that smile. It seemed to travel up and down him, to quiz him from the soles of his boots to the top of his hat; it rested on his angry eyes, burrowed, dug into them with a clinging deviltry, annoying and puzzling him so intensely that he could not take his eyes off it. Men's glances are supposed sometimes to divest women of their clothes; this woman's smile divested Mr. Justice Belliver, not exactly of his clothes, but of his self-possession, self-importance, almost of his self-control. He was ashamed to stop, turn round or cross the road; he just walked and stood it. his nerves quivering, his face flushed; and all the time he could see that the woman was extremely pleased with the effect of her smile. Then the car suddenly speeded, and he was alone, using a most unjudicial word.

What was the meaning of it? He racked his brains to remember the womans name— it had been mentioned in the case; Mac— Mac— something— quite unfamiliar to him; and her face— no— unless— no, quite unknown!

Again he used the unjudicial word, and with the power that his life had given him, turned his mind to other things— almost.

BEFORE taking his seat in court next morning, he perused the shorthand report of the case; the names of the parties conveyed nothing to him. Toward lunch-time, while he was pronouncing his second decree nisi, his eyes, roving over the court, were arrested by a large black hat in the front row of the gallery. Beneath it— yes!— that woman's face, and smiling! The impudence of it! By heaven, he would have her removed! Removed! He lowered his eyes, broke a pen angrily against his desk, and with an effort finished his judgment and adjourned the court.

He sat before his lunch without eating, enraged. At that distance, the smile, endowed as if with enchantment, had been more irritating, baffling, damnably quizzing than ever. It was such contempt of court as he had never known, and yet there was nothing to be done about it! He was exposed to her impudence whenever he sat in public, so long as she wished. Well, who cared." It was absurd— a smile! And yet— there was something behind that smile— it had

some cursed meaning that he could not reach. Had he said anything foolish in his judgment yesterday? He took up the report a second time. Nothing! Nothing but what he would say again this minute; he agreed with every word of it! Well, one thing was clear, if he couldn't commit her for contempt of court, he must ignore her.

He attacked his risotto, nearly cold by now, drank his glass of claret; brushed his hair, put on his wig and again went into court.

When Counsel sat down after opening the new case, Mr. Justice Belliver saw in the gap made by the dropping of the gowned figure, that woman under her large black hat— smiling, with the same meaning deviltry, the same quizzing, burrowing seizure on his face. His stare, fierce for a moment, became grim and stony. He leaned back, gripping his chair with both hands. He had been on the point of saying; "If a certain person in court cannot behave with the respect due to justice, I shall have her removed."

Phew! What an escape! This was a question of will-power! One would see whether a woman could beat him at that! It was clear to him now that she was bent on a petty persecution. If that were so —he would see! And he did. For whenever his eyes in the business of the case were raised, there was that woman's face, and at once the smile broke out.

Never— not even after influenza— had it been so great a strain to keep his mind on the business of the court. When at last he adjourned, he beckoned the usher. He would point out the woman, give instructions for her exclusion.

"Yes, my Lord?"

"The ventilation was not all it might be this afternoon. See to it, will you?"

"Yes, my Lord."

And my Lord rose, and as he rose, the woman rose, and smiled.

Driving home that day, he sat back with his eyes closed. Not a particularly unimaginative man, he was unimaginative enough to see that he was making a fool of himself. The woman was annoying him in revenge for his judgment about her daughter's child, but if a judge had not the strength of mind to disregard such petty persecutions, he was not fit for his job! He smiled best, anyway, who smiled last! Yet, racking his brains for a way of smiling last, he could not find one.

NEXT MORNING he forced himself at once to scrutinize every corner of the court. No woman— no smile! She did not appear. The next day was Sunday. By Monday morning the matter had almost passed from his mind, leaving the unpleasant dent of a sinister dream. He was back in King's Bench, too, with his old work; and he reflected sardonically that no woman would put up with the boredom of Common Law cases for the pleasure of annoying him.

But her smile was almost the first thing he saw when he entered, and he was alarmed by the effect it had on him. The consciousness that it was ready to pounce the moment his eyes strayed, seemed to deprive him of that serenity and patience so necessary for the trial of Common Law cases.

And the next day it was the same, and the next.

SITTING in his club that third evening before dinner, he seriously reviewed the courses open to him to abate this nuisance. It was less than a fortnight to the Easter vacation, but he felt as if a fortnight of this daily irritation would make him ill. The idea of having her removed, or committed for contempt of court, did not seriously return to him— it was too like the Red King in "Alice in Wonderland;" and what if like the Cheshire Cat, she left her smile behind— for it was not so much the woman, as what her smile meant, which was now so on his nerves. Something it meant— and he could not reach that meaning! What courses then were left? To go to the woman's house and confront her point blank? Impossible! The dignity of his office forbade it.

Equally undignified to write!

To go sick and begin his vacation at once? That was to leave her with the victory!

To get a friend to interfere? He could not confide his weakness to a friend.

To take to smoked glasses? They would merely blur his view of Counsel and witnesses, and leave the smile undimmed; it was a "haunt" now, too mental in its effect to be removed that way. Besides— the woman would rejoice!

To laugh— at himself, at her! All very well if it were just a revengeful trick; but one could not laugh at something that one could not understand.

He rose from that session of sweet, silent thought, powerless, devoid of remedy or anodyne. He must just stick it out and trust to time to wear the woman down. And with a deep sigh he went in to dinner.

The woman missed no single one of the ten days that followed; for two to three hours, morning or afternoon, she sat in his court and smiled whenever he gave her a chance; and that was far more often than he wished, God knew; for when a rider has a weak spot, out of sheer nervousness he always falls on it.

By this time he had almost lost consciousness of how the thing began; the woman and her smile were as unreal, and yet as hopelessly painful, as a recurrent nightmare. When he adjourned his court for the Easter vacation, his face had a jaundiced look, his eyes were restless and unhappy, his dark, twisting eyebrows seemed to have lost their attractive bristle. And the woman

looked as freshly full-blown, as meaningful, as mocking under her large black hat as on the first day he saw her. She had battened on him.

Never had he entered train for his vacation with such intense relief. Brighton air would set him up, remove all this silly nerve trouble and exasperation. He drove up from the station to his hotel with the buoyant feeling of a man out for the first time after an illness. Walking up to the desk through the hall lounge, he passed two ladies. One of them turned and smiled. For a moment he felt positively faint; then, with the thought: "Ha! but I'm not a judge here; I'm a man!" he stepped up to the desk and registered. Here she was no privileged harpy, he no helpless official butt. He was a man, she a woman— and she should know it!

HE spent the hour before dinner maturing his resolve to dog her to some quiet nook and give her the half-hour of her life.

"Madam," he would begin, "I think I have reason to know your face. I think you have been so good as to favor me with certain smiles these last three weeks." By heaven, his tongue should tear the skin off her!

In the coffee-room he searched every table, looking at every face; she was not there. Perhaps she had an inkling of what was before her; perhaps she had repented of her rashness in pursuing him down here.

After dinner he continued his restless searching of every face; he could not see her anywhere, and at last, tired out, sat down in the lounge, where a screen kept off the draft, and lay back in his chair drawing feebly at his cigar. Unnerved, exhausted by this spurt of savage feeling, he dozed.

He was awakened by voices. Two women were talking somewhere close to him.

"And he doesn't know me from Eve— isn't it priceless? My dear, I've had the time of my life. From the moment he said that Kathleen shouldn't have the child, and sneered at her, and wouldn't have it that Charles pursued her, I made up my mind to get back on him. He— *he*— of all men! Why, do you know, twenty-seven years ago, in my first marriage, when I was twenty-three, slim and pretty as an angel— my dear, I was, though you wouldn't think it!— he— *he*— a barrister he was then, and quite a buck— he made violent love to me; wanted me to go off with him. And I should have, my dear, if it hadn't been that Kathleen was on the way! *He*— *he*! He's clean forgotten that he ever was flesh and blood! And now! Oh, my God! What a humbug! *What* a humbug, in his precious wig!— Hallo!"

The screen was tottering. Mr. Justice Belliver, risen from his hastily pushed-back chair, stood with one hand grasping the falling screen and his other hand crisped on the lapel of his evening coat, as if to conceal the feelings in his

chest. His lips quivered, thin and bloodless from compression; with eyes deep in his head, he looked at the woman who had spoken, and as he looked, she smiled.

He bowed slightly, let go of the screen and walked shakily away; and in a mirror he saw her smile slowly fade, and a look of compunction, almost of compassion, take its place.

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8: The Schartz-Metterklume Method

Saki

H. H. Munro, 1870-1916

The Westminster Gazette, 14 Oct 1911

LADY CARLOTTA stepped out on to the platform of the small wayside station and took a turn or two up and down its uninteresting length, to kill time till the train should be pleased to proceed on its way. Then, in the roadway beyond, she saw a horse struggling with a more than ample load, and a carter of the sort that seems to bear a sullen hatred against the animal that helps him to earn a living. Lady Carlotta promptly betook her to the roadway, and put rather a different complexion on the struggle. Certain of her acquaintances were wont to give her plentiful admonition as to the undesirability of interfering on behalf of a distressed animal, such interference being "none of her business." Only once had she put the doctrine of non-interference into practice, when one of its most eloquent exponents had been besieged for nearly three hours in a small and extremely uncomfortable may-tree by an angry boar-pig, while Lady Carlotta, on the other side of the fence, had proceeded with the water-colour sketch she was engaged on, and refused to interfere between the boar and his prisoner. It is to be feared that she lost the friendship of the ultimately rescued lady. On this occasion she merely lost the train, which gave way to the first sign of impatience it had shown throughout the journey, and steamed off without her. She bore the desertion with philosophical indifference; her friends and relations were thoroughly well used to the fact of her luggage arriving without her. She wired a vague non-committal message to her destination to say that she was coming on "by another train." Before she had time to think what her next move might be she was confronted by an imposingly attired lady, who seemed to be taking a prolonged mental inventory of her clothes and looks.

"You must be Miss Hope, the governess I've come to meet," said the apparition, in a tone that admitted of very little argument.

"Very well, if I must I must," said Lady Carlotta to herself with dangerous meekness.

"I am Mrs. Quabarl," continued the lady; "and where, pray, is your luggage?"

"It's gone astray," said the alleged governess, falling in with the excellent rule of life that the absent are always to blame; the luggage had, in point of fact, behaved with perfect correctitude. "I've just telegraphed about it," she added, with a nearer approach to truth.

"How provoking," said Mrs. Quabarl; "these railway companies are so careless. However, my maid can lend you things for the night," and she led the way to her car.

During the drive to the Quabarl mansion Lady Carlotta was impressively introduced to the nature of the charge that had been thrust upon her; she learned that Claude and Wilfrid were delicate, sensitive young people, that Irene had the artistic temperament highly developed, and that Viola was something or other else of a mould equally commonplace among children of that class and type in the twentieth century.

"I wish them not only to be taught," said Mrs. Quabarl, "but interested in what they learn. In their history lessons, for instance, you must try to make them feel that they are being introduced to the life-stories of men and women who really lived, not merely committing a mass of names and dates to memory. French, of course, I shall expect you to talk at meal-times several days in the week."

"I shall talk French four days of the week and Russian in the remaining three."

"Russian? My dear Miss Hope, no one in the house speaks or understands Russian."

"That will not embarrass me in the least," said Lady Carlotta coldly.

Mrs. Quabarl, to use a colloquial expression, was knocked off her perch. She was one of those imperfectly self-assured individuals who are magnificent and autocratic as long as they are not seriously opposed. The least show of unexpected resistance goes a long way towards rendering them cowed and apologetic. When the new governess failed to express wondering admiration of the large newly-purchased and expensive car, and lightly alluded to the superior advantages of one or two makes which had just been put on the market, the discomfiture of her patroness became almost abject. Her feelings were those which might have animated a general of ancient warfaring days, on beholding his heaviest battle-elephant ignominiously driven off the field by slingers and javelin throwers.

At dinner that evening, although reinforced by her husband, who usually duplicated her opinions and lent her moral support generally, Mrs. Quabarl regained none of her lost ground. The governess not only helped herself well and truly to wine, but held forth with considerable show of critical knowledge on various vintage matters, concerning which the Quabarls were in no wise able to pose as authorities. Previous governesses had limited their conversation on the wine topic to a respectful and doubtless sincere expression of a preference for water. When this one went as far as to

recommend a wine firm in whose hands you could not go very far wrong Mrs. Quabarl thought it time to turn the conversation into more usual channels.

"We got very satisfactory references about you from Canon Teep," she observed; "a very estimable man, I should think."

"Drinks like a fish and beats his wife, otherwise a very lovable character," said the governess imperturbably.

"My dear Miss Hope! I trust you are exaggerating," exclaimed the Quabarls in unison.

"One must in justice admit that there is some provocation," continued the romancer. "Mrs. Teep is quite the most irritating bridge-player that I have ever sat down with; her leads and declarations would condone a certain amount of brutality in her partner, but to souse her with the contents of the only soda-water syphon in the house on a Sunday afternoon, when one couldn't get another, argues an indifference to the comfort of others which I cannot altogether overlook. You may think me hasty in my judgments, but it was practically on account of the syphon incident that I left."

"We will talk of this some other time," said Mrs. Quabarl hastily.

"I shall never allude to it again," said the governess with decision.

Mr. Quabarl made a welcome diversion by asking what studies the new instructress proposed to inaugurate on the morrow.

"History to begin with," she informed him.

"Ah, history," he observed sagely; "now in teaching them history you must take care to interest them in what they learn. You must make them feel that they are being introduced to the life-stories of men and women who really lived—"

"I've told her all that," interposed Mrs. Quabarl.

"I teach history on the Schartz-Metterklume method," said the governess loftily.

"Ah, yes," said her listeners, thinking it expedient to assume an acquaintance at least with the name.

"WHAT ARE YOU children doing out here?" demanded Mrs. Quabarl the next morning, on finding Irene sitting rather glumly at the head of the stairs, while her sister was perched in an attitude of depressed discomfort on the window-seat behind her, with a wolf-skin rug almost covering her.

"We are having a history lesson," came the unexpected reply. "I am supposed to be Rome, and Viola up there is the she-wolf; not a real wolf, but the figure of one that the Romans used to set store by— I forget why. Claude and Wilfrid have gone to fetch the shabby women."

"The shabby women?"

"Yes, they've got to carry them off. They didn't want to, but Miss Hope got one of father's fives-bats and said she'd give them a number nine spanking if they didn't, so they've gone to do it."

A loud, angry screaming from the direction of the lawn drew Mrs. Quabarl thither in hot haste, fearful lest the threatened castigation might even now be in process of infliction. The outcry, however, came principally from the two small daughters of the lodge-keeper, who were being hauled and pushed towards the house by the panting and dishevelled Claude and Wilfrid, whose task was rendered even more arduous by the incessant, if not very effectual, attacks of the captured maidens' small brother. The governess, fives-bat in hand, sat negligently on the stone balustrade, presiding over the scene with the cold impartiality of a Goddess of Battles. A furious and repeated chorus of "I'll tell muvver" rose from the lodge-children, but the lodge-mother, who was hard of hearing, was for the moment immersed in the preoccupation of her washtub.

After an apprehensive glance in the direction of the lodge (the good woman was gifted with the highly militant temper which is sometimes the privilege of deafness) Mrs. Quabarl flew indignantly to the rescue of the struggling captives.

"Wilfrid! Claude! Let those children go at once. Miss Hope, what on earth is the meaning of this scene?"

"Early Roman history; the Sabine Women, don't you know? It's the Schartz-Metterklume method to make children understand history by acting it themselves; fixes it in their memory, you know. Of course, if, thanks to your interference, your boys go through life thinking that the Sabine women ultimately escaped, I really cannot be held responsible."

"You may be very clever and modern, Miss Hope," said Mrs. Quabarl firmly, "but I should like you to leave here by the next train. Your luggage will be sent after you as soon as it arrives."

"I'm not certain exactly where I shall be for the next few days," said the dismissed instructress of youth; "you might keep my luggage till I wire my address. There are only a couple of trunks and some golf-clubs and a leopard cub."

"A leopard cub!" gasped Mrs. Quabarl. Even in her departure this extraordinary person seemed destined to leave a trail of embarrassment behind her.

"Well, it's rather left off being a cub; it's more than half-grown, you know. A fowl every day and a rabbit on Sundays is what it usually gets. Raw beef makes it too excitable. Don't trouble about getting the car for me, I'm rather inclined for a walk."

And Lady Carlotta strode out of the Quabarl horizon.

The advent of the genuine Miss Hope, who had made a mistake as to the day on which she was due to arrive, caused a turmoil which that good lady was quite unused to inspiring. Obviously the Quabarl family had been woefully befooled, but a certain amount of relief came with the knowledge.

"How tiresome for you, dear Carlotta," said her hostess, when the overdue guest ultimately arrived; "how very tiresome losing your train and having to stop overnight in a strange place."

"Oh dear, no," said Lady Carlotta; "not at all tiresome— for me."

9: The Novelist

Gilbert Dayle

fl 1897-1914

West Gippsland Gazette (Victoria) 24 Sep 1901

English author of "My Jolliest Chistmas,", "The Fates and Prince Conrad," "Mr. Chester Heath of Philadelphia", etc., etc.; numerous short stories, and at least one three-act play: "What Would a Gentleman Do?" (The play, by the way, seems to have the same plot as this story, but different in details, and dates from about 1907; it was produced in London's West End and on Broadway). I can not find any biographical info.

IT WAS A PERFECT SPRING AFTERNOON, and a little party of three, mounted on mules, were plodding along the track that leads from Cape Spartel to Tangier. Grierson, the novelist, allowed the reins to drop round his animal's neck, and proceeded to roll a cigarette. By his side rode an upright elderly man with close cropped hair and a keen face, and the third member of the party, a young girl of about twenty, was some fifty yards ahead.

"It has been a first class sort of day," observed the elder man. "Celia and I owe you a debt of gratitude for having looked after us this week in Tangier."

"The luck has been on my side!" returned Grierson, with a laugh. "You see, I came over here from Gibraltar as a certain young person's society was exercising a depressing influence upon me."

"Did she bore you?" asked Ardell.

"The reverse! She has charmed me more than any other girl for a longer period than I like to think. The point is that her parents insist on her having nothing to do with me— which at least shows they are not wanting in good sound common sense!"

Ardell laughed, and gazed contemplatively on the surrounding stretch of country.

"I could put in another month here well, but I'm afraid it would hardly suit Celia," he said, with a nod towards the trim figure riding in front of them.

"Is she in a huge hurry to see England?" asked Grierson. He knew a little of his companion's history. He was a wealthy Australian sheep farmer, who had lately sold his run, and determined on a visit to England.

"Not so much that, but eagerness to meet the man."

The novelist opened his eyes. "Oh, is she in love, too?" he said with a sigh.

"Yes: I had a young Englishman on the farm as manager. He was with us about five years, a decent sort of fellow, a gentleman by birth— you meet a good many of that sort up and down the runs in the bush," said Ardell. "Eventually, he fell in love with Celia, and asked my consent; I liked the chap and gave it. Then one day came a letter telling him there had been a big snap

in his family chain, and that he had stepped into an estate and money in England."

"I know," added the novelist. "I've used him in a good many of my books. So he went, and you are following?" he added with a smile.

"Yes, he said he would return and fetch Celia when things were settled up a bit. But shortly after he had gone. I suddenly took it into my head that I had done about enough work for one man's life, so sold the farm, and brought the girl away on this trip." Ardell laughed. "It'll be somewhat of a surprise to him— you see, there wasn't time to write, so he doesn't know we're coming!"

Presently Grierson urged his mule into a gentle trot, and succeeded in getting level with Celia.

"I thought I'd just like to congratulate you," he began.

A touch of colour flew to the girl's cheeks, and her eyes glistened— she made a wonderfully pretty picture, he thought.

"Are you interested in love affairs?" she asked, with a smile.

"My dear young lady, I've been vainly trying to invent a new one ever since I first began to write!" he exclaimed. Then his tone changed. "Now, please tell me all about him— is he as near perfection as a mere man can be?"

"I don't know about Archie being that," she answered, with a laugh. "But he is the man I love, and nothing else matters much, does it?"

"Absolutely nothing! But I wish your opinion was more universal!" he added, with a sigh, as he thought of the young person in the party he had left at Gibraltar. An idea seemed to strike him, for a quick light came into his eyes. "Does Archie—" he began, then paused. "By the way, I hardly like referring to him as Archie; it seems so horribly familiar. What is his other name?"

"Trevor— Archibald Errington Trevor," she said with a laugh.

"I've been trying to get alongside of you for five minutes!" cried Mr Ardell's voice from behind. "Do, for goodness sake, rein in your thoroughbred for a moment, Celia!"

The girl, with a laugh, turned round to him and waited. Grierson rode on, and kept a little ahead of the others for the rest of the way. His face was unusually grave, and he seemed buried in thought. They reached the town and, wishing to do some shopping, he separated from his companions. When at length he also arrived at the hotel, he caught sight of a tall, good-loolking young man standing in the hall; he was chatting to a girl at his side. Grierson gave a start, then hurried towards them.

"This is very absurd !" he exclaimed as he shook hands with the girl. "I left you to go on to Seville and Madrid, not to follow me here."

Lady Constance laughed. "We started, but father was so terribly anxious to get a glimpse of Morocco, that at length we had to give in— so here we are."

She moved towards the staircase. "Mother was a little upset with the crossing; I am just going to see how she is getting on, then will return," she said with a little smiling nod of farewell.

Grierson watched her disappear, then turned to the young man, and, linking his arm within his, drew him into an alcove in which there was a seat.

"You know, it's really too bad of you to bother me in this way!" he said reproachfully. "But there's no alternitive— I feel bound to tell you what an awful scoundrel I think you!"

His companion looked at him in wonder. "What on earth has happened, Grierson?" he cried.

The novelist opened his mouth to speak, but paused as he caught sight of a light figure tripping down the stair case. He gripped the younger man's arm, and nodded in her direction. The girl— it was Celia Ardell— crossed the hall some three yards in front of them, and entered a drawing-room without seeing them. Trevor breathed heavily; he did not speak, his eyes were fastened on the door through which Celia had vanished.

"Sufficient explanation, eh?" said Grierson. "A month or so after you left the farm, old Mr Ardell sold out and decided to bring Celia to you. They halted for a week here, and that dearest of little girls is actually counting the hours that will bring her to the man who stole her love, and who in return—!"

Trevor winced.

"Yes," he broke in, "I've been an awful scoundrel. I hardly know how it happened. I left her, feeling she was all the world to me; then, the new life in England, with money, troops of new friends, new faces— I somehow seemed to forget, and—" he paused. "I thought she might forget also!" he continued, lamely. "I know it was playing it horribly low down." He looked up at Grierson anxiously. "Do you think it will matter so very much to her?"

"Oh, no!" retorted the novelist, airily, "She has only lavished on you every scrap of love she has to give, and finding you are not worth it will only break her heart. But that's a mere trifle, and not worth considering— you will be able to marry Lady Constance, and boast a wife with a title."

Young Trevor rose to his feet, he was very white.

"What do you think you will do?" continued the novelist. "You see, if you happen to have actually proposed to Lady Constance...."

"I haven't!" put in the other man, shortly.

A slight gleam came into Grierson's eyes as he watched his companion. Suddenly Trevor swung round on him.

"Going to play the man?" said the novelist quietly. Trevor nodded, and walked sharply towards the door of the room in which the girl was.

Grierson came after him at a run, and laid a hand on his sleeve. "One moment, Archie!" he said, rapidly. "Lady Constance— you thought her pretty, bright, intelligent— you had money, she a title— head turned a little ?" He paused.

"But it wasn't love, not love, Archie?"

Trevor looked at him for a moment, and a ghost of a smile trembled on his lip.

"No, not love !" he said, decidedly. Then he opened the door and strode in. Grierson walked along the corridor to the billiard-room in a thoughtful frame of mind. He glanced in and saw it was empty. A second or two afterwards Lady Constance approached him.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "Come along in here and have a talk!"

"I have been doing that, off and on, for some years," she said, with a smile. "Yes, but this time I shall be very in-teresting. I can't remember anything I've so wanted to tell you."

They seated themselves on a lounge.

"Are you ready?" he began.

She nodded. "Very well, listen to this: Archie Trevor will never have the exquisite honor of becoming your husband!" he said, dramatically. He was watching her narrowly. He saw a slight touch of colour pass over her cheeks, but there was a smiling look in the eyes still. He was satisfied.

The bantering tone dropped from his voice, and he told the story to her quietly. She listened intently, and at the conclusion indicated the direction of the drawing-room with a little excited gesture.

"And he is actually in there with her now?" she cried, quickly.

"And she's just deliriously happy," he said, with a nod. He turned round to her. "Are you glad ?"

"Yes," she answered, softly. "Very glad he played the man." Grierson jumped up from his seat and stood in front of her. His face had light-ed up again, and there was a humorous twinkle in his eyes.

"Don't you see ?" he cried. "Now that you cannot marry the man your parents picked for you, obviously the only thing you can do is to marry the man you would choose for yourself."

"But I haven't chosen," she protested.

"Ah! but you would if you dared," he exclaimed. "Just forget you're a lady of title; forget the desirability of marrying a man of immense wealth, strike out a line for yourself, and marry the man who has adored you for ten years. It will mean a bit of a tussle with the parents, but think how furious the fun will be."

She looked up at him doubtfully.

"Yes, I'm serious— in just this one thing," he said pleadingly.

Archie Trevor's voice was heard from the other end of the hall. "Grierson," he was crying, "I want you old chap!"

The novelist turned excitedly to Lady Constance. "There! You can tell from his voice that he's happy. Think of the embarrassment it would save you, tedious explanations, too," he raced on. "And besides, I'm not really poor ! My last book was so utterly bad that it ran into twenty editions, and dramatised versions are being played everywhere— packed houses in Scandinavia last week. I'm stupidly rich!"

"Come along," cried Archie's voice, impatiently.

"Can't," Grierson called back, with his eyes on the girl, sitting on the lounge. Lady Constance slowly raised her head and met his imploring gaze. She was smiling, and the blood went tumbling through his veins.

"What's the matter?" The voice was coming nearer.

"I'm engaged!" said the novelist laconically.

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10: The Interpreter

(A Mere Episode)

Frank Harris

1856-1931

In: *Montes the Matador and other stories*, 1900

I WAS in the entrance hall of the Hotel de Roma in Madrid. I had come downstairs to see if I could get an interpreter or competent guide to accompany my wife to the Museum of the Prado, whilst I went off with a Toreador to a rustic wedding. There was a man in the hall who rather puzzled me; he was not well dressed enough for a visitor to the hotel; yet his eye did not seek mine with the servile solicitation which is the mark of the guide tribe in all civilized capitals, nor did he show that dignified indifference to one's obvious wants which is, so to say, the livery of the Spaniard in quest of employment. He was about the middle height, of commonplace appearance; but there was something in the thoughtful quietude of his look and manner that pleased me. As there was nothing for it but to speak to him, I made up my mind to speak in English: "Good morning."

"Good morning, sir," he answered quietly. His tone encouraged me.

"Do you happen to be an interpreter?" I asked.

"No, I am not an interpreter." There was something subdued, half melancholy, in his tone, but he was a Spaniard; the r's betrayed him unmistakably.

"What a bore," I said disconsolately, turning half aside; "Mazzantini will be waiting for me, and I wanted some one to go with my wife to the Museum."

"I shall be happy to accompany Madame," said the Spaniard, "and if Madame cares for paintings, she will have emotions in the Prado."

"Thanks, as you are not a guide, I must not trouble you."

"I often go with people to the Prado," he answered simply.

"But then," I went on with British love of a fact, "you must be either an interpreter or a guide."

"I am not an interpreter," he replied abruptly, his manner almost rude as he turned away.

"Well," I said, feeling my mistake, "at any rate you speak English better than any Spaniard I have met, and I dare say you know more about the pictures than the ordinary guide."

He turned to me, lifting his eyebrows in deprecating pity, and as my wife appeared at the moment, I confided her to his charge. When we met before dinner my wife spoke of him: "Such a strange man— so terribly enthusiastic. He bored me to extinction about Velasquez, and seemed quite hurt because I could not appreciate— 'las Meniñas,' yes, that was the name— a quite absurd

picture. Polite? Oh yes, for a foreigner and a man in his position." After this I met the man frequently, and often talked with him. I found that he knew a great deal about the Spanish school of painting, andespecially about Velasquez and Goya; but his knowledge was curiously fragmentary. He had evidently divined more than he had read, and his ideas about men and things had grown to have all the weight of facts for his mind. There was, too, a curious mixture of self-assertion and humility about him which I could not account for. I ventured to ask him, one evening, how he had come to learn so much about painting, and especially about Velasquez. He went on twirling a cigarette between his yellow-stained fingers, while his little brown eyes contracted with the effort of thinking. After a pause, he said:

"I was in the Prado every day, and somehow or other the little pictures grew hideous to me and the masterpieces more and more interesting.

"That's a rare experience," I said, "but not singular; I have a friend who declares that no one can really understand a picture till he has lived with it. But of course there are people who can appreciate even a masterpiece at first sight." As I saw he didn't agree with me, I went on probing: "Surely you must have got some of your knowledge from books?"

"Yes," he replied indifferently, "what I knew before, I found in books and little else. But most people like what they call facts, so I read in order to get facts. But I am so constituted that I can only remember such facts as possess some vital or spiritual significance, so I am not much better off for all my reading. Other men's knowledge doesn't help one much."

"Then you have always been a guide and interpreter?" I interrupted.

He turned upon me abruptly in a revolt of conceit:

"Oh yes, Señor, I was an interpreter once. I did not only interpret our language, but the pictures of our greatest masters in the Prado to ordinary visitors. You know that as a rule people do not see pictures at all until their beauties have been pointed out to them. Well, I revealed to Englishmen, Frenchmen and Germans the immortal works of Zurbaran, Velasquez, and Goya. And when there were any willing to listen, I went further and showed them how these masters had discovered their souls in their paintings; and thus I interpreted to foreign tourists the spiritual essence of our greatest. Ah, it was strange! For one who admired the strength and dignity of Zurbaran there were a dozen who loved the brutality of Goya, and the voluptuousness of his *mayas*; and for a score who understood Zurbaran, there was only one to care for the soul of Velasquez, who saw dwarfs and kings, ministers and women, horses and dogs, as God's sunlight sees them. Curious, isn't it? that only the noble can love nobility, and that a thousand wanted me to translate to them some silly piece of newspaper scandal for one who wished to understand how Velasquez

felt towards Christ,... I began as a democrat," he went on, as if to himself, "but I soon came to hate and despise the people. Nine men out of ten have no reverence in them, no desire to learn and grow. I used to think my trade the best in the world,"he broke off,— "in itself an education that refines and ennobles. Yes, oh yes," he repeated, nodding his head, while a sort of flush came over his sallow cheeks, "I was an interpreter— once."

In spite of his self-assertion the man impressed me; I noticed now a certain intellectuality in his breadth of brow and patient insistence in his peering eyes; his mouth, too, was very sensitive and refined. But underneath my sympathy there was the prickling of vulgar curiosity, and after a certain amount of lighter talk I couldn't help asking him:

"Why did you tell me the first evening that you were not an interpreter? And why don't you wear the band on your cap?"

He shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. I pressed him, and at length he spoke:

"When the visitors found out I was a real interpreter, they began to recommend me to their friends, and I got constant employment, more than I could do; and as I got money, I grew proud. The proprietor let me have rooms in the hotel....

"One day, out of the season, an English gentleman, called Mr. Ponsonby, came here, and after spending a day in his room, he asked me what there was to do in this dull place, and I took him to the Prado. He was very affable and quick, and liked all I told him. He said I ought to have a great reputation, and when I said I thought I had, he said he did not mean that sort of reputation. I ought to write down what I knew about the painters, and the book would sell, and make me a reputation throughout Europe. We passed theevening together in this *café*; see, at that table. All the next day, too, we spent together; he did not seem to want to be alone; it was so damned dull, he said, without anyone to talk to. He always read the English newspapers as soon as they came. Except for that time, I was with him every minute for three days.

"On the fourth morning, about nine o'clock, I was in the hail waiting for him, when suddenly there came up to me my sister's husband's brother's son, the youngest of the family. He was in the police and had got on. I had known him as a baby, and played with him often; his third name was José, after me. We began to talk. I asked him about the family; they all live in Toledo. And so we passed about ten minutes; then he said to me:

" 'Are you doing anything now? Why don't you go and see them?'

" 'Ah, no,' I replied; 'I stick to my work. Besides, I have an English gentleman here now, who takes me everywhere with him; such a nice gentleman, a Mr. Ponsonby.'

" 'Is he in the hotel now?' he asked.

" 'He is in his room; I am waiting for him,' was my answer.

" 'Take me up to him, won't you? I think I have something to tell him—or something for him.'

"I forget exactly what he said; but I replied: 'All right, come on.'

"I was sure Mr. Ponsonby would not be angry with me; he was so pleasant, and I, like a vain fool, never paused to think. We went up to theroom, and I knocked at the door. Mr. Ponsonby asked sharply: 'Who's there?' and I said:

" 'It is I, Mr. Ponsonby, your guide, José, who—'

"Then we heard him unlocking the door.

"As he opened it I began: 'Mr. Ponsonby, I have brought—'; but before I could finish, my sister's husband's brother's son stepped before me, and put his hand on Mr. Ponsonby's shoulder, saying in English (I did not know he knew a word of it):

" 'Mr. Ponsonby Pigott, you must come with me.'

"I still did not understand, and I was a little angry at being pushed aside, so I went forward and asked him:

"'What do you mean?'

"He looked at me with a smile and said: 'Mr. Pigott understands; he is my prisoner.'

"Then I knew, and I said to my sister's husband's brother's son:

" 'You have made me a spy like yourself, you devil. You have made me help to give my friend up, you low beast, you...' and I went on. I was mad with rage, because I felt the guilt in myself; but Mr. Ponsonby Pigott, he did not reproach me. He was too much of a gentleman; he grew a little pale, that was all.

"Pointing to the alcove where the bed stood, he asked the detective: 'May I go to get my brushes and things?'

"I stepped in front of the young man, and said:

" 'Certainly, Mr. Ponsonby Pigott, you shall get what you like; he does not dare to disturb you.'

"Oh, I was determined to be a fine fool to the end! When he went to the alcove, I turned to my sister's husband's brother's son, and I spat on the floor and said— What did I not say? I have not forgiven him; he will see yet.

"All the while I was thinking what a brute I had been and fool, to be outwitted by a boy. Suddenly there came a click, and— as the detective rushed past me— the bang of a revolver. When we got to the alcove, there he lay, Mr. Ponsonby who had been so kind to me, all huddled up on the floor— with his brains scattered on the pillow and the wall— dead.

"Then I knew what I had done, and I turned and went out of the room, and in the hall they all met me, and asked:

" 'What is the matter, Interpreter?'

"And I took the band on my cap with 'Interpreter' on it, and I tore it off my cap, and I said:

" 'I am no interpreter, I am a fool.'

"I went out crying—

"YES, I've heard he was a forger and a cheat; he may have been a bad man; but whatever crimes be committed, there was something kindly in him and noble; at all events he knew when to die....

"I was greatly to blame, greatly; I was too self-sufficient and proud. That is why I will never wear the badge again nor call myself an interpreter. I am not worthy of the name; but if Mr.Pigott had liked me as I liked him, and trusted me, I would have hidden him away here in Madrid, so that they would never have found him, never. I cannot bear to think of it now, he was so pleasant and kind—"

11: A Bewitched Ship

W. Clark Russell

William Clark Russell, 1844-1911

In: *Great Short Stories Volume II: Ghost Stories*, 1906

"ABOUT TEN YEARS AGO," began my friend, Captain Green, "I went as second mate of a ship named the *Ocean King*. She'd been an old Indiaman in her time, and had a poop and topgallant forecastle, though alterations had knocked some of the dignity out of her. Her channels had been changed into plates with dead-eyes above the rail, and the eye missed the spread of the lower rigging that it naturally sought in looking at a craft with a square stern and windows in it, and checkered sides rounding out into curves, that made a complete tub of the old hooker. Yet, spite of changes, the old-fashioned grace would break through. She looked like a lady who has seen better days, who has got to do work which servants did for her in the times when she was well off, but who, let her set her hand to what she will, makes you see that the breeding and the instincts are still there, and that she's as little to be vulgarized by poverty and its coarse struggles as she could be made a truer lady than she is by money. Ships, like human beings, have their careers, and the close of some of them is strange, and sometimes hard, I think.

"The *Ocean King* had been turned into a collier, and I went second mate of her when she was full up with coal for a South African port. Yet, this ship, that was now carrying one of the dirtiest cargoes you could name, barring phosphate manure, had been reckoned in her day a fine passenger vessel, a noble Indiaman indeed— her tonnage was something over eleven hundred— with a cuddy fitted up royally. Many a freight of soldiers had she carried round the Cape, many an old nabob had she conveyed— ay, and Indian potentates, who smoked out of jeweled hookahs, and who were waited upon by crowds of black servants in turbans and slippers. I used to moralize over her just as I would over a tomb, when I had the watch and was alone and could let my thoughts run loose.

"The sumptuous cabin trappings were all gone, and I seemed to smell coal in the wind, even when my head was over the weather side, and when the breeze that blew along came fresh across a thousand miles of sea; but there was a good deal of the fittings left— fittings which, I don't doubt, made the newspapers give a long account of this 'fine, great ship' when she was launched— quite enough of them to enable a man to reconstruct a picture of the cuddy of the *Ocean King* as it was in the days of her glory, when the soft oil-lamps shone bright on the draped tables and sparkled on silver and glass; when the old skipper, sitting with the mizzenmast behind him, would look, with his red face and white hair, down the rows of ladies and gentlemen eating

and drinking, stewards running about, trays hanging from the deck above, and globes full of gold-fish swinging to the roll of the vessel as she swung stately, with her stunsails hanging out, over the long blue swell, wrinkled by the wind. The ship is still afloat. Where are the people she carried? The crews who have worked her? The captains who have commanded her? There is nothing that should be fuller of ghosts than an old ship; and I very well remember that when I first visited the *Victory*, at Portsmouth, and descended into her cockpit, what I saw was not a well-preserved and cleanly length of massive deck, but groups of wounded and bleeding and dying men littering the dark floor, and the hatchway shadowed by groaning figures handed below, while the smell of English, French, and Spanish gunpowder, even down there, was so strong— phew! I could have spat the flavor out!

"Well, the old *Ocean King* had once upon a time been said to be haunted. She had certainly been long enough afloat to own a hundred stories, and she was so stanch and true that if ever a superstition got into her there was no chance of its getting out again. I only remember one of these yarns; it was told to me by the dockmaster, who had been at sea for many years, was an old man, and knew the history of all such craft as the *Ocean King*. He said that, in '51, I think it was, there had been a row among the crew: an Italian sailor stabbed an Englishman, who bled to death. To avenge the Englishman's death the rest of the crew, who were chiefly English, thrust the Italian into the forepeak and let him lie there in darkness. When he was asked for they reported that he had fallen overboard, and this seems to have been believed. Whether the crew meant to starve him or not is not certain; but, after he had been in the forepeak three or four days, a fellow going behind the galley out of the way of the wind to light his pipe— it being then four bells in the first watch— came running into the forecastle, with his hair on end, and the sweat pouring off his face, swearing he had seen the Italian's ghost. This frightened the men prettily; some of them went down into the forepeak, and found the Italian lying there dead, with a score of rats upon him, which scampered off when the men dropped below. During all the rest of the voyage his ghost was constantly seen, sometimes at the lee wheel, sometimes astride of the flying-jibboom. What was the end of it— I mean, whether the men confessed the murder, and, if so, what became of them— the dockmaster said he didn't know. But, be this as it may, I discovered shortly after we had begun our voyage that the crew had got to hear of this story, and the chief mate said it had been brought aboard by the carpenter, who had picked it up from some of the dockyard laborers.

"I well recollect two uncomfortable circumstances; we sailed on a Friday, and the able and ordinary seamen were thirteen in number, the idlers and

ourselves aft bringing up the ship's company to nineteen souls! when, I suppose, in her prime the *Ocean King* never left port short of seventy or eighty seamen, not to mention stewards, cooks, cooks' mates, butcher, butcher's mate, baker, and the rest of them. But double topsail yards were now in; besides, I understood that the vessel's masts had been reduced and her yards shortened, and we carried stump fore and mizzen-topgallant masts.

"All being ready, a tug got hold of our tow-rope, and away we went down the river and out to sea.

"I don't believe myself that any stories which had been told the men about the ship impressed them much. Sailors are very superstitious, but they are not to be scared till something has happened to frighten them. Your merely telling them that there's a ghost aboard the ship they're in won't alarm them till they've caught sight of the ghost. But once let a man say to the others: 'There's a bloomin' sperrit in this ship. Lay your head agin the forehatch, and you'll hear him gnashing his teeth and rattlin' his chains,' and then let another man go and listen, and swear, and perhaps very honestly, that he 'heerd the noises plain,' and you'll have all hands in a funk, talking in whispers, and going aloft in the dark nervously.

"In our ship nothing happened for some days. We were deep and slow, and rolled along solemnly, the sea falling away from the vessel's powerful round bows as from a rock. Pile what we could upon her, with tacks aboard, staysails drawing, and the wind hitting her best sailing point, we could seldom manage to get more than seven knots out of her. One night I had the first watch. It was about two bells. There was a nice wind, sea smooth, and a red moon crawling up over our starboard beam. We were under all plain sail, leaning away from the wind a trifle, and the water washed along under the bends in lines through which the starlight ran glimmering.

"I was thinking over the five or six months' voyages which old wagons after the pattern of this ship took in getting to India, when, seeing a squall coming along, I sung out for hands to stand by the main-royal and mizzen-topgallant halliards. It drove down dark, and not knowing what was behind I ordered the main-royal to be clewed up and furled. Two youngsters went aloft. By the time they were on the yard the squall thinned, but I fancied there was another bearing down, and thought it best to let the ordinary seamen roll the sail up. On a sudden down they both trotted, hand over hand, leaving the sail flapping in the clutch of the clew-lines.

"I roared out: 'What d'ye mean by coming down before you've furled that sail?'

"They stood together in the main rigging, and one of them answered: 'Please, sir, there's a ghost somewhere up aloft on the foretopsail-yard.'

" 'A ghost, you fool!' I cried.

" 'Yes, sir,' he answered. 'He says: "Jim, your mother wants yer." I says: "What?" and he says: "Your mother wants yer," in the hollowest o' voices. Dick here heard it. There's no one aloft forrard, sir.'

"I sung out to them to jump aloft again, and finding that they didn't move I made a spring, on which they dropped like lightning on deck, and began to beg and pray of me in the eagerest manner not to send them aloft, as they were too frightened to hold on. Indeed, the fellow named Jim actually began to shiver and cry when I threatened him; so as the royal had to be furled I sent an able seaman aloft, who, after rolling up the sail, came down and said that no voice had called to him, and that he rather reckoned it was a bit of skylarking on the part of the boys to get out of stowing the sail. However, I noticed that the man was wonderfully quick over the job, and that afterward the watch on deck stood talking in low voices in the waist.

"Jim was a fool of a youth, but Dick was a smart lad, aged about nineteen, and good-looking, with a lively tongue, and I heard afterward that he could spin a yarn to perfection all out of his imagination. I called him to me, and asked him if he had really heard a voice, and he swore he had.

" 'Did it say,' said I, 'Jim, your mother wants you?'

" 'Ay, sir,' he answered, with a bit of a shudder, 'as plain as you yourself say it. It seemed to come off the foretop-gallant yard, where I fancied I see something dark a-moving, but I was too frightened to take particular notice.'

"Well, it was not long after this, about eleven o'clock in the morning, that, the captain being on deck, the cook steps out of the galley, comes walking along the poop, and going up to the skipper touches his cap, and stands looking at him.

" 'What d'ye want?' said the captain, eying him as if he took him to be mad.

" 'Didn't you call, sir?' says the cook.

" 'Call!' cries the skipper. 'Certainly not.'

"The man looked stupid with surprise, and, muttering something to himself, went forward. Ten minutes after he came up again to the skipper, and says: 'Yes, sir!' as a man might who answers to a call. The skipper began to swear at him, and called him a lunatic, and so on; but the man, finding he was wrong again, grew white, and swore that if he was on his death-bed he'd maintain that the captain had called him twice.

"The skipper, who was a rather nervous man, turned to me, and said: 'What do you make of this, Mr. Green? I can't doubt the cook's word. Who's calling him in my voice?'

" 'Oh, it's some illusion, sir,' said I, feeling puzzled for all that.

"But the cook, with the tears actually standing in his eyes, declared it was no illusion; he'd know the captain's voice if it was nine miles off. And he then walked in a dazed way toward the forecastle, singing out that whether the voice he had heard belonged to a ghost or a Christian man, it might go on calling 'Cook!' for the next twenty years without his taking further notice of it. This thing, coming so soon after the call to Jim that had so greatly alarmed the two ordinary seamen, made a great impression on the crew; and I never regret anything more than that my position should have prevented me from getting into their confidence, and learning their thoughts, for there is no doubt I should have stowed away memories enough to serve me for many a hearty laugh in after years.

"A few days rolled by without anything particular happening. One night it came to my turn to have the first watch. It was a quiet night, with wind enough to keep the sails still while the old ship went drowsily rolling along her course to the African port. Suddenly I heard a commotion forward, and fearing that some accident had happened, I called out to know what the matter was. A voice answered: 'Ghost or no ghost, there's somebody a-talking in the forehold; come and listen, sir.' The silence that followed suggested a good deal of alarm. I sang out as I approached the men, 'Perhaps there's a stowaway below.'

" 'It's no living voice,' was the reply; 'it sounds as if it comes from a skelington.'

"I found a crowd of men standing in awed postures near the hatch, and the most frightened of all looked to me to be the ordinary seaman Dick, who had backed away on the other side of the hatch, and stood looking on, leaning with his hands on his knees, and staring as if he were fascinated. I waited a couple or three minutes, which, in a business of this kind, seems a long time, and, hearing nothing, I was going to ridicule the men for their nervousness, when a hollow voice under the hatch said distinctly, 'It's a terrible thing to be a ghost and not be able to get out.'

"I was greatly startled, and ran aft to tell the captain, who agreed with me that there must be a stowaway in the hold, and that he had gone mad. We both went forward, and the hatch was lifted, and we looked on top of the coal; and I was then about to ask some of the men to join me in a search in the forepeak, for upon my word I had no taste single-handed for a job of that kind at such a moment, when the voice said, 'There's no use looking, you'll never find me. I'm not to be seen.'

" 'Confound me!' cried the skipper, polishing his forehead with a pocket-handkerchief, 'if ever I heard of such a thing. I'll tell you what it is,' he shouted, looking into the hatch, 'dead men can't talk, and so, as you're bound to be

alive, you'd better come up out of that, and smartly too— d'ye hear?— or you'll find this the worst attempt at skylarking that was ever made.'

"There was a short silence, and you'd see all hands straining their ears, for there was light enough for that, given out by a lantern one of the men held.

" 'You couldn't catch me because you couldn't see me,' said the voice in a die-away tone, and this time it came from the direction of the main hatch, as though it had flitted aft.

" 'Well,' says the captain, 'may I be jiggered!' and without another word he walked away on to the poop.

"I told the men to clap the hatches on again, and they did this in double-quick time, evidently afraid that the ghost might pop up out of the hold if they didn't mind their eye.

"All this made us very superstitious, from the captain down to the boys. We talked it over in the cabin, and the mate was incredulous, and disposed to ridicule me.

" 'Any way,' said he, 'it's strange that this voice is only heard in your watch. It's never favored me with any remarks. The creaking and groaning of an old wooden ship is often like spoken words, and what you've been hearing may be nothing but a deception of the ear.'

" 'A deception in your eye,' cried the skipper. 'The timbers of an old wooden ship may strain and creak in the Dutch language, but hang me if they ever talked good, sensible English. However, I'm not going to worry. For my part,' said he, with a nervous glance around him, 'I don't believe in ghosts; whatever it is that's talking in the hold may go on jawing, so long as he sticks to that, and don't frighten the men with an ugly mug, nor come upon us for a man's allowance.'

" 'If it's anybody's ghost,' said I, 'it must be the Italian's, the chap that was starved in the forepeak.'

" 'I doubt that,' said the skipper. 'I didn't detect anything foreign in what he said. To my ear it sounded more like Whitechapel than Italiano.'

"Well, for another week we heard little more of the ghost. It's true that one middle watch a chap I had sent aloft to loose the main-royal had hardly stepped out of the lower rigging, after lingering in the crosstrees to overhaul his clew-lines, when he comes rushing up to me and cries out, 'I've been hailed from aloft, sir! a voice has just sung out, "Tommy, jump aloft again that I may have a good look at you!"'

" 'Who's up there?' I asked him, staring into the gloom where the mast and yards went towering.

" 'There's no one up there, sir; I'll swear it. I was bound to see him had any one been there,' he answered, evidently very much frightened.

"It occurred to me that some one of the crew might be lying hid in the top, and that if I could catch him I might find out who the ghost was. So I jumped into the rigging and trotted aloft, keeping my eye on the lee rigging, to make sure that no one descended by it. I gained the top, but nobody was there. I mounted to the crosstrees, but the deuce a sign of any one could I see. I came down, feeling both foolish and scared; for you see I had heard the voice myself in the hold; there was no question that there was a voice, belonging to nobody knew what, knocking about the ship, and consequently it was now impossible to help believing a man when he said he heard it.

"However, it was necessary to keep the men in heart, and this was not to be done by captain and mates appearing scared; so I reasoned a bit with the man, told him that there were no such things as ghosts, that a voice was bound to come from a live person, because a spectre couldn't possibly have lungs, those organs being of a perishable nature, and then sent him forward, but no easier in his mind, I suspect, than I was. Anyhow, I was glad when eight bells struck and it was my turn to go below. But, as I have said, nothing much came of this— at least, nothing that reached my ears. But not many nights following the ship lay becalmed— there wasn't a breath of air, and the sea lay smooth as polished jet. This time I had the middle watch again. I was walking quietly up and down the poop, on the lookout for a deeper shadow upon the sea to indicate the approach of wind, when a man came up the ladder and said, 'There's some one a-talking to the ship under the bows.'

" 'Are you awake?' said I.

" 'Heaven help me, as I stand here, sir,' exclaimed the fellow, solemnly, 'if that there woice which talked in the hold t'other day ain't now over the side.'

"I ran forward, and found most of the watch huddled together near the starboard cathead. I peered over, and there was a dead silence.

" 'What are you looking over that side for? I'm here!' said a thin, faint voice, that seemed more in the air than in the sea.

"There!' exclaimed one of the seamen, in a hoarse whisper, 'that's the third time. Whichever side we look, he's on the other.'

" 'But there must be some one in the water,' said another man. 'Anybody see his houtline? cuss me if I couldn't swear I see a chap swimmin' just now.'

"'No, no,' answered some one, gruffly, 'nothing but phosphorus, Joe, and the right sort o' stuff, too, for if this ain't old Nick—'

" 'You're a liar, Sam!' came the voice clear, and, as one could swear, plain from over the side.

"There was a general recoil, and a sort of groan ran among the men.

"At the same moment I collared a figure standing near me, and slued him round to bring his face fair to the starlight, clear of the staysail. 'Come you

along with me, Master Dick,' said I; and I marched him off the forecastle, along the main deck, and up on to the poop. 'So *you're* the ghost, eh?' said I. 'Why, to have kept your secret you should have given my elbow a wider berth. No wonder the voice only makes observations in my watch. You're too lazy, I suppose, to leave your hammock to try your wonderful power on the mate, eh? Now see here,' said I, finding him silent, and noticing how white his face glimmered to the stars, 'I know you're the man, so you'd better confess. Own the truth and I'll keep your secret, providing you belay all further tricks of the same kind; deny that you're the ghost and I'll speak to the captain and set the men upon you.'

"This fairly frightened him. 'Well, sir, it's true; I'm the voice, sir; but for God's sake keep the secret, sir. The men 'ud have my life if they found out that it was me as scared them.'

"This confession was what I needed, for though when standing pretty close to him on the forecastle I could have sworn that it was he who uttered the words which perplexed and awed the sailors, yet so perfect was the deception, so fine, in short, was his skill as a ventriloquist that, had he stoutly denied and gone on denying that he was the 'voice,' I should have believed him and continued sharing in the wonder and superstition of the crew. I kept his secret as I promised; but, somehow or other, it leaked out in time that he could deceive the ear by apparently pitching his voice among the rigging, or under the deck, or over the side, though the discovery was not made until the 'ghost' had for a long time ceased to trouble the ship's company, and until the men's superstitious awe had faded somewhat, and they had recovered their old cheerfulness. We then sent for Dick to the cabin, where he gave us a real entertainment as a ventriloquist, imitating all sorts of animals, and producing sounds as of women in distress and men singing out for help, in the berths; indeed, such was the skill that I'd often see the skipper and mate turning startled to look in the direction whence the voices proceeded.

"He made his peace with the men by amusing them in the same way; so that, instead of getting the rope's ending aft and the pummeling forward which he deserved, he ended as a real and general favorite, and one of the most amusing fellows that a man ever was shipmate with. I used to tell him that if he chose to perform ashore, he was sure to make plenty of money, since such ventriloquial powers as his was the rarest thing in the world; and I'd sometimes fancy he meant to take my advice. But whether he died or kept on going to sea I don't know, for after he left the ship I never saw nor heard of him again."

12: Experience

Albert Richard Wetjen

1900-1948

Blue Book Feb 1924

THE big-boned Swedish mate of the Polaris shifted uneasily on his feet.

He twisted his sandy mustache; he frowned; he moved his jaws as though chewing his cheeks.

"Gins," he rumbled. "We ought to have new gin-blocks. Two derricks for'ard an' one aft not safe."

"Quiet!" thundered Captain Nelson. His bull neck swelled and grew red; his smooth, fat face grew red; the veins stood out like rope. The deep blue eyes of him popped out from under bushy yellow brows. He took a tuck in his blue serge pants and scratched his leg.

He said: "I will have no new gins."

The mate blinked and went on— he was a very patient man: 'We ought to have new falls for the boats—"

Captain Nelson snorted.

"I will have no gins this voyage. Nor new falls— nor anything! They will do for a while. Have I sailed for thirty years to be told I don't know rope?"

The mate rumbled, "But—" and then shrugged. You can't argue with a captain who also owns his ship.

"Bah!" said Captain Nelson. He went for'ard along the main deck. He rolled like a ship in a beam sea, a great, broad hulk of a man, five feet seven high. The mate jerked at his mustache, and his frown deepened. He went up on the bridge and cursed a snub-nosed boy polishing brass-work there. It relieved him somewhat.

For'ard, Captain Nelson found the carpenter and two men spreading the tarpaulins over Number One hatch. He watched for awhile. The men dropped the iron battens in place, and the carpenter started to fold in the corners of the canvas ready for wedging. Captain Nelson rolled forward.

He thundered: "Not that way! Give it me."

He pushed the carpenter aside. The man stood up and snorted. He was very much ruffled. He started: "I've been on lots of ships, an' I've always folded in corners—"

"On this ship you do it my way." The Captain banged the canvas savagely until it was to his satisfaction. He straightened.

"See that?" He rolled on to the fo'c'stlehead and inspected the old-fashioned anchors. The carpenter swore and scratched his head. He was a new man on the *Polaris*.

TWO hours later the little steamship slipped out of Antwerp and headed to the open sea. She was a queer-looking craft, a one-time schooner. Her bridge was right aft, built over and extended from the one-time poop. The galley and storeroom stood in a little deckhouse amidships. For'ard was a very small t'gallant fo'c'stle. Her masts were fat and stumpy— not her old sailing masts. Her wheel was an atrocious hand affair, chains about a wooden drum. Her smokestack stuck up like a cigarette from a flat board, immediately abaft the scanty little navigation bridge. She smelled of tallow and tar and old coal cargoes. Her total crew numbered twenty men.

The second mate was busy with the seamen, clearing up the decks and washing down, The mate paced the bridge with Captain Nelson. The helmsman stood in a badly built matched-board house, open at the for'ard end, before a wheel considerably bigger than himself.

"Typhoon," said the Captain, frowning. He was finishing a long argument. "Fairy tales. Bah! Twice I've sailed to Sierra Leone, once to Iceland. When I was a boy, I took a voyage to Tokio. J never saw a typhoon. Old woman's yarns." He scratched his leg viciously.

"It is so," the mate insisted. "Fifteen years away, I saw a wind near Madagascar. And such a wind! There was a man starting from for'ard to relieve the wheel, and the wind lifted him and blew him onto the lower bridge. With my own eyes—"

Captain Nelson thundered, "Bah!" and his neck swelled and grew red. He hammered the bridge-rail with his fists. "Am I a child to believe that? I've never seen such a wind. There is none. You are a good liar, Svensen. Like Olson! He said to me he had seen fishes rain in the rain. Bah!"

The Swede jerked his mustache and scowled. He knew the Captain had spent most of his sea life in the Baltic and the North Sea. What did he know of southern hurricanes?

"Fairy tales," snorted the Captain. "They try to tell me of the sea serpent. have seen the kraken, the great squid, and I know that is true. But I have never seen the sea-serpent. And I have sailed for thirty years. Is that not enough, tell me, for a man to see these things if they were so?"

The mate nodded but said nothing. He scowled at the weather sky where the clouds were massing darkly. Captain Nelson chuckled and scratched his leg.

"I will not believe that fishes rain— nor winds blow men up— nor sea-serpents. We sail now for America— first for this New York and then the river St. Lawrence. They tell me I shall presently sail fresh water where I cannot see across. I think they lie, but we shall see. And these houses that go thirty decks up we shall see also. It may be fairy tales too. Bah!"

The Swede said curiously: "Your first voyage to America, sir?" The Captain nodded. He clucked deep in his throat and scratched his leg again.

"They tell me I cannot go across the Western Ocean this time of the year— not in the *Polaris*. She is old, they say, not strong as a ship needs be for great storms. I tell them it is the man, not the ship. *I* have never lost a ship. And I get the charter, to start when we get to this fairytale lake. I sail. Sardines and wine and cloth for New York. Cars and steel for Montreal. Then light to this big lake of fresh water where it may be we load iron ore. They say the *Polaris* will not do all this. They refuse insurance. Fairy tales. Bah! We will show them."

He turned and rolled away, the son and grandson of sea captains, a descendent from the fiord men of old. The sea was salt. He knew because he had sailed it for thirty years, and tasted it too. It was wet. He knew because he had felt its wetness. In the same way he knew that a blow from a fist hurt because he had felt blows from fists. A strange man, Captain Nelson. The mate shook his head as he paced the bridge. He fumbled inside his jacket for an ivory charm. The touch of the thing comforted him.

The *Polaris* limped into New York, and her decks were ruin. Salt caked her from truck to scuppers. Her engines were wheezy and running fitfully, and half her rigging hung in hopeless-looking bights. Nor had she any boats left. But her crew was safe, and on her bridge a grim, wearylooking Captain Nelson stood. He thundered at the equally weary mate: "They told me she would not come across. Bah! We will show them!"

At her appointed time the Polaris was patched up, was unloaded and loaded again. She crept painfully up the coast and curved into the broad St. Lawrence. Captain Nelson's eyes popped as he traversed the mighty stream. The short, sullen seas of the Baltic were an old tale. The angry, shallow chop of the North Sea and the Channel he knew. He remembered even the quiet swell of the glassy doldrums and the swollen floods of tropic rivers. But this calm, deep surge of endless water, that split a very continent in twain, was fresh to him.

He was frowning by the time Quebec was reached. At Montreal, where the *Polaris* docked, he recovered somewhat. The river had resumed river-like proportions, as was proper. He even argued with the mate one night, in French Marie's saloon, that it was impossible for any river to run much farther inland— because he had never known any such river.

The *Polaris* accomplished at Montreal what she was supposed to accomplish. Then she groped on into the hinterland, the Captain swearing softly to himself as the river curved endlessly before him. He studied his charts, new charts bought in New York, and wondered. These immense masses of water! Great Lakes. He might believe that. It was his experience that charts

seldom lied. But this talk of them being fresh water. Bah! It was his experience that a fresh-water lake never exceeded a certain limited size. Doubtless these lakes were fed somewhere from the sea.

The ship plodded by Wolfe Island and breasted the surge of Lake Ontario. The Captain's eyes bulged. He took to swearing more and more to himself. He choked at the sight of the long, lean-bellied Lake steamers, with such immense flat decks between after engine house and fo'c'stlehead.

He said to the mate, protesting: "This is no lake. This is the sea, the Pacific I sailed once when I went to Tokio. It was calm like this then. Yes, this is the sea." But he would not look at the charts again.

The mate grunted and jerked at his mustache. Then he grinned and disappeared for a while. He dropped a bucket overside at the end of a heaving-line and bore it up to the bridge when it was full.

He rumbled solemnly, "Fresh, sir,"' and waited.

The Captain's bull neck swelled and grew red. His smooth, fat face grew red also. The veins stood out like rope. The deep blue eyes of him bulged from under bushy yellow brows. He scratched his leg mechanically.

He thundered: "Quiet! This is no lake. There never was such a lake as this. I have never—" He stopped abruptly. A little frightened look crept into his eyes. He splashed his fingers into the bucket and then sucked them. He grew very quiet, hardly breathing. He rocked for a moment as though struck by something solid. He scratched his leg again. Bleakly he searched the vacant horizon.

He said hazily: "They tell me of fishes that rain. And typhoons. And sea-serpents. Bah! Fairy tales." He recovered somewhat. He thundered again, insistently: "This water! Fresh! Bah!" He tasted it once more and cocked his head to one side. "Fresh! Bah! There is a salt tinge. I can feel it. Fresh? Fairy tales!"

He snorted and rolled away. With a sigh the mate allowed the water to run over the bucket's side. He moved off after a while, shaking his head. He was a very patient man.

The *Polaris* went through the Welland Canal commanded by a dazed man. He blinked at Lake Erie and then retired to his charts. It was unbelievable, but it was so. The charts said it was. Worse! The charts said the Lakes ahead were bigger. He sighed and wondered if he was going mad, or dreaming. The mate was satisfied these days, chuckling often, twisting his mustache gently.

By virtue of good luck, fine weather and the uncanny sea-sense of her master that operated under any conditions, the *Polaris* crept at last unharmed into Lake Superior and began the long run past Whitefish Point to Duluth, where her charter was to commence in earnest. At Sault Ste. Marie, just before

the greatest Lake was reached, Captain Nelson was forced to fly signals for a doctor. An able seaman had fallen from the bos'n's chair at the head of the smokestack, where he had been painting.

The doctor came aboard, a cheery, redfaced man with white fringe whiskers and a hearty voice. The Captain disliked him from the start. While setting the seaman's broken leg and ribs, the doctor talked mightily.

"From the deep water, eh? Hah! Don't laugh at our Lakes. I know you ocean men. Come here and grin. Lake sailing easy, eh? Seems like a holiday. Wait a bit! Wait a bit! There's storms here that'll crimp your hair. Make you pray for sea-room, too."

"Bah!" thundered Captain Nelson pugnaciously. "Storms here! I could sail across this water in two days— one, maybe. A pond. Pooh! I have never seen storms in a sheltered harbor. Land all around."

"Wait a bit! Wait a bit!" the genial doctor admonished. He stopped to shoot something into the seaman's arm. "Storms you'll see afore you're through. What you in? Taking ore-company charter, eh? Lots of time for you to learn, then. You'll pass Whitefish Point on your way. Watch out. Oh, watch out. Graveyard of the Lakes, they call it. Lake floor's thick with ships that went down there. Piled on each other."

"Bah!" Captain Nelson's bull neck swelled and grew red. "Bah!" His smooth, fat face grew red. 'What can you expect? There can be no sailors on this water. Bad seamanship. I know! I have talked with a Lake skipper. He had never tasted deep sea. This is for pleasure-boats. Storms and wrecks— fairy tales! I have not seen a ripple since I came."

The doctor went ashore laughing. He told them the joke at the club that night.

"Nelson's his name. Cast-iron Norwegian. Believes nothing he don't see. Measures our water by the Western Ocean and giggles. I'd like to meet him a year from now."

THE Polaris steamed on. The Captain said less about fairy tales and fresh water when he nearly ran into a waterlogged derelict off Whitefish Point. His charts, too, held him dumb. You can't argue with charts. He had thought the North Sea and Pacific, the Baltic and the Atlantic was the world. It could not be, and yet it was so, against all experience— a lake across which his strongest glasses could not see. He took soundings, doubting the charts, but found them correct. Still, a hundred fathoms, which his lead showed, was not much. He scratched his leg when he thought of this. It took a thousand fathoms to make a sea. Shallow little pond! He sniffed, but he made no more soundings.

The evening he sighted the Gull Rock Light, the water started to swell. It came up choppy at first— choppy, short and breaking over a sort of under-running pulse. Spray even flew over the knight'sheads. The mate rumbled: "We'll batten down, sir— and put lashings extra on the boats, eh? The glass—"

Captain Nelson thundered "Quiet!" and his soul was in revolt. "Am I a fool to be told the glass is falling? Batten down. Bah! There is no water here to make a sea." He rolled away and stood in the tiny bridge-wing, his hands behind him, snorting into the wind.

By dark there was weather. A sea flooded the open fore-hatch. The fo'c'stle was swimming. A few bules and kegs of deck-cargo aft had gone. The house wherein the helmsman wrestled with the monster wheel had been knocked drunkenly askew.

The mate took a chance at last. He called to the bos'n. He shouted, above the wind: "Lash everything. Get the carpenter and batten down. We're in for a dirty night."

Captain Nelson stood near and heard this. His bull neck swelled. He scowled. It was on his lips to roar a counter-command when a bitter cold spray danced over the dodger, slapped him across the mouth and robbed him of breath. He was soaked to the skin— he had not even troubled to put on his oilskins, so great was his contempt. The bos'n looked at him inquiringly. The mate waited. Then he said sharply, when the Captain made no move: "Get along and do as you're told!"

The bos'n muttered, "Yessir," and hurried away. The Captain thundered, suddenly getting back his breath, "Fairy tales! Bah!" and rolled to his cabin. He went in and slammed the door with a bang, leaving the mate and the second to carry the ship through. Nor did he show his face again until next morning, when the sun shone and the water had calmed. He noted his ship had a mauled look, and deep inside, he was perplexed.

In the minute chart-room, behind the drunken wheelhouse, he found an entry in the log-book under date of the previous night. It ran: "Heavy wind and sea. Severe damage done to cargo." Wrath stirred in him. Bah! A storm on fresh water! He rubbed out the entry and wrote: "Slight swell running. Wind fair. A little damage done to cargo." Then scratching his leg viciously, he went to see the carpenter about fixing the wheelhouse. He was in a very bad temper all that morning. The mate he ignored completely.

THE Polaris drew near her destination.

She curved round the Apostle Islands and picked up Granite Point far on her starboard beam. Because of his inexperience with the Lakes, and partly because of his careless contempt and indifference to the navigation, the

Captain had lost time on his run from the sea. But still, he was arriving. Somewhere ahead lay Duluth, and the ore company that had chartered him.

It was late afternoon, with the port of his profanities in sight, the breakwaters to the harbor in view, when the *Polaris*, contemptuously skirting a deserted-looking shore, ran smack on to a sand bar.

When it happened, the mate rumbled: "I told you we should have kept farther out." He blinked and jerked at his mustache. The Captain cursed and shook his fists at distant Duluth.

"These blasted Lakes! Never have I sailed such a place. The whole country is crazy. I will not stand for it. Damn the charter! Back we go to the sea. Bah! Am I a child to spend my life playing with ponds?"

The *Polaris* was stuck hard and fast, on an even keel. Luckily the day was calm. Scarce a ripple shook the surface of the water. The wind was off-shore and very fair. The sun was bright. The sky was misty blue. The Captain put the engines astern time and again. They stirred up considerable sand. That was all. There was no movement of the *Polaris*. The Captain cursed again. Then he rolled below and shut himself in his room.

After a while the mate tapped at the door. He said: "Shall I signal for a tow, sir?"

Captain Nelson exploded. He bounced up from the settee where he had been lying. He choked. His bull neck swelled and grew red. His smooth, fat face grew red. The deep. blue eyes of him popped out from under bushy yellow brows. He shook his fists.

He thundered: "Quiet! A tow? What should I be wanting with a tow? We will wait for the flood tide and back off ourselves. Are you crazy, Svensen? Am I made of money? Bah!"

The mate started, unperturbed: "There is—"

"Get out!" choked the Captain. "Am I a fool?"

"But—" said the mate. The Captain took a step toward him, and he fled.

"Am I crazy?" the Captain demanded of his mirror when the mate had gone. "Is every man crazy? They tell me of fresh water and lakes I cannot see across. They tell me of typhoons and sea-serpents. Now they want me to take a tow, a tow, when my ship is only on a sandbar. Fairy tales! Bah!" He snorted after a while: "I think all sailors died with my father."

HOURS passed. The mate went to his room and slept, smiling wisely, knowing many things. He was a patient man. The second mate and a seaman kept the watch. The rest of the crew lounged in the fo'c'stle and talked with strange tongues and gambled at strange games.

Then there came from between the harbor breakwaters, miles away, a bluff-bowed fussy tug with a great squat stern and an immense fat black smokestack. From her bridge window hung a lean, hollow-cheeked man in a dilapidated uniform. He spat tobacco-juice incessantly and had a high, squeaky voice.

The tug churned right round the Polaris, her lesser draft taking her clear over the sand on which the bigger ship rested. Apparently satisfied she was fast, the tug captain squeaked shrilly.

"Want a tow? Hi! Take you in reasonable."

The second mate straightened from his seat in the cool chart-room and rubbed his eyes. Yawning, he went out on the bridge. He was a Dane, dark-haired and gray-eyed. In his quaint English he answered the hail. Then he went to call Captain Nelson.

Ruffled, like a bear tormented, the Captain rolled to the ship's rail and leaned over.

"Go to hell!" he thundered. "Am I crazy to need a tow?"

The thin man gasped and spat tobacco overside. In the bows of the tug, a whitewhiskered seaman was coiling a thin heaving-line ready for throwing. He looked up abruptly at the Captain's words.

"Wot the hell," said the master of the tug. "You can't stay here all day."

"Can't I? Can't I?" bawled the Captain. He choked, and his neck swelled and grew red. He scratched his leg and thundered again: "Is there a law in this mad country that a ship cannot run aground? Am I crazy to pay for a tow? There is nothing wrong. A little sand holds us. I wait for the flood tide to float us off. Get out of my sight. Tow! Bah!"

"You're waiting for what?" roared the astonished master of the tug.

"Tide! Flood tide!"

The mate of the Polaris roused by the shouting, touched his commander's elbow. "But, sir—" he started. The Captain swung on him and snarled: "Shut up, you!"

"Tide?" squeaked the master of the tug. He tried to spit tobacco-juice, apparently swallowed some and started to cough. His eyes ran water. His face went red and seemed to puff.

"Did you say tide?" he asked feebly at last.

The old white-whiskered seaman in the tug's bows removed his clay pipe. He dropped the heaving-line he was coiling and stared with red-rimmed eyes. "Well, I'll be damned!" he said.

"My God," croaked the master of the tug. He collapsed inside his wheelhouse.

"Get out!" thundered Captain Nelson, swinging back to the rail. His brow was dark. 'Get out of here. I want no tow."

The master of the tug stuck out his head again. He had recovered himself. He spat tobacco-juice overside. He squeaked, quite calmly: "There is no tide."

CAPTAIN NELSON'S bull neck swelled. His smooth, fat face grew red. Anger swept him. This was the crowning insult. Too long had men taken him for a child, telling him quaint tales. He scratched his leg and stormed: "Quiet! Am I a fool? Because I come from the sea to strange waters, you think I crazy altogether? No tide? Bah! More fairy tales. So they tell me sea-serpents and fishes that rain. Bah! And typhoons! Go away."

"But sir—" said the mate behind him.

He flung, "Shut up!" over his shoulder and snorted.

"You're crazy, Cap'," said the master of the tug. The white-whiskered seaman in the bows scratched his head. He called: "Say, you must be crazy. Tides? Huh! There's everything but, here."

"Quiet!" thundered the outraged Captain Nelson. "Have I sailed the sea for thirty years to be told this? Fool I have been to come here at all. This pond shall I leave. No tide! Never have I sailed a sea that had no tide. I have never known the tide not to come. It is impossible. I am not crazy. Sooner would I believe in sea-serpents and typhoons. Get out. Bah!"

"But," said the mate behind him, "there is no tide here. It is known. There never was a tide in these waters."

"You too?" shouted the Captain. "Must every man think I know nothing? Have I sailed the sea for thirty years to be told there is no such thing as tide? Bah! Bah! Bah! Fairy tales!" He stamped along the rail and shook his fists.

"I'll come back tonight," called the master of the tug. Doubling up with what might have been laughter, he headed back for the breakwaters. In the bows of his craft the white-whiskered old seaman sank helpless on a bitt and looked at Captain Nelson.

"I shall wait for the tide," the Captain announced. "Don't talk to me. This is conspiracy against me. To kid me, eh? I am not a boy. Thirty years on the sea! I know. Fairy tales. Bah!" He rolled away to his cabin and locked himself in, snorting indignantly. The mate grunted and went back to his bunk. More days, more dollars for him.

After a while, when the ship had settled to peace again, Captain Nelson came furtively from his cabin and went right aft. He leaned over the rail and gazed at the clear, cold water. Anxiously he watched it, marking its level from a rust-spot on the red-painted great rudder. He could just see the rudder by

leaning far outboard. The water must rise or fall. It could not be that there was no tide. All his life he had navigated according to tide.

It must be there was a tide here. He could not imagine any body of water so great without a tide. He was lost, shaken. His confidence in himself and his seamanship was rocking. If you could not depend on the tide, what could you depend on? Perhaps in some parts of the world the sun did not rise in the east and set in the west. Perhaps in some parts it did not rise at all. And the moon likewise. Perhaps even the stars! How then could a man get a sight and run his reckoning? They had told him at the navigation school, twenty odd years before, that such matters ran with the great unchanging law of things. He did not remember whether tides had been included, but he thought they had.

He scratched his leg mechanically, and frowned. The water still swirled around the rust-spot. No rise, no fall. Perhaps it was slack water. He hoped so. Perhaps the compass pointed to the east sometimes. It might be. Perhaps that accounted for so many puzzling wrecks. Some law was not working. If such a state of affairs was so, what right had the books and the schools to bluff? Why should they tell lies? He frowned deeper than before.

Sea-serpents, typhoons, fishes that rained, tideless seas, freshwater seas, lakes you couldn't look across, storms that wrecked ships in a pond! They whirled through his brain in a jumble. He stirred uneasily and scratched his leg again. He was a respectable, honest, capable skipper. He had never lost a ship. He had never been told his navigation was incompetent. He had always considered himself as one of vast experience, able, looking with proper contempt and patronage on younger men.

But this was beyond experience. It violated the wisdom of years. The whole voyage had been crazy. Everything seemed reversed. Men mocked him. He swore strange oaths and watched the rust-spot, a very lonely and bewildered old man. After a while he crept back to his cabin and raked a whisky-bottle from his locker. He thought he needed a drink.

AT evening the tug came back. The lean, hollow-cheeked man still leaned from the bridge window and spat tobacco-juice. And beside the white-whiskered seaman in the bows now stood two men in neat tweed suits and white stiff collars.

"Want a tow?" squeaked the master of the tug. He spat overside. Captain Nelson bounced on the bridge, all his pugnacity aroused.

"Quiet!" he thundered. "I will not have a tow. The tide will soon come, and I shall float off."

The two well-dressed men started to laugh. They pulled out notebooks and waved them. "Can we come aboard?" one of them called.

The Captain stormed: "I will kill the first man." He shook his fists.

"We're from the papers," said the man in response. "I'm from the *Herald*. This chap's from the *Tribune*. We want a story—"'

"Good stuff!" shouted the other man. "Give you publicity. Skipper waiting for the tide off Duluth."

The Captain thundered, outraged: "Go to hell! Take your boat to hell! I would not have a tow if I stay here forever now. Get out. Bah! No tide! Fairy tales!"

Abruptly he rolled aft, out of sight of the tug, frowning and swearing. The mate followed him. The tug, after a short conversation between the master and the two reporters, put back for Duluth.

"Sir," asked the mate quietly, "shall I lower a boat and carry out an anchor?"

The Captain swelled and grew red. "No!" he stormed. '"No!"

"But," said the mate patiently," there is no tide."

"Fairy tales," shouted the Captain. "Bah! Leave me alone."

He went aft and hung over the rail, watching the rust-spot on the rudder. And he was there when the stars came out and the cold Lake breeze made him shiver. He went to his room reluctantly and lay awake most of the night, perplexed. Twice he got up and went aft to view the water, and twice he came back swearing. There was no tide.

It was unbelievable and monstrous and impossible. But it was so. You could not dispute that rust-spot. The Captain slept at last, fitfully, tossing and turning in his narrow bunk.

WITH the dawn he was up and aft again.

No change. The rust-spot stood as it had before, half in, half out of the clear water. The mate came to him after breakfast.

"Shall I lower a boat—" he commenced, twisting his mustache. He was a very patient man. The Captain croaked: "No! I will not haul myself off. The tide will come. This is strange, but there must be a tide sometime. Never have I seen a day when there was no tide. Get out of my sight."

"Yes sir," said the mate carefully. He walked away, frowning. With suppressed excitement, the crew washed down. Some of them broke into giggles at times. The mate cursed them coldly when he heard. He liked Captain Nelson. It was not right they should laugh at him.

The *Polaris* stayed on the sandbar all that day, while Captain Nelson hung over the rail and waited for the tide. By the grace of the sea-gods the weather held fine, else the steamer would have been battered to bits as she lay.

On the morning of the third day the tug came out again. Her master made no attempt to get a tow. His decks were loaded with curious townsfolk who had paid a dollar a head to view the outland captain who waited for a tide. The tug swept slowly round the *Polaris* three times and then returned to Duluth. The raw-boned mate flushed under his tan as he heard the fading laughter. He swore a mighty oath. Then he started determinedly for'ard.

"Let go the port lifeboat," he roared. His voice was savage. The crew jumped, alarmed. They hesitated a moment and then ran for the poop. The whining of the old falls roused Captain Nelson from his survey of the rust-spot on the rudder. He came angrily on to the bridge.

"Damn you, Svensen! Who gave you orders? I will not drag my ship off."

The mate said harshly: "She's coming off, and you can be damned." His eyes were frosty and unafraid at his mutiny. "I'm sick of being laughed at. You're an old fool, and you know it. What do we know of strange waters? We must sail according as we find them. I do not know these Lakes, either, but the books say certain things, and the books do not always lie. Else how should we navigate!"

"Quiet!" thundered the Captain. He shook his fists. "Order that boat in. I will not— The tide must be somewhere," he ended plaintively. He looked suddenly old. Secretly he was glad the decision had been taken from him. He felt he was up against something subtle that was not to be resisted. It frightened him. He bluffed with a semblance of his usual arrogance: "Have I sailed the sea for thirty years to find a place without a tide?"

"You have," snapped the mate grimly. He strode away to superintend the lowering of an anchor to the boat. The Captain choked. His bull neck grew red. His smooth, fat face grew red also. He clenched his fists, and for a moment seemed about to start after the mate.

Then the smoke from the departing tug caught his eye, and he hesitated. Uneasiness swept him. He must be wrong. But— but— the world would fall about his ears. And they were laughing at him. He was waiting for a tide that they said would never come. There was no tide. He felt bewildered, and slowly rolled to his cabin.

THE mate had her off at dusk, the ship's winches gripping the cable and hauling on the anchor which had been dropped to the Lake floor far astern. The ship's engines went astern too. The *Polaris* slipped off the sand and floated lightly on the Lake. Free again! The mate went to Captain Nelson when he had the ship making slowly for the distant breakwaters.

"Are you taking her in, sir?" he inquired grimly. The Captain rose from his chair and with astonishing meekness followed the mate on deck.

Once or twice he rolled into the chartroom for a look at the chart. Apart from that, he didn't move.

As they were making for an anchorage in the center of the bay, a fussy white-painted launch shot alongside. A snappy-looking serge-suited man stood in the stern sheets and bellowed for a line. At a gesture from Nelson the mate ordered the pilot-ladder dropped. The snappy-looking stranger clambered up and strode on the bridge.

"Captain Nelson? Glad to meet you. I'm your charter party's representative. Charter starts soon as you're docked. Been making a damned fool of yourself, so I hear. Waiting for the tide! You're the laughingstock of the Lakes..... Well, that's your dock— over there." He pointed. "Get in soon as you can..... By the way," he added, grinning, "how'd you get off? Take a tow?"

CAPTAIN NELSON roused himself. And he forgot his fear and humiliation. He was the seaman, capable, confident.

"Quiet!" he thundered.

"But," insinuated the agent, "you found there was no tide, eh?"

The Captain's bull neck swelled and grew red. His smooth, fat face grew red also. The veins stood out like rope. He shook his fists. He breathed deep. Then he burst out, in one great shedding of his old standards: "Yes, I did! I found there was no tide. I saw buildings thirty decks high— and fresh water seas— and storms in ponds— and damned fools who asked crazy questions!" He shouted enormously: "Now show me your sea-serpents! And your typhoons! And your fishes that rain! I guess I can stand them. They might be! Have I sailed the deep water for thirty years without learning to be reasonable? Bah!"

He scratched his leg. He stalked away, rolling like a ship in a beam sea. The mate grinned under his hand and pulled his mustache. He had been expecting this for days. He was a very patient man.

"My God," said the agent weakly. His grin disappeared.

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13: A Comedy of Dullness

J. J. Bell

1871-1934

Australian Town and Country Journal, 17 June 1914

Scottish author and playwright; noted for his "Wee Macgreegor" tales.

"WHY WILL people write dull books?" Mrs. Methven murmured impatiently, flinging the red-covered novel aside and rising from the couch whereon she had been reclining for a long hour. "Life is dull enough in all conscience, without any addition from the libraries."

Languidly she crossed the spacious drawing-room and halted by one of the large windows. She was a dark, handsome woman of 25 and she had been a widow for over a year. The late Mr. Methven had married at an age when the average man is either a grandfather or a confirmed bachelor. The orphan girl on whom he had set his venerable but virgin heart had accepted him quite honestly for the home and wealth he could give her, yet she made earth such a cheerful place for him that he had been sorry indeed to leave it at 68.

Now she was free, and rich enough to indulge her freedom as she chose, and— desperately dull.

Few people were moving in the square on which she idly looked, but presently a tall, slight, black-coated figure caught her attention.

"I do believe that is Dick Charterhouse," she said to herself, after a brief scrutiny. "Haven't seen him for years. How earnest he looks! It would be rather nice to have a chat with him again. Why does he not think of calling? He knows perfectly well that I live here."

The black-coated figure went on without looking to right or left. On an impulse Mrs. Methven rushed to the bell. On the appearance of the maid she said quickly, but calmly— "Eliza, a clergyman has just passed the house— to the left. Run after him and say that I desire to speak to him."

Roused from a dullness almost as heavy as that of her mistress, Eliza obeyed with alacrity.

"What a goose I am!" muttered Mrs. Methven. "I have nothing to say to him. I hope Eliza does not catch him." He entered the room, looking somewhat bewildered.

"It was good of you to come back," she said, after the formal greeting, which was rather awkward on her part.

"Good of you to ask me, Mrs. Methven. I have passed your house frequently of late, and have intended calling upon you."

"Bolton Square is paved with good intentions, I suppose. You have not come to see me since I was married. I never had a host of friends, you know."

"You have been having a sad time," he began lamely.

"Dullness, sheer dullness, is my chief trouble at present. I don't know what I want. But let us have tea and please tell me about yourself."

"Myself!— a limited subject. Mrs. Methven. Only my work—"

"It was always your work, I remember."

"Ah! you remember! Well, well," he continued, with a sigh, "there's nothing new to tell you. I go into the same sad corners as of yore, and I have to confess that I don't see much change for the better."

"The poor are strong conservatives," she remarked. "You remember when I tried my little hand at slumming. Ah, dear! the flesh was weak."

"Why not give it up? You've done your share of the dirty work. Now you deserve to be presented with a sweet little living in the country."

"It is kind of you to consider my welfare," he said gravely, remembering their last meeting.

Mrs. Methven proceeded to pour out tea.

"Two lumps?" she asked lightly.

"What a wonderful memory!"

"Merely for trifles, Mr. Charterhouse. Do you know, you are making me feel almost merry?"

"You should always be merry," he said softly.

"No; I ought to be serious; but I never get deeper than dullness."

They talked on for half an hour, and then he looked at his watch and mentioned an engagement. "Is it very important?" she asked in a way that redeemed the forwardness of the question. Charterhouse was tempted.

"It's kind of you, Maud," he said, gratefully. "It's good to be your friend once more."

"I'm selfish, as you know," he returned, "and I'm often lonely. Take pity; and come to see me sometimes."

"Whenever I can get away from my work I shall come," he said.

"Always your work!" she cried, a little impatiently.

A minute later he was hastening from the square towards the station, whence the underground railway would bear him to the eastern slums of the city. He had a particularly disagreeable case of chronic drunkenness to visit, but he went in company with Hope.

Mrs. Methven watched his departure from the window. Her dullness seemed to have lifted a little.

MRS. METHVEN laid aside her mourning, not suddenly, but by artistic gradations through greys and violets.

It seemed to Dick, who was now her frequent visitor, that each succeeding shade set off her beauty in a new and clearer light. But at times, he was ashamed of himself. He had not reached the point of neglecting his work, but he knew that his interest in it was in danger of being chilled. It began to be an effort.

An illness in the spring might have been held as an excuse— had he been less a man. He had been very near to death, and his recovery was slow, made bearable, however, by the cheering messages and kindly gifts of invalid luxuries from Maud, and the prospect of seeing her again. But Maud was never more than friendly, and whatever he may have hoped during the period of his convalescence appeared mere folly to him at the first meeting after his recovery. Moreover, as he told himself with sad repetition, his circumstances were utter poverty compared with hers.

Still, the charm drew him, and he continued to find his way to Bolton Square on every possible occasion. If the widow was secretly amused, it was in a tender fashion. She perceived his struggle between duty and inclination, and accepted the compliment. It would be too much to say that she actually tempted him to neglect his work, but she certainly did nothing to stimulate the old enthusiasm which appeared to he failing. But at last an incident occurred to check the fall of Dick. He was sitting talking to Maud one autumn afternoon, when the maid entered with a basket of hot-house blooms. Mrs. Methven laid them carelessly on the table.

"So you've given up the idea of going eastward to-day, Dick?"

"Well, I didn't promise I would go," he answered weakly.

"I'm afraid your poor people will be offended," she said teasingly. "You know you've got them into the bad habit of expecting you nearly every day."

"Do you think I ought to go, Maud?"

"Oh, no, my friend. I require you more than they. I want you to preach to me, for a change."

"Maud!"

"So you think I'm hopeless."

"Oh, Dick!" she cried, with a little laugh. "Tell me, do you love the people you preach to?"

He was silent. "You used to — at least you told me so. And yet, you are sitting here with me—" She broke off suddenly, observing his face.

"Maud, you don't know what you are saying!"

"Heigh-ho!" she sighed lightly. "I'm aware I'm very dreadful. That's why I want you to preach to me. Or, stay! Let I me make a confession first." She picked up the basket of flowers and handed them to him.

"They are beautiful," he said; and then his eye caught sight of the name on the card I in their midst. "They are beautiful," he I repeated.

"Sir Lewis Morton wants me to marry him," she said.

"I must congratulate you," he returned feebly.

"But is it not rather soon to consider such a thing? I want your advice. Besides," she added, "I don't specially care for him."

"Then, what advice can I give you?" he said, endeavoring to speak naturally.

"On the other hand," she continued, "I'm I not sure that I specially care for anyone. But I'm getting tired of myself."

"How can I advise you? I don't know Sir Lewis Morton except by name. I've heard he is an exceedingly brilliant scholar. He left college the year I entered."

"But would it be right for me to marry again?"

"Maud, Maud, how can you ask me?" he cried hotly.

"Why?"— innocently— "am I rude? I've I told you before that you are my only real friend. If I asked my aunt she would dissolve in tears. My uncle would congratulate me; and straightway fly to borrow money from my probable fiance, as he did from poor Mr. Methven. Can't you understand, Dick, why I'm not after the exact pattern of the average woman?"

Dick was touched, and he said very gently, "I wish I could help you, but you must please yourself."

"You're a most unsatisfactory friend." she sighed.

"I know it," he said ruefully; "I make a very poor friend to you. But now I must be going; I've stayed too long as it is."

"Then you leave me to my fate?" she questioned, with a faint smile.

"To yourself, Maud," he replied.

When he had gone, Mrs. Methven seated herself at her desk, and, after much deliberation, indited a letter to Sir Lewis Morton.

iii

ONCE MORE dullness had settled upon Mrs. Methven. It was nearly a month since Dick's last call, and she was angry with him.

A week's visitation from her uncle and aunt had not left her in a cheerful mood. And now, apparently, her friend had deserted her. She tried to make herself believe that she regretted the letter she had written four weeks previously to Sir Lewis Morton.

When Dick did call he was received with the coldness his recent neglect merited.

"I'm sorry I ,could not come before this," he said.

"Pray don't mention it. I've been busy and hardly noticed the time."

"It will be four weeks to-morrow since I saw you."

"Really?"— with polite dubiety.

"Yes; and I fear it will be a longer period ere I call again," he said sadly.

"You needn't trouble to be rude."

"You misunderstand me, Maud. I've come to tell you that I am about to leave London."

Mrs. Methven became interested at once: she clapped her hands. "I knew it, I knew it! And I'm delighted!"

"It is you who are rude now," said Dick, rather sulkily.

"It is you who misunderstand now," she replied. "But I'm glad for your sake. Oh, I was sure it would come! Is it a nice place? Oh, my friend, you do deserve a beautiful country home after the slums of London."

"But my destination is China."

She gave a little gasp, but said nothing.

"Maud, you know how discontented I have been of late. I've felt that I was doing little or no good in London, and when I heard, about a month ago, of a man being wanted for China, I volunteered. My steamer sails on Saturday."

"How foolish you have been," she said in a helpless sort of voice.

"I have been foolish, and that is perhaps my best reason for making this change."

"Ah, you will take me up wrongly. Have you not considered how your poor folk will miss you? You may shake your head, but I know they used to depend on you, and I believe they still do. And don't you think it's just a little cowardly to throw up your work here because you haven't been able to right the wrongs of half a million souls in a few years?"

The curate flushed.

"Maud, I like to hear you talk like that," he stammered.

She nodded sagely and continued. "Don't you feel that you are exhibiting a sad lack of faith in giving up here? And yet"— suddenly changing her tone— "I can't understand you. You have always set your mind against a comfortable country charge for the sake of these London poor, and all of a sudden you throw them over for the atrocious Chinese."

"I know you don't understand me, Maud, and so it would be vain to try to explain why I am taking this step."

"Quite vain to try to explain folly."

"However, it's all arranged now, and I feel it's for the best"— the tone of his voice scarcely agreed with the words. "Of course, I'm sorry to leave the home country and the people. I hope you will write occasionally to me, Maud?"

"I'll think over that," she said. "And I'm glad that you and Sir Lewis Morton will—"

"Are you?"

"Have you not—?"

"No; I have not," she replied quickly. And ere he could, make further; remark, she deftly changed the subject, and for the next half-hour kept the ball of conversation rolling among the slightest everyday topics.

At last they both wearied of it all, and Dick rose to go. There was no reason, he considered, why his farewell should be longer delayed. He was pale, while Maud's color and ready smile did not desert her, despite her nervousness. She wondered if he would speak at the very last moment. If not—

"Good-bye, Maud. You'll think over my annual letter," he said, with a poor attempt at lightness.

"I've a shocking memory," she said, cruelly.

"I can't forget you, Maud," he blurted out in a boyish fashion.

"You are very kind."

"Good-bye, Maud."

"And is this all?" thought Mrs. Methven, with a strange sharp misery in her heart. But she smiled sweetly.

"I shall honor your last visit, Dick, by seeing you to the door myself."

They went downstairs together.

"Don't you feel like changing your mind at the eleventh hour?" she asked, laughingly. He shook his head.

"Think once more of the poor folk in the East End. Think of your own people."

"I have done so, Maud. I have decided." He laid hold of the handle of the door— one of the handles, rather, for the door had two. Mrs. Methven held the other.

"Think how dull I shall be," she said with a great effort. "And oh! how dull you are!" she added under her breath.

He gripped the handle hard. "I must go, Maud. Good-bye," he said huskily, attempting to open the door.

"The wrong handle, Dick," she managed to say. How stupid the man was! His hand groped six inches lower and met something soft. But they were cold little fingers that his own caught.

"Oh, Maud," he whispered, "how can I leave you?"

"I'm sure I don't know. It's mean of I you to leave me to my d— dullness." Her voice shook.

"Maud, would you mind taking me back to the drawing-room for a minute? There's I something I forgot."

But he could not wait until they reached the drawing-room. At the bend of the stairs he suddenly halted, and said his say in three words. But words, after all, are not everything. And even after they had mounted the remaining steps, an hour elapsed before Dick remembered that in a few days he must leave for China. Good, earnest man though he was, he was aghast at the prospect.

As for Maud, she merely laughed and said, I in her old flippant manner:

"Send them word that you've found a better engagement."

"But, dear, I can't turn back now," he protested, "it would be cowardly."

"Pouf! It would be cowardly not to confess that you want to stay at home. It I would, be dreadfully cowardly to desert a defenceless woman. No, no; remain in London, and go on with your work."

"But what do you care about my work, sweetheart?" he asked, astonished.

"Oh, my dear, did you believe that I held your work cheaply? I didn't know before, though I do now, that I was jealous of it. Stay at home, and see if I'm not interested in all your schemes. We'll make it up to the Mission in other ways. Or, if you must I go— take me."

14: "J. & J. Merriman"

J. J. Bell

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 22 Nov 1902

"AND WHAT do you think of the idea, James?" said John Merriman. He blew a cloud of smoke, through which he gazed expectantly at his younger brother, who occupied the easy chair on the other side of the fireplace.

"Excellent, John, excellent!" was the reply, followed by a puff. The smoke from the two pipes met and mingled in the air between the brothers.

"I'm glad we are agreed," observed the elder, as he thoughtfully regarded the glowing bowl of his pipe and pressed down a few curling shreds of partly ignited tobacco.

As a matter of fact, the twain agreed on every conceivable point, with one exception: John favored a pipe with a straight stem; James preferred a pipe with a curved stem. Arguments occasionally arose as to which made the best smoke, but these were invariably conducted In a spirit of amity over the mutual tobacco jar.

"Yes, I'm glad we are agreed," repeated John, "for I'm sick of life in lodgings."

"So am I," remarked his brother. "I'd have mentioned the matter a year ago, James, if I had thought It would have pleased you."

"Strange, John, that I wanted to speak about it, too. Only I was afraid you might not like it."

"Well, well. Now that we're going to make the change, the sooner we do It the better. When a man approaches fifty, James—"

"When a man is over forty, John—"

"He likes to feel that his house is his own."

"Exactly."

"I'm not saying anything against our good landlady, Mrs Snegg "

"Certainly not!"

"But Mrs Snegg is growing old, and, as she mentioned to me the other day, she is thinking of giving up this nouse. And so my idea is that we should make her a little present, bid her good-bye, and set up a small establishment of our own a bit further away from the city than we are at present."

Mr Merriman, senior, emitted three puffs in rapid succession.

"An excellent idea, John, a most excellent idea! And, of course, we should have a housekeeper."

"Precisely. But not too young, James."

"Oh, no, John. But not too old."

"Certainly not, James. What we want is a respectable, middle-aged female of temperate habits and with a capacity for marketing and plain cooking. I must say that the steak which Mrs Snegg set before as yesterday was anything but—"

"It was, John, anything but—"

"Ah, well, as we couldn't discuss it yesterday, we needn't try to discuss it now. Eh, James?"

They both chuckled. Then they sighed almost in unison, "Poor Mrs Snegg!"

ii

"THE WOMAN must go, James," said Mr Merriman, as the brothers, grown a year older, puffed their evening pipes in their new parlor.

"She must go, John," echoed James, gloomily. "She has grossly deceived us!"

"She has! She called herself a widow without a friend in the world, and goodness knows how many nights during the past month she has been entertaining her husband and family to supper In the kitchen."

"I never would have suspected her had it not been for the stout. You and I, James, were bound to trust her in the ordering of goods... And now, when the monthly bills are coming in, we cannot close our eyes to the fact that our confidence has been abused. But the stout is the worst item of all. Twenty dozen bottles of stout in a month!"

"Twenty dozen! And you and I never exceed a bottle each a day. What on earth will the grocer think of us?"

"It's no joke," said John. Then he laughed.

"Well, it was funny when I went into the kitchen to-night, to see our poor lone widow transformed into a happy wife and mother. Her husband was just in the middle of his third bottle when I entered."

"But the woman must go," said James, checking a smile.

"Undoubtedly. Will you give her notice?" asked his brother.

"Well, John, you are sailor, you know."

"True, very true. Still, I have observed that you, James, have less hesitation in talking to a woman than I."

"Surely not, my dear fellow. But suppose we proceed to the kitchen together, or, better, let us ring for the housekeeper."

"Excellent idea, James," said the elder, and he rang the bell without delay.

"Do you think I rang hard enough?" he asked, after three minutes had passed.

"Try again," said James. But as no one answered the summons, the brothers made their way to the kitchen.

"The woman must go," muttered John.

"The woman must go," muttered James. But when they arrived at the kitchen they found that the woman had gone.

"What a mess!" exclaimed the elder.

"Place is like a pig-stye!" said the younger. "But I'm glad she went without being told, James."

"So am I, John."

"Suppose we try to tidy up a bit."

"Right you are!"

And for an hour or so they tolled at their unwonted occupation.

"Jingo! It's warm work, John."

"Indeed it is, James. "What do you say to splitting a bottle of stout?"

"Excellent idea, John, most excellent idea!"

James went in search of the beverage, and presently returned with the news that there were plenty of bottles, but no stout.

"Well, I never!" ejaculated John.

"Did you ever!" exclaimed James.

iii

"I MUST congratulate you on your choice, James," said John a week later.

"Not at all, my dear fellow; she was as much your choice as mine."

"Still, I must confess that I raised objections to her on account of her— h'm— appearance."

"She is really uncommonly— ahem!" said the younger Merriman.

"She is— h'm! h'm! And what a cook she is! Excellent, most excellent! You you think she is really a widow, James?"

"We could hardly ask her for a certificate of her husband's death, could we?" said James, laughing.

"Well, hardly. And I must say I am inclined to trust her. There's something about her face— er— h'm! h'm!"

"There is. I don't believe she's more than thirty, either. I suppose some people would call her handsome. Ahem!"

There was a slight pause, and then John asked, with some difficulty, "James, did you ever think of marrying?"

"Certainly not, John. Did you?"

"No, indeed. Possibly I might have done so had I been alone in the world."

"Well, of course, there's no saying what I might have done had I been left to myself," said his brother.

"We are not unhappy as we are, James," said John, a little whistfully.

"By no means," returned James, heartily.

"If you would only smoke a straight pipe," said John, taking a fill from the jar.

"Nonsense! You don't know what a good smoke is," retorted James, as he struck a light.

iv

SIX MONTHS slipped away, and throughout that period the brothers Merriman dwelt in unalloyed peace and comfort. What Mrs Lavender, their housekeeper, could not do, they agreed, was not worth doing, and hardly a day passed without disclosing a new and praiseworthy detail in her system of management.

With the assistance of a small maid, she kept the domestic wheels going round so smoothly that never a jar disturbed her employers, who were wont to set out arm in arm in the morning, looking forward to their return in the evening, with an intensity of which each was secretly ashamed.

At the end of the half-year, however, their happy calm was suddenly broken by Mrs Lavender giving a month's notice. She was well satisfied with her situation, she told the gentlemen, but, having received a little legacy, she would be enabled now to resume tbe position which her husband's early death had caused her to relinquish.

"Of course, we knew she was a lady," said John, disconsolately, the evening when the bad news came.

"Of course," said James, in a dismal voice. "And we shall never get anyone like her."

"It wasn't only that she kept the house so beautifully and made us so comfortable; there was something about her— well, perhaps you understand, James."

"I do, John, though I can't explain. I suppose she will— er— marry again."

"What? Ah, yes; that's but natural. She's quite a young woman."

"Oh, quite," said his brother.

"I was thinking we might give her little present before she leaves us. Eh, James?"

"An excellent idea, John, a most excellent idea!"

"You might sound her on. the subject during the month, James."

It was the younger Merriman who came oftenest in contact with Mrs Lavender, he being the one who gave her the instructions for the daily arrangements of the house.

"I'll try to do what you wish, John," he returned.

They filled their pipes, smoked for half-an-hour in mournful silence, and retired to bed.

v

"MRS LAVENDER leaves to-morrow forenoon," said the elder Merriman one evening a month later. "Have you mentioned how desirous we are of making her a little gift, James?"

"Er— no. Not yet, John. You see, it is rather a delicate matter. However, I'll step across to her parlor now, and ask her."

"I think you'd better," said John, a trifle crisply.

Something seemed to have come between the brothers during the past few weeks. A suspicion of restraint characterised their conversation, their eyes did not meet so frequently as of yore, and they both grumbled over the contents of the mutual tobacco jar.

To-night James was visibly ill at ease, while John, though he sought to conceal his trouble, was no less perplexed. The younger man rose, laid down his pipe, which had been out for the last twenty minutes, and stepped slowly to the door.

Then he came back to the hearthrug.

"I say, John," he said, without looking at his brother, "what am I to tell her?"

John frowned and checked an angry exclamation. He sucked at his pipe for a moment, and his face began to clear and soften.

"I don't see why we should get rusty over this or anything else," he said quietly. "Make any arrangement you like, old fellow, and I'll be pleased."

"You're a brick, John," said his brother as he left the room.

IT WAS more than an hour till he reappeared, and the elder Merriman had time for thought, which, to tell the truth, he needed. He realised what had happened to his brother and himself within the past few months, and he made up his mind to accept the back seat which fate had provided for him.

So, when James came back with a curious sparkle in his eyes, and an unusual color in his face, and a stammering request that John should accompany him to Mrs Lavender's parlor, the elder man put his arm through

his brother's, and went without uttering a word, beyond murmuring, "a most excellent idea, James!"

And when about midnight the twain settled down to talk it over, James suddenly discovered that John was smoking a bent pipe, and, full of surprise, drew his attention to the fact.

John smiled slightly, and puffed away in silence.

"You don't really like it, do you?" asked James, somewhat amused.

"I'm learning," returned his brother quietly.

The younger Merriman looked puzzled. "I believe you're doing it to please me, John," he said at last.

"Well, we're agreed on everything now," said John. "Pass the jar."

"Prime tobacco!" said James with enthusiasm as he blew a big cloud.

"Capital!" said John, peering into the depths of the jar... It was empty.

15: Pride and Poverty

Val Jameson

fl 1900s-1930s

Western Mail (Perth) 20 April 1907

On the Kalgoorlie goldfields in the early days, not everyone was rich... author Val Jameson was on the goldfields herself during the 1890s gold rush.

MR. BRUIN ate his breakfast with the air of a man attacking an enemy. The slender grilled chop dodged the pursuing fork as though possessed of the conscious art of self-defence. Bruin was a large man, possessed of that enviable expanse of chest usually indicative of ease and affluence or political ability. His rotund form gave no signs as yet of reduced circumstances, but his every day business suit was less secretive. The face with which he wooed timid clients to a business transaction was genial and cherubic. Clean-shaven round, pink-hued, with full shapely lips and large blue eyes, his face usually suggested infantile simplicity and guilelessness. But the face bending over the fugitive chop was expressive of infantile fury matured.

On the opposite side of the breakfast-table a plump middle-aged woman sipped coffee and ate buttered bread, her dark eyes fixed timorously on the stormy countenance of her lord. His eyes flashed wrathful glances at the closed door of an adjoining room. Dropping the fork, he seized the diminutive chop in his fingers."Call this a chop?" he demanded.

"It ees all I hat," replied his patient wife. "When you git me more money] can get for you better meals."

"When I give you more money," blurted the angry man. "Why don't you make him," pointing to the closed door, "pay what be owes? I'm just about full up of it; if he can't pay for the room let him quit! I'm battling every day of the week to provide a roof for an old loafer like him! There's the Old Men's Home— that's the place for him I'm sick an' tired of your philanthropy. If he can't find the money to pay up the two months' rent owing between this and Saturday, he's got to go out or be bloomin' well kicked out!"

"Do not be so hard, Don," said the soft-eyed lady, "Skeeper is an old man, an' you would not kick him to die in ze street!"

"Won't I?" returned the angry man, smiting the table noisily, "you'll see! I'll show you whether you can turn my house into a benevolent institution. For two pins I'd heave the lazy old sponger out now! I'm just in the mood."

"Do be reason, Don," pleaded Mrs Bruin, " 'pr'a's he weel pay some money soon. He weel pay me when he get it, poor ole man."

A loud knock on the front door severed the conversation. The pompous anger on Bruin's face gave place to apprehension. His burly voice sank to a husky whisper. "It's the landlord. Don't go!"

Another peremptory knock was silently ignored. A peaceful hush, intended to proclaim the absence of the inmates, was preserved. The purring of a cat smoothing her black coat before the fire made silence audible. The couple at the breakfast-table sat like statues awaiting the click of the gate to announce the dreaded landlord's departure.

Suddenly, through the open window, close beside Bruin's chair, a man's head was thrust. The face with a pair of angry, snapping eyes clearly expressed "I caught you", but the voice said, "Good morning."

The sudden shock caused Bruin to spill his cup of tea, then with swift recovery, he replied, "Good morning, Stone; was that you knocking? Thought it was that darned paper-boy again! How d'ye do?"

"Nothing special, thank you," said the landlord, "but I want a settlement of this four weeks' rent this very day or you must quit the house by Saturday!"

"Right y'are," replied Bruin haughtily; "I'll see you at your office this afternoon. Just now I'm at breakfast! Understand, I'm at breakfast!"

The landlord sullenly departed.

With pompous wrath Bruin resumed his domestic character. "Madam!" he exclaimed, "now you see what your benevolence has brought us to! There's one consolation," pointing at the closed door, "he's got to share the exodus o' this camp, and I'll see that he's not tacked on to the furniture."

Having lit his pipe, and tenderly brushed the moss of his daily suit, Bruin sauntered forth on his usual quest, lately productive of no business. Mrs. Bruin, in troubled perplexity of mind, stood on the verandah gazing after his retreating form,

"His clothes may be old as he say," she mused, "but he ees look a gentelsman yet. I hope he make some money to-day."

When silence proclaimed the kitchen Vacant, the lodger's door was cautiously opened, and a head with long white tangled hair and bright, deep-set eyes took observations from the aperture.

"He's gone!"

The cat looked up and saw a long lean figure limply clad in quaintly patched pyjamas, a towel concealing the angular shoulders.

"He's gone!" repeated the lodger, extending his long skinny hands to the spiring fire.

His eyes, guarded by projecting brows, were embedded in wrinkles, lines that divided his sallow, hungry face into skinny folds. His nose was formed in Wellingtonian mould. Vitality shone in the sunken eyes, and when his lips

parted, showed itself in long yellow teeth, though the skipper's smile was not a pleasant revelation. Whatever his past career, there certainly was the savour of an old salt in his appearance and gait. Bruin had named him Skipper, and the name fitted the derelict like a new skin. Having warmed his hands, the Skipper shuffled off to the bath-room. His morning bath, at all seasons, was the custom of a lifetime,

Meanwhile Mrs. Bruin returned to the kitchen. Finding her lodger's door open, she tip-toed into the room and peered into a large biscuit-tin.

"Skeeper haf no bread!" she remarked, having formed a habit of addressing the cat, "pore ole deala!"

Cutting two thick slices from her own portion, she placed them in the empty tin, and stole quietly out. The old man made no acknowledgement of this thoughtful provision, being well accustomed to such contributions. His kind landlady had braved many a breeze with her turbulent husband in defence of Skipper. But affairs had reached a climax that morning by the ultimatum of the landlord.

"Skeeper," said Mrs. Bruin, "I want spik to you when you feanis' you break fis'!"

In response to this request, Skipper displaced the cat from a smug reverie and seated himself cosily before the fire, intimating his readiness for the requested interview.

"Skeeper," proceeded the good lady, "There is adverts'mun in paper, wanted a yardman!"

"What about it?" queried the old man, sharply raising his eyebrows.

"You haf been ever day lookeen for job lookeen for job," Mrs. Bruin gesticulated her words, "but you nevair find one. What weel you do ? We haf to go nex' Sat'day, ye lan'lor' poot us out, an' Meeser Bruin say you can't go wees us if you do not pay what you owe. We are too poor ourself to keep you wizout some money; Mr. Bruin got no beesness now, so what can' we do? Dat is no use, Skeeper, you mus' gol Why you not try yardman? Ye work ees not too hard."

The old man straightened his aged limbs and stood erect.

"Madam!" he said coldly, "do you know whom you are addressing? Me? Yardman? Me? Bruce MacKie, of the MacKies of Drumlockenslock, wi' royal blood in oor veins. Me a yardman! Hoots!"

Timid Mrs. Bruin was somewhat overawed by this majestic retort, but bravely persevered. "Lots peebles come down in ye wurld and not shame to work. Ye blood in ye vein weelt not keep you, Skeeper! Meeser Bruin say dis mornin' you mus' go. It is no use! He mean it. If you got no money, no beelet who will take you in?"

Skipper smiled benignantly on the troubled countenance of his warm-hearted friend. "Don't vex your kind heart, wumman! Bruce MacKie is no fool. Have ye heard aught o' the fortunes med on these goldfields?" Scarce waiting for assent, he continued excitedly, "Fortunes are turned up wi' the stroke o' a pick? I've a proposition back o' Kalgoorlie that'll lick a' the gold finds oop to date! I'll show you the plans an' prospectus, but ye' mus' na tell Bruin. It's no in a workin' stage yet."

After considerable rummaging amongst his possessions, the old man laid down a large square document, bearing plans and cryptic signs, that resembled the erratic course of a spider after wading through ink.

"That!" said Skipper, proudly, laying a long, yellow finger on the paper, "is the Bed o' Croesus! A submerged lake containing the main deposits of the great mineral belt o' country known as Boulder mile. This lake, I hae found by special methods known to meself only is twa hundred' feet below the surface. The water is the main deeficulty, an' wull hae to be pumped away. But it can't be done without capital, so I'm tryin' to find a syndicate wi' five thousand pounds. It's no easy. Money is tight, but I'm no despairing. When I strike the alluvial in my Bed o' Croesus, I'll be th' making of a millionaire!" concluded Skipper, exuberantly. "Can ye no wait for the rent wi' these gran' expectations?"

Mrs. Bruin's mild brown eyes widened and her mouth shaped itself into an O of respectful awe. But at the last question she gravely shook her head.

"Meeser Bruin haf a mine up in ye bushes, but it went what you call boong. an' he loss his money. Pr'a's yours vill boong, an' vair ve find rent? Ah?"

Skipper carefully rolled his precious document and loftily ignored the question. His faith in the Bed o' Croesus was not to be shaken by a mere woman's pessimism.

ON THE following Saturday morning Skipper was returning from an unsuccessful raid on mining speculators, his spurned prospectus tucked under his arm, but his golden visions undimmed by disappointment. But he leant a little more heavily on his walking-stick than usual, and there was less defiance of old age in his gait. A casual glance could not detect the old man's close association with poverty. His thread-bare suit was carefully brushed and mended, embellished by a neat collar and tie, while the shine of his thick soled boots covered a multitude of bad repairs. Carefully brushed white hair added its lustre of respectability.

As he turned the corner of the small street leading to Bruin's cottage, pleasant anticipations of a kindly greeting quickened his steps. Perhaps, on

such a bleak morning, he would find a bowl of hot broth awaiting him. Mrs. Bruin had a heart of pure gold.

His hand was on the latch of the gate when a sense of desolation fell upon him, sudden, intangible, overwhelming.

The house stared at him with hollow eyes. Unfriendly, cold, forsaken. He felt as a mourner by the corpse of a friend.

He knocked at the familiar door and waited, with a sickening heart, for the welcome sound of footsteps. He wandered to the back entrance and repeated the summons, only to hear the mocking echoes within. His portion of worldly goods that would not tempt the cupidity of the pettiest thief, was neatly packed and placed on the back verandah. His shaking limbs forced him to sink on the verandah steps.

He did not reflect on the timely warnings of Mrs. Bruin, or realise that as a non-paying lodger he was lawfully and justly evicted. He only knew that he had been sheltered for the past twelve months by a warm, human heart. He had no desire to seek a new haven. Who would receive him without money, with nothing to commend him save his boasted lineage and family pride. Yet, homeless, aged forsaken, he held, or believed he held, a fortune in his hand.

The sun shone with pitying warmth on big bent head and rust-hued garments. The family cat crept from beneath the verandah, where she had hidden to escape removal, and curled herself close at his side.

"Pore ole deala."

Roused from brooding dejection by the familiar voice, Skipper turned with dazed, bewildered looks, and saw Mrs. Bruin's round, compassionate face beaming upon him from the open doorway. A furniture van flanked the view, just backing into the kerb.

"Come, Skeeper, de van is here!"

A voice like bottled thunder gave reply. "I say he shan't! Let him go to the Old Men's Home, that's the place for him!"

"Do not now, do not!" Mrs. Bruin laid entreating hands on her husband's arm, for the skipper, needing no second imitation, and heedless of Bruin's prohibition, had leapt from the steps with the buoyancy of renewed youth and commenced hoisting his meagre possessions into the furniture van.

"Pore ole deala!" echoed Bruin, yielding to the softer influence of his wife's charity. "He reckon's he's scored a passage this trip! Poor as we are, the old boy's adopted us!"

The remainder of the household goods were packed into the van, and Skipper, seating himself beside the driver, booked a passage without further protest.

16: Safety First

E. Mary Gurney

1900–38

The Bulletin, 24 Apr 1935

New Zealand author and equestrienne, who died after being kicked by her horse. One known collection of her short stories: "Pageant from the Foothills, a slim and now rare hard cover volume of 127 pages, published in NZ in 1943.

MR. WALTER DENBY sat alone in his bedroom. For the seventh time that week he was going through his books. Not that it was a new thing for him to sit alone and go through his books. Right from the very beginning his motto had been Safety First. Even when he was young, and the world had been, presumably, at his feet, he had liked to see, before he took a step, exactly where those feet would land. So he never ventured round corners or attempted rough or rocky or steep ascents.

No one ever knew whether he loved the garish day. One step at a time being enough for him, he could not afford friendships— expensive, unsettling pastimes. Friends had ideas, unstable ideas, about getting out and getting on; making places for themselves in the world.

Other men came and went, but Mr. Denby stayed. Of most of those who went he lost sight. Occasionally one of them crossed his orbit again, and of these many had failed. Some, indeed, would try to borrow from him, but Mr. Denby, who took no risks for himself, was certainly not going to take them for other men.

“Sorry, old man,” he would say. “I make it a rule never to lend. Times are hard. Advancement is slow, you know. I’ve worked hard— never done anything silly, or taken any risks; but, even so, I can hardly see my way... Sorry, old man.”

And he would go his way without even offering the needy one a drink.

MR. DENBY had started at the age of fourteen in the shipping offices of Messrs. Tomb and Failing. At thirty-four he had risen to the position of accountant in the same firm. At fifty, with occasional small increases in salary during the first ten years and numerous little niggling cuts later, he was still accountant.

His hair had gone a little. He looked as shabby and cautious as he was. He walked to and from the office, and lived, meagrely, in a little back room in a little back street in a cheap little suburb.

There was a bed that creaked, A plain table, with a kitchen chair pushed under it. There was a gas ring, over which he did his cooking, a gas fire, seldom

lit, with, beside it, an exceedingly shabby but exceedingly comfortable basket chair. Otherwise, a bare place.

Mr. Denby was accustomed to routine. Get up at six, shave, wash, dress, cook sausages over the gas ring, walk to work. Dinner at the self-help across the road, walk home in the evening, and cook sausages over the gas ring. Wash up the breakfast and tea things in the sink on the landing, run through his bookstand then settle down until ten o'clock with a book from the circulating library which he passed twice daily.

Ever since he had achieved accountancy at Messrs, Tomb and Failing, he had allowed himself one luxury and taken, yearly, one risk. He became a subscriber to the circulating library; and he invested fifty pounds in gilt-edged securities. And, all his life, though he had never had the slightest inclination to advance more than one step at a time, he had known what he was going to do. When he was sixty he was going to realise on those securities, add them to the little nest-egg that had accrued in his savings bank, retire and buy an annuity.

NOW, to his alarm, he realised that it would be necessary for him to revise his programme somewhat; for Messrs. Tomb and Failing, never a large or progressive firm, but always regarded as remarkably solid, was sliding by imperceptible but definite degrees down the slope that ends in bankruptcy.

Walter Denby knew it. Had known it for some time, but had determinedly blinked the fact. They cut his salary and cut it again, and dismissed first one and then another of their clerks. They cut his salary and sold one of their antiquated old coastal boats to the breakers, and cut his salary. But neither Mr. Tomb nor Mr. Failing, who had also always lived for safety, was capable of advancing with the times and reorganising their ancient, out-of-date concern.

It had always taken their old ships such and such a time to sail from port to port. It always would. Why hurry? Why worry? There was all the time in the world, and time was money; and their freights had always been, and still were, cheaper than those of any other line. To all this Mr. Denby agreed— with the reservation that, since he had always played for safety first, it would be wise for him to quit the ship, so to speak, before it sank.

So, every day, for the term of a month, he went through his books, revising estimates, revising and devising investments, until he was quite convinced that the safest, if not the most remunerative, course to follow was to realise and buy the annuity immediately.

By the exercise of the strictest economy he would be able to go on living much as he had always lived. He would not, of course, require sausages for breakfast. Sausages were for workers. Bread and butter, perhaps, and a cup of

coffee. And, since he would not be walking to work, his shoes would not need resoling so frequently.

Yes; it could be done.

HE closed his books, sighed, more with satisfaction and relief than from anxiety or weariness, and settled himself in his chair for his evening recreation. To-morrow he would hand in his notice to Messrs. Tomb and Failing. As he opened his book he was quite unconscious of the fact that he was deriving no little satisfaction from his position. There had been a time when Messrs. Tomb and Failing had tentatively offered him a partnership, but he had been too careful for that. Businesses, he knew, even the most conservative of them, could fail.

Totally unimaginative, he yet could picture the consternation his resignation would cause, and the mere thought of it swelled his self-esteem to such proportions that he actually felt that, after all, he had got somewhere.

He found his place, adjusted his pince-nez and began to read.

For a time he lost himself in the realms of romance; but round about nine o'clock he began to find that thought of the morrow was obtruding between him and the printed page.

Outside things began to distract him.

The noises of the other roomers began to jar on his consciousness. The gramophone in the room below; a child wailing across the corridor; doors banging; a man shouting; a woman screaming with rage.

Footsteps running along the corridor the quick, staccato tapping of high heels on boards. They ceased a second, then came again, turning into the short passage that led to his room.

He closed his book, frowning with annoyance. These sounds, he supposed, had always gone on, but he had never noticed them before. It was, he cogitated, because he had been used to them all his life. His safe, ordered life. Everything had gone on like this, always; but to-morrow there was a big change pending. Though he had always known it would come, had always regarded it as part of the ordered scheme of things, still it was an event— an epoch, as it were; and epochs were, in the nature of themselves, disturbing things.

Things that called, almost, for a cup of coffee.

MR. DENBY laid his book aside and rose, opening the cupboard beside the fireplace, to look into the coffee-pot. With it in his hand some sixth sense made him swing round. The door was opening inch by inch.

He stood with his spine crawling. His mouth sagged open and his eyes popped like a scared rabbit's.

Inch by inch, like slow torture, the door opened. With every inch he died a thousand deaths. When it had opened a full foot, the coffee-pot dropped from his nerveless grasp. The door swung wide, and he faced the slight form of a woman.

She stood braced at the door and looked at him with a faint smile, a smile that did nothing to restore his lost equanimity, a smile that mocked, pleaded, threatened, provoked.

He drew a deep, shuddering breath, and put his hand over his eyes, feeling that, suddenly, his ship was out to sea again, rudderless in a storm. And yet there was a great silence on the world; a silence that waited for Mr. Denby.

It was the woman who spoke first, in a slightly husky, common voice that might have been musical once.

"Say!" she said. "Scared you, did I?"

And she laughed. It was a sound the like of which he had never heard before. A low, cool sound that rippled.

SHE was slight and white, with mascara'd eyes and a red slash of a mouth. Her teeth were large and white, and her nose turned up, with a dab of powder clingingly precariously to its tip. Her shingled henna'd hair was a riot, and her frock, ripped from armpit to thigh, exposed the curves of her body. Mr. Denby gulped, shivered, turned his back.

"Your frock!" he gasped.

He had never looked at a woman. Women, he had felt, were dangerous, risky, utterly incompatible with his motto. Besides which, he had never wanted to look at women. But he did now; dreadfully, over-whelmingly. He wanted to turn and look again into that alluring, threatening, provocative face; look again at the wonderful white curve beneath her rounded arm.

"Your frock!" he gulped again.

She laughed at him. That low sound that was like the cool rippling of water. It slapped against the sides of Mr. Denby's boat, all but capsizing it.

"Gosh!" she said. "Where did they dig you up?"

Unaccountably he fell to trembling. He peered foolishly into the coffee-pot. He giggled weakly, turning very slowly and lifting his eyes from the coffee-pot to the woman.

She had moved from the door, but had not attempted to attend to her frock. Indeed, she turned deliberately so that the rent was towards him, so that he could see.

Doing it, she watched him with a faint irony that changed to impatient mockery

"Hell!" she said. "Ain't you ever seen what's inside a woman's clothes?"

Again Mr. Denby giggled. He said in his thin, colorless voice:

"I don't know anything about women. I haven't been— able to afford them."

He was amazingly unconscious of the fact that until that very moment he had never in the least wished to afford them.

"God!" she breathed in her husky, common voice. "You're archaic!"

She seated herself on the table, still with that shameless rent towards him, swung her foot and hummed a little song under her breath, and seemingly forgot him.

MR. DENBY looked helplessly into the coffee-pot and then made a surprising suggestion.

"I —I was going to have some coffee," he said. "I —would you like some coffee?"

"Coffee!" she echoed. "God, coffee!" Laughter shook her. "Sure it won't upset you, Baby? What about your milk?"

Mr. Denby, following her dimly, flushed and grew a little annoyed.

"I am sorry I cannot offer you anything stronger," he said stiffly. "I have never been able to afford strong drink."

"Gosh!" She regarded him darkly, with incredulity and hidden laughter.

Then she rose, stretched so that her frock emitted alarming sounds of further rending, and at his start relented. "Well, make it strong and keep it black. Destitute, are you?"

Mr. Denby lit the gas ring and put the kettle on.

"Not exactly," he admitted cautiously.

"Saved a bit, eh?"

Her eyes were suddenly calculating, but Mr. Denby's mind was on the coffee— on the speculation as to whether he should put in two spoonfuls and fill the pot up, or one.

"A little," he said, and put in one.

"A rich man— in a garret!"

Her laughter jeered, stung.

Mr. Denby denied it.

"Not rich! Not by any means rich. But enough to retire on, with care."

"Umph!" She watched him covertly.

"Retire, eh? Lucky, aren't you?"

Again he denied it.

"Not lucky. There's no such thing as luck. I have been careful. Very. Saved. Invested wisely. Never taken a risk. I shall not, now. I shall buy an annuity. Settle near the sea. Live very quietly."

WITH apparent concentration he made the coffee, but all the time he was conscious of her, of her mascara'd eyes fixed on him, of the red, greedy slash of her mouth. Of the white of her flesh.

"Buy an annuity, eh?"

"Absolutely safe." He was unconscious of smugness. "I shall arrange it to-morrow..."

He poured coffee into a cracked cup and handed it to her, and she put her hand round the saucer, deliberately putting her fingers over his. The coffee slopped over their hands, splashed over her frock and down her silk-clad leg.

"Clumsy!" Her laughter flowed over him again. "Now you'll have to mop me up!"

He produced a handkerchief and knelt before her, trembling. Mopped her slim leg, mopped her frock.

While he was doing it she took his hand and guided it to the tear in her frock, turning suddenly so that for an instant his fingers brushed her bare flesh.

"Annuities cost a hell of a lot, don't they?" she asked idly.

"Two thousand," he admitted, shocked out of his caution.

She sipped her coffee without comment, put the cup aside and said lazily:

"Well, thanks awfully. Young Joe was getting a bit fresh, so I had to leave him. This was a posh place to hide in, but I guess I'd better go."

Mr. Denby peered into the coffee-pot.

"Must you? There's a little more coffee."

She held out her cup, appraising him coolly.

"Must—nothing! I never do anything except what I want! Never have. Never will. Life's too short—too uncertain— to waste it doing what you don't want— playing safe..."

"You're young," he said.

She looked at him through narrowed lids.

"You're not so old."

"No," he said. "No."

BUT he knew that he had always been too old for the adventure that was rushing towards him, bearing down with sickening certitude.

Life, he thought, with sudden horror— life, which had always been so safe and sane, was getting out of hand... would get out of hand...

Behind him the clock struck ten. Time he was in bed. Time he was sleeping. Time this disturbing young woman took herself off and left him to peace— to safety.

As though entering into his thoughts, she yawned loudly.

"God!" she said. "I'm tired."

She looked from him to his bed. She laughed a little, that low, rippling sound, cool, like water; lawless, like red, red wine.

"I think I'll stay here to-night," she said. "Would you like me to stay here to-night?"

He nearly shouted, grabbing at his head with both hands.

"No!" he cried out. "Yes!" he muttered recklessly.

"I can't afford it!" he thought in agony, because, careful as he had been, he still knew something about these little adventures. Men who had come to the office and gone from it had not all lived so safely.

Her laughter seemed to ripple her from the table.

"All right, I'll stay. Can't bear to think of anyone missing life the way you have. To-morrow we'll talk perhaps. Perhaps I'll show you your way about..."

To-night, he thought wildly, life was in danger of capsize; but, even though they foundered, boat, hook and sinker, he would embrace to-night.

To-morrow...

With hands that shook he locked the door and laid the key on the mantel beside the clock.

IN the morning, as he had hoped she would be, she was gone; but he had an uneasy feeling that at any moment she might return. A complex feeling, uneasy but furtively hopeful. And the feeling was right.

She did not come the following night, but the one after she was there. She had, she said, broken it off with Joe. Terror got hold of Mr. Denby; terror that warred violently with his newly-awakened desire. Without money, he knew, he could not keep her. Without money safety was doomed. She could not, would not, be satisfied, he knew, with the meagre three pounds a week his annuity would bring him. It was a case, instinct warned him, of the annuity or the woman.

For some time he wavered, and then a new idea presented itself. He would buy the annuity, and he would get another job.

For a time he even toyed with the idea of marriage, but in the end he dismissed it. Marriage was respectable, but a wife would expect to have the handling of the money, and that would never do. Certainly not with this woman.

Next time she came he did not tell her of his decision. He gave her four crisp five-pound notes, and she took them with a semblance of gratitude. He had, she knew, two thousand, but he would not have it long. Easy picking.

Mr. Denby settled about the annuity, and a week later he got a new job. Three pounds a week. That made six pounds; and he could hold it for ten years, if necessary. And in ten years' time she would surely have grown tired of him, or he of her.

Once againt he felt that he was in command of his destiny. Yet, instinctively, he moved with infinite caution, nor did he tell her of what he had done, even when she asked him, a trifle abruptly, for "dough."

"And make it worth while— a monkey or so. Clothes cost money, and I need a perm, and a facial. Bit of a miser, aren't you?"

Her laughter took the sting from her words, but he was suddenly aware that he had miscalculated. The teashop where he was entertaining her was quite nice, but only for one. She would want hotels, wine, whisky...

He felt suddenly cold. He had purchased security— but at what price? The price of— living...

When he told her, she would leave him ; this light, alluring thing... Well, he'd keep it from her while he could... play recklessly for once. The bank would advance him something, "We'll go to the bank," he said largely. He gave her forty pounds,

She dismissed him coolly, mollified, and he watched her go.

Very well she looked in her maroon frock, with her hat cocked jauntily over one eye. He felt a new thrill— a surprising thrill of complacency in possession.

"Safety!" he thought, surprisingly, "Safety be damned!"

He would sell that annuity for what it would fetch; sell it, and have his hour! He would go to his lawyer now, this very instant, and see what could be done, For the first time in his life Mr. Denby moved without looking a step ahead,

"God!" said the taxi-driver. "He ain't dead! He *cawn*'t be!"

And was very sick,

"The wheel went up over 'im," he babbled. "I ain't never 'ad a accident before."

A policeman reached out and laid a kindly, restraining hand on the boy's arm.

"Steady, my lad. I saw it. It wasn'tyour fault— no one could have avoided it... The city's plastered with safety-first notices ; and he couldn't even look one step ahead"...

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17: The Golden Hound

E. Mary Gurney

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OF a litter of five pups, Blond was the last and largest, and the death of the bitch who whelped him. She was a good hound, and faithful, and a favorite with Dan King, who combined the duties of whip and kennel man for the Waimate Hunt Club; so it was not odd, perhaps, that King should, from the first, have taken a dislike to the gaunt golden hound pup.

At birth, Blond was a pale, patched fawn that glittered in the sunlight. As he aged, it deepened to a golden-yellow and red-chestnut. There was not a fleck of white on him. His limbs were immense, and his eyes, deep-set and sombre, were a light and sinister yellow.

Abbott Veedol, who walked him, said that he never associated with the other pups— never joined them in their play and their deliberate mischief. When they stole eggs or chased the hens, Blond kept aloofly apart, sedate and dignified, or played earnestly and solemnly with shadows, Abb thought; but in a way that gave him a creepy feeling. There was nothing psychic about Abb Veedol, but he said that he caught himself trying to see what Blond saw: spectral hound pups and the shades of boots that had rotted to shreds untold years ago...

If at those times you went near Blond, he would bristle all over, lifting his hackles and baring his teeth in a soundless snarl, and Abb said he always imagined that he might be walking through one of the pup's invisible playmates.

The other pups did not seem exactly afraid of Blond, but tacitly they avoided him. Even at night when they were penned, Blond slept in a corner apart; but he never fought them. His attitude was rather one of indifference than hostility.

At six months old, Blond was as big as a grown hound. Dan King called him a throw-back, and was all for getting rid of him, but Pinner would not hear of it. Unlike Dan, he was inordinately proud of the golden hound, and attempted to make a favorite of him, but there was nothing of his dam about Blond.

Pinner's advances he met with indifference until the young huntsman became importunate, when the big hound warned him off with rising hackles and a silent snarl of peculiar malignance.

IN secret, Dan King let his hatred have full sway, depriving the hound of food and freedom, and using his whip in and out of season. Perhaps if Blond

had reacted in a normal canine manner, and yelled under the lash, King might have desisted, but the dog merely bared his teeth in that soundless snarl and went indifferently about his business.

King rode a gaunt roan mare with flecked wall-eyes, and there was something sinister about the trio.

If the hound reciprocated the man's hatred, he did not show it. At exercise or on the roads to and from the meets, Blond's muzzle was invariably to the roan mare's heels. The mare and the hound had a peculiar similarity of gait: that loose, slouching, cat-like gait that is indicative of perfect muscular development and has about it a deceptive air of laziness. King slouched in the saddle, gave the same impression of furtive slinkiness, and his depthless agate eyes held the same look as the horse's and the hound's: a soulless look, ugly with unreasoning malevolence.

Watching them, Abbott Veedol said to Pinner, who rode beside him:

"Look at 'em, Pin! There's something queer about them— something dark and horrible, like evil incarnate!"

"Who?" demanded Pinner with his vague and vagrant happiness. "Not Dan? Not Blondie?"

He called the hound by name, and he dropped back reluctantly from his position in the van of the pack, close to the heels of the wall-eyed mare. Level with Pinner's horse, he paced beside him, leering up at him with unquestioning honey-colored eyes.

"He says you're evil," said Pinner, as he might have to a human. "And, by God, you're a soulless looking brute, Blondie!"

The hound averted his gaze and stared unblinkingly ahead, and Pinner laughed.

"He's damned intelligent, anyway! You'd swear he knows what I'm saying! You may go, Blondie!"

Instantly the hound forged ahead, shouldering his way through the pack until he paced once more with his muzzle to the roan mare's heels.

"He certainly has brains," said Pinner comfortably.

IT was not until well on into the season, which was exceptionally hard and dry, that the hunt as a whole began to hint that there was something mighty queer about some of the runs they had; though Abb Veedol swore, half in earnest, and more than once, that when Dan King or the golden hound came near him he felt a sort of clammy, unearthly coldness envelop him.

While they hunted inland things were normal enough, though they had, considering the dry, summery weather, a number of abnormally hard and fast runs. Invariably Blond, green though he was, was first on the scent. Dan King

tailed him ruthlessly, and it was Dan who voiced the opinion that Blond never gave tongue unless the hare was a strong buck.

"I've seen him cross the trail of does and young bucks!" he averred, and persisted in the teeth of Pinner's good-natured scoffing and the master's open displeasure.

Hadly asked coldly: "D'you tail 'em up and have a look at them? Or have you an affinity with them, Dan?"

Dan stared at them loweringly.

"I've seen strange things where I come from," he muttered. "I've seen fox-hounds hunt a man— aye, and pull him down..."

He reined his mare away, and when they hunted the coast kept his own counsel.

Oddly, the coast meets, usually the most popular, began to be less well attended. One by one the members began to have excuses for being elsewhere. It was a significant fact that they thought excuses necessary. One or two of them resigned; yet the runs there were full of incident, and fast as steeple-chases. Hounds began to run with uncanny promptness, and to run faultlessly; and, no matter where they started from, they always finished on the cliffs that fell away to the sparkling blue waters of the Manakau harbor.

It was at the second meet at Manakau, where the country rolls out in wider fields and the going has a sting, that Abb Veedol gave voice to the question that was haunting half the members of the hunt.

After a quick run they pulled up on the shore, while hounds cast desultorily; all but Blond, who squatted on his haunches on the cliffs and stared steadily out to sea. Overhead, the great shore gulls wheeled with their eerie crying, the only other sound the heavy breathing and fretful movements of the horses. The sun was on the sea and the sudden lift of the mountain cone, and warm on the backs of horses and hounds. One or two of the men were smoking, but the majority of them sat their horses stiffly, their faces peculiarly strained— taut with an unconscious look of waiting. For all the gay laughter of the sun, the air from the sea had a numbing coldness.

No one spoke.

Abb Veedol got his cigarette case out, and sat staring at Pinner, who was talking in a low voice to Dan King. They rode round close to Abb, and he burst out, without meaning to: "Well, what the devil are we hunting, anyhow?"

Pinner reined up and eyed him with extraordinary unfriendliness. His eyes had a foreign, worried look, and he bit his lips, as though he might be at a loss for an answer. Dan King saved him the trouble. His voice plopped dourly into a silence through which even the horses had seemed to hold their breath.

“Nothing we’ll ever see or catch!” said Dan King with astonishing violence. “I tell you, the yellow hound should be destroyed! ”

Blond stood up, took a last long look at the sea, and then slouched to the heels of Dan’s mare. King ripped out a smothered oath and began to bawl at the hounds, riding after them with a restrained energy that had a curious and repelling grotesquerie.

Old Owen Bently, who had been out, come rain, come shine, since the inception of the pack, reined his cob round and began to ride away. Abb Veedol hesitated, and then went after him. There was a feeling down his back like icy fingers stroking his spine with significant urgency. Behind him, the beat of following hoofs woke a roll like muffled drums. At the first fence he overtook Bently, and knew that his voice lacked normality as he asked: “Well? What’s the idea?”

Bently threw him an enigmatic look. “I don’t like it,” he said dryly, and set his cob at the fence.

Veedol followed him over. “What don’t you like?” he persisted.

“Same thing you don’t— that they don’t.” Bently jerked his thumb over his shoulder, and Abb looked back. Every last member of the hunt was straggling after them.

“Good God! ” said Abb, “what’s come over us?”

Back against the line of sea and sky the red coats of Pinner and Hadly and Dan King stood out in sharp relief.

Abb Veedol reined up.

“I’m going back,” he said doggedly.

“I’m going to see it through,” Bently grunted.

A DOZEN of them followed Abb back over the fence. They went reluctantly— hard-faced thrusters who loved fences as they loved life. Abb grinned at them sourly, and they grinned back sheepishly,

Jim Vermont, who had a face hard and dark as mahogany, muttered: “I don’t believe in the devil!”

Abb growled: “Or anything else!”

He wondered whether he had the same look that seemed common to them all; a pinched, blue look, as though they were suffering from extreme cold.

As they rode up King moved off with the pack at his heels. Pinner lingered for a further word with Hadly, whose fine face looked pinched, too, but immovably dogged. Whatever was afoot he would see it through to a finish. Pinner went off after hounds, but Hadly waited, sitting his horse silently, staring at them with a sarcasm that was written over with a puzzled unease.

When he spoke it was with unusual formality, as though his thoughts were elsewhere.

"Thank you, gentlemen; but I think we had better call it a day."

Sombrely he rode after hounds. Uneasily silent, they followed him.

As they rode back over the paddocks it seemed to Abb Veedol that all his perceptions were painfully acute. He noticed things that he had never noticed before— the way the wind ruffled the horses' manes, and the glint of the sun on their backs and the backs of the queerly sedate hounds. The gold of it was mellow on the grass and the hills and the gorse hedges that were splashed with yellow bloom.

With the exception of Blond, the hounds were crowding behind Pinner, whom they adored. He rode level with King, but a little apart. Blond paced with his muzzle to the roan mare's heels, moving at his accustomed slouching gait, but not looking to right or left. The mare was fretful, uneasy and vicious. Once she tried a tentative kick, for which King punished her with venomous severity.

Whenever they went over a fence, hounds stuck close to Pinner, instead of following Blond's lead.

IT was close on five miles from the original starting place to the shore where they had finished, and they had just jumped out into the road close to where the hound van was parked when Blond threw up his head, giving vent to a hair-raising snarl, and was gone over the opposite hedge, travelling flat out on a breast-high scent.

The rest of the pack, irresistible as the sea-waves, but dumb as death, went after him.

Pinner and Dan King had their whips out, storming, and shouting, but, though the lashes found more than one hide, never a yelp came out of them. Merely they dodged automatically, and, swift and silent, bright and urgent, poured over the hedge, and went away after the golden hound, not hunting, but drawn on by some strange, primeval force sinister and overpowering.

There was no spar in the high gorse hedge opposite, but an ugly ditch before it, yet Pinner drove his horse at it, and the brute did not hesitate. Abb Veedol had a blurred impression of Dan King's red coat flashing up behind Pinner's, and then his own mount plunged and took hold. The ditch and the hedge and a wide ditch on the far side streaked beneath him, and then they were going flat to the green earth.

It seemed to Abb, as the wind whistled past his ears, that never in all his years of hunting had the blood coursed through his veins with such a swift and tingling ecstasy. Even as horse and hound, he felt the call of some unearthly urgency— a call that he must answer, even though a numbing fear mingled

with the passionate joy of the following. Before him. Pinner's red coat bobbed fantastically, and over half a field away Dan King lay low to the roan mare's withers. They had gone a couple of miles before it dawned on Abb that they were running in a wide arc that would take them back to the sea. Far ahead he caught a glimpse of it, flashing under the sun— a living light that was like a shout of laughter, like a call that is heard in dreams.

Two fields ahead of the pack Blond raced tirelessly to a breast-high scent that was not of the earth. Watching him, Abb thought, with that strange, sharpened perception; "This is an evil thing— a devilish thing! A man should pull out!"

But his bay horse, ears cocked, reefed his head out, snorting a little to the swift taking of his breath, and opened up for a fence that sped beneath them like a flash of silvered light. With the ecstasy of the leap thrilling his blood like a pagan song, Abb Veedol shivered under the knowledge that, straight as an arrow, they were going back to the spot they had so recently left.

"We'll always go back to it," thought Abb. "Until that which is to happen there has found fulfilment... "

Two fences, two fields— and the cliffs above the shore. Leaning back from it the terraced cone of the mountain had a relentless air of waiting. The pock-marks of the outcroppings of grey scoria gleamed dully, like dead, waiting eyes.

Veedol went over the last fence neck and neck with Pinner. Ahead, hounds scattered wildly as Dan King's mare plunged through them, and dashed to the very edge of the cliff. Veedol's heart stopped, and Pinner cried out, but the mare, sensing her danger at the last moment, ploughed her hoofs in and swerved in a desperate slither that scattered the turf to the rocks below.

Wide-eyed with terror the mare reared away from the edge of the cliff, but Dan King jerked her to a stand and sat staring, as Blond stared, out to the little curling waves of the incoming tide. Far away the spume went from the rocky inlet of the Heads, and the waters of the harbor boiled and seethed under the caressing peace of the sun.

Veedol felt his horse shuddering beneath him as Dan King's was shuddering. He turned to look at Pinner's cob, and the sight of it sickened him. It stood on straddled legs, with its head low, and there were exhaustion and abject fear in its dilated eyes.

The hounds were not roaming about aimlessly, rolling and scratching, as hounds will after a sharp run, but were sitting or standing in an uneasy circle, watching Blond, who sat a couple of yards back from the cliff's edge, his honey-colored eyes moving out towards the Heads, as though he watched his quarry escaping to the sea.

In a gaunt old pine that had its roots in the cliff, a bird trilled; and spent horses and riders loomed over the last hedge.

King wrenched suddenly on the roan mare's head and drove her towards the motionless Blond.

"That hound!" he grated. "That spawn of hell!"

He spurred between Blond and the edge of the cliff, and as he crossed the hound's line of vision Blond stood up slowly, the hackles on his back rising until they stood perpendicular. Slowly his gaze lifted to Dan King's face. For a second man and beast stared into each other's eyes. Then the man threw his whip hand up across his face, and the roan mare reared up and up and toppled backwards, crashing over and over to the rocks below.

Abb Veedol flung himself from his horse and ran to the cliff's edge, but it needed no second glance to convince him that Dan King and his mare had, on earth at least, no more use for haste or time.

BESIDE him someone drew a breath like a sob, and Abb Veedol looked round into Pinner's young face.

"It's awful!" said Pinner. "It's ghastly!" His face was drawn and discolored and old-looking.

Abb looked down again and saw a blotch of gold gliding over the rocks towards Dan King and the mare. A numbness of horror took him. He gesticulated wildly, mouthing, and the numbness passed, and he shouted incoherently, but the golden hound did not even look up.

Gulls swooped in from the sea, clamoring and wheeling above the dead horse and rider. Blond moved forward steadily, not furtively, but with unswerving purpose.

Abb Veedol fell silent, his mind a chaos of half-formulated thoughts. Was it Dan King, who hated him, and against whom Blond cherished a silent and deadly malignancy, that the yellow hound had hunted with such strange and untiring persistency, luring him to follow, instead of following him?

Veedol tried to shout again, but again sound would not come. He turned to look at Pinner, and saw beyond him a row of blunt, bland .hound faces peering down questioningly on the ghastly scene below. Pinner had his hands over his face. Behind him the other men stood staring, eyes dilated in their white, strained faces.

Mutely the yellow hound circled his kill. Mutely the pack watched him from above. Over the mud-flats the incoming tide slithered in a lather of dirty white foam. It seethed into land-locked pools, and snarled hungrily among the slimy rocks.

Poised on a rock above his kill Blond howled once; a terrible long-drawn cry of triumph and despair. On the cliff's edge the pack pointed their muzzles to the intense blue of the sky and howled a devil's chorus. Over the mud-flats a big wave surged, whipping up the little flecks of spent foam. With the speed of horses it came shoreward, with the sun lacing its crest to a lacquer of light; and Blond, with a last look at all that was left of Dan King and his mare, leaped to meet it.

It washed over Dan King and the mare, washing the red stains from the rocks; ebbed a little so that the horse's head seemed to lift. Then the wave came back. It took Blond from his feet, driving him back towards the shore, but with super-strength he breasted it and began to swim steadily out towards the little white horses that galloped across the deep waters.

With eyes that burned, Abb Veedol watched until the infinitesimal speck of gold that was Blond's head was lost in the waste of water.

At the cliff's foot the waves snarled, flirting with the hem of Dan King's red coat. Overhead the great gulls wheeled, crying... crying...

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18: Dr. Heidegger's Experiment

Nathaniel Hawthorne

1804-1864

The Knickerbocker, Jan 1837, as "The Fountain of Youth"

In: *Twice-Told Tales*, 1837

THAT VERY SINGULAR man old Dr. Heidegger once invited four venerable friends to meet him in his study. There were three white-bearded gentlemen— Mr. Medbourne, Colonel Killigrew and Mr. Gascoigne— and a withered gentlewoman whose name was the widow Wycherly. They were all melancholy old creatures who had been unfortunate in life, and whose greatest misfortune it was that they were not long ago in their graves. Mr. Medbourne, in the vigor of his age, had been a prosperous merchant, but had lost his all by a frantic speculation, and was now little better than a mendicant. Colonel Killigrew had wasted his best years and his health and substance in the pursuit of sinful pleasures which had given birth to a brood of pains, such as the gout and divers other torments of soul and body. Mr. Gascoigne was a ruined politician, a man of evil fame— or, at least, had been so till time had buried him from the knowledge of the present generation and made him obscure instead of infamous. As for the widow Wycherly, tradition tells us that she was a great beauty in her day, but for a long while past she had lived in deep seclusion on account of certain scandalous stories which had prejudiced the gentry of the town against her. It is a circumstance worth mentioning that each of these three old gentlemen— Mr. Medbourne, Colonel Killigrew and Mr. Gascoigne— were early lovers of the widow Wycherly, and had once been on the point of cutting each other's throats for her sake. And before proceeding farther I will merely hint that Dr. Heidegger and all his four guests were sometimes thought to be a little beside themselves, as is not infrequently the case with old people when worried either by present troubles or woeful recollections.

"My dear old friends," said Dr. Heidegger, motioning them to be seated, "I am desirous of your assistance in one of those little experiments with which I amuse myself here in my study."

If all stories were true, Dr. Heidegger's study must have been a very curious place. It was a dim, old-fashioned chamber festooned with cobwebs and besprinkled with antique dust. Around the walls stood several oaken bookcases, the lower shelves of which were filled with rows of gigantic folios and black-letter quartos, and the upper with little parchment-covered duodecimos. Over the central bookcase was a bronze bust of Hippocrates, with which, according to some authorities, Dr. Heidegger was accustomed to hold consultations in all difficult cases of his practice. In the obscurest corner of the room stood a tall and narrow oaken closet with its door ajar, within which

doubtfully appeared a skeleton. Between two of the bookcases hung a looking-glass, presenting its high and dusty plate within a tarnished gilt frame. Among many wonderful stories related of this mirror, it was fabled that the spirits of all the doctor's deceased patients dwelt within its verge and would stare him in the face whenever he looked thitherward. The opposite side of the chamber was ornamented with the full-length portrait of a young lady arrayed in the faded magnificence of silk, satin and brocade, and with a visage as faded as her dress. Above half a century ago Dr. Heidegger had been on the point of marriage with this young lady, but, being affected with some slight disorder, she had swallowed one of her lover's prescriptions and died on the bridal-evening. The greatest curiosity of the study remains to be mentioned: it was a ponderous folio volume bound in black leather, with massive silver clasps. There were no letters on the back, and nobody could tell the title of the book. But it was well known to be a book of magic, and once, when a chambermaid had lifted it merely to brush away the dust, the skeleton had rattled in its closet, the picture of the young lady had stepped one foot upon the floor and several ghastly faces had peeped forth from the mirror, while the brazen head of Hippocrates frowned and said, "Forbear!"

Such was Dr. Heidegger's study. On the summer afternoon of our tale a small round table as black as ebony stood in the centre of the room, sustaining a cut-glass vase of beautiful form and elaborate workmanship. The sunshine came through the window between the heavy festoons of two faded damask curtains and fell directly across this vase, so that a mild splendor was reflected from it on the ashen visages of the five old people who sat around. Four champagne-glasses were also on the table.

"My dear old friends," repeated Dr. Heidegger, "may I reckon on your aid in performing an exceedingly curious experiment?"

Now, Dr. Heidegger was a very strange old gentleman whose eccentricity had become the nucleus for a thousand fantastic stories. Some of these fables— to my shame be it spoken— might possibly be traced back to mine own veracious self; and if any passages of the present tale should startle the reader's faith, I must be content to bear the stigma of a fiction-monger.

When the doctor's four guests heard him talk of his proposed experiment, they anticipated nothing more wonderful than the murder of a mouse in an air-pump or the examination of a cobweb by the microscope, or some similar nonsense with which he was constantly in the habit of pestering his intimates. But without waiting for a reply Dr. Heidegger hobbled across the chamber and returned with the same ponderous folio bound in black leather which common report affirmed to be a book of magic. Undoing the silver clasps, he opened the volume and took from among its black-letter pages a rose, or what was

once a rose, though now the green leaves and crimson petals had assumed one brownish hue and the ancient flower seemed ready to crumble to dust in the doctor's hands.

"This rose," said Dr. Heidegger, with a sigh— "this same withered and crumbling flower— blossomed five and fifty years ago. It was given me by Sylvia Ward, whose portrait hangs yonder, and I meant to wear it in my bosom at our wedding. Five and fifty years it has been treasured between the leaves of this old volume. Now, would you deem it possible that this rose of half a century could ever bloom again?"

"Nonsense!" said the widow Wycherly, with a peevish toss of her head. "You might as well ask whether an old woman's wrinkled face could ever bloom again."

"See!" answered Dr. Heidegger. He uncovered the vase and threw the faded rose into the water which it contained. At first it lay lightly on the surface of the fluid, appearing to imbibe none of its moisture. Soon, however, a singular change began to be visible. The crushed and dried petals stirred and assumed a deepening tinge of crimson, as if the flower were reviving from a deathlike slumber, the slender stalk and twigs of foliage became green, and there was the rose of half a century, looking as fresh as when Sylvia Ward had first given it to her lover. It was scarcely full-blown, for some of its delicate red leaves curled modestly around its moist bosom, within which two or three dewdrops were sparkling.

"That is certainly a very pretty deception," said the doctor's friends— carelessly, however, for they had witnessed greater miracles at a conjurer's show. "Pray, how was it effected?"

"Did you never hear of the Fountain of Youth?" asked Dr. Heidegger, "which Ponce de Leon, the Spanish adventurer, went in search of two or three centuries ago?"

"But did Ponce de Leon ever find it?" said the widow Wycherly.

"No," answered Dr. Heidegger, "for he never sought it in the right place. The famous Fountain of Youth, if I am rightly informed, is situated in the southern part of the Floridian peninsula, not far from Lake Macaco. Its source is overshadowed by several gigantic magnolias which, though numberless centuries old, have been kept as fresh as violets by the virtues of this wonderful water. An acquaintance of mine, knowing my curiosity in such matters, has sent me what you see in the vase."

"Ahem!" said Colonel Killigrew, who believed not a word of the doctor's story; "and what may be the effect of this fluid on the human frame?"

"You shall judge for yourself, my dear colonel," replied Dr. Heidegger.— "And all of you, my respected friends, are welcome to so much of this

admirable fluid as may restore to you the bloom of youth. For my own part, having had much trouble in growing old, I am in no hurry to grow young again. With your permission, therefore, I will merely watch the progress of the experiment."

While he spoke Dr. Heidegger had been filling the four champagne-glasses with the water of the Fountain of Youth. It was apparently impregnated with an effervescent gas, for little bubbles were continually ascending from the depths of the glasses and bursting in silvery spray at the surface. As the liquor diffused a pleasant perfume, the old people doubted not that it possessed cordial and comfortable properties, and, though utter sceptics as to its rejuvenescent power, they were inclined to swallow it at once. But Dr. Heidegger besought them to stay a moment.

"Before you drink, my respectable old friends," said he, "it would be well that, with the experience of a lifetime to direct you, you should draw up a few general rules for your guidance in passing a second time through the perils of youth. Think what a sin and shame it would be if, with your peculiar advantages, you should not become patterns of virtue and wisdom to all the young people of the age!"

The doctor's four venerable friends made him no answer except by a feeble and tremulous laugh, so very ridiculous was the idea that, knowing how closely Repentance treads behind the steps of Error, they should ever go astray again.

"Drink, then," said the doctor, bowing; "I rejoice that I have so well selected the subjects of my experiment."

With palsied hands they raised the glasses to their lips. The liquor, if it really possessed such virtues as Dr. Heidegger imputed to it, could not have been bestowed on four human beings who needed it more woefully. They looked as if they had never known what youth or pleasure was, but had been the offspring of Nature's dotage, and always the gray, decrepit, sapless, miserable creatures who now sat stooping round the doctor's table without life enough in their souls or bodies to be animated even by the prospect of growing young again. They drank off the water and replaced their glasses on the table.

Assuredly, there was an almost immediate improvement in the aspect of the party— not unlike what might have been produced by a glass of generous wine— together with a sudden glow of cheerful sunshine, brightening over all their visages at once. There was a healthful suffusion on their cheeks instead of the ashen hue that had made them look so corpse-like. They gazed at one another, and fancied that some magic power had really begun to smooth away the deep and sad inscriptions which Father Time had been so long engraving

on their brows. The widow Wycherly adjusted her cap, for she felt almost like a woman again.

"Give us more of this wondrous water," cried they, eagerly. "We are younger, but we are still too old. Quick! give us more!"

"Patience, patience!" quoth Dr. Heidegger, who sat, watching the experiment with philosophic coolness. "You have been a long time growing old; surely you might be content to grow young in half an hour. But the water is at your service." Again he filled their glasses with the liquor of youth, enough of which still remained in the vase to turn half the old people in the city to the age of their own grandchildren.

While the bubbles were yet sparkling on the brim the doctor's four guests snatched their glasses from the table and swallowed the contents at a single gulp. Was it delusion? Even while the draught was passing down their throats it seemed to have wrought a change on their whole systems. Their eyes grew clear and bright; a dark shade deepened among their silvery locks: they sat around the table three gentlemen of middle age and a woman hardly beyond her buxom prime.

"My dear widow, you are charming!" cried Colonel Killigrew, whose eyes had been fixed upon her face while the shadows of age were flitting from it like darkness from the crimson daybreak.

The fair widow knew of old that Colonel Killigrew's compliments were not always measured by sober truth; so she started up and ran to the mirror, still dreading that the ugly visage of an old woman would meet her gaze.

Meanwhile, the three gentlemen behaved in such a manner as proved that the water of the Fountain of Youth possessed some intoxicating qualities—unless, indeed, their exhilaration of spirits were merely a lightsome dizziness caused by the sudden removal of the weight of years. Mr. Gascoigne's mind seemed to run on political topics, but whether relating to the past, present or future could not easily be determined, since the same ideas and phrases have been in vogue these fifty years. Now he rattled forth full-throated sentences about patriotism, national glory and the people's right; now he muttered some perilous stuff or other in a sly and doubtful whisper, so cautiously that even his own conscience could scarcely catch the secret; and now, again, he spoke in measured accents and a deeply-deferential tone, as if a royal ear were listening to his well-turned periods. Colonel Killigrew all this time had been trolling forth a jolly bottle-song and ringing his glass in symphony with the chorus, while his eyes wandered toward the buxom figure of the widow Wycherly. On the other side of the table, Mr. Medbourne was involved in a calculation of dollars and cents with which was strangely intermingled a project for supplying the East Indies with ice by harnessing a team of whales to the polar icebergs. As for the

widow Wycherly, she stood before the mirror courtesying and simpering to her own image and greeting it as the friend whom she loved better than all the world besides. She thrust her face close to the glass to see whether some long-remembered wrinkle or crow's-foot had indeed vanished; she examined whether the snow had so entirely melted from her hair that the venerable cap could be safely thrown aside. At last, turning briskly away, she came with a sort of dancing step to the table.

"My dear old doctor," cried she, "pray favor me with another glass."

"Certainly, my dear madam— certainly," replied the complaisant doctor. "See! I have already filled the glasses."

There, in fact, stood the four glasses brimful of this wonderful water, the delicate spray of which, as it effervesced from the surface, resembled the tremulous glitter of diamonds.

It was now so nearly sunset that the chamber had grown duskier than ever, but a mild and moonlike splendor gleamed from within the vase and rested alike on the four guests and on the doctor's venerable figure. He sat in a high-backed, elaborately-carved oaken arm-chair with a gray dignity of aspect that might have well befitted that very Father Time whose power had never been disputed save by this fortunate company. Even while quaffing the third draught of the Fountain of Youth, they were almost awed by the expression of his mysterious visage. But the next moment the exhilarating gush of young life shot through their veins. They were now in the happy prime of youth. Age, with its miserable train of cares and sorrows and diseases, was remembered only as the trouble of a dream from which they had joyously awoke. The fresh gloss of the soul, so early lost and without which the world's successive scenes had been but a gallery of faded pictures, again threw its enchantment over all their prospects. They felt like new-created beings in a new-created universe.

"We are young! We are young!" they cried, exultingly.

Youth, like the extremity of age, had effaced the strongly-marked characteristics of middle life and mutually assimilated them all. They were a group of merry youngsters almost maddened with the exuberant frolicsomeness of their years. The most singular effect of their gayety was an impulse to mock the infirmity and decrepitude of which they had so lately been the victims. They laughed loudly at their old-fashioned attire—the wide-skirted coats and flapped waistcoats of the young men and the ancient cap and gown of the blooming girl. One limped across the floor like a gouty grandfather; one set a pair of spectacles astride of his nose and pretended to pore over the black-letter pages of the book of magic; a third seated himself in an arm-chair and strove to imitate the venerable dignity of Dr. Heidegger. Then all shouted mirthfully and leaped about the room.

The widow Wycherly— if so fresh a damsel could be called a widow— tripped up to the doctor's chair with a mischievous merriment in her rosy face.

"Doctor, you dear old soul," cried she, "get up and dance with me;" and then the four young people laughed louder than ever to think what a queer figure the poor old doctor would cut.

"Pray excuse me," answered the doctor, quietly. "I am old and rheumatic, and my dancing-days were over long ago. But either of these gay young gentlemen will be glad of so pretty a partner."

"Dance with me, Clara," cried Colonel Killigrew.

"No, no! I will be her partner," shouted Mr. Gascoigne.

"She promised me her hand fifty years ago," exclaimed Mr. Medbourne.

They all gathered round her. One caught both her hands in his passionate grasp, another threw his arm about her waist, the third buried his hand among the glossy curls that clustered beneath the widow's cap. Blushing, panting, struggling, chiding, laughing, her warm breath fanning each of their faces by turns, she strove to disengage herself, yet still remained in their triple embrace. Never was there a livelier picture of youthful rivalship, with bewitching beauty for the prize. Yet, by a strange deception, owing to the duskiness of the chamber and the antique dresses which they still wore, the tall mirror is said to have reflected the figures of the three old, gray, withered grand-sires ridiculously contending for the skinny ugliness of a shrivelled grandam. But they were young: their burning passions proved them so.

Inflamed to madness by the coquetry of the girl-widow, who neither granted nor quite withheld her favors, the three rivals began to interchange threatening glances. Still keeping hold of the fair prize, they grappled fiercely at one another's throats. As they struggled to and fro the table was overturned and the vase dashed into a thousand fragments. The precious Water of Youth flowed in a bright stream across the floor, moistening the wings of a butterfly which, grown old in the decline of summer, had alighted there to die. The insect fluttered lightly through the chamber and settled on the snowy head of Dr. Heidegger.

"Come, come, gentlemen! Come, Madam Wycherly!" exclaimed the doctor. "I really must protest against this riot."

They stood still and shivered, for it seemed as if gray Time were calling them back from their sunny youth far down into the chill and darksome vale of years. They looked at old Dr. Heidegger, who sat in his carved armchair holding the rose of half a century, which he had rescued from among the fragments of the shattered vase. At the motion of his hand the four rioters resumed their seats— the more readily because their violent exertions had wearied them, youthful though they were.

"My poor Sylvia's rose!" ejaculated Dr. Heidegger, holding it in the light of the sunset clouds. "It appears to be fading again."

And so it was. Even while the party were looking at it the flower continued to shrivel up, till it became as dry and fragile as when the doctor had first thrown it into the vase. He shook off the few drops of moisture which clung to its petals.

"I love it as well thus as in its dewy freshness," observed he, pressing the withered rose to his withered lips.

While he spoke the butterfly fluttered down from the doctor's snowy head and fell upon the floor. His guests shivered again. A strange dullness— whether of the body or spirit they could not tell— was creeping gradually over them all. They gazed at one another, and fancied that each fleeting moment snatched away a charm and left a deepening furrow where none had been before. Was it an illusion? Had the changes of a lifetime been crowded into so brief a space, and were they now four aged people sitting with their old friend Dr. Heidegger?

"Are we grown old again so soon?" cried they, dolefully.

In truth, they had. The Water of Youth possessed merely a virtue more transient than that of wine; the delirium which it created had effervesced away. Yes, they were old again. With a shuddering impulse that showed her a woman still, the widow clasped her skinny hands before her face and wished that the coffin-lid were over it, since it could be no longer beautiful.

"Yes, friends, ye are old again," said Dr. Heidegger, "and, lo! the Water of Youth is all lavished on the ground. Well, I bemoan it not; for if the fountain gushed at my very doorstep, I would not stoop to bathe my lips in it— no, though its delirium were for years instead of moments. Such is the lesson ye have taught me."

But the doctor's four friends had taught no such lesson to themselves. They resolved forthwith to make a pilgrimage to Florida and quaff at morning, noon and night from the Fountain of Youth.

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19: By Courier

O. Henry

William Sydney Porter, 1862-1910

Courier-Mail (Brisbane) 12 May 1934

IT WAS NEITHER the season nor the hour when the park had frequenters; and it is likely that the young lady who was seated on one of the benches at the side of the walk had merely obeyed a sudden impulse to sit for a while and enjoy a foretaste of coming spring.

She rested there, pensive and still. A certain melancholy that touched her countenance must have been of recent birth, for it had not yet altered the fine and youthful contours of her cheek, nor subdued the arch though resolute curve of her lips.

A tall young man came striding through the park along the path near which she sat. Behind him tagged a boy carrying a suit case. At sight of the young lady the man's face changed to red and back to pale again. He watched her countenance as he drew nearer, with hope and anxiety mingled on his own. He passed within a few yards of her, but he saw no evidence that she was aware of his presence or existence.

Some fifty yards further on he suddenly stopped and sat on a bench at one side. The boy dropped the suit case and stared at him with wondering, shrewd eyes. The young man took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow. It was a good handkerchief, a good brow, and the young man was good to look at. He said to the boy:

"I want you to take a message to that young lady on that bench. Tell her I am on my way to the station, to leave for San Francisco, where I shall join that Alaska moose-hunting expedition. Tell her that, since she has commanded me neither to speak nor write to her, I take this means of making one last appeal to her sense of justice, for the sake of what has been. Tell her that to condemn and discard one who has not deserved such treatment, without giving him her reasons or a chance to explain, is contrary to her nature, as I believe it to be. Tell her that I have thus, to a certain degree, disobeyed her injunctions, in the hope that she may yet be inclined to see justice done. Go and tell her that."

The young man dropped a half-dollar into the boy's hand. The boy looked at him for a moment with bright, canny eyes out of a dirty, intelligent face, and then set off at a run. He approached the lady on the bench a little doubtfully, but unembarrassed. He touched the brim of the old plaid bicycle cap perched on the back of his head. The lady looked at him coolly, without prejudice or favour.

"Lady," he said, "dat gent on de oder bench sent yer a song and dance by me. If yer don't know de guy, and he's tryin' to do de Johnny act, say de word,

and I'll call a cop in t'ree minutes. If yer does know him, and he's on de square, w'y I'll spiel yer de bunch of hot air he sent yer."

The young lady betrayed a faint interest. "A song and a dance!" she said in a deliberate sweet voice that seemed to clothe her words in a diaphanous garment of inpalpable irony. A new idea— in the troubadour line, I suppose. I— used to know the gentleman who sent you, so I think it will hardly be necessary to call the police. You may execute your song and dance, but do not sing too loudly. It is a little early yet for open-air vaudeville, and we might attract attention."

"Awe," said the boy, with a shrug down the length of him, "yer know what I mean, lady. 'Tain't a turn, it's wind. He told me to tell yer he's got his collar and cuffs in dat grip for a scoot clean out to 'Frisco. Den he's going to shoot snowbirds in de Klondyke. He says yer told him not to send 'round no more pink notes, nor come hangin' over de garden gate, and he takes dis means of puttin' yer wise. He says yer refereed him out like a has-been, and never gave him no chance to kick at de decision. He says yer swiped him, and never said why."

The slightly awakened interest in the young lady's eyes did not abate. Perhaps it was caused by either the originality or the audacity of the snowbird hunter, in thus circumventing her express commands against the ordinary modes of communication. She fixed her eye on a statue stand-ing disconsolate in the dishevelled park, and spoke into the transmitter.

"Tell the gentleman that I need not repeat to him a description of my ideals. He knows what they have been and what they still are. So far as they touch on this case, absolute loyalty and truth are the ones paramount. Tell him that I have studied my own heart as well as one can, and I know its weakness as well as I do its deeds. That is why I decline to hear his pleas, whatever they may be. I did not condemn him through hearsay or doubtful evidence, and that is why I make no charge. But, since he persists in hearing what he already well knows, you may convey the matter.

"Tell him that I entered the conservatory that evening from the rear to cut a rose for my mother. Tell him I saw him and Miss Ashburton beneath the pink oleander. The tableau was pretty, but the pose and juxtaposition were too eloquent and evident to require explanation. I left the conservatory, and, at the same time, the rose and my ideal. You may carry that song and dance to your impresario."

"I'm shy on one word, lady, Jux-jux-put me wise on dat, will yer?"

"Juxtaposition— or you may call it propinquity— or, if you like, being rather too near for one maintaining the position of an ideal."

The gravel spun from beneath the boy's feet. He stood by the other bench. The man's eyes interrogated him, hungrily. The boy's were shin-ing with the impersonal zeal of the translator.

"De lady says she's on to de fact dat gals is dead easy when a feller comes speilin' ghost stories and tryin' to make up, and dat's why she won't listen to no soft-soap. She says she caught yer dead to rights, huggin' a bunch o' calico in de hothouse. She side-stepped in to pull some posies and yer was squeezin' the oder gal to beat the band. She says it looked cute, all right, all right, but it made her sick. She says yer better git busy, and make a sneak for de train."

The young man gave a low whistle and his eyes flashed with a sudden thought. His hand flew to the in-side pocket of his coat, and drew out a handful of letters. Selecting one, he handed it to the boy, following it with a silver dollar from his vest pocket.

"Give that letter to the lady," he said, "and ask her to read it. Tell her that it should explain the situation. Tell her that, if she had mingled a little trust with her conception of the ideal much heartache might have been avoided. Tell her that the loyalty she prizes so much has never wavered. Tell her I am waiting for an answer."

The messenger stood before the lady.

"De gent says he's had de ski-bunk put on him widout no cause. He says he's no bum guy; and, lady, yer read dat letter, and I'll bet yer he's a white sport all right."

The young lady unfolded the letter, somewhat doubtfully, and read it.

"Dear Dr. Arnold:

I want to thank you for your most kind and opportune aid to my daughter last Friday evening, when she was overcome by an attack of her old heart trouble in the conservatory at Mrs. Waldron's reception. Had you not been near to catch her as she fell and to render proper attention we might have lost her. I would be glad if you would call and undertake the treatment of her case.—

Gratefully yours,
Robert Ashburton."

The young lady refolded the letter, and handed it to the boy.

"De gent wants an answer," said the messenger. "Wot's de word?"

The lady's eyes suddenly flashed on him, bright, smiling, and wet. "Tell that guy on the other bench," she said, with a happy, tremulous laugh, "that his girl wants him."

20: He Had An Alibi

Anonymous

Albury Banner and Wodonga Express (NSW), 20 March 1936

MORRISON, with the glare of the afternoon sun in his face, did not see the scarred man until the hot brown eyes were looking straight into his own grey ones.

'Hullo!' said Morrison.

'You!'

'A good guess,' grunted the scarred man. 'Waiting for someone?'

'Yes,' said Morrison. 'A murderer.'

'Hope you'll catch him.' The other made as if to pass. But Morrison barred the way.

'You stay here,' he said. His breath came quicker. 'You can't walk off like that. The police have got a few questions to ask first.'

The scarred man, arms akimbo, seemed mildly amused.

'How are you going to stop me?'

Morrison, though his brain from the first had been desperately busy, had no answer ready. In the left-hand pocket of his coat was an old pin-fire revolver. Side by side with a dusty packet of cartridges, it had lain for years in a drawer at his aunt's cottage. Herries, the police sergeant he brought there after the discovery of the tragedy, had agreed that it would be an invaluable ally in stopping any suspicious character. More especially in stopping the scarred man, otherwise Steve Vogel, otherwise Morrison's distant cousin. In the corresponding right hand pocket was a police whistle. A blast could be heard by any of the men who were patrolling the down between the cottage and the town.

From Morrison himself, paying one of his frequent calls, had come the announcement of the murder. He had dashed on to the little police station, and to the sergeant-in-charge breathlessly described how he had found the body, skull smashed with one terrific blow dealt from behind, sprawling across the sitting-room floor. And then, in reply to questions, he had added details about the scarred man, lately seen loitering within a hundred yards of the cottage— Vogel, the ne'er-do-well, the lately released gaol bird, whose possible visits the old lady had dreaded.

Sergeant Herries had enlisted the help of half-a-dozen unofficial assistants, including Morrison himself, to search the downs. Whichever route Vogel had taken, he would find it difficult to get clear away. He had no car, no cycle. If he tried to steal either, it would be easier still to track him.

'Well?' said Vogel at last.

If only Morrison had put the revolver in the other pocket! His right hand, with a sliding movement, groped, frantically but ineffectively, for the whistle. It eluded his fingers just too long. In a flash Morrison's arms were pinned to his sides. His spine, in Vogel's gorilla-like grip, sagged; he swayed, recovered, and finally crashed on to the cliff path, the other on top of him. The sharp edges of the revolver hurt agonisingly. He wriggled, and found himself engaged in a second struggle. Neither spoke or tried to speak. Until abruptly Vogel's voice rose to a shout.

'Look out, you fool!' and the chalky footpath became a steep slope of turf, and they fell.

MORRISON opened his eyes, warily. A yard away Vogel was sitting, his knees drawn up, his knotted hands clasped about them. His clothes were torn, and white with chalk. Morrison 's revolver was beside him.

'Hullo— come to your senses?' he asked. Morrison, mumbling an answer, put an unsteady hand to his head. It ached abominably, and his fingers came away damp.

'It's only superficial,' Vogel assured him. 'You've been let off lightly— considering. But you'll have to go slow with that right shoulder of yours.'

Instinctively Morrison moved the shoulder. A white-hot stab of pain, rewarded him.

'When we pitched, over the cliff,' explained Vogel, 'you were underneath. And you were still there when we hit the beach. If the sand had been shingle, you wouldn't have had much spine left.'

'How long have we been here?'

'Can't say exactly— the fall smashed my watch to splinters. But if you call it half an hour I guess you won't be much out.

'I daresay you're wondering,' he went on, 'why I don't finish you off, and let the tide carry your body round the point and dump it there for the coroner to guess what happened? It wouldn't have been a bad programme, only I happen to need a guide. It's no use blinking facts; we're both up against it. On either side the water is already six feet deep, with a swirl where it fetches up against the cliff that means death to anyone who can't swim. Which rules out me. You'd be surprised at the number of sailors who never learn. And you're a wash-out, anyway. And to shout for help in this wind would be sheer waste of breath. That leaves us the cave.'

'The cave?' echoed Morrison, stupidly.

'Otherwise the Devil's Alley, just on our left. I'm told that the other end comes out somewhere on the Downs. You ought to know.'

'I've never explored it beyond a yard or so,' said Morrison.

'Then you'd better make a start, right away,' said Vogel. 'In an other five minutes it will be too late.'

Morrison struggled to his feet. The change of position set his shoulder throbbing damnably. Sky and sea merged in a spinning darkness. But presently his brain cleared, and he was able to move shakily towards the cave. Vogel followed him.

For the first few yards the path, of sloping downwards, was easy; then the walls narrowed, and darkness engulfed them. Morrison stumbled forward, his finger-tips touching the chalk walls. Here and there a remote and inaccessible crevice overhead turned darkness into twilight. The path of twisted, climbed, and finally descended as again to a pool of ice-cold water into which both men blundered. Vogel struck a match.

'How many of those have you got?' asked Morrison.

'The best part of a boxful. What's that?'

It was the sound of water, pouring out from an invisible source into the pool. Vogel bent, dipped a finger, and put it to his lips.

'Salt. I suppose it flows in with the rising tide. And there's the height it reaches.' He pointed to a line of green scum, level with their heads.

'Push on. We've no time to waste.'

They came to a fork in the path.

'Any idea which way?' snapped Vogel.

'None,' Morrison snapped back.

The other, striking a fresh match, bent to examine the floor. But it recorded no footprints.

'We'll take the wider path,' he said. 'It's a fifty-fifty chance, anyway. What are you doing?'

'Nothing,' lied Morrison. He had been peering among the debris at the side of the cave for a fragment of chalk big enough to use as a weapon.

'Listen,' said Vogel. 'No, don't argue, listen! If you try any fool trick down here, you'll never see daylight again. Got that? Then push on.'

The wider path ended. A dead wall of cliff mocked them. There was nothing for it but to return to the narrow path. It was steeper than the other, and twisted tortuously. Splinters of chalk crumbled and slid under their feet; the darkness was unbroken, the air stagnant and tainted.

Vogel came to a sudden halt.

'Is there much more of this?'

'I've told you—'

'Yes, I know. But I'm not sure I believe you. You've spent enough time exploring the neighborhood. Sort of hobby, I gathered.'

'Who told you I'd explored it?'

'The old lady, when she showed me your photo.'

'She showed you—' Morrison began, but Vogel interrupted him.

'We talked for some time. She wasn't a bad sort, in spite of that tongue of hers.'

They struggled forward. The passage grow so narrow that there was only just room for a man to worm his way between the walls. But there were compensations. The air became fresher, the darkness paler, and presently, through a tangle of shrubs high above them, they glimpsed the sky.

'Journey's end,' said Vogel.

'Yes,' said Morrison. His heart began to thud again. 'I suppose we'll be able to scramble out.'

'For a man who could grip the rock and drag himself from point to point, maybe there's a chance.'

'If a rope were lowered?'

Vogel grinned. 'I guess I'd be able to make a getaway without waiting for a rope.'

'Do you mean that you'll deliberately leave me here?'

'Why not? You've done your damndest for me.'

'Naturally, knowing—'

'That I'd written saying that I was coming this afternoon. And I'll bet you reminded her that I'd the Fiend's own temper, and had just finished a stretch of three months in Marseilles for letting it run away with me?'

'It's all true.'

'True enough. But sailors don't care. She showed you my letter, of course?'

'Yes.'

'I thought so. And the new will?'

'No.'

'You're lying again— she did. She told you, too, that we'd parted friends And you knew that she was leaving half her property to me, that Peter the Virtuous would have to go shares with Steve the Waster— the only two relations she'd got. It would be interesting to speculate as to where that will is now. But there's one thing you didn't know, and that is that she walked with me to the far end of the lane, and that half a dozen people saw us part there. Anything to say to the perfect alibi? Nothing? So long, then.'

Vogel made a leap at a jutting spur of rock. He clutched it, hauled himself up, gained a precarious foothold, Morrison watched him scramble with sailor's dexterity, from point to point, saw his head reach the gap, hands grasp and haul him up to safety. The sergeant must have known the cave opening after all, and been astute enough to watch it. Someone was leaning over, shouting.

But Morrison neither listened nor answered. He felt sick, utterly exhausted. Sweat tingled on his forehead. He fumbled for his handkerchief. It wasn't there. He had wrapped it round the poker before he struck the blow, to avoid any risk of finger-marks, and flung the poker in the spinney behind the cottage. Was the handkerchief there, too? Perhaps.

He suddenly recollected the revolver. No, that had gone, too. He turned, and began stumbling blindly back along the path which led to the pool. As he hurried nearer he could hear in the distance the sibilant ripple of its waters.

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21: Symptoms

L. C. Douthwaite

1878-1948

Telegraph (Brisbane), 17 April 1937

AS the solidly built Inspector Hemingway, and Holden, the slimly immaculate Divisional Surgeon, were shown into the study, the tall slightly cadaverous man who had been standing by the desk came forward to introduce himself as Dr. Fauntleroy.

"No doubt as to the cause of death, unfortunately," he said in a voice that was inclined to be resonant. "A calamity I feel more deeply because, apart from my being his doctor, professor Humphreys was my friend."

Hemingway transferred his glance to the figure seated at the desk. Hands clasped loosely on the blotting-pad, where, by the side of a small green phial, a half-sheet of notepaper stirred in the breeze from the open window, it was as if the grey-haired figure seated there had fallen asleep over his work.

"You have no doubt—?" he began, and Fauntleroy's reply was immediate,

"Unfortunately, no," he said definitely, "as is proved by that letter."

After glancing at the note, the Inspector passed it across to his companion, who read:

As I can find no valid reason why I should not curtail my agony, you, my dearest, will forgive.

Your devoted husband,
Osborne Humphries.

"I take it," Holden said. "there's no question as to the handwriting." Fauntleroy's tone was emphatic as he indicated the phial.

"None whatever— as there is none that, in a moment of mental aberration, he took an overdose of veronal," he said.

Having verified the bottle's contents, Holden, making his examination, looked up.

"Do I understand Professor Humphries was your patient?" he inquired.

"He was under my treatment for carbuncle," Fauntleroy explained, and Holden nodded confirmatively.

"I noticed it— on the check...." Adding: "Usual treatment for the usual symptoms, I take it? And with the usual response?"

Again, Fauntleroy nodded.

"Yes, Sub-normal temperature and staphylococcus injections," he said, and seemed to hesitate. "A treatment. I'm sorry to say, that was not as definitely successful as I could have wished," he added.

Holden turned to the Inspector. "You'll want particulars for your report," he said, and glanced to Fauntleroy. "Lady Humphreys first, I expect?"

"If you think it necessary," his fellow practitioner conceded. "Only— well— naturally, the shock— If you'll excuse me, I'll go and prepare her."

WHEN the door had closed, Holden indicated the dead man's letter.

"Anything strike you in that " he asked quietly of Hemingway— "or about the state of the writing-table?"

The detective re-read the letter.

"What's at the back of your mind?" he said. "It's suicide, all right, Isn't it?"

"There's a discrepancy," Holden replied.

"Where?" Hemingway demanded.

"Between the state of the room, and the desk, where there's nothing out of place, and this letter," Holden said. "Take another look at it— a note that was thrown down just anyhow— and with a perfectly good paperweight immediately to hand."

"What's there funny about the note itself?"

Hemingway demanded, replacing it on the desk. "Doesn't it strike you as curious that a man as methodical as the Professor should write a letter of such tragic importance— and with neither formal beginning nor date?" Holden demanded. "Or, with a well-filled stationery rack to hand, that he should use a soiled half-sheet of note-paper?"

Hemingway looked startled.

"What's the inference?" he asked quickly, but Holden's reply was interrupted by the re-appearance of Fauntleroy.

"If you will follow me, please—" he said, in a low voice.

They passed up the staircase to a comfortably furnished sitting-room where an attractive but grief-stricken woman of 35 awaited them.

"Perhaps," the detective suggested gently, when Fauntleroy had presented them, "It would save you distress to tell us in your own words exactly at what time, and in what circumstances, your husband was found."

With a gesture that invited them, also, to be seated, Lady Humphrey sunk into a chair.

"He was not home when I retired last night," she said. "When I awoke about six o'clock he was not in the room. Thinking he must have fallen asleep over his work, I sent Hortense, my maid, to the study. She returned to say that the door was locked. While I slipped on a dressing-gown, Watkins, the butler, went to the side of the house, and through the window saw my husband at his desk. He called out, but could not attract his attention. We sent for the chauffeur, who forced the study door, and—" her voice trailed off.

Hemingway thought for a moment. "I take it the key was in the lock?" he suggested.

Lady Humphrey shook her head.

"No," she said, "it was in my husbands pocket." She paused, then added: "With the windows fastened from the inside."

Holden broke in. "Your maid was fully dressed— hair arranged, and so on— when she answered your bell?" he inquired.

"To the best of my recollection." Lady Humphreys replied.

"Wasn't that a little early?" Holden suggested, and the widow thought for a moment.

"Possibly it was— usually she doesn't come to my room until nine."

"And the butler— Watkins— how was he dressed?" Holden further inquired, and this time the answer came promptly.

"In his shirt sleeves, but without collar or tie. He makes a practice of being the first down, and when everything's going smoothly, returns to his room."

Hemingway glanced at Holden, who nodded. Both rose.

On his way to the door, however, Holden checked himself. "Apart from carbuncle," he asked quietly, "was your husband well?"

Her reply came only after consideration. "He's not been himself for quite a little time," she said at last "Head pains and, until recently, subnormal temperature... I think he's been depressed at not perfecting his discovery."

Holden looked up.

"Perfecting his discovery" he repeated. "Report has it his experiments were successful."

Lady Humphreys made a gesture of weariness. "An overstatement, unfortunately," she said. Then, her voice definite: "Not but what, given a little longer, there's little doubt he would have succeeded."

Holden nodded sympathetically. "Perhaps we might be permitted to glance at his workroom," he suggested.

They followed the doctor to an elaborately equipped and meticulously ordered laboratory, where was a bench with a microscope, a box of slides, and a catalogue of the exhibits that— with a single exception— Holden found to correspond with the index numbers on the slides.

"Curious!" he said, his eyes distant.

"What is it you find so odd?" their guide questioned.

"That one as methodical as Professor Humphreys should include an unmarked and unnumbered slide in a box wherein every other one is catalogued," he said.

Holden picked up the unnumbered slide and, placing it carefully into the microscope, looked intently through the eye-piece. Then he gave place to Fauntleroy.

"Granting this is a specimen of Professor Humphreys' own blood, put yourself in his place when he examined it," he suggested quietly.

The doctor's inspection was prolonged.

"What reason have you for thinking it is a specimen of the professor's blood?" he demanded at last.

"Because it was what I was looking for," said the divisional surgeon.

IN the study again, Watkins having announced that his mistress had been taken suddenly unwell, Fauntleroy left them.

When the butler would have followed, however, Holden checked him.

"You overslept this morning, I believe?" he inquired, and the butler looked apologetic.

"I can't understand it, sir." he said, self-reproachfuly. "Last night I'd no heavy supper or anything— just the cup of tea Hortense brought me last thing. Touch of liver, I expect."

"Bad mouth, eh?" Holden suggested sympathetically.

"Pretty bad, sir." Watkins admitted. "And that's not like me, either."

As he turned to go: "Would it be possible for me to spend a few moments in your late master's bedroom?" Holden inquired, and the butler hesitated.

"I'm afraid I've no authority, sir," he said doubtfully, and glanced at Hemingway. "But if it's the Inspector's order—"

After an apparently unproductive look around the bedroom, Holden passed through to the adjoining bathroom. It was from the articles on the shelf above the basin that he slipped a small object into his pocket. He listened intently, and at the sound of swift footsteps from the corridor passed into the bedroom; as the girl came in, he was standing by the bed.

Black-haired, pale, and dark-eyed, her manner was tense.

"Scared stiff" was the inspector's mental comment.

"What you do 'ere?" she demanded sharply.

"I see you've changed the linen already."

Holden observed, and noted the sudden lessening of her trepidation.

"To the laundry," she explained, and as Holden crossed to a basket that stood near the window, cried: "Empty, m'sieu!"

But Holden raised the cover to show a full basket, and when from the crumpled linen he tumbled to the floor he picked two articles, the French-woman's fame flamed.

"I instruct the 'ousemaid to prepare ze laundry," she exclaimed, as he turned the pillow-cases over in his hand.

"Which, so far as I'm concerned, she is at liberty to do," Holden said, tossing them back into the basket.

In the hall again, Holden summoned Watkins.

"Ask your mistress if we may see her," he instructed. "Also, make sure her maid is present."

PALE, in command of herself, but with her doctor hovering solicitously in the background, Lady Humphreys was seated in a big chair by the fire. Noting the absence of Hortense, Holden made a sign to Hemingway, who disappeared. When, a few moments later, he returned with the French woman, she was dressed for the street, and looked pale and dishevelled.

"I'm sorry to intrude again, Lady Humphreys." Holden said apologetically, "but there remain still one or two points upon which we are not quite clear." He turned to Heming-way, who, in turn, addressed Watkins. "Why, this morning, was it necessary to break into the study?" he inquired.

"Because my key wasn't in it's usual place in the top drawer of my pantry dresser," the butler explained, and the Inspector's eyes narrowed.

"Are you sure it's not there?' he said, and the butler's colour deepened.

"Quite," he said definitely. "I turned everything out of the drawer to make sure."

"Go and look again." Hemingway said abruptly, and when the man returned his expression was one of bewilderment.

"It wasn't there this morning, sir, that I will swear!" he said emphatically.

"Now do you understand why you overslept?" Holden asked. "If not, I'll tell you. It was to enable whoever drugged your overnight tea to enter the study before you were down."

"Me! Doped!"

Watkins cast an outraged glance at the French girl, whose eyes shone black against the dead white of her face. Lady Humphreys, her pallor intensified, started up with a cry.

"Then my husband—" she began, but, with a gesture of gentleness, Holden broke in: "Wait, please," he said.

He crossed to the writing-table, scribbled a few lines, passed the note to Hemingway, who, leaving the room, returned a moment later without explanation.

Holden said gravely: "It's only fair to tell you, Lady Humphreys, that from the moment I entered your husband's study I became convinced that all was not as appeared on the surface."

Lady Humphreys' hands tightened on the chair arm.

"You mean—"she began hoarsely.

"I mean," Holden returned, "that with his habit of almost pedantic order, for a letter of the type of the one left on his desk, Professor Humphreys was unlikely to use only a half-sheet of paper, to begin it without date or preliminary, or when completed, to toss it indifferently aside. My conviction of the unusual intensified when, concealed in a box of carefully numbered and catalogued microscopic slides, I discovered one that was unnumbered, and upon which was a specimen of human blood." His voice dropped. "The blood of a dying man," he said quietly. He swung round to Fauntleroy: "Blood," he added slowly, "that, as you learnt a few moments ago, is swarming with anthrax bacilli— a disease whose symptoms are identical with those of carbuncle!"

Although a smothered cry came from Lady Humphreys, when, compassionately, Holden turned to her, it was to find her more self-contained.

"Continue, please," she said, steadily.

"To ascertain if my suspicions were correct," Holden resumed, "it was necessary to examine the pillow-cases used by your husband. Fortunately, though the bed-linen had been changed it was still in the soiled linen basket. Neither case showed any of those signs that, inevitably, would have been present had they been used by a sufferer from carbuncle."

As if inviting comment, he ceased speaking. Hortense glared at him fiercely, but no one spoke.

THE door opened to admit a constable, who, approaching Holden, handed him a tube rather bigger than those used for ordinary shaving-soap— at the sight of which the Frenchwoman's pale face grew suddenly paler still.

Balancing the tube in his palm, Holden went on:

"My first thought, of course, was that infection had come from a new and un-sterilised shaving-brush. The briefest inspection of the dressing-table, however, showed that the patient used a cream," he held up the tube for inspection— "that renders a brush unnecessary... Hence, with Lady Humphrey's permission, it would be as well to see if a microscopic examination shows any bacilli in this soap here."

Stepping forward, Fauntleroy took the tube from Holden's outstretched hand.

"I don't see why not; the laboratory's unoccupied— unfortunately," he said, and began to move towards the door...

"Ah, clumsy!" he gasped. Tripping over the hearthrug, he lay sprawling, jerked from his hand, the tube landed directly into the heart of the redly-

glowing fire— that melted the thin lead of the tube, so that the fat-impregnated contents burst into flame.

Inspector Hemingway stepped forward.

"Allow me," he said courteously, and the prostrate man held up his hands. A moment later, struggling, handcuffs about his wrists, he fell back.

"This outrage— what does it mean?" he shouted, and the question was addressed, not to Hemingway, but to Holden.

"It means," the latter said quietly, "that when it was published that Professor Humphreys had completed his researches, you set yourself to steal his discovery... it must have been some thing of a shock when, having read his notes, you found the announcement was premature— that your infection of his shaving soap was to bring no reward but the addition of murder to your record."

He swung round to face Hortense, who, eyes blazing, was glaring at Fauntleroy.

"And that is the gre-a-t Doctor Fauntleroy!" she cried, pointing to the hand cuffed man. "I will say he make of me the fool..."

The girl went on to tell how she had been duped into drugging Watkins' tea so as to steal the key and get the letter which Fauntleroy had cut in half. She had returned the half of the letter to the study, and had also changed the bed linen because Fauntleroy had told her to. There was also another thing she explained.

"Before the gre-at Fauntleroy ask Madame to see you, 'e fin' me, an' say for me to give 'im the soap I fin' in the bedroom."

HOLDEN pointed out further that the professor, having subjected a specimen of his blood to microscopic examination, and found the presence of anthrax bacilli, and with the exact knowledge of the agony inseparable from that condition, had written the part of the letter which had been found to explain and justify his action in taking the veronal.

"Without corroborative evidence," Fauntleroy said scornfully, "that girl's precious statement will be worth"— he snapped the thumb and finger of one manacled hand — "exactly that!" He turned his head slowly to the fire, where the soap glowed a crumbling mass against the flames.

"Not a shred of evidence, but the bare word of a domestic—" His eyes fixed upon Holden, the words died.

For the Divisional Surgeon had taken from his pocket a tube that was identical with the one that had been burnt.

"I'll retain this, Hemingway, for Home Office analysis," he said quietly. "Probably it will be more eloquent even than the sample I sent for especially, and that with its destruction, has told us so much."

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22: The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes

Rudyard Kipling

1865-1936

Quartette, Christmas 1885

In: *The Phantom 'Rickshaw & other Eerie Tales*, India, 1888

Alive or dead— there is no other way.
— Native Proverb.

THERE IS, as the conjurers say, no deception about this tale. Jukes by accident stumbled upon a village that is well known to exist, though he is the only Englishman who has been there. A somewhat similar institution used to flourish on the outskirts of Calcutta, and there is a story that if you go into the heart of Bikanir, which is in the heart of the Great Indian Desert, you shall come across not a village but a town where the Dead who did not die but may not live have established their headquarters. And, since it is perfectly true that in the same Desert is a wonderful city where all the rich money lenders retreat after they have made their fortunes (fortunes so vast that the owners cannot trust even the strong hand of the Government to protect them, but take refuge in the waterless sands), and drive sumptuous C-spring barouches, and buy beautiful girls and decorate their palaces with gold and ivory and Minton tiles and mother-n'-pearl, I do not see why Jukes's tale should not be true. He is a Civil Engineer, with a head for plans and distances and things of that kind, and he certainly would not take the trouble to invent imaginary traps. He could earn more by doing his legitimate work. He never varies the tale in the telling, and grows very hot and indignant when he thinks of the disrespectful treatment he received. He wrote this quite straightforwardly at first, but he has since touched it up in places and introduced Moral Reflections, thus:

IN THE BEGINNING it all arose from a slight attack of fever. My work necessitated my being in camp for some months between Pakpattan and Muharakpur — a desolate sandy stretch of country as every one who has had the misfortune to go there may know. My coolies were neither more nor less exasperating than other gangs, and my work demanded sufficient attention to keep me from moping, had I been inclined to so unmanly a weakness.

On the 23d December, 1884, I felt a little feverish. There was a full moon at the time, and, in consequence, every dog near my tent was baying it. The brutes assembled in twos and threes and drove me frantic. A few days previously I had shot one loud-mouthed singer and suspended his carcass in terrorem about fifty yards from my tent-door. But his friends fell upon, fought

for, and ultimately devoured the body; and, as it seemed to me, sang their hymns of thanksgiving afterward with renewed energy.

The light-heartedness which accompanies fever acts differently on different men. My irritation gave way, after a short time, to a fixed determination to slaughter one huge black and white beast who had been foremost in song and first in flight throughout the evening. Thanks to a shaking hand and a giddy head I had already missed him twice with both barrels of my shot-gun, when it struck me that my best plan would be to ride him down in the open and finish him off with a hog-spear. This, of course, was merely the semi-delirious notion of a fever patient; but I remember that it struck me at the time as being eminently practical and feasible.

I therefore ordered my groom to saddle Pornic and bring him round quietly to the rear of my tent. When the pony was ready, I stood at his head prepared to mount and dash out as soon as the dog should again lift up his voice. Pornic, by the way, had not been out of his pickets for a couple of days; the night air was crisp and chilly; and I was armed with a specially long and sharp pair of persuaders with which I had been rousing a sluggish cob that afternoon. You will easily believe, then, that when he was let go he went quickly. In one moment, for the brute bolted as straight as a die, the tent was left far behind, and we were flying over the smooth sandy soil at racing speed.

In another we had passed the wretched dog, and I had almost forgotten why it was that I had taken the horse and hogspear.

The delirium of fever and the excitement of rapid motion through the air must have taken away the remnant of my senses. I have a faint recollection of standing upright in my stirrups, and of brandishing my hog-spear at the great white Moon that looked down so calmly on my mad gallop; and of shout-log challenges to the camel-thorn bushes as they whizzed past. Once or twice I believe, I swayed forward on Pornic's neck, and literally hung on by my spurs—as the marks next morning showed.

The wretched beast went forward like a thing possessed, over what seemed to be a limitless expanse of moonlit sand. Next, I remember, the ground rose suddenly in front of us, and as we topped the ascent I saw the waters of the Sutlej shining like a silver bar below. Then Pornic blundered heavily on his nose, and we rolled together down some unseen slope.

I must have lost consciousness, for when I recovered I was lying on my stomach in a heap of soft white sand, and the dawn was beginning to break dimly over the edge of the slope down which I had fallen. As the light grew stronger I saw that I was at the bottom of a horseshoe-shaped crater of sand, opening on one side directly on to the shoals of the Sutlej. My fever had

altogether left me, and, with the exception of a slight dizziness in the head, I felt no had effects from the fall over night.

Pornic, who was standing a few yards away, was naturally a good deal exhausted, but had not hurt himself in the least. His saddle, a favorite polo one was much knocked about, and had been twisted under his belly. It took me some time to put him to rights, and in the meantime I had ample opportunities of observing the spot into which I had so foolishly dropped.

At the risk of being considered tedious, I must describe it at length: inasmuch as an accurate mental picture of its peculiarities will be of material assistance in enabling the reader to understand what follows.

Imagine then, as I have said before, a horseshoe-shaped crater of sand with steeply graded sand walls about thirty-five feet high. (The slope, I fancy, must have been about 65 degrees.) This crater enclosed a level piece of ground about fifty yards long by thirty at its broadest part, with a crude well in the centre. Round the bottom of the crater, about three feet from the level of the ground proper, ran a series of eighty-three semi-circular ovoid, square, and multilateral holes, all about three feet at the mouth. Each hole on inspection showed that it was carefully shored internally with drift-wood and bamboos, and over the mouth a wooden drip-board projected, like the peak of a jockey's cap, for two feet. No sign of life was visible in these tunnels, but a most sickening stench pervaded the entire amphitheatre— a stench fouler than any which my wanderings in Indian villages have introduced me to.

Having remounted Pornic, who was as anxious as I to get back to camp, I rode round the base of the horseshoe to find some place whence an exit would be practicable. The inhabitants, whoever they might be, had not thought fit to put in an appearance, so I was left to my own devices. My first attempt to "rush" Pornic up the steep sand-banks showed me that I had fallen into a trap exactly on the same model as that which the ant-lion sets for its prey. At each step the shifting sand poured down from above in tons, and rattled on the drip-boards of the holes like small shot. A couple of ineffectual charges sent us both rolling down to the bottom, half choked with the torrents of sand; and I was constrained to turn my attention to the river-bank.

Here everything seemed easy enough. The sand hills ran down to the river edge, it is true, but there were plenty of shoals and shallows across which I could gallop Pornic, and find my way back to terra firma by turning sharply to the right or left. As I led Pornic over the sands I was startled by the faint pop of a rifle across the river; and at the same moment a bullet dropped with a sharp "whit" close to Pornic's head.

There was no mistaking the nature of the missile— a regulation Martini-Henry "picket." About five hundred yards away a country-boat was anchored in

midstream; and a jet of smoke drifting away from its bows in the still morning air showed me whence the delicate attention had come. Was ever a respectable gentleman in such an impasse? The treacherous sand slope allowed no escape from a spot which I had visited most involuntarily, and a promenade on the river frontage was the signal for a bombardment from some insane native in a boat. I'm afraid that I lost my temper very much indeed.

Another bullet reminded me that I had better save my breath to cool my porridge; and I retreated hastily up the sands and back to the horseshoe, where I saw that the noise of the rifle had drawn sixty-five human beings from the badger-holes which I had up till that point supposed to be untenanted. I found myself in the midst of a crowd of spectators — about forty men, twenty women, and one child who could not have been more than five years old. They were all scantily clothed in that salmon-colored cloth which one associates with Hindu mendicants, and, at first sight, gave me the impression of a band of loathsome fakirs. The filth and repulsiveness of the assembly were beyond all description, and I shuddered to think what their life in the badger-holes must be.

Even in these days, when local self-government has destroyed the greater part of a native's respect for a Sahib, I have been accustomed to a certain amount of civility from my inferiors, and on approaching the crowd naturally expected that there would be some recognition of my presence. As a matter of fact there was; but it was by no means what I had looked for.

The ragged crew actually laughed at me— such laughter I hope I may never hear again. They cackled, yelled, whistled, and howled as I walked into their midst; some of them literally throwing themselves down on the ground in convulsions of unholy mirth. In a moment I had let go Pornic's head, and, irritated beyond expression at the morning's adventure, commenced cuffing those nearest to me with all the force I could. The wretches dropped under my blows like nine-pins, and the laughter gave place to wails for mercy; while those yet untouched clasped me round the knees, imploring me in all sorts of uncouth tongues to spare them.

In the tumult, and just when I was feeling very much ashamed of myself for having thus easily given way to my temper, a thin, high voice murmured in English from behind my shoulder: "Sahib! Sahib! Do you not know me? Sahib, it is Gunga Dass, the telegraph-master."

I spun round quickly and faced the speaker.

Gunga Dass, (I have, of course, no hesitation in mentioning the man's real name) I had known four years before as a Deccanee Brahmin loaned by the Punjab Government to one of the Khalsia States. He was in charge of a branch telegraph-office there, and when I had last met him was a jovial, full-

stomached, portly Government servant with a marvelous capacity for making bad puns in English— a peculiarity which made me remember him long after I had forgotten his services to me in his official capacity. It is seldom that a Hindu makes English puns.

Now, however, the man was changed beyond all recognition. Caste-mark, stomach, slate-colored continuations, and unctuous speech were all gone. I looked at a withered skeleton, turban-less and almost naked, with long matted hair and deep-set codfish-eyes. But for a crescent-shaped scar on the left cheek— the result of an accident for which I was responsible I should never have known him. But it was indubitably Gunga Dass, and— for this I was thankfull— an English-speaking native who might at least tell me the meaning of all that I had gone through that day.

The crowd retreated to some distance as I turned toward the miserable figure, and ordered him to show me some method of escaping from the crater. He held a freshly plucked crow in his hand, and in reply to my question climbed slowly on a platform of sand which ran in front of the holes, and commenced lighting a fire there in silence. Dried bents, sand-poppies, and driftwood burn quickly; and I derived much consolation from the fact that he lit them with an ordinary sulphur-match. When they were in a bright glow, and the crow was nearly spitted in front thereof, Gunga Dass began without a word of preamble:

"There are only two kinds of men, Sar. The alive and the dead. When you are dead you are dead, but when you are alive you live." (Here the crow demanded his attention for an instant as it twirled before the fire in danger of being burned to a cinder.) "If you die at home and do not die when you come to the ghât to be burned you come here."

The nature of the reeking village was made plain now, and all that I had known or read of the grotesque and the horrible paled before the fact just communicated by the ex-Brahmin. Sixteen years ago, when I first landed in Bombay, I had been told by a wandering Armenian of the existence, somewhere in India, of a place to which such Hindus as had the misfortune to recover from trance or catalepsy were conveyed and kept, and I recollect laughing heartily at what I was then pleased to consider a traveler's tale.

Sitting at the bottom of the sand-trap, the memory of Watson's Hotel, with its swinging punkahs, white-robed attendants, and the sallow-faced Armenian, rose up in my mind as vividly as a photograph, and I burst into a loud fit of laughter. The contrast was too absurd!

Gunga Dass, as he bent over the unclean bird, watched me curiously. Hindus seldom laugh, and his surroundings were not such as to move Gunga Dass to any undue excess of hilarity. He removed the crow solemnly from the

wooden spit and as solemnly devoured it. Then he continued his story, which I give in his own words:

"In epidemics of the cholera you are carried to be burned almost before you are dead. When you come to the riverside the cold air, perhaps, makes you alive, and then, if you are only little alive, mud is put on your nose and mouth and you die conclusively. If you are rather more alive, more mud is put; but if you are too lively they let you go and take you away. I was too lively, and made protestation with anger against the indignities that they endeavored to press upon me. In those days I was Brahmin and proud man. Now I am dead man and eat"— here he eyed the well-gnawed breast bone with the first sign of emotion that I had seen in him since we met— "crows, and other things. They took me from my sheets when they saw that I was too lively and gave me medicines for one week, and I survived successfully. Then they sent me by rail from my place to Okara Station, with a man to take care of me; and at Okara Station we met two other men, and they conducted we three on camels, in the night, from Okara Station to this place, and they propelled me from the top to the bottom, and the other two succeeded, and I have been here ever since two and a half years. Once I was Brahmin and proud man, and now I eat crows."

"There is no way of getting out?"

"None of what kind at all. When I first came I made experiments frequently and all the others also, but we have always succumbed to the sand which is precipitated upon our heads."

"But surely," I broke in at this point, "the river-front is open, and it is worth while dodging the bullets; while at night"— I had already matured a rough plan of escape which a natural instinct of selfishness forbade me sharing with Gunga Dass. He, however, divined my unspoken thought almost as soon as it was formed; and, to my intense astonishment, gave vent to a long low chuckle of derision— the laughter, be it understood, of a superior or at least of an equal.

"You will not"— he had dropped the Sir completely after his opening sentence— "make any escape that way. But you can try. I have tried. Once only."

The sensation of nameless terror and abject fear which I had in vain attempted to strive against overmastered me completely. My long fast— it was now close upon ten o'clock, and I had eaten nothing since tiffin on the previous day— combined with the violent and unnatural agitation of the ride had exhausted me, and I verily believe that, for a few minutes, I acted as one mad. I hurled myself against the pitiless sand-slope I ran round the base of the crater, blaspheming and praying by turns. I crawled out among the sedges of the river-front, only to be driven back each time in an agony of nervous dread by the

rifle-bullets which cut up the sand round me— for I dared not face the death of a mad dog among that hideous crowd— and finally fell, spent and raving, at the curb of the well. No one had taken the slightest notion of an exhibition which makes me blush hotly even when I think of it now.

Two or three men trod on my panting body as they drew water, but they were evidently used to this sort of thing, and had no time to waste upon me. The situation was humiliating. Gunga Dass, indeed, when he had banked the embers of his fire with sand, was at some pains to throw half a cupful of fetid water over my head, an attention for which I could have fallen on my knees and thanked him, but he was laughing all the while in the same mirthless, wheezy key that greeted me on my first attempt to force the shoals. And so, in a semi-comatose condition, I lay till noon. Then, being only a man after all, I felt hungry, and intimated as much to Gunga Dass, whom I had begun to regard as my natural protector. Following the impulse of the outer world when dealing with natives, I put my hand into my pocket and drew out four annas. The absurdity of the gift struck me at once, and I was about to replace the money.

Gunga Dass, however, was of a different opinion. "Give me the money," said he; "all you have, or I will get help, and we will kill you!" All this as if it were the most natural thing in the world!

A Briton's first impulse, I believe, is to guard the contents of his pockets; but a moment's reflection convinced me of the futility of differing with the one man who had it in his power to make me comfortable; and with whose help it was possible that I might eventually escape from the crater. I gave him all the money in my possession, Rs. 9-8-5— nine rupees eight annas and five pie — for I always keep small change as bakshish when I am in camp. Gunga Dass clutched the coins, and hid them at once in his ragged loin cloth, his expression changing to something diabolical as he looked round to assure himself that no one had observed us.

"Now I will give you something to eat," said he.

What pleasure the possession of my money could have afforded him I am unable to say; but inasmuch as it did give him evident delight I was not sorry that I had parted with it so readily, for I had no doubt that he would have had me killed if I had refused. One does not protest against the vagaries of a den of wild beasts; and my companions were lower than any beasts. While I devoured what Gunga Dass had provided, a coarse chapatti and a cupful of the foul well-water, the people showed not the faintest sign of curiosity— that curiosity which is so rampant, as a rule, in an Indian village.

I could even fancy that they despised me. At all events they treated me with the most chilling indifference, and Gunga Dass was nearly as bad. I plied

him with questions about the terrible village, and received extremely unsatisfactory answers. So far as I could gather, it had been in existence from time immemorial— whence I concluded that it was at least a century old — and during that time no one had ever been known to escape from it. [I had to control myself here with both hands, lest the blind terror should lay hold of me a second time and drive me raving round the crater.] Gunga Dass took a malicious pleasure in emphasizing this point and in watching me wince. Nothing that I could do would induce him to tell me who the mysterious "They" were.

"It is so ordered," he would reply, "and I do not yet know any one who has disobeyed the orders."

"Only wait till my servants find that I am missing," I retorted, "and I promise you that this place shall be cleared off the face of the earth, and I'll give you a lesson in civility, too, my friend."

"Your servants would be torn in pieces before they came near this place; and, besides, you are dead, my dear friend. It is not your fault, of course, but none the less you are dead and buried."

At irregular intervals supplies of food, I was told, were dropped down from the land side into the amphitheatre, and the inhabitants fought for them like wild beasts. When a man felt his death coming on he retreated to his lair and died there. The body was sometimes dragged out of the hole and thrown on to the sand, or allowed to rot where it lay.

The phrase "thrown on to the sand" caught my attention, and I asked Gunga Dass whether this sort of thing was not likely to breed a pestilence.

"That," said he with another of his wheezy chuckles, "you may see for yourself subsequently. You will have much time to make observations."

Whereat, to his great delight, I winced once more and hastily continued the conversation: "And how do you live here from day to day? What do you do?" The question elicited exactly the same answer as before — coupled with the information that "this place is like your European heaven; there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage."

Gunga Dass had been educated at a Mission School, and, as he himself admitted, had he only changed his religion "like a wise man," might have avoided the living grave which was now his portion. But as long as I was with him I fancy he was happy.

Here was a Sahib, a representative of the dominant race, helpless as a child and completely at the mercy of his native neighbors. In a deliberate lazy way he set himself to torture me as a schoolboy would devote a rapturous half-hour to watching the agonies of an impaled beetle, or as a ferret in a blind burrow might glue himself comfortably to the neck of a rabbit. The burden of

his conversation was that there was no escape "of no kind whatever," and that I should stay here till I died and was "thrown on to the sand." If it were possible to forejudge the conversation of the Damned on the advent of a new soul in their abode, I should say that they would speak as Gunga Dass did to me throughout that long afternoon. I was powerless to protest or answer; all my energies being devoted to a struggle against the inexplicable terror that threatened to overwhelm me again and again. I can compare the feeling to nothing except the struggles of a man against the overpowering nausea of the Channel passage— only my agony was of the spirit and infinitely more terrible.

As the day wore on, the inhabitants began to appear in full strength to catch the rays of the afternoon sun, which were now sloping in at the mouth of the crater. They assembled in little knots, and talked among themselves without even throwing a glance in my direction. About four o'clock, as far as I could judge Gunga Dass rose and dived into his lair for a moment, emerging with a live crow in his hands. The wretched bird was in a most draggled and deplorable condition, but seemed to be in no way afraid of its master. Advancing cautiously to the river front, Gunga Dass stepped from tussock to tussock until he had reached a smooth patch of sand directly in the line of the boat's fire. The occupants of the boat took no notice. Here he stopped, and, with a couple of dexterous turns of the wrist, pegged the bird on its back with outstretched wings. As was only natural, the crow began to shriek at once and beat the air with its claws. In a few seconds the clamor had attracted the attention of a bevy of wild crows on a shoal a few hundred yards away, where they were discussing something that looked like a corpse. Half a dozen crows flew over at once to see what was going on, and also, as it proved, to attack the pinioned bird. Gunga Dass, who had lain down on a tussock, motioned to me to be quiet, though I fancy this was a needless precaution. In a moment, and before I could see how it happened, a wild crow, who had grappled with the shrieking and helpless bird, was entangled in the latter's claws, swiftly disengaged by Gunga Dass, and pegged down beside its companion in adversity. Curiosity, it seemed, overpowered the rest of the flock, and almost before Gunga Dass and I had time to withdraw to the tussock, two more captives were struggling in the upturned claws of the decoys. So the chase — if I can give it so dignified a name — continued until Gunga Dass had captured seven crows. Five of them he throttled at once, reserving two for further operations another day. I was a good deal impressed by this, to me, novel method of securing food, and complimented Gunga Dass on his skill.

"It is nothing to do," said he. "Tomorrow you must do it for me. You are stronger than I am."

This calm assumption of superiority upset me not a little, and I answered peremptorily: "Indeed, you old ruffian! What do you think I have given you money for?"

"Very well," was the unmoved reply. "Perhaps not tomorrow, nor the day after, nor subsequently; but in the end, and for many years, you will catch crows and eat crows, and you will thank your European God that you have crows to catch and eat."

I could have cheerfully strangled him for this; but judged it best under the circumstances to smother my resentment. An hour later I was eating one of the crows; and, as Gunga Dass had said, thanking my God that I had a crow to eat. Never as long as I live shall I forget that evening meal. The whole population were squatting on the hard sand platform opposite their dens, huddled over tiny fires of refuse and dried rushes. Death, having once laid his hand upon these men and forborne to strike, seemed to stand aloof from them now; for most of our company were old men, bent and worn and twisted with years, and women aged to all appearance as the Fates themselves. They sat together in knots and talked— God only knows what they found to discuss— in low equable tones, curiously in contrast to the strident babble with which natives are accustomed to make day hideous. Now and then an access of that sudden fury which had possessed me in the morning would lay hold on a man or woman; and with yells and imprecations the sufferer would attack the steep slope until, baffled and bleeding, he fell back on the platform incapable of moving a limb. The others would never even raise their eyes when this happened, as men too well aware of the futility of their fellows' attempts and wearied with their useless repetition. I saw four such outbursts in the course of the evening.

Gunga Dass took an eminently business-like view of my situation, and while we were dining— I can afford to laugh at the recollection now, but it was painful enough at the time— propounded the terms on which he would consent to "do" for me. My nine rupees eight annas, he argued, at the rate of three annas a day, would provide me with food for fifty-one days, or about seven weeks; that is to say, he would be willing to cater for me for that length of time. At the end of it I was to look after myself. For a further consideration— *videlicet* my boots — he would be willing to allow me to occupy the den next to his own, and would supply me with as much dried grass for bedding as he could spare.

"Very well, Gunga Dass," I replied; "to the first terms I cheerfully agree, but, as there is nothing on earth to prevent my killing you as you sit here and taking everything that you have" (I thought of the two invaluable crows at the

time), "I flatly refuse to give you my boots and shall take whichever den I please."

The stroke was a bold one, and I was glad when I saw that it had succeeded. Gunga Dass changed his tone immediately, and disavowed all intention of asking for my boots. At the time it did not strike me as at all strange that I, a Civil Engineer, a man of thirteen years' standing in the Service, and, I trust, an average Englishman, should thus calmly threaten murder and violence against the man who had, for a consideration it is true, taken me under his wing. I had left the world, it seemed, for centuries. I was as certain then as I am now of my own existence, that in the accursed settlement there was no law save that of the strongest; that the living dead men had thrown behind them every canon of the world which had cast them out; and that I had to depend for my own life on my strength and vigilance alone. The crew of the ill-fated Mignonette are the only men who would understand my frame of mind. "At present," I argued to myself, "I am strong and a match for six of these wretches. It is imperatively necessary that I should, for my own sake, keep both health and strength until the hour of my release comes— if it ever does."

Fortified with these resolutions, I ate and drank as much as I could, and made Gunga Dass understand that I intended to be his master, and that the least sign of insubordination on his part would be visited with the only punishment I had it in my power to inflict— sudden and violent death. Shortly after this I went to bed. That is to say, Gunga Dass gave me a double armful of dried bents which I thrust down the mouth of the lair to the right of his, and followed myself, feet foremost; the hole running about nine feet into the sand with a slight downward inclination, and being neatly shored with timbers. From my den, which faced the river-front, I was able to watch the waters of the Sutlej flowing past under the light of a young moon and compose myself to sleep as best I might.

The horrors of that night I shall never forget. My den was nearly as narrow as a coffin, and the sides had been worn smooth and greasy by the contact of innumerable naked bodies, added to which it smelled abominably. Sleep was altogether out of question to one in my excited frame of mind. As the night wore on, it seemed that the entire amphitheatre was filled with legions of unclean devils that, trooping up from the shoals below, mocked the unfortunates in their lairs.

Personally I am not of an imaginative temperament— very few Engineers are— but on that occasion I was as completely prostrated with nervous terror as any woman. After half an hour or so, however, I was able once more to calmly review my chances of escape. Any exit by the steep sand walls was, of

course, impracticable. I had been thoroughly convinced of this some time before. It was possible, just possible, that I might, in the uncertain moonlight, safely run the gauntlet of the rifle shots. The place was so full of terror for me that I was prepared to undergo any risk in leaving it. Imagine my delight, then, when after creeping stealthily to the river-front I found that the infernal boat was not there. My freedom lay before me in the next few steps!

By walking out to the first shallow pool that lay at the foot of the projecting left horn of the horseshoe, I could wade across, turn the flank of the crater, and make my way inland. Without a moment's hesitation I marched briskly past the tussocks where Gunga Dass had snared the crows, and out in the direction of the smooth white sand beyond. My first step from the tufts of dried grass showed me how utterly futile was any hope of escape; for, as I put my foot down, I felt an indescribable drawing, sucking motion of the sand below. Another moment and my leg was swallowed up nearly to the knee. In the moonlight the whole surface of the sand seemed to be shaken with devilish delight at my disappointment. I struggled clear, sweating with terror and exertion, back to the tussocks behind me and fell on my face.

My only means of escape from the semicircle was protected with a quicksand!

How long I lay I have not the faintest idea; but I was roused at last by the malevolent chuckle of Gunga Dass at my ear "I would advise you, Protector of the Poor" (the ruffian was speaking English) "to return to your house. It is unhealthy to lie down here. Moreover, when the boat returns, you will most certainly be rifled at." He stood over me in the dim light of the dawn, chuckling and laughing to himself. Suppressing my first impulse to catch the man by the neck and throw him on to the quicksand, I rose sullenly and followed him to the platform below the burrows.

Suddenly, and futilely as I thought while I spoke, I asked: "Gunga Dass, what is the good of the boat if I can't get out anyhow?" I recollect that even in my deepest trouble I had been speculating vaguely on the waste of ammunition in guarding an already well protected foreshore.

Gunga Dass laughed again and made answer: "They have the boat only in daytime. It is for the reason that there is a way. I hope we shall have the pleasure of your company for much longer time. It is a pleasant spot when you have been here some years and eaten roast crow long enough."

I staggered, numbed and helpless, toward the fetid burrow allotted to me, and fell asleep. An hour or so later I was awakened by a piercing scream— the shrill, high-pitched scream of a horse in pain. Those who have once heard that will never forget the sound. I found some little difficulty in scrambling out of the burrow. When I was in the open, I saw Pornic, my poor old Pornic, lying

dead on the sandy soil. How they had killed him I cannot guess. Gunga Dass explained that horse was better than crow, and "greatest good of greatest number is political maxim. We are now Republic, Mister Jukes, and you are entitled to a fair share of the beast. If you like, we will pass a vote of thanks. Shall I propose?"

Yes, we were a Republic indeed! A Republic of wild beasts penned at the bottom of a pit, to eat and fight and sleep till we died. I attempted no protest of any kind, but sat down and stared at the hideous sight in front of me. In less time almost than it takes me to write this, Pornic's body was divided, in some unclear way or other; the men and women had dragged the fragments on to the platform and were preparing their normal meal. Gunga Dass cooked mine. The almost irresistible impulse to fly at the sand walls until I was wearied laid hold of me afresh, and I had to struggle against it with all my might. Gunga Dass was offensively jocular till I told him that if he addressed another remark of any kind whatever to me I should strangle him where he sat. This silenced him till silence became insupportable, and I bade him say something.

"You will live here till you die like the other *Feringhi*," he said, coolly, watching me over the fragment of gristle that he was gnawing.

"What other Sahib, you swine? Speak at once, and don't stop to tell me a lie."

"He is over there," answered Gunga Dass, pointing to a burrow-mouth about four doors to the left of my own. "You can see for yourself. He died in the burrow as you will die, and I will die, and as all these men and women and the one child will also die."

"For pity's sake tell me all you know about him. Who was he? When did he come, and when did he die?"

This appeal was a weak step on my part. Gunga Dass only leered and replied: "I will not— unless you give me something first."

Then I recollected where I was, and struck the man between the eyes, partially stunning him. He stepped down from the platform at once, and, cringing and fawning and weeping and attempting to embrace my feet, led me round to the burrow which he had indicated.

"I know nothing whatever about the gentleman. Your God be my witness that I do not. He was as anxious to escape as you were, and he was shot from the boat, though we all did all things to prevent him from attempting. He was shot here." Gunga Dass laid his hand on his lean stomach and bowed to the earth.

"Well, and what then? Go on!"

"And then— and then, Your Honor, we carried him in to his house and gave him water, and put wet cloths on the wound, and he laid down in his house and gave up the ghost."

"In how long? In how long?"

"About half an hour, after he received his wound. I call Vishnu to witness," yelled the wretched man, "that I did everything for him. Everything which was possible, that I did!"

He threw himself down on the ground and clasped my ankles. But I had my doubts about Gunga Dass's benevolence, and kicked him off as he lay protesting.

"I believe you robbed him of everything he had. But I can find out in a minute or two. How long was the Sahib here?"

"Nearly a year and a half. I think he must have gone mad. But hear me swear Protector of the Poor! Won't Your Honor hear me swear that I never touched an article that belonged to him? What is Your Worship going to do?"

I had taken Gunga Dass by the waist and had hauled him on to the platform opposite the deserted burrow. As I did so I thought of my wretched fellow-prisoner's unspeakable misery among all these horrors for eighteen months, and the final agony of dying like a rat in a hole, with a bullet-wound in the stomach. Gunga Dass fancied I was going to kill him and howled pitifully. The rest of the population, in the plethora that follows a full flesh meal, watched us without stirring.

"Go inside, Gunga Dass," said I, "and fetch it out."

I was feeling sick and faint with horror now. Gunga Dass nearly rolled off the platform and howled aloud.

"But I am Brahmin, Sahib— a high-caste Brahmin. By your soul, by your father's soul, do not make me do this thing!"

"Brahmin or no Brahmin, by my soul and my father's soul, in you go!" I said, and, seizing him by the shoulders, I crammed his head into the mouth of the burrow, kicked the rest of him in, and, sitting down, covered my face with my hands.

At the end of a few minutes I heard a rustle and a creak; then Gunga Dass in a sobbing, choking whisper speaking to himself; then a soft thud— and I uncovered my eyes.

The dry sand had turned the corpse entrusted to its keeping into a yellow-brown mummy. I told Gunga Dass to stand off while I examined it. The body— clad in an olive-green hunting-suit much stained and worn, with leather pads on the shoulders— was that of a man between thirty and forty, above middle height, with light, sandy hair, long mustache, and a rough unkempt beard. The left canine of the upper jaw was missing, and a portion of the lobe of the right

ear was gone. On the second finger of the left hand was a ring — a shield-shaped bloodstone set in gold, with a monogram that might have been either "B.K." or "B.L." On the third finger of the right hand was a silver ring in the shape of a coiled cobra, much worn and tarnished. Gunga Dass deposited a handful of trifles he had picked out of the burrow at my feet, and, covering the face of the body with my handkerchief, I turned to examine these. I give the full list in the hope that it may lead to the identification of the unfortunate man:

1. Bowl of a briarwood pipe, serrated at the edge; much worn and blackened; bound with string at the crew.

2. Two patent-lever keys; wards of both broken.

3. Tortoise-shell-handled penknife, silver or nickel, name-plate, marked with monogram "B.K."

4. Envelope, postmark undecipherable, bearing a Victorian stamp, addressed to "Miss Mon—" (rest illegible)— "ham"— "nt."

5. Imitation crocodile-skin notebook with pencil. First forty-five pages blank; four and a half illegible; fifteen others filled with private memoranda relating chiefly to three persons— a Mrs.L. Singleton, abbreviated several times to "Lot Single," "Mrs. S. May," and "Garmison," referred to in places as "Jerry" or "Jack."

6. Handle of small-sized hunting-knife. Blade snapped short. Buck's horn, diamond cut, with swivel and ring on the butt; fragment of cotton cord attached.

It must not be supposed that I inventoried all these things on the spot as fully as I have here written them down. The notebook first attracted my attention, and I put it in my pocket with a view of studying it later on.

The rest of the articles I conveyed to my burrow for safety's sake, and there being a methodical man, I inventoried them. I then returned to the corpse and ordered Gunga Dass to help me to carry it out to the river-front. While we were engaged in this, the exploded shell of an old brown cartridge dropped out of one of the pockets and rolled at my feet. Gunga Dass had not seen it; and I fell to thinking that a man does not carry exploded cartridge-cases, especially "browns," which will not bear loading twice, about with him when shooting. In other words, that cartridge-case had been fired inside the crater. Consequently there must be a gun somewhere. I was on the verge of asking Gunga Dass, but checked myself, knowing that he would lie. We laid the body down on the edge of the quicksand by the tussocks. It was my intention to push it out and let it be swallowed up-the only possible mode of burial that I could think of. I ordered Gunga Dass to go away.

Then I gingerly put the corpse out on the quicksand. In doing so, it was lying face downward, I tore the frail and rotten khaki shooting-coat open, disclosing a hideous cavity in the back. I have already told you that the dry

sand had, as it were, mummified the body. A moment's glance showed that the gaping hole had been caused by a gun-shot wound; the gun must have been fired with the muzzle almost touching the back. The shooting-coat, being intact, had been drawn over the body after death, which must have been instantaneous. The secret of the poor wretch's death was plain to me in a flash. Some one of the crater, presumably Gunga Dass, must have shot him with his own gun— the gun that fitted the brown cartridges. He had never attempted to escape in the face of the rifle-fire from the boat.

I pushed the corpse out hastily, and saw it sink from sight literally in a few seconds. I shuddered as I watched. In a dazed, half-conscious way I turned to peruse the notebook. A stained and discolored slip of paper had been inserted between the binding and the back, and dropped out as I opened the pages. This is what it contained: "Four out from crow-clump: three left; nine out; two right; three back; two left; fourteen out; two left; seven out; one left; nine back; two right; six back; four right; seven back." The paper had been burned and charred at the edges. What it meant I could not understand. I sat down on the dried bents turning it over and over between my fingers, until I was aware of Gunga Dass standing immediately behind me with glowing eyes and outstretched hands.

"Have you got it?" he panted. "Will you not let me look at it also? I swear that I will return it."

"Got what? Return what?" asked.

"That which you have in your hands. It will help us both." He stretched out his long, bird-like talons, trembling with eagerness.

"I could never find it," he continued. "He had secreted it about his person. Therefore I shot him, but nevertheless I was unable to obtain it."

Gunga Dass had quite forgotten his little fiction about the rifle-bullet. I received the information perfectly calmly. Morality is blunted by consorting with the Dead who are alive.

"What on earth are you raving about? What is it you want me to give you?"

"The piece of paper in the notebook. It will help us both. Oh, you fool! You fool! Can you not see what it will do for us? We shall escape!"

His voice rose almost to a scream, and he danced with excitement before me. I own I was moved at the chance of my getting away.

"Don't skip! Explain yourself. Do you mean to say that this slip of paper will help us? What does it mean?"

"Read it aloud! Read it aloud! I beg and I pray you to read it aloud."

I did so. Gunga Dass listened delightedly, and drew an irregular line in the sand with his fingers.

"See now! It was the length of his gun-barrels without the stock. I have those barrels. Four gun-barrels out from the place where I caught crows. Straight out; do you follow me? Then three left. Ah! how well I remember when that man worked it out night after night. Then nine out, and so on. Out is always straight before you across the quicksand. He told me so before I killed him."

"But if you knew all this why didn't you get out before?"

"I did not know it. He told me that he was working it out a year and a half ago, and how he was working it out night after night when the boat had gone away, and he could get out near the quicksand safely. Then he said that we would get away together. But I was afraid that he would leave me behind one night when he had worked it all out, and so I shot him. Besides, it is not advisable that the men who once get in here should escape. Only I, and I am a Brahmin."

The prospect of escape had brought Gunga Dass's caste back to him. He stood up, walked about and gesticulated violently. Eventually I managed to make him talk soberly, and he told me how this Englishman had spent six months night after night in exploring, inch by inch, the passage across the quicksand; how he had declared it to be simplicity itself up to within about twenty yards of the river bank after turning the flank of the left horn of the horseshoe. This much he had evidently not completed when Gunga Dass shot him with his own gun.

In my frenzy of delight at the possibilities of escape I recollect shaking hands effusively with Gunga Dass, after we had decided that we were to make an attempt to get away that very night. It was weary work waiting throughout the afternoon.

About ten o'clock, as far as I could judge, when the Moon had just risen above the lip of the crater, Gunga Dass made a move for his burrow to bring out the gun-barrels whereby to measure our path. All the other wretched inhabitants had retired to their lairs long ago. The guardian boat drifted downstream some hours before, and we were utterly alone by the crow-clump. Gunga Dass, while carrying the gun-barrels, let slip the piece of paper which was to be our guide. I stooped down hastily to recover it, and, as I did so, I was aware that the diabolical Brahmin was aiming a violent blow at the back of my head with the gun-barrels. It was too late to turn round. I must have received the blow somewhere on the nape of my neck. A hundred thousand fiery stars danced before my eyes, and I fell forwards senseless at the edge of, the quicksand.

When I recovered consciousness, the Moon was going down, and I was sensible of intolerable pain in the back of my head. Gunga Dass had

disappeared and my mouth was full of blood. I lay down again and prayed that I might die without more ado. Then the unreasoning fury which I had before mentioned, laid hold upon me, and I staggered inland toward the walls of the crater. It seemed that some one was calling to me in a whisper— "Sahib! Sahib! Sahib!" exactly as my bearer used to call me in the morning I fancied that I was delirious until a handful of sand fell at my feet. Then I looked up and saw a head peering down into the amphitheatre— the head of Dunnoo, my dog-boy, who attended to my collies. As soon as he had attracted my attention, he held up his hand and showed a rope. I motioned, staggering to and fro for the while, that he should throw it down. It was a couple of leather punkah-ropes knotted together, with a loop at one end. I slipped the loop over my head and under my arms; heard Dunnoo urge something forward; was conscious that I was being dragged, face downward, up the steep sand slope, and the next instant found myself choked and half fainting on the sand hills overlooking the crater. Dunnoo, with his face ashy grey in the moonlight, implored me not to stay but to get back to my tent at once.

It seems that he had tracked Pornic's footprints fourteen miles across the sands to the crater; had returned and told my servants, who flatly refused to meddle with any one, white or black, once fallen into the hideous Village of the Dead; whereupon Dunnoo had taken one of my ponies and a couple of punkah-ropes, returned to the crater, and hauled me out as I have described.

To cut a long story short, Dunnoo is now my personal servant on a gold mohur a month— a sum which I still think far too little for the services he has rendered. Nothing on earth will induce me to go near that devilish spot again, or to reveal its whereabouts more clearly than I have done. Of Gunga Dass I have never found a trace, nor do I wish to do. My sole motive in giving this to be published is the hope that some one may possibly identify, from the details and the inventory which I have given above, the corpse of the man in the olive-green hunting-suit.

23: Man Not Overboard

Ring Lardner

1885-1933

Cosmopolitan, Nov 1927

BEN BRAINARD posed for the newspaper photographers on the deck of the *Gargantua*, saying to himself: "There's a picture for page one— 'Young Novelist Kills Himself at Sea.' "

He went into his cabin and opened his two bags. In one were a couple of clean handkerchiefs. The other was empty. He would tell the steward he had come in a terrible hurry, had not had time to pack. The truth was that after eleven o'clock that night he would need nothing in the world, not even the clothes he was wearing. He wondered vacantly how long a man's clothes outlasted his body in salt water.

He sat down on the bed and felt pressing against him the little gun he had bought on Third Avenue a week ago, the day when he had planned this thing he was going to do. He would have been a week dead now but for his not exceptional aversion to funerals and his preference to die at sea, and the added fact that it was not quite a year since he had taken out insurance for $10,000 in favor of his mother and sister and the suicide clause would still, five days ago, have been in force. The mother and sister had very little and he realized that he was hurting them enough by just killing himself without, in addition, leaving them penniless.

His plan had been carefully made. The Gargantua, on which his friend Phil Runyon was purser, would dock on the eighth and sail again on the tenth, just a week after his Third Avenue shopping tour. He would be on board and would have Phil for a witness of his death to avoid any balking on the part of the insurance company. And he would spend the intervening days and nights in boundless drinking, such as would cause him to be remembered around New York as something more than the writer of two popular books and one which no publisher would accept. (Perhaps they would accept it when he had made his name better known by doing what he was about to do; if so, the royalties would help his poor mother and sister.)

Well, he had had his orgy, opening and closing day clubs and night clubs till early yesterday morning, when he had been taken home and put to bed by his friend the purser after a party of whose details he remembered nothing at all.

The *Gargantua* was gliding smoothly out of New York Harbor. Ben Brainard went into the lounge and ordered three quick drinks to steady his hand so that he might write farewell letters to the members of his family and to the Girl whose heartless treatment of him had made life intolerable. His last act would

be to entrust these letters to good old Phil Runyon, just previous to his embarkation to another World.

To his mother and sister he explained the reasons for his deed—the failure of his latest and greatest work to win appreciation, and the loss of the most wonderful and lovable of all girls. He asked their forgiveness. He knew they would understand.

To the Girl he wrote over two thousand words that would make her at least a little bit sorry even if she were really as hard-hearted as she had appeared at their last meeting. (The Girl was Pauline Lannin of the chorus of "Hit the Deck" and he might have known that a chorus girl, what with making quick changes and one thing and another, would never have time to digest two thousand words, especially as the ordinary daily extent of her reading was the captions in an evening tabloid.)

The bugle blew for dinner, but of what use was dinner to a man who had only four hours more to live? What Brainard needed was enough Scotch to sustain his resolution, for it really is tough to pass out at the age of thirty, when you are a genius and there is so much good writing God wants you to do. It was this fear of weakening at the last moment that had influenced him to buy a gun. He was an excellent swimmer and if he toppled overboard without shooting himself first, a natural instinct of self-preservation might keep him afloat until the Gargantua's sailors had rescued him.

He had had one drink and was about to order another when a stranger stopped at his table, a man of robust health, apparently about fifty-five years old.

"Do you mind if I join you?" he asked. "I am all alone and I like company when I have a drink."

Brainard was going to lie and say he expected a friend, but it occurred to him that the time would pass more quickly if he had someone to talk to; listen to, rather, for he was not in a mood to do much talking himself.

"Sit down," he invited. "I am ordering a Scotch high-ball. Perhaps you'd rather have a cocktail."

"No, make it two high-balls," said the stranger, and added to the waiter, "Bring me the check."

"You can buy the next one," Brainard said. "I suppose we ought to introduce ourselves. I am Benjamin Brainard, of New York."

"Not Benjamin Brainard the author!" the other exclaimed. "Why, I read two of your books and enjoyed them immensely. But I certainly never would have guessed you were such a young man; your novels show such a wide knowledge of life."

"I guess I've lived!" said Brainard with a bitter smile.

"My name," said his new companion, "is Fred Lemp. I'm just a plain business man, with very little business," he added good-naturedly.

"Where are you bound for?" Brainard inquired.

"Paris," said Lemp. "Paris and Château-Thierry. And you?"

Brainard's face wore a queer expression. "I don't know," he said.

"You don't know!"

"I only know that it's a long way off," said Brainard.

"Oh, I suppose you are just wandering around, in search of material for a new book."

"I have written my last book."

"You mustn't say that! A man your age and with your talent! You owe it to the world to keep on writing."

"Thank you, but I am sure I don't owe the world anything."

They had had four drinks and Brainard was now ordering another.

"I don't know whether I'd better or not," said Lemp hesitantly. "I hardly ever drink more than three, because after three I get talky and bore everybody to death."

"It doesn't matter to me if you get talky," said Brainard, and added to himself: "I don't have to listen to you."

"Well, it's on your own head," said Lemp, and ordered his fifth high-ball.

"Mr. Lemp," Brainard said, "what would you do— Never mind. I guess I'm getting too talky myself."

"Not at all," said Lemp. "I'd like to hear what you were going to ask me."

"Well, I was going to ask what you would do if you were an artist in a certain line and nobody appreciated your work—"

"I'd keep at it anyway if I knew it was good work."

"I wasn't through. What would you do if you suddenly realized you were an unappreciated artist, and then, on top of that, a Girl broke your heart?"

"Is this autobiographical?"

"Perhaps."

"Well, I'd try my best to forget her and I'd go ahead and do such masterful work that she would be very sorry for what she had done to me."

"Forget her!" Brainard's tone was bitter in the extreme.

They were awaiting a sixth drink.

"You said you were going to Château-Thierry. I was in the fight there. I wish I'd been killed!"

"My boy was," said Lemp.

"Are you going to visit the grave?"

"Yes, and also to visit a little Frenchwoman who ought to have been his wife. Every year I pay her a call, to see if there is anything I can do for her and

her child. Every year I try to coax her back to America with me, but she won't leave France. I wish she would. I'm all alone now and the youngster— he's nine years old— he's a mighty cute kid and would be company for me. A man gets lonesome sometimes. And my wife is worse than dead. She has lost her mind and has to be kept in a private sanitarium."

"Are you allowed to see her?"

"I do see her twice a year, on her birthday and on our anniversary. But I might as well stay away. She has no idea who I am. Poor Margaret! She is almost as beautiful as the day I met her."

"What type?"

"I suppose you would call her an Irish type— black hair and blue eyes. Just the type my first wife was; in fact, I believe it was her resemblance to Edith that made me fall in love with her."

"How old was your first wife when she died?"

"She didn't die. Poor Edith! I guess it was mostly my fault. She was too young to marry, too young to know her own mind. When we had lived together a little over a year, she fell desperately in love with a man I used to invite frequently to the house, a business acquaintance."

"Did she run away with him?"

"Yes. He had more money than I. I don't mean to say that Edith was money-mad, but she did like good times and our marriage came just at a period when I was in desperate financial straits; rather, just before that period, for naturally, if I had known what was going to happen, I wouldn't have married her."

"What did happen?" asked Brainard, sipping his eighth drink.

"You are an inquisitive young man."

"Oh, if you'd rather not tell me—"

"I might as well. I warned you I'd get talky. Well, my youngest brother went wrong. He was cashier in a small bank, out on Long Island, and he embezzled to the extent of twenty thousand dollars. He had gambled it all away at the race-tracks and in order to keep him out of jail, I liquidated all my assets and borrowed three thousand from a friend to make up the amount. I did it more for my mother's sake than for his; I knew that if she heard that he had stolen, it would kill her." Lemp brushed a hand across his eyes. "She found out about it anyway, and it did kill her."

"Horrible!"

"I worked like the devil to get back on my feet, and I did it. But it was too late. Edith had gone."

"What do you say if we have a drink?"

"I say yes."

"And how long after that did you get married the second time?"

"Four years, and the same thing nearly happened again. My other brother, older than I, fell in love with a woman in Garden City, another man's wife. The husband found it out and there was a fight in which my brother shot the husband dead. There was no chance in the world of my brother's getting off, but I felt it my duty to give him the best counsel obtainable. He had no money himself. I paid two lawyers forty thousand and my brother went to the chair. Well, I learned afterwards that on the very same day my brother committed murder, Margaret, my second wife, became friendly with a piano tuner. Of course he had nothing except his wages and she was not fool enough to give me up for him. But when those lawyers had taken all my capital she would have left me if Providence had not intervened. The piano tuner was hit by a truck on the Fifty-ninth Street bridge and lost his hearing."

"Did you have any other children besides the boy killed in the war?"

"Yes, a girl. But I'd rather not talk about her. Oh, well, what does it matter? Miriam was our first-born, a year and a half older than my son. One day she was driving a car up in Westchester County, going forty or fifty miles an hour, when she was stopped by a handsome young motorcycle policeman, and the rascal told her he would let her off if she would be his girl.

"She said to him, 'I don't know what you mean by being your girl, but I think you're awfully nice-looking and I'd just as soon be your wife.' They were married and had three children. Then it was discovered that he had another wife and family in Ardsley. He was sent to jail, she is a stenographer in an insurance office down-town and I am supporting the kiddies."

Brainard consumed his twelfth drink, then fumbled awkwardly in his pocket and drew out his gun.

"Mr. Lumps," he said, "I'm going to ask you to do me a favor. Put this right in your mouth, aim it upwards and shoot."

"What are you talking about, boy? Do you want me to commit suicide? Why, I'm only sixty-one years old and having a damn good time!"

"You do as I say and do it right in here so we won't lose the gun. I'm going to need it myself at eleven o'clock."

"What for?"

"To do the same thing you're going to do."

"But I'm not going to do anything except go to bed. What you intend to do is none of my business, though I would suggest that as you still have over two hours and a half to wait, you go to your cabin and take a nap and leave a call for eleven. I've always heard that the time to kill yourself with the best results is right after a nice nap."

Brainard had already started on one, but Lemp and a steward managed to get his room key out of his pocket and arouse him sufficiently to be conducted to the cabin, partly undressed and laid on his bed. Lemp then returned to the lounge and was soon joined by Phil Runyon.

"He's safe for the night anyway," said Lemp.

"You've done a good job, Fred, and I'm grateful to you," said the purser.

"I made him cry twice, and there were three or four times when I nearly broke down myself. Here's his gun."

"All right; I'll take charge of it if you're sure you don't want it. Though I don't know what good it would do you, as I emptied it yesterday morning after I'd got him to sleep, and I don't think we're selling any ammunition on the *Gargantua*, except what comes in bottles. That was a great party he took me on night before last. He insisted on dragging me to some night club and who should be there but this dame that's turned him down. She was with a man who could have been her father, but wouldn't want to if he was sober. I swear, Fred, she must be the manager's wife's sister ever to land a job in what they tell me is a pretty chorus.

"He was going to their table and make a scene, but I told him it would be cowardly to pick on a man as old as that. I finally got her eye and gave her the office to duck, and when she saw who was with me, she didn't hesitate a minute.

"Pretty soon Ben was worse than I ever saw him. He had his suicide plan all worked out and he gave me the details, thinking I was somebody else. He talked like this:

" 'I haven't much longer to live,' he said. 'In fact, this is the last time you'll see me. I've got it all fixed up to kill myself and a good old pal of mine is going to help me. I've bought a gun; it's over in my room now, all loaded and waiting for me. Well, this pal of mine is Phil Runyon, purser on the *Gargantua*, and she sails day after tomorrow. I'm going to be aboard and I'll make a date to meet Phil when we're out at sea and I'll coax him to one of the decks, telling him I want to discuss something with him where we can't be overheard. Then I'll sit up on the rail and I'll sit so that when I shoot myself, I'll be bound to fall overboard. You see, I've got to have him there, or somebody else that knows me, so there won't be any trouble about my insurance. How is that for an idea?'

"Imagine him asking me what kind of an idea I thought it was!

"And the funny part, along about five o'clock, when I finally succeeded in getting him out of the place, he knew me and was calling me Phil and talking about other times we'd been out together.

"Yesterday afternoon I called up his hotel and made sure he was out; then I went there and fixed it with a bell-hop and porter to go up in his room after he left this morning and pack up enough stuff for him to make the trip with and have it sent down to the ship in my name. He thinks he hasn't any baggage, but he's got enough to go over and back with, and I really think the crossing will do him a lot of good. Though writers are mostly all nutty and you never know what to expect of them."

"I haven't told you," said Lemp, "that when I was through with my story, he gave me the gun and ordered me to use it on myself."

"Oh, Ben was always a generous boy," said Runyon. "It surprises me that he didn't offer to take you out on deck, shoot you and throw you off the ship."

"Listen," said Lemp: "I need one more drink for courage and then I've got to find my wife and take my scolding. I explained to her that I'd met a man I thought I could do some business with and I might not be in for dinner. But what good is that explanation going to be when she sees me?"

"Probably none," Runyon said cheerfully. "But the drink is on me."

About noon next day Brainard woke up, summoned his steward and ordered him to send the purser to his cabin.

"Phil," he said when Runyon arrived, "didn't we have an engagement last night?"

"Yes, but you went to bed long before your bedtime."

"Phil, where did that steamer trunk come from?"

"I suppose it came from your hotel."

"I didn't bring any baggage except those two empty bags."

"Did you plan crossing the ocean without baggage?"

"I didn't plan crossing the ocean. And another thing, who was the fella I was with all evening, a fella about sixty years old, named Limp or Lemp or something?"

"Oh," said Runyon, "that's Fred Lemp, a big hosiery manufacturer from up-state."

"Say, he's had a tough life. He told me all about it. He told me stuff enough for a whale of a novel."

"Why don't you write it?"

"Because I can't remember a word he said."

"Well," said Runyon, "we'll get you together again some time."

"Do that, Phil," said Brainard. "But make it out on deck where he can't order so many drinks. A man as old as he ought not to drink so much. It's liable to get him."

24: The Man who Held the Wires

Randolph Bedford

1868-1941

The Grand Magazine, Sep 1905

Sunday Times (Perth) 5 Nov 1905

In: *Billy Pagan, Mining Engineer*, Sydney, 1911

Randolph Bedford wrote ten short stories featuring Billy Pagan, initially published in The Grand Magazine, London, and then collected in 1911.

A WILLY-WILLY blowing over Coolgardie filled with dust our camp on the twenty-five mile road. We ate dust, breathed dust, and wore it as our most intimate garment; we wrote in a mixture of organic matter and mud.

'Twenty-five per cent moisture, twenty-five per cent dust, and fifty per cent dead blowfly,' said Billy Pagan as he decoded the cable from London.

'What does it say?' said I, when he had closed the codebook.

'It's from Harmer. There's a show at English Flag under offer to him, and his option expires in four days. Did you ever hear of a big mine there, Harry?'

'No,' I replied. 'Is it supposed to be big?'

'Judging by the price, yes. Harmer says it's under offer to them for fifty thousand pounds, and that other people are ready to take it up when his option expires. He's had a report on it, and it's so good he wants me to confirm it.'

'Whose report was it?'

'Manning's. He says it's a two-ounce show with unlimited quantities of ore proved.'

'Do you know Manning?'

'Only by reputation, and that says he's very straight but not very smart.'

'And you've got to confirm in four days?'

'Yes. Do you feel inclined for a trip? It's not a nice day but there's only fifty miles of it.'

'I'll come, certainly.'

'Right, old man. I'll get the buggy round.'

Late that night we drove up to the mine— a mile or so beyond the grogshop of galvanized iron roof, salmon gum wallplates and rafters, and hessian sides— having been directed to the track to the mine by the owner of the shanty. A great blow of quartz, a mountain in size and of precipitous steepness, loomed grey and mysterious at our right, but the light of a camp to the left bore us away from the mammoth outcrop. At the sound of buggy wheels the door of the camp opened, and the white rays of a kerosene lamp

invaded the darkness, except where it was broken by the figure of a man who appeared in the doorway.

'All right, Mr Pagan,' said the man. 'Jim'll take care o' your horses.'

'H'm,' said Billy Pagan to me, and I saw that he was not pleased at the meeting, although he replied, 'Hullo, Swainger. What are you doing here?'

'Just come along to measure up for the contractor tomorrow, Mr Pagan.'

'H'm.' We had alighted and entered the hut when Billy Pagan spoke again. 'Sinking the shaft on contract, are you?' he said.

'Yes, Mr Pagan. Sit down here. I've got a bunk ready for you. Didn't expect your mate.'

'Never mind troubling about the bunk,' said Billy Pagan. 'We've got our blankets and I'd rather camp outside.'

There were three men at the rough table— two of the usual type of young Australians, very tall and spare, very silent— their faces wrinkled by blinding suns to the semblance of middle-aged men, whereas they were little more than youths. The third man was short, broad and black-bearded— every hair of him gave the impression of the immense strength of their owner. He received us sullenly, as if we were men he was forced to meet and would be glad to part with. Peculiar glances as of enquiry on one side and of warning in reply passed between this pocket Hercules and Swainger.

'Have a drink, mates,' said the Hercules almost commandingly, and although neither of us desired it, we could not be guilty of a refusal— which is a serious infraction of bush law. But after we had drunk the whisky and the hot water, which proved that it had known the condenser only a few minutes before, Billy Pagan said that we were tired and would talk in the morning. Without waiting for a reply, he said 'Goodnight,' and led the way out to our buggy, and I followed him.

In silence we spread our blankets near the buggy, filled the last pipe for the night, removed our boots, and turned in. We smoked for a few minutes in silence— a silence broken by the first of the questions that tormented me.

'Why don't you like Swainger, Billy?'

'S-s-sh— not so loud… I don't know anything against him except indefinite hearsay, but I don't like him on sight, and I trust to my instinct.'

'But how can your likings affect this business?'

'He was in Coolgardie when we left. He was loafing about the post office when I drove down Bailey street… looking as if he were at rest and likely to stay so. Yet he turns up here to receive us.'

'How could he know where we were going?'

'A cable from whoever is trying to sell this mine in London, or leakage in the telephone office here.'

'I see, but—'

'S-s-sh—'

A quartz splinter cracked under a heavy boot. I looked in the direction of the sound and saw two figures so indefinite as to appear mere shadows. They had approached from the back of the camp.... now they stood motionless.

Billy Pagan's whisper came to me, 'Talk— laugh— so they can go away again.'

I took the cue.

'Hang this pipe... It's foul. Got your knife, Billy?'

'No,' replied he as loudly. 'There's saltbush growing near you— get a twig.'

He continued talking advice as to pipe cleaning while I turned over to pluck the saltbush, and I heard the quartz splinter crepitate as if its broken edges were relieved of weight. I looked up and the two shadows had vanished.

The midnight winds sprang up and ruffled the plain; the night showed fever stars and darker than usual.

'What's their game, Billy?'

'S-s-sh— no more talking tonight... It's risky.'

There were sounds as of shovels being moved from the ground behind the camp. Then the noise of retreating footsteps.

'But what are they doing?'

'They're going to the shaft. It's none of our business, though.'

'What shall we do then?'

'S-s-sh. When in doubt, keep quiet— go to sleep.'

He rolled over, his face set from the dawn. In a few minutes his deep and regular breathing told me that he had followed his own advice. For myself, I was too excited by the mystery I felt afoot, and by turns dozed and awakened to every sound from the camp, the shaft and the plain.

Morning showed us the great outcrop of quartz that had been grey mystery in the starlight, a white crystalline mountain glaring and eye-wearing in the sun. In the centre it had weathered to fragments that strewed the plain— rising again in towers and pinnacles of whiteness, showing only the infrequent discoloration of millions of years of moss.

'H'm,' said Billy Pagan, chipping a boulder as if with his prospecting hammer— hungry as a swamper.'

Swainger interpolated hastily, 'She's not all brick quartz like this. She's better below— and she'll get richer with depth.'

'H'm,' said Billy, as Swainger and the sullen Hercules walked before us to the shaft. 'Same old lie, Harry— the stone will get richer with depth. Will it? I've never known a reef that did— it's always the other way.' We reached the shaft, and the engineer, addressing Swainger, said, 'What's the depth?'

'Two hundred and twenty; we've opened out and driven at the hundred and the two hundred. I suppose you like to do the sampling alone?'

'Yes, my friend and myself will go.'

'Right you are— we'll lower you then'. As he spoke he looped and knotted the end of the windlass rope as a foothole.

'No thanks. We'll go down the ladders. Will you lower the sample bags, Harry, after I've got down? There's a connection between the hundred foot level and the two hundred, isn't there, Mr Swainger?'

'Yes, there's a winze through and ladders in it.'

'Right. Is your friend here'— he indicated the sullen Hercules— 'the leaseholder?'

'I'm one of 'em, mister,' replied Hercules, answering for himself, and truculently, as if he expected opposition and wanted to anticipate it.

Swainger silenced him with a look.

'And you, Mr Swainger?' pursued Pagan imperturbably, as if he had neither heard nor seen the truculence nor its correction.

'I've got the option,' replied Swainger, flushing uneasily.

'And who has given the option to my people?'

'Coakley—'

'He's in London, I think?'

'Ye-e-es— he's in London.'

'H'm… Lower away when I call, Harry.'

I sat in the hundred foot level, looking at a glistening mass of quartz. Billy Pagan's candle burned steadily in its spider-socket driven into the soft slate of the reef-enclosing rock. I held my candle in my hand and the tallow guttered to my fingers.

He had spread a long sampling sheet of canvas on the floor of the drive and drove the pick at random into the quartz that stood up well, although it was shattered in all directions.

We had sampled the drive in sections of ten feet, had then roughly quartered each sample, packed it in its bag— numbered for identification— and sealed it.

When he had finished every section of the level Billy walked back into one of the crosscuts and measured the width of the lode.

'She's a beauty for size,' he said. 'Thirty feet if it's an inch… Let's go down the winze… Wait a minute. What about a sample from the floor?'

'But you didn't knock it down. All you knocked down fell on the sapling sheet.'

'Never mind that. We'll see what it's worth.' He scraped away half an inch of the surface and smiled as he saw moisture in the debris below.

'Who would have expected water? Eh! hold the bag, Harry. That'll do… Now to No. 2.'

I climbed down the hundred feet of crazy Jacob's ladder and Billy Pagan lowered the tools and sample bags, threw down the sampling sheet, and followed slowly— holding the candle to the white walls around him, scanning each point and crevice of the rock.

'Won't you sample the winze?'

'Yes,' he said loudly— and then whispered, 'S-s-sh, this place carries sound like a railway tunnel… No. It's not worth the smell of gold to the acre.'

'But it's the same stone as in the level.'

'S-s-sh— what if it is? We'll sample number two now, and then we'll get away.'

The reef at the lower level showed the same characteristics as the upper stone, but with fewer of the laminated veinings that had distinguished the reef at shallower depths. He sampled it quickly, and then he took a sample of the floor, which the sampling sheet had hidden, bagged it and sealed the bag, enclosed the samples in two gunny bags and sealed them. We carried them along the drive and to the shaft, and as he prepared to ascend by the ladders he handed me the last half inch of his candle— guttering tallow and sealing wax and nigh extinction.

'I'll climb quickly and lower the rope for the samples. Don't take your eyes off the bags, Harry— not for a moment.'

'Why— there's no one here?'

'There's always somebody everywhere… keep one eye on each bag. I won't be long.'

He climbed out of the circle of candlelight and into the half gloom of the shaft.

I looked at the bags as he had bidden, but the eye wearied of them, and I must have been looking at the candleflame for some minutes when I was conscious of the nearness of a man. There is a sensation something approaching horror at the sudden consciousness of the espionage of an enemy; and at the moment I must confess I was at least disagreeably startled.

I turned swiftly, and there, in the entrance to the drive, stood the sullen Hercules— his black beard and piercing eyes more commandingly sinister than usual, his left foot arrested suddenly in the act of taking another step towards me.

'Hallo!' said I, astounded at finding him behind me. 'How did you get here?'

'Same way as you. Down the ladders to the hundred foot and then down the winze, and along this level.'

'But in the dark?' For I saw he had no candle.

'Yes. I know every stone in this show… You finished sampling pretty slick.'

I did not immediately reply— I felt a new dislike to him. This man who went wandering through a mine and down crazy Jacob's ladders in the dark and then showed that he wished me to believe that he had taken the risks carelessly, motivelessly and merely to pass the time, was not at all to my taste or understanding.

'You got through the sampling in quick time,' he said again.

'Yes,' I replied, then, 'Mr Pagan is a quick worker.'

'It isn't fair to a mine to jump through it like that,' he replied, plainly showing that the rapid sampling had not been anticipated by him and had disarranged his plans.

'Mr Pagan doesn't scamp his work,' I replied with some warmth.

'More haste— less speed, I think,' he said doggedly, and then his eye suddenly flamed as he saw the sampling sheet folded up, with all Billy Pagan's finnicky orderliness, on the bags. I saw the glance, shifted the candle to my left hand, and prepared for war.

'Under below,' called the voice of Billy Pagan cheerily, and with feelings of relief I heard the hook on the windlass rope strike metallically against the walls of the shaft. There were two slings on the hook. I slung the two bags of samples, called to the men on top to 'haul away,' and as soon as the samples were out of reach took the sampling sheet over my shoulder, put the prospecting hammer in my belt, blew out the candle and started for the surface.

I expected Hercules, maddened by his black and silent rage, to wrench me from the ladder, and I climbed through the half gloom with only one sensation, and that, the instinct to reach the good earth's surface quickly; but I had no need for fear. Hercules warred in no such open ways. I could hear him muttering curses in the blackness of the drive, but I was on the last ladder before he began to climb.

BILLY PAGAN stood on guard over the bags. At the mouth of the shaft Swainger, looking furtively depressed and making his anxiety more apparent by affecting an air of good fellowship, deprecated an immediate departure.

'Give the show a chance, Mr Pagan,' he said. 'There's another reef further over there.'

'But no work done on it?'

'Not as much as on this one— just potholes.'

'Well, I don't trouble to see them,' replied Billy Pagan. 'My instructions were to sample a mine not potholes.'

'But you'd better wait and drive back in the cool. Your horses are getting a bit of green feed, too.'

Billy Pagan smiled— he knew how much 'green feed' there was in that drought-stricken wilderness, and then he suddenly snapped rather than said, 'Green feed! Much more likely poison plant… Hallo! What's that fellow doing with my horses?'

I looked in the direction of his gaze and saw one of the over-tall youths stoning Pagan's two greys. They had halted to browse on the ridge three hundred yards from us, and the lanky youth attempted to drive them on. Another minute and they would have been driven down the ridge and out of our sight in the gullies.

'Hey, you! Leave those horses alone,' Billy shouted, and at the sound of his voice the lanky youth dropped behind a boulder and disappeared, and the horses resumed feeding on the scanty salt-bush.

Billy Pagan's eyes glittered, but he said no word to betray the fact that his suspicions were aroused to their highest pitch.

'Will you bring my horses back here, Harry,' he said quietly, and I threw the sampling sheet on the bags. At sight of it Swainger's eyes were filled with murder.

As I turned to go the sullen face of Hercules appeared at the mouth of the shaft.

WHEN I RETURNED with the horses the group of three at the shaft mouth were waiting in silence; Hercules, with his strong, sullen head bent, relieving his passion by pulling fragments of stout chip with fingers that seemed to be made of steel— so hard and irresistible seemed their grip upon the wood. Swainger, in doubt, glaring at the sampling sheet; Billy Pagan, cool, calmly smiling his superiority in the struggle.

As I came up he said, 'Will you put the horses in, Harry? The harness is in the buggy', and as I nodded acquiescence, his tone became stern as he hailed the second lanky youth who hovered round the buggy with an axle-nut wrench.

'Hey, you! What are you doing?'

'Goin' to put a drop o' neatsfoot in the axleboxes,' replied the youth sulkily.

'Well, why don't you?' I, who knew him, detected irony in the question— irony that was sure of the weakness of its opponent.

'Our wrench won't fit,' said the youth, even more sulkily than before.

'Won't it? Well, there's a wrench in the box under the seat.'

The youth started towards it.

'Wait a minute— the box is locked.'

The youth stopped with an oath.

'Never mind— I'll oil the axles myself. I like greasy work… Come here, my lad.'

The youth slouched to the mouth of the shaft. 'Take one of these bags, will you? I'll take the other.'

'I'll carry one,' said Hercules with a little badly disguised eagerness in his voice.

'I won't trouble you,' said Billy soothingly, as if he were merely careful that Hercules should not overtax his strength. 'But you may carry the sampling sheet.'

Hercules snatched up the canvas and cursed in a whisper as audible as a stage aside.

The little procession came to the buggy. Billy Pagan stacked the bags in the front of the vehicle, took his seat and put a foot on each bag. I handed him the reins as Swainger came from the camp with a bottle and glasses.

'No thanks,' said Billy; 'I never drink before twelve.'

'But it's after twelve now,' said Swainger.

'I mean before twelve midnight then.'

Swainger scowled, but affected to laugh off his disappointment.

I fastened the traces to the bars and mounted to the buggy beside the engineer.

He bore upon the reins to feel the mouths of the horses and let them know the journey was beginning. Then he shook hands with Swainger, thanking him for the hospitality of the camp in the usual set terms, and concluded to the lanky youth.

'Good-bye, sonny— I take the will for the deed in the matter of greasing the axles… Good-b'— Hallo! Where's your mate, Mr Swainger?'

Hercules had disappeared.

'In the camp, I think,' replied Swainger confusedly.

'All right… Well, good-bye.'

He put the horses up to the collar as he spoke, and the buggy moved.

'Good-bye, Mr Pagan… Hey! You're left the sampling sheet.'

'Never mind… I'll give it to you. You'll find it handy next time.'

If Swainger made reply he never heard it. The beautiful team took us swiftly past the spurs of gleaming quartz into the deep-milled dust of the main track.

'SO THE MINE'S a fraud, Billy?'

'Fraud's no name for it… And those fellows would stick at nothing. That black scoundrel sneaking after us in the dark; the murder in the eyes of both of

them when they saw the sampling sheet, and knew that the little game of salting the bottom edges of the drive was no good to them… I knew when I saw the stone it was N.G… They sunk that shaft on the strength of little rich leaders that I could see at the surface *had* been payable… Then they say, Well, here's a boom. We'll be in it. We've got any quantity of stone, and we'll make the quality good enough… I don't grumble at them doing that… It's all in the game— their game; and it's all in my game to crab them if I can.'

'What are you hot about then?'

'Because they've done things that are not in the game. They'd have thrown us both down that shaft and the samples after us, only they hadn't quite enough courage for it. If we had shown the least sign of fear we were done. But they couldn't understand a man having sufficient front to laugh at 'em. And what clumsy liars! Swainger had come along to measure up the work of the contractors, and there's no contractors there and not a foot of work has been done for months. They tried to lose our horses, didn't they?— and that long-necked young thief who was monkeying round with a wrench— trying to kindly grease the wheels and lose an axle-nut or two… They've put my back up. We've only two days to stop Harmer paying the money to the other thief in London— less than two days, because Australia is nine hours ahead of England.'

'And where did the black ruffian go to?'

'Did you see a cloud of dust away to the right— two miles back?'

'Yes.'

'Well, I'll lay a wager that was Mr Hercules rounding up his horses and galloping them back to the English Flag.'

'They'll follow us then?'

'My colonial oath they will. The game's just begun, but we'll win it.'

'We! What do you get out of it, Billy?'

His face hardened at that, and he replied almost coldly, 'My fee— and so far as actual inspection goes, it's the easiest two hundred and fifty I ever earned.'

'But you'll get it whether you beat these fellows or not?'

'Harry,' said Billy Pagan severely, 'I'm surprised at you. You're no sportsman!'

'NOW, Mr Manning,' said Billy, the night after our arrival in Coolgardie, 'will you please tell me how you took your samples?'

'In the usual way,' replied the older man, but deprecatingly— 'all along the drive diagonally in six feet sections.'

'But you didn't use a sampling sheet. All the stone you broke down fell to the floor and you shovelled it up from there and then quartered it.'

'Yes, but—'

'And the result is this. I've crushed and panned all my samplings, and I can only get a few grains to the ton. But I took a special sample of the broken stuff along the side of the drive and I got twelve ounces to the ton for one sample and fourteen ounces for the other.'

'Good heavens! Then I was salted?'

'You were.'

'I'm ashamed of myself. I am sick of myself. I might have known by the character of the rock, but I don't trust my eyes, as I'm shortsighted.'

'It can't be helped— you got an average of two ounces for all the stone in sight, didn't you?'

'Yes— two ounces.'

'Then we've just got time to stop the swindle… Now don't be downhearted. Nobody could doubt your straightness.'

The old man smiled sadly. 'But I doubt my own ability now, Mr Pagan.'

'We must go now… Good-bye. See you later… Off to the telephone office, Harry.'

THE TERMINUS of the telegraph line was twenty miles further west, and from Coolgardie telegrams were sent by telephone to the operator at the terminus at Pink Rocks.

Billy Pagan coded a cable that was translatable thus,

'Refuse to complete. The mine is an absolute swindle.'

We walked to the Post Office feeling very successful and confident, but Billy Pagan stopped at the entrance as Swainger's figure disappeared within.

'They're here, Harry— but they're later than I thought. And what's the good of them being here now and cabling?'

We entered. Hercules leaned against the wall of the inner office and glared at us, drunkenly truculent.

Billy rapped at the wooden shutter of the telephone room, and the clerk appeared and demanded our business.

'I've got a cable I want sent right away.'

'Can't send it till I've got this message through.'

'And how long will that be?'

'About two hours.'

'Two hours! Man, it must go through at once. I'll pay urgent rates.'

'It's an urgent I've got on now, and it's a long message.'

Billy thought a moment and then replied, 'All right, I'll come back in two hours. You must arrange to break the long message if it's not through then.'

The clerk said 'All right,' and closed the shutter. The telephone bell rang again— the voice of the transmitter spoke again.

We left the office, Billy leading me into the scrub beyond the office, and then by a detour back to the Post Office, but at its side and not its front.

'Quiet,' he whispered. 'Keep out of the ray of the lamp. Now… crawl behind me.'

We crawled through a little belt of scrub and past the piles of a building— built, as usual, high from the ground on zinc-covered piles to delay the ravages of white ants.

We were under the Post Office.

'Listen— Harry— what is it?'

We listened and heard this:

'In the last summer number of The Clarion *we reviewed the Westralian discoveries by sea— 'Have you got that? eh. … Never mind whether it's rot or not -this is the message and I'm being paid for it—' By sea. Inseparably connected with the land discoveries are the travels of John Forrest, Alexander Forrest, Fyre Austin and others whose names we know and of that great and nameless legion of explorers and prospectors and adventurers who have beaten the ways for the little men of the cities in all countries and at all times. And if there is one thing that calls for the adventurous Australian's gratitude it is— - 'Got that?"*

'Come away quietly,' whispered Billy, and knowing the uselessness of questioning him I backed out silently after him.

He did not speak until we were well clear of the scrub and near his camp again.

'What's the game, Billy? What does it all mean? What is it they are telephoning?

'You'll laugh at the idea. That was an article out of the '*Clarion*'. They are probably telephoning the whole paper.'

'But what for?'

'To hold the line, man. While they pay they hold the wires, and I can't get my cable through.'

'But the cost?'

'They cut that down by waiting until they saw me leave Manning's house. They're probably only telegraphing it as far as Fremantle, and what's a penny a word to fifty thousand for a shicer?'

'So you're beaten?'

'Not yet— the horses have had a day off. We'll yoke 'em up.'

'Where away now?'

'To the telegraph station at Pink Rocks.'

CAN I EVER forget the romance of the track that night— the beauty of the bush lying under the starlight without a breath to ruffle it; the smoke of our pipes curling up as incense; the ghostly track lying coiled and mysterious through scrub and forest; the horses enjoying their own rapid motion through the cool air; the only sounds the occasional clicking of shoe on shoe, the straining of the harness and the silky rustling of tyres in the sand.

As we sped through the divinely soft air, he told me my part of the programme.

'I'll drop you at twenty miles out, drive the other ten alone, get my cable away and drive back to you.'

'But if the operator has started on the long message he won't stop it for the cable.'

'I won't ask him to, but as there'll be a sudden interruption of communication with the place we've come from, he'll take my cable all right.'

I looked at him, and in the half darkness could just see that he was smiling.

'You mean to cut the telephone wire?'

'I mean that you shall. It's half past twelve now— you mustn't cut it till a quarter past two. I'll be in the office at Pink Rock then.'

'I see— that gives you an alibi.'

'Of course— they'd suspect me at once if I first cut a wire and then drive to the next office to get a cable through.'

'I see— all right, old man. How do I get up the poles?'

'There are no poles. Civilisation hasn't come along yet. The insulators are spiked to trees.'

'Good. And what do I cut the wire with?'

'This.'

He pressed a fencing wire cutter into my hand, and we drove on in silence and I dozed.

A touch brought me to consciousness, and I found he had stopped the buggy.

'There you are, old man. There's the wire. What's your time?— five minutes to one! Right. I can do the ten miles by twenty past two, easy. Cut at twenty past. Good luck, old man— I'll be here again at four thirty, but it will be best for you to walk west, and I'll meet you sooner.'

'Good-bye, Billy, and good luck.'

We clasped hands. I lit my pipe and settled down to waiting— the buggy disappeared in the long perspectives of the aisles of salmon gum.

'CAN'T DO it— I've got a long message,' said the operator.

'All right, I'll wait,' replied Billy Pagan, with one eye on his sweating but still strong team at the door, and the other on the telephone.

'It won't be much good waiting unless you've brought your blankets,' said the operator, laughing. 'Some crank up on the field has taken a ninety-nine years lease of this 'phone. He's sent half *The Clarion* up to now— all except the illustrations— and I suppose when he's through with that he'll start on Johnston 's *Dictionary* and poor Doctor Watt's hymns. Sorry to keep you, but I can't help it.'

'I know,' replied Billy. 'It's not your fault. Fire away. Give that lunatic asylum at the other end another chance.'

'All right— you take it easily, anyhow— Hello! Are you there? Yes. Go on. What's my last? 'Repeat' did you say? All right? Here you are— 'Governor Denison writing to H. Labouchere of the Colonial Office, respecting the formation of the first New South Wales Ministry, said—'

'Can you hear that?… Can you hear that? Hello!— Shake your battery… Oh, damn!'

Billy Pagan looked at his watch. It was *fifteen* minutes past two.

At that moment I had climbed the tree and cut the wire.

IN THE EARLY DAWN I met him driving gaily through the dewy bush, and he stopped the buggy to pick me up, and laughed. And when he had me in the buggy he laughed again, as at an excellent joke, and called me his good mate and his blood brother and many other pleasant things.

'Swainger will be on our track when they know of the broken wire. I'm game to bet that he's been admiring through my window a dummy in the bed, supposing it to be me.'

The wire must have been repaired the next day, for twenty-four hours after we reached Coolgardie came a cable for Billy Pagan and its decodation said this:

'Many thanks. We were on the point of paying. Please make complete examination Jindabine mines and cable report.

———————————

25: The Little Green Man

Edgar Wallace

1875-1932

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AN UNDERSTANDING, disturbed or terminated, has a more tragic aspect than a broken contract. For understandings are without the foundations of pledge and promise written or spoken.

There was an understanding between Molly Linden and Thursby Grant. Neither was important, because they were young; they were as yet nebulæ, hoping to be worlds. He was poor in the sense that he could afford no more than a Kensington flat and the lightest of light cars; he was (Molly thought) very handsome and very, very nice.

Mr. Fathergill amused her— fascinated her by reason of his great age and romantic past. He was forty, and his immense riches were common knowledge. But that did not count with Molly. She much preferred riding in his smooth-running limousine to being buffeted and rattled in Thursby's two-seater. Mr. Fathergill's little dinners at the Ritz had a comfort which was not afforded by the solid restaurant where table-cloths were only changed when absolutely necessary.

Still, there was a sort of understanding. If the matter had been allowed to remain where Charles Fathergill left it, that warm night in June when they paced the scented dusky garden, Thursby Grant might have become a tender memory or a bitter disappointment, according to the way he accepted his *congé*. Unhappily, Molly's father had been a little tactless.

She carried the news to him in his study; she was fluttered, a little tearful. One nice word about Thursby would have swung her definitely to the side of Charles Fathergill.

Instead, Mr. Linden said:

"Thank God for that, Molly! You had better write to young Grant and tell him he need not call again."

There was no reason in the world why he should not have called again; why he should not have appeared with a sad, brave smile and a hearty, "Good luck, old girl!"

But Mr. Linden had been brought up in the Victorian tradition. Then and there Thursby Grant was martyred for love; became a radiant figure of persecution. Worse, he himself accepted the martyr's rôle, and indited severe and haughty letters to Molly's father, to Molly's fiancé.

One evening he walked fiercely down Pall Mall, entered the sublime portals of the Disraeli Club and, thrusting his hat at an inoffensive page-boy, was

ushered into the smoke-room. For the greater part of an hour he sat in a sort of trance, listening to Mr. Charles Fathergill, who was never averse from talking…

Just beyond Fathergill's chair was a high marble pillar of a rich red, broken by white spots and minute serpentines. Thursby Grant had been staring at that pillar for twenty minutes with a painful intensity, some place in his brain busy with the baffling quest for the exact part of the world where such marble may be quarried. *Rosso antico*— that was its technical description. He remembered a big house in Marlborough with a fireplace. Rosso antico. That was it.

Behind the pillar, half concealed, was a hatchet-faced little waiter, whose livery hung upon him in folds. He was staring out of the window at the white façade of the Auto Club.

A big room, rather over decorated, with red paper and dingy gildings. Scores of well-used, cozy chairs about round tables, where middle-aged men sat smoking over their coffee and told one another of the queer thing that happened to them, twenty?— no, it must be twenty-five— years ago.

Rosso antico…

A buzz of talk as even as an asphalt pavement lay on the club smoking-room. Fathergill's voice, pitched on an infinitesimally higher plane, rippled along its surface.

All Thursby's brain which was not occupied by rosso antico was at Fathergill's disposition.

"… hundred, two hundred years ago, quite a lot of people would have hired a bravo to cut me up. Possibly you would not have descended to hiring an assassin. A quarrel in a coffee-house, chairs to Leicester Gardens, and a few passes with our swords would have settled the matter. Satisfactory— in a way. It would depend entirely upon who was pinked. Now we take no risks, carry no swords, do nothing stupid, and only a few things that are vulgar. Slay and heal with currency; the age of reason."

Fathergill's head was long and narrow. He had a dark face and black, abundant hair brushed back from his forehead. He affected a tiny black moustache, an adequate occupation for his long fingers in moments of abstraction. His lank body was doubled up in a low chair, and he lay back so that his knees were level with his chin. When he spoke he waved one hand or the other to emphasize a point.

With the free part of his mind Thursby found himself wishing that the man did not wear diamond studs in his dress shirt.

"I asked you to dinner tonight— you preferred to come in for coffee. I appreciate your feelings. You are hurt. You are saying to yourself: 'Here am I, a struggling engineer, who has found a nice girl who likes me'— I grant that—

'and here is a fellow worth millions who comes along and cuts me out, not because he's more attractive, but because he has enough money to order life as he wishes it.'"

"It isn't much to boast about, is it?" asked Thursby, his voice husky from a long, dry-mouthed silence.

Charles Fathergill shook his head.

"I am not boasting. You have suddenly found the door of a nice house on Wimbledon Common closed to you— or only opened as far as is necessary to tell you that Miss Molly Linden is not at home. All this is unexpected— rather staggering. Your letters are returned, your telephone messages not delivered. You know I am a friend of the family, and you ask me if I can explain. I bring you to my club, and I tell you plainly and honestly that I intend within the next twelve months marrying Molly Linden, that her father has agreed, and that she— seems reconciled. Could I be fairer?"

Thursby drew a long breath. It almost seemed that he had suddenly awakened from a heavy, ugly sleep.

"Money could not have been the only inducement," he said.

Fathergill shrugged one shoulder, silently inserted a cigarette in the end of a long holder, and lit it with deliberate puffs.

"The key to all power is knowledge," he said—"and ruthlessness."

Throughout the interview his tone, his manner, had been most friendly. The wrath of this good-looking young guest, who had come with murder in his heart, had been blanketed under the unconscious friendliness of one whom Thursby Grant so little regarded as a host that he had not sipped the coffee that had filmed itself cold under his eyes.

"I started life as a bricklayer's assistant"— Fathergill watched the ragged wisps of smoke dissipating with an air of enjoyment— "and at an early stage of my career I began to *know*. I knew that we were cheating the Borough Surveyor. The Borough Surveyor gave me ten shillings for my information. He took me into his office. He had a love affair with his typist. I knew— I was assistant store-keeper at eighteen."

"That sounds almost like blackmail to me," frowned Thursby.

Mr. Fathergill smiled slowly.

"Never label things," he warned. "Know them, but never commit yourself to labels."

"You mean you have some hold over Linden?"

"Melodrama," murmured the other, closing his eyes wearily. "How terribly young you are! No. I know that John Linden wants to marry again. He is fifty, and young for fifty. A good-looking man, with an ineradicable sense of adventure. You would not be able to marry Molly for three years— at least I

would marry at once; she asks for a year. Molly must have an establishment of her own before John Linden makes his inevitable blunder and brings his inevitably youthful bride to Wimbledon!"

Again Thursby discovered that he was breathing heavily through his nose, and checked his rising anger.

"I think that is about all I wanted to know," he said, and rose awkwardly.

"You *know* that is important," said Fathergill, and offered a lifeless hand.

As much of this interview as he deemed necessary went forward to Wimbledon.

John Linden, gray and red-faced, read scraps of the letter written on club notepaper to his daughter. Over his glasses he looked to see how she took the news. Her face was expressionless.

"I really think that a year will make all the difference," he told her— and himself. "I like Thursby, but, my dear, I have to consider you."

She raised her eyes from the plate. She was not especially beautiful: she was distinctly pretty— the kind of cultivated-garden prettiness which youth brings, and good, simply cut clothes adorn.

"Are you very rich, father?"

She had never asked him such a question before.

"Why, my dear? I'm not rich in money and not particularly rich in property. Why?"

She looked past him through the leaded casement window.

"Only… Charles never made the least suggestion that he wanted to marry me until he came back from Roumania."

He laughed loudly at this.

"What a romantic little devil you are!" he said good-humoredly. "I see how your queer little mind is working. Fathergill went to Roumania and discovered my oil property is worth a fortune; he kept the knowledge to himself and came back to propose to my daughter."

If she had not thought this, she should not have gone scarlet. He did not add to her embarrassment.

"I should be glad to get back the money I have sunk in Roumanian oil," he said. "You seem to forget that I have an agent in Bukharest who keeps me *au fait* with all that is happening."

"Thursby says you can buy any Roumanian agent for a thousand *lei*," she protested, and he shook his head.

"You seem to forget that Charles Fathergill is a millionaire—"

"He says so. Thursby says—"

Mr. Linden consigned Thursby to the devil.

"I really am in love with Thursby," she said haltingly.

Mr. Linden said nothing. Soon after she got up from the table hurriedly. She was rather young.

It could not be said that Charles Fathergill was well known in the City. The obvious is accepted without analysis: that is the deadly danger of the obvious. One knows that Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square is built of stone. Nobody knows or cares who built it or what stone was employed. Everybody knew that Mr. Charles Fathergill was immensely rich. He had a flat in Carlton House Gardens, and paid a twenty-thousand-pounds premium to secure it. The cabmen he tipped, the club servants, the policeman on the beat— who else matters?— could all testify to his wealth and generosity. He grew richer by being rich. When interested people inquired as to his stability, Stubbs pointed out the fact that he had never had a judgment recorded against him; his lawyers certified him as a desirable client or customer to any person who wished him as a client or customer; one of his bank managers— he employed several bankers— seconded the reference. There is only one peculiarity which need be mentioned— each of his bankers was under the impression that they were carrying his smallest account, and often hinted to him that they would like to carry one of his heavier balances.

As has been remarked before, he was not known in the City, for he did not speculate or engage in commerce. And not being known in the City has this advantage, that nothing is known to your disadvantage.

Mr. Linden met his prospective son-in-law at the club a few days later.

"Going to Roumania?" Mr. Fathergill's eyes opened. "Good heavens!— why? I haven't been back four months."

Mr. Linden tossed down a cocktail and wiped his mouth busily.

"I thought I'd go… may meet the girl of my dreams, eh?" A long chuckle: John Linden was old enough not to be ashamed of dreams.

"When do you think of leaving? I am going as far as Budapest. I have some big interests there."

A rapid calculation produced the assurance that Mr. John Linden's many directorships and annual general meetings would make it impossible to leave before another month. Charles pursed his lips thoughtfully. He must go before then, he said.

He left London within a week.

Thursby Grant was at Victoria Station saying good-bye to a friend who was traveling to the Near East. He acknowledged Fathergill's smiling nod without effort, being helped to toleration by a letter which crashed all solemn promises made by the writer.

"Good Lord!" said Thursby's friend. "Do you know Charles Fathergill? They say he is a millionaire five times over."

"Six times," said Thursby, suddenly sour. "Why damn his reputation for a million?"

ii

MR. LINDEN'S agent in Bukharest was a lawyer, one Bolescue. He was a stout man, with a large, damp face, who loved food and music and baccarat. Otherwise he and discretion and probity might have walked hand in hand. As it was, he vociferated refusals, his countenance growing moister, talked wildly of "committees," fearfully of engineers, but never once of the majestic law, soon to be flaunted.

Charles Fathergill had a letter of credit for many thousands of pounds. His French was not too good; the money spoke with the purest accent. M. Bolescue, with his light heart fixed upon the gambling tables at Cinta, agreed that certain reports might be postponed, an engineer's emphatic opinion suppressed, borings now in progress slowed till the coming of Mr. John Linden, and then suspended.

"After six months' more time all subterfuges is impossibility," said M. Bolescue, who occasionally tried to speak good English.

"After six months nothing matters," replied the lank man.

His plan was to stay a fortnight in Bukharest, leaving for Constantinople to avoid John Linden. But a fortnight is a long time, and the joys of motoring in hired machines are too easily exhausted. Nor had beautiful Cinta in the hills, with its glorious surroundings of mountain and forest, any attraction for him.

On the eighth night he sent for the hall porter of the Petite Splendide, and the official came quickly, Mr. Fathergill being a lordly dispenser of tips. A short man, square-shouldered, bow-legged, resplendent in gold lace, he came, hat in hand— would have crawled.

"I'm bored, Peter," said Mr. Fathergill.

His half-eaten dinner was on the table. He had scarcely touched his wine.

"Ah!" said Peter, and beamed.

"I want amusing: somebody who can talk or sing. God! I'm sick of Bukharest."

He was justified, for into Bukharest seem to have seeped the dregs of ancient Rome— dregs that have gained a little foulness from Turk and Slav. A rococo Rome.

"Talk… seeng… hum!"

Peter's stumpy hand caressed two of his blue-black chins.

"The book I can bring… some beautiful ones— no? Talk and seeng— ah! Gott of Gotts!"

He resolved into a windmill of waving palms; noises of pride and exultation came from him.

"One who never came to the books! New— a princess, Mr. Fat'ergill! No! I swear by Gott"— he put his hand on his heart and raised his eyes piously to the ceiling—"I would not lie. You will say, Peter says this of all. But a veritable princess. Russian… from— I don't know— the Black Sea somewhere. You say yes?" He nodded in anticipation, and then his face fell. "You must be rich for this princess… wait!"

He rummaged in the tail pocket of his frock coat and found a packet of letters, fixed steel-rimmed pince-nez, and sought for something, his lips moving in silent speech— a comical, cherubic bawd of a man.

"Here— it is in French… I read. From she— to me!" He struck an attitude. "Irene… listen…"

He read rapidly. Charles could not understand half the letter: the important half was intelligible.

"All right; tell her to come up and have a glass of wine with me."

"I shall telephone," said Peter…

Ten struck when Irene came. Charles, reading a week-old *Times*, looked up over the newspaper at the click of the lock and saw the door opening slowly. She stood in the doorway, looking at him. Very slim and lithe and white. Her black hair dressed severely, parted in the center and framing her face. Clear-skinned, no art gave her aid there. The exquisite loveliness of her caught him by the throat. He rose instinctively, and then the faintest smile twitched the corner of her blood-red mouth.

Regal… and Russian. Russia was in her dark eyes— the inscrutable mystery of the Slav… a million æons removed from Western understanding.

"May I come in?"

Her voice was as he had expected— rather low and rich. There was a sort of husky sweetness in it that made his slow pulses beat the faster. Her English was faultless.

"May I have a cigarette?"

She was at the table, looking down at him, one hand already in the silver box.

"Sit down, won't you?" He found his voice.

He drew up a chair so that he faced her.

"Do you want me to sing— really? I'm afraid my voice isn't awfully good. Or don't you?"

He shook his head.

"What are you doing… here?" His gesture embraced not only the material part of Bukharest, but the place she occupied in its social life.

Again that faint smile.

"One must live… singing and… and talking to people. I have not really begun my career as… an entertainer. You are my first audience. It may prove to be very amusing after all."

"Very amusing," he repeated mechanically.

"So many things have seemed— impossible." She blew ring after ring of smoke between her words. "So many nights I have sat on my bed and looked at The Little Green Man and wondered… and wondered. Then I have put The Little Green Man under my pillow and said: 'Let me see tomorrow— it may be fun.'"

She was smiling at his perplexity, reached for the black velvet handbag that she had laid on the table, and, opening it, took out a small green bottle. It was fashioned like a squat Russian moujik, wearing a heavy overcoat belted at the waist. The hat was the stopper. As she held it up to the light, Fathergill saw that it was three parts filled with a fluid.

"In other words, poison. That's rather theatrical, isn't it?"

"Is it?" She was interested. "I don't know. Professor Bekinsky gave it to me the week before he was arrested. He was a Jew and a good man. They blew his brains out in front of the house where I was staying in Kieff."

Charles Fathergill was chilled: this was not amusing.

"Has it any special properties— arsenic… aconite…?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know. He called it 'knowledge'— he had a sense of humor." She made a wry little face at him, then laughed softly. It was one of those delicious chuckling laughs that are so beautiful when heard from a woman. "You would rather I sang?"

"No… only it *is* rather depressing, isn't it?"

She asked him who he was. On the subject of Mr. Fathergill he could be eloquent. To talk of himself without exposing his theory of life was difficult. She listened gravely. He felt that it was impossible that she could be startled.

Lovely, he thought as he talked— amazingly lovely. The contours of her face had some indefinable value that he had not found in any other. In a pause she asked:

"But you are ruthless!" (He rather liked that.) "You would stop at nothing to reach your end?"

"Nothing. Knowledge is power only when it can be utilized for the benefit of its holders."

She shook her head.

"That is strange— because it seems you have no objective. You wish to get nowhere, only somewhere better at all costs. I could understand if it was for a definite place."

He was flattered by her disapproval.

"Have you any objective?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Happiness… security. The security that a peasant workman could give his wife."

"In fact, marriage?" he smiled.

She nodded slowly and mushroomed the red end of her cigarette in the silver ash-tray.

"Yes… I would fight like a devil to retain that. It is my idea of heaven. I have a little sister— here in Bukharest."

She looked up at him slowly.

"A sister is like a baby: one does things and puts The Little Green Man under the pillow for her sake."

She seemed to shake herself as though she were throwing off an unpleasant garment. When she spoke her voice was almost gay.

"We are getting tedious. Shall I sing, or shall we talk?"

"We have talked too much," said Fathergill.

He walked to the window and pulled the curtains together.

iii

A FEW MONTHS later an eminent firm of lawyers wrote to Mr. Linden to the effect that they had a client who wished to acquire oil land. They understood he had a property, etc.

Mr. Linden, a very happy and cheerful man, wrote asking that the offer should be reduced to sterling.

There were many reasons why adventures in Roumanian oil should have no further appeal, and why he wished to convert a property of dubious value into something which paid six per cent with monotonous regularity.

Mr. Fathergill, who had reached Paris, received the lawyers' intimation with mild interest. It was curious, he mused, how much labor, how many hours of anxiety are involved needlessly and uselessly because one cannot foresee the end. In the months that had elapsed between his going to Roumania and his return to Paris he had become a millionaire, and every one of his banks believed that they carried his heaviest account.

He had met a man in Constantinople, an international financier, who bought properties for a song and talked them into cantatas. Dog does not eat

dog except in Constantinople. Mr. Fathergill was unaware of this exception. He acquired a tract of wild mountain-land, and a concession sealed and signed by the Turkish Government. And on the day his check was honored and the vendor was on his way, per Orient Express, to acquire a timber concession in Sofia, a miracle happened. A forgotten and unpaid prospector made a discovery. Mr. Fathergill believed in quick profits, particularly if they were big profits. The syndicate which took over his holding and his concession offered him a head-reeling sum.

The oil proposition was now an amusing sideline… but there was Molly.

"That may be awkward," said Charles, and pulled at his nose thoughtfully.

For Mr. Linden was married again. Molly had mentioned the fact in one of her cold, proper letters. She did not tell him that John Linden had become de-Victorianized and that Thursby Grant was a frequent visitor at Wimbledon Common.

John Linden wrote. The letter was awaiting the wanderer on his arrival at the Meurice. Would he come over and spend Christmas with the family?

"I am getting rid of my oil lands— some foolish man wishes to buy and has offered me a good price."

Charles left for London on the next day: he would have preferred to have spent Christmas in Paris. The boat train was crowded, the sea choppy. Mr. Fathergill arrived in London a very ruffled man. Paris would have been ideal at Christmas— or Bukharest. Irene! A most unsubstantial dream. The fragrant memory of her caught at his heart. A week after he had left Bukharest he had gone back to find her. Peter contorted himself apologetically. The lady had left Bukharest: he had inquired for her; some other guest had desired speech and song. It was a thousand pities. She was a veritable princess. But (here he brightened) there was a beautiful little girl, a veritable lady…

Charles Fathergill had shaken his head. He looked for her in Budapest; caused inquiries to be made in Vienna… no.

He stalked up and down his beautiful drawing-room, his hands in his pockets. Wimbledon… roast turkey… plum pudding… Molly Linden… he shuddered.

Snow was falling heavily when his car pulled up under the portico, and there was John Linden, rubicund and white, and there were holly wreaths hanging on the panelled walls of the hall, and Molly, gauche and awkward, and an uncomfortable Thursby Grant— Charles could have fallen on his neck. And there too was a stranger— a pretty, slim child in white, with a clear skin and dark hair and eyes, and…

"You haven't met Mrs. Linden, old boy." John was very jovial, very excited. "I told you I would get my romance. We met on the train just outside of Trieste… Irene, darling!"

Irene, darling!

There she was, her calm, glorious self, framed in a doorway, as he had seen her before. Only now she wore purple… it suited her better than black, completed her regality.

Her eyes met his. Only the faintest hint of recognition lit and died within their unfathomable deeps. Had she been prepared, he would not have seen even that.

"Glad to meet you… Mrs. Linden."

He took her hand in his; the pressure was just as firm as, and no firmer than, one would expect in a hostess.

"Come along to my study— the man will take the suitcase to your room."

In the study Charles drank a little port and listened.

"Um… about Molly. I've been thinking— you don't mind if we have this out right away?"

Fathergill shook his head. He preferred that the matter of Molly should be disposed of.

"My wife— by the way, she was the Princess Irene Dalruski— had a terrible time in the revolution; I will tell you all about it one of these days— my wife thinks it would be a mistake for Molly to marry except where her heart is. Old-fashioned, eh?— By the way, did you see Vera— my wife's sister, a dear kid…"

How curiously futile everything was, Charles Fathergill thought. All his scheming— the Roumanian lawyer with a moist face. Suppose now he had put no spoke in the wheel, had let the reports go forward, and John Linden had entered into his minor riches, and instead had fastened to himself with hooks of iron this find of Peter's…

He was very silent at dinner; scarcely looked at the glorious being at the head of this suburban table; permitted himself the fatuity of wearing a paper cap. Molly thought he was sorrowing over a lost bride and cried herself to sleep that night.

"Have a talk with Irene. I'd like you to know her," said John Linden.

There was a little drawing-room that was half conservatory, and was in consequence a place that smelt faintly of the earth. Hostess and guest detached themselves from the noisy group about a Christmas tree.

"Well, my dear?" Charles Fathergill closed the door. His heart was beating a shade faster than usual, a sense of exhilaration made him feel a little drunk.

"Well?"

She did not sit down. Curiously was the scene reminiscent of another meeting— eighteen hundred miles away.

"You have reached your objective?" he said, and, when she slowly nodded: "I have searched Europe for you."

She looked at him steadily.

"Why?"

He was nonplussed for a moment.

"Why do you think?" he asked, and went on quickly: "We're going to be very good friends, aren't we?"

"I hope so. You won't come here again, of course?"

"Why not? Linden's a great friend of mine."

She nodded.

"That is the reason. I have heard a great deal about you, without realizing who you were."

He smiled at this; the hinted disparagement pleased him. She had aroused that kind of emotion once before.

"You still believe that knowledge is power?"

He still believed that. This was the moment he would have chosen to hammer home the guiding principle of his life.

"And The Little Green Man?" he bantered. "Has he been smashed?"

She shook her head.

"No. Once or twice I thought I would bury him, with all that belongs to his day. Something prevented me."

A very long, uncomfortable silence followed. The sound of laughter came faintly from the larger drawing-room.

"I have rather a nice apartment in Carlton House Gardens. I hope you will come along and see me. Often."

She made no reply. He repeated the invitation.

"You mean that I should enter a new bondage for an indefinite period?"

She looked round.

"It needs Peter to smooth over the crudities."

He thought she was being very sensible and was relieved.

"And if I cannot find time to see your beautiful flat? Will you grow reminiscent some day when you meet John Linden?"

He did not hesitate.

"Yes. You may say: 'What purpose will that serve?' You asked me that before. I reply now, as I replied then: 'Knowledge is of value so long as it is used. A threat of its use, unless it is backed by the will to use it, is so much foolish talk.' It is because you believe, rightly, that not in a spirit of revenge, but as a logical consequence…"

"I see."

She half turned towards the door.

"I wanted to be sure. Come and be festive… have you seen my little sister?"

"A lovely child," he said conventionally.

That was all that passed between them: they did not speak again. He asked for a glass of milk to be sent to his room, and this was done.

When he went upstairs to bed he looked for her, but she had already retired.

The servant who knocked at his door the next morning could not make him hear. She went in and drew up the blinds, put down the tray, and did not notice that the glass she had taken up the previous night was gone.

"Your tea, sir," she said.

Even John Linden did not believe that Fathergill was dead until the doctor came.

"I am sorry your Christmas has been spoilt," said Irene gravely, and looked from him to the big fire which burnt in her bedroom. The Little Green Man had already melted out of sight.

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26: Hugues, The Wer-Wolf

Sutherland Menzies

1806-1886

Court Magazine, Monthly Critic, Lady's Magazine and Museum, Sep 1838

ON THE CONFINES of that extensive forest-tract formerly spreading over so large a portion of the county of Kent, a remnant of which, to this day, is known as the weald* of Kent, and where it stretched its almost impervious covert midway between Ashford and Canterbury during the prolonged reign of our second Henry, a family of Norman extraction by name Hugues (or Wulfric, as they were commonly called by the Saxon inhabitants of that district) had, under protection of the ancient forest laws, furtively erected for themselves a lone and miserable habitation.

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** That woody district, at the period to which our tale belongs, was an immense forest, desolate of inhabitants, and only occupied by wild swine and deer; and though it is now filled with towns and villages and well peopled, the woods that remain sufficiently indicate its former extent.*

And amidst those sylvan fastnesses, ostensibly following the occupation of woodcutters, the wretched outcasts, for such, from some cause or other, they evidently were, had for many years maintained a secluded and precarious existence. Whether from the rooted antipathy still actively cherished against all of that usurping nation from which they derived their origin, or from recorded malpractice by their superstitious Anglo-Saxon neighbours, they had long been looked upon as belonging to the accursed race of wer-wolves, and as such churlishly refused work on the domains of the surrounding franklins or proprietors, so thoroughly was accredited the descent of the original lycanthropic stain transmitted from father to son through several generations. That the Hugues Wulfric reckoned not a single friend among the adjacent homesteads of serf or freedman was not to be wondered at, possessing as they did so unenviable a reputation; for to them was invariably attributed even the misfortunes which chance alone might seem to have given birth. Did midnight fire consume the grange;— did the time-decayed barn, over-stored with an abundant harvest, tumble into ruins;— were the shocks of wheat lain prostrate over the fields by a tempest;—did the smut destroy the grain;— or the cattle perish, decimated by a murrain;— a child sink under some wasting malady;— or a woman give premature birth to her offspring, it was ever the Hugues Wulfric who were openly accused, eyed askance with mingled fear and detestation, the finger of young and old pointing them out with bitter

execrations— in fine, they were almost as nearly classed *feroe natura* as their fabled prototype, and dealt with accordingly.*

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** King Edgar is said to have been the first who attempted to rid England of these animals; criminals even being pardoned by producing a stated number of these creatures' tongues. Some centuries after they increased to such a degree as to become again the object of royal attention; and Edward I appointed persons to extirpate this obnoxious race. It is one of the principal bearings in armoury. Hugh, surnamed Lupus, the first Earl of Kent, bore for his crest a wolf's head.*

Terrible, indeed, were the tales told of them round the glowing hearth at eventide, whilst spinning the flax, or plucking the geese; equally affirmed too, in broad daylight, whilst driving the cows to pasturage, and most circumstantially discussed on Sundays between mass and vespers, by the gossip groups collected within Ashford parvyse, with most seasonable admixture of anathema and devout crossings. Witchcraft, larceny, murther, and sacrilege, formed prominent features in the bloody and mysterious scenes of which the Hugues Wulfric were the alleged actors: sometimes they were ascribed to the father, at others to the mother, and even the sister escaped not her share of vilification; fair would they have attributed an atrocious disposition to the unweaned babe, so great, so universal was the horror in which they held that race of Cain! The churchyard at Ashford, and the stone cross, from whence diverged the several roads to London, Canterbury, and Ashford, situated midway between the two latter places, served, so tradition avouched, as nocturnal theatres for the unhallowed deeds of the Wulfrics, who thither prowled by moonlight, it was said, to batten on the freshly-buried dead, or drain the blood of any living wight who might be rash enough to venture among those solitary spots. True it was that the wolves had, during some of the severe winters, emerged from their forest lairs, and, entering the cemetery by a breach in its walls, goaded by famine, had actually disinterred the dead; true was it, also, that the Wolf's Cross, as the hinds commonly designated it, had been stained with gore on one occasion through the fall of a drunken mendicant, who chanced to fracture his skull against a pointed angle of its basement. But these accidents, as well as a multitude of others, were attributed to the guilty intervention of the Wulfrics, under their fiendish guise of wer-wolves.

These poor people, moreover, took no pains to justify themselves from a prejudice so monstrous: full well apprised of what calumny they were the victims, but alike conscious of their impotence to contradict it, they tacitly suffered its infliction, and fled all contact with those to whom they knew themselves repulsive. Shunning the highways, and never venturing to pass through the town of Ashford in open day, they pursued such labour as might occupy them within doors, or in unfrequented places. They appeared not at

Canterbury market, never numbered themselves amongst the pilgrims at Becket's far-famed shrine, or assisted at any sport, merry-making, hay-cutting, or harvest home: the priest had interdicted them from all communion with the church—the ale-bibbers from the hostelry.

The primitive cabin which they inhabited was built of chalk and clay, with a thatch of straw, in which the high winds had made huge rents and closed up by a rotten door, exhibiting wide gaps, through which the gusts had free ingress. As this wretched abode was situated at considerable distance from any other, if, perchance, any of the neighbouring serfs strayed within its precincts towards nightfall, their credulous fears made them shun near approach so soon as the vapours of the marsh were seen to blend their ghastly wreaths with the twilight; and as that darkling time drew on which explains the diabolical sense of the old saying, " 'tween dog and wolf," " 'twixt hawk and buzzard," at that hour the will-o'-wisps began to glimmer around the dwelling of the Wulfrics, who patriarchally supped— whenever they had a supper— and forthwith betook themselves to their rest.

Sorrow, misery, and the putrid exhalations of the steeped hemp, from which they manufactured a rude and scanty attire, combined eventually to bring sickness and death into the bosom of this wretched family, who, in their utmost extremity, could neither hope for pity or succour. The father was first attacked, and his corpse was scarce cold ere the mother rendered up her breath. Thus passed that fated couple to their account, unsolaced by the consolation of the confessor, or the medicaments of the leech. Hugues Wulfric, their eldest son, himself dug their grave, laid their bodies within it swathed with hempen shreds for grave cloths, and raised a few clods of earth to mark their last resting-place. A hind, who chanced to see him fulfilling this pious duty in the dusk of evening, crossed himself, and fled as fast as his legs would carry him, fully believing that he had assisted at some hellish incantation. When the real event transpired, the neighbouring gossips congratulated one another upon the double mortality, which they looked upon as the tardy chastisement of heaven: they spoke of ringing the bells, and singing masses of thanks for such an action of grace.

It was All Souls' eve, and the wind howled along the bleak hillside, whistling drearily through the naked branches of the forest trees, whose last leaves it had long since stripped; the sun had disappeared; a dense and chilling fog spread through the air like the mourning veil of the widowed, whose day of love hath early fled. No star shone in the still and murky sky. In that lonely hut, through which death had so lately passed, the orphan survivors held their lonely vigil by the fitful blaze emitted by the reeking logs upon their hearth. Several days had elapsed since their lips had been imprinted for the last time

upon the cold hands of their parents; several dreary nights had passed since the sad hour in which their eternal farewell had left them desolate on earth.

Poor lone ones! Both, too, in the flower of their youth— how sad, yet how serene did they appear amid their grief! But what sudden and mysterious terror is it that seems to overcome them? It is not, alas! the first time since they were left alone upon earth that they have found themselves at this hour of the night by their deserted hearth, enlivened of old by the cheerful tales of their mother. Full often had they wept together over her memory, but never yet had their solitude proved so appalling; and, pallid as very spectres, they tremblingly gazed upon one another as the flickering ray from the wood-fire played over their features.

“Brother! heard you not that loud shriek which every echo of the forest repeated? It sounds to me as if the ground were ringing with the tread of some gigantic phantom, and whose breath seems to have shaken the door of our hut. The breath of the dead they say is icy cold. A mortal shivering has come over me.”

“And I, too, sister, thought I heard voices as it were at a distance, murmuring strange words. Tremble not thus— am I not beside you?”

“Oh, brother! let us pray the Holy Virgin, to the end that she may restrain the departed from haunting our dwelling.”

“But, perhaps, our mother is amongst them: she comes, unshrived and unshrouded, to visit her forlorn offspring— her well-beloved! For, knowest thou not, sister, ’tis the eve on which the dead forsake their tombs. Let us open the door, that s our mother may enter and resume her wonted place by hearthstone.”

“Oh, brother, how gloomy is all without doors, how damp and cold the gust sweeps by. Hearest thou, what groans the dead are uttering round our hut? Oh, close the door, in heaven’s name!”

“Take courage, sister, I have thrown upon the fire that holy branch, plucked as it flowered on last palm Sunday, which thou knowest will drive away all evil spirits, and now our mother can enter alone.”

“But how will she look, brother? They Say the dead are horrible to gaze upon; that their hair has fallen away; their eyes become hollow; and that, in walking, their bones rattle hideously. Will our mother, then, be thus?”

“No; she will appear with the features we loved to behold; with the affectionate smile that welcomes us home from our perilous labours; with the voice which, in early youth, sought us when, belated, the closing night surprised its far from our dwelling.”

The poor girl busied herself awhile in arranging a few platters of scanty fare upon the tottering board which served them for a table; and this last pious

offering of filial love, as she deemed it, appeared accomplished only by the greatest and last effort, so enfeebled had her frame become.

"Let our dearly-beloved mother enter then," she exclaimed, sinking exhausted upon the settle. "I have prepared her evening meal, that she may not be angry with me, and all is arranged as she was wont to have it. But what ails thee, my brother, for now thou tremblest as I did awhile agone?"

"See'st thou not, sister, those pale lights which are rising at a distance across the marsh? They are the dead coming to seat themselves before the repast prepared for then. Hark! list to the funeral tones of the Allhallowtide* bells, as they come upon the gale, blended with their hollow voices.—Listen, listen!"

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** On this eve formally the Catholic church performed a most solemn office for the repose of the dead.*

"Brother, this horror grows insupportable. This, I feel, of a verity, will be my last night upon earth! And is there no word of hope to cheer me, mingling with those fearful sounds? Oh, mother! Mother!"

"Hush, sister, hush I see'st thou now the ghastly lights which herald the dead, gleaming athwart the horizon? Hearest thou the prolonged tolling of the bell? They come! they come!"

"Eternal repose to their ashes!" exclaimed the bereaved ones, sinking upon their knees, and bowing down their heads in the extremity of terror and lamentation; and as they uttered the words, the door was at the same moment closed with violence, as though it had been slammed to by a vigorous hand. Hugues started to his feet, for the cracking of the timber which supported the roof seemed to announce the fall of the frail tenement; the fire was suddenly extinguished, and a plaintive groan mingled itself with the blast that whistled through the crevices of the door. On raising his sister, Hugues found that she too was no longer to be numbered among the living.

ii

HUGUES, on becoming the head of his family, composed of two sisters younger than himself, saw them likewise descend into the grave in the short space of a fortnight; and when he had laid the last within her parent earth, he hesitated whether he should not extend himself beside them, and share their peaceful slumber. It was not by tears and sobs that grief so profound as his manifested itself, but in a mute and sullen contemplation over the supulture of his kindred and his own future happiness. During three consecutive nights he wandered, pale and haggard, from his solitary hut, to prostrate himself and

kneel by turns upon the funereal turf. For three days food had not passed his lips.

Winter had interrupted the labours of the woods and fields, and Hugues had presented himself in vain among the neighbouring domains to obtain a few days' employment to thresh grain, cut wood, or drive the plough; no one would employ him from fear of drawing upon himself the fallity attached to all bearing the name of Wulfric. He met with brutal denials at all hands, and not only were these accompanied by taunts and menace, but dogs were let loose upon him to rend his limbs; they deprived him even of the alms accorded to beggars by profession; in short, he found himself overwhelmed with injuries and scorn.

Was he, then, to expire of inanition or deliver himself from the tortures of hunger by suicide? He would have embraced that means, as a last and only consolation, had he not been retained earthward to struggle with his dark fate by a feeling of love. Yes, that abject being, forced in very desperation, against his better self, to abhor the human species in the abstract, and to feel a savage joy in waging war against it; that paria who scarce longer felt confidence in that heaven which seemed an apathetic witness of his woes; that man so isolated from those social relations which alone compensate us for the toils and troubles of life, without other stay than that afforded by his conscience, with no other fortune in prospect than the bitter existence and miserable death of his departed kin: worn to the bone by privation and sorrow, swelling with rage and resentment, he yet consented to live— to cling to life; for, strange— he loved! But for that heaven-sent ray gleaming across his thorny path, a pilgrimage so lone and wearisome would he have gladly exchanged for the peaceful slumber of the grave.

Hugues Wulfric would have been the finest youth in all that part of Kent, were it not that the outrages with which he had so unceasingly to contend, and the privations he was forced to undergo, had effaced the colour from his cheeks, and sunk his eyes deep in their orbits: his brows were habitually contracted, and his glance oblique and fierce. Yet, despite that recklessness and anguish which clouded his features, one, incredulous of his atrocities, could not have failed to admire the savage beauty of his head, cast in nature's noblest mould, crowned with a profusion of waving hair, and set upon shoulders whose robust and harmonious proportions were discoverable through the tattered attire investing them. His carriage was firm and majestic; his motions were not without a species of rustic grace, and the tone of his naturally soft voice accorded admirably with the purity in which he spoke his ancestral language— the Norman-French: in short, he differed so widely from people of his imputed condition that one is constrained to believe that jealousy

or prejudice must originally have been no stranger to the malicious persecution of which he was the object. The women alone ventured first to pity his forlorn condition, and endeavoured to think of him in a more favourable light.

Branda, niece of Willieblud, the flesher of Ashford, had, among other, of the town maidens, noticed Hugues with a not unfavouring eye, as she chanced to pass one day on horseback, through a coppice near the outskirts of the town, into which the latter had been led by the eager chase of a wild hog, and which animal, from the nature of the country was, single-handed, exceedingly difficult of capture. The malignant falsehoods of the ancient crones, continually buzzed in her ears, in nowise diminished the advantageous opinion she had conceived of this ill-treated and good-looking wer-wolf. She sometimes, indeed, went so far as to turn considerably out of her way, in order to meet and exchange his cordial greeting: for Hugues, recognizing the attention of which he had now become the object, had, in his turn, at last summoned up courage to survey more leisurely the pretty Branda; and the result was that he found her as buxom and pretty a lass as, in his hitherto restricted rambles out of the forest, his timorous gaze had ever encountered. His gratitude increased proportionally; and at the moment when his domestic losses came one after another to overwhelm him, he was actually on the eve of making Branda, on the first opportunity presenting itself, an avowal of the love he bore her.

It was chill winter— Christmas-tide— the distant roll of the curfew had long ceased, and all the inhabitants of Ashford were safe housed in their tenements for the night. Hugues, solitary, motionless, silent, his forehead grasped between his hands, his gaze dully faced upon the decaying brands that feebly glimmered upon his hearth: he heeded not the cutting north wind, whose sweeping gusts shook the crazy roof, and whistled through the chinks of the door; he started not at the harsh cries of the herons fighting for prey in the marsh, nor at the dismal croaking of the ravens perched over his smoke-vent. He thought of his departed kindred, and imagined that his hour to join them would soon be at hand; for the intense cold congealed the marrow of his bones, and fell hunger gnawed and twisted his entrails. Yet, at intervals, would a recollection of nascent love, of Branda, suddenly appease his else intolerable anguish, and cause a faint smile to gleam across his wan features.

“Oh, blessed Virgin! grant that my sufferings may speedily cease!” murmured he, despairingly. “Oh, would I might be a wer-wolf, as they call me! I could then requite them for all the foul wrong done me. True, I could not nourish myself with their flesh; I would not shed their blood; but I would be able to terrify and torment those who have wrought my parents’ and sisters’ death— who have persecuted our family even to extermination! Why have I

not the power to change my nature into that of a wolf, if, of a verity, my ancestors possessed it, as they avouch? I should at least find carrion to devour,* and not die thus horribly. Branda is the sole being in this world who cares for me; and that conviction alone reconciles me to life!”

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** Horseflesh was an article of food among our Saxon forefathers in England.*

Hugues gave free current to these gloomy reflections. The smouldering embers now emitted but a feeble and vacillating light, faintly struggling with the surrounding gloom, and Hugues felt the horror of darkness coming strong upon him; frozen with the ague-fit one instant, and troubled the next by the hurried pulsation of his veins, he arose, at last, to seek some fuel, and threw upon the fire a heap of faggot-chips, heath and straw, which soon raised a clear and crackling flame. His stock of wood had become exhausted, and, seeking wherewith to replenish his dying hearth-light, whilst foraging under the rude oven amongst a pile of rubbish placed there by his mother wherewith to bake bread— handles of tools, fractured joint-stools, and cracked platters, he discovered a chest rudely covered with a dressed hide, and which he had never seen before; and seizing upon it as though he had discovered a treasure, broke open the lid, strongly secured by a string.

This chest, which had evidently remained long unopened, contained the complete disguise of a wer-wolf:— a dyed sheepskin, with gloves in the form of paws, a tail, a mask with an elongated muzzle, and furnished with formidable rows of yellow horse-teeth.

Hugues started backwards, terrified at his discovery— so opportune, that it seemed to him the work of sorcery; then, on recovering from his surprise, he drew forth one by one the several pieces of this strange envelope, which had evidently seen some service, and from long neglect had become somewhat damaged. Then rushed confusedly upon his mind the marvellous recitals made him by his grandfather, as he nursed him upon his knees during earliest childhood; tales, during the narration of which his mother wept silently, as he laughed heartily. In his mind there was a mingled strife of feelings and purposes alike undefinable. He continued his silent examination of this criminal heritage, and by degrees his imagination grew bewildered with vague and extravagant projects.

Hunger and despair conjointly hurried him away: he saw objects no longer save through a bloody prism: he felt his very teeth on edge with an avidity for biting; he experienced an inconceivable desire to run: he set himself to howl as though he had practised wer-wolfery all his life, and began thoroughly to invest himself with the guise and attributes of his novel vocation. A more startling change could scarcely have been wrought in him, had that so horribly

grotesque metamorphosis really been the effect of enchantment; aided, too, as it was, by the, fever which generated a temporary insanity in his frenzied brain.

Scarcely did he thus find himself travestied into a wer-wolf through the influence of his vestment, ere he darted forth from the hut, through the forest and into the open country, white with hoar frost, and across which the bitter north wind swept, howling in a frightful manner and traversing the meadows, fallows, plains, and marshes, like a shadow. But, at that hour, and during such a season, not a single belated wayfarer was there to encounter Hugues, whom the sharpness of the air, and the excitation of his course, had worked up to the highest pitch of extravagance and audacity: he howled the louder proportionally as his hunger increased.

Suddenly the heavy rumbling of an approaching vehicle arrested his attention; at first with indecision, then with a stupid fixity, he struggled with two suggestions, counselling him at one and the same time to fly and to advance. The carriage, or whatever it might be, continued, rolling towards him; the night was not so obscure but that he was enabled to distinguish the tower of Ashford church at a short distance off, and hard by which stood a pile of unhewn stone, destined either for the execution of some repair, or addition to the saintly edifice, in the shade of which he ran to crouch himself down, and so await the arrival of his prey.

It proved to be the covered cart of Willieblud, the Ashford flesher, who was wont twice a week to carry meat to Canterbury, and travelled by night in order that he might be among the first at market-opening. Of this Hugues was fully aware, and the departure of the flesher naturally suggested to him the inference that his niece must be keeping house by herself, for our lusty flesher had been long a widower. For an instant he hesitated whether he should introduce himself there, so favourable an opportunity thus presenting itself, or whether he should attack the uncle and seize upon his viands. Hunger got the better of love this once, and the monotonous whistle with which the driver was accustomed to urge forward his sorry jade warning him to be in readiness, he howled in a plaintive tone, and, rushing forward, seized the horse by the bit.

“Willieblud, flesher,” said he, disguising his voice, and speaking to him in the lingua Franca of that period, “I hunger; throw me two pounds of meat if thou would’st have me live.”

“St. Willifred have mercy on me!” cried the terrified flesher, “is it thou, Hugues Wulfric, of Wealdmarsh, the born wer-wolf?”

“Thou say’st sooth— it is I,” replied Hugues, who had sufficient address to avail himself of the credulous superstition of Willieblud; “I would rather have raw meat than eat of thy flesh, plump as thou art. Throw me, therefore, what I

crave, and forget not to be ready with the like portion each time thou settest out for Canterbury market; or, failing thereof, I tear thee limb from limb."

Hugues, to display his attributes of a wer-wolf before the gaze of the confounded flesher, had mounted himself upon the spokes of the wheel, and placed his forepaw upon the edge of the cart, which he made semblance of snuffing at with his snout. Willieblud, who believed in wer-wolves as devoutly as he did in his patron saint, had no sooner perceived this monstrous paw, than, uttering a fervent invocation to the latter, he seized upon his daintiest joint of meat, let it fall to the ground, and whilst Hugues sprung eagerly down to pick it up, the butcher at the same instant having bestowed a sudden and violent blow upon the flank of his beast, the latter set off at a round gallop without waiting for any reiterated invitation from the lash.

Hugues was so satisfied with a repast which had cost him far less trouble to procure than any he had long remembered, readily promised himself the renewal of an expedient, the execution of which was at once easy and diverting; for though smitten with the charms of the fair-haired Branda, he not the less found a malicious pleasure in augmenting the terror of her uncle Willieblud. The latter, for a long while, revealed not to a living being the tale of his terrible encounter and strange compact, which had varied according to circumstances, and he submitted unmurmuringly to the imposts levied each time the wer-wolf presented himself before him, without being very nice about either the weight or quality of the meat; he no longer even waited to be asked for it, anything to avoid the sight of that fiend-like form clinging to the side of his cart, or being brought into such immediate contact with that hideous misshapen paw stretched forth, as it were to strangle him, that paw too, which had once been a human hand. He had become dull and thoughtful of late; he set out to market unwillingly, and seemed to dread the hour of departure as it approached, and no longer beguiled the tedium of his nocturnal journey by whistling to his horse, or trolling snatches of ballads, as was his wont formerly; he now invariably returned in a melancholy and restless mood.

Branda, at loss to conceive what had given birth to this new and permanent depression which had taken possession of her uncle's mind, after in vain exhausting conjecture, proceeded to interrogate, importune, and supplicate him by turns, until the unhappy flesher, no longer proof against such continued appeals, at last disburthened himself of the load which he had at heart, by recounting the history of his adventure with the wer-wolf.

Branda listened to the whole of the recital without offering interruption or comment; but, at its close—

"Hugues is no more a wer-wolf than thou or I," exclaimed she, offended that such unjust suspicion should be cherished against one for whom she had

long felt more than an interest; “ ’tis an idle tale, or some juggling device; I fear me thou must needs dream these sorceries, uncle Willieblud, for Hugues of the Wealmarsh, or Wulfric, as the silly fools call him, is worth far more, I trow, than his reputation.”

“Girl, it boots not saying me nay, in this matter,” replied Willieblud, pertinaciously urging the truth of his story; “the family of Hugues, as everybody knows, were wer-wolves born, and, since they are all of late, by the blessing of heaven, defunct, save one, Hugues now inherits the wolf’s paw.”

“I tell thee, and will avouch it openly, uncle, that Hugues is of too gentle and seemly a nature to serve Satan, and turn himself into a wild beast, and that will I never believe until I have seen the like.”

“Mass, and that thou shalt right speedily, if thou wilt but along with me. In very troth ’tis he, besides, he made confession of his name, and did I not recognize his voice, and am I not ever bethinking me of his knavish paw, which he places me on the shaft while he stays the horse. Girl, he is in league with the foul fiend."

Branda had, to a certain degree, imbibed the superstition in the abstract, equally with her uncle, and, excepting so far as it touched the hitherto, as she believed, traduced being on whom her affections, as if in feminine perversity, had so strangely lighted. Her woman’s curiosity, in this instance, less determined her resolution to accompany the flesher on his next journey, than the desire to exculpate her lover, fully believing the strange tale of her kinsman’s encounter with, and spoliation by the latter, to be the effect of some illusion, and of which to find him guilty, was the sole fear she experienced on mounting the rude vehicle laden with its ensanguined viands.

It was just midnight when they started from Ashford, the hour alike dear to wer-wolves as to spectres of every denomination. Hugues was punctual at the appointed spot; his howlings, as they drew nigh, though horrible enough, had still something human in them, and disconcerted not a little the doubts of Branda. Willieblud, however, trembled even more than she did, and sought for the wolf’s portion; the latter raised himself upon his hind legs, and extended one of his forepaws to receive his pittance as soon as the cart stopped at the heap of stones.

“Uncle, I shall swoon with affright,” exclaimed Branda, clinging closely to the flesher, and tremblingly pulling the coverchief over her eyes: “loose rein and smite thy beast, or evil will surely betide us.”

“Thou are not alone, gossip,” cried Hugues, fearful of a snare; “if thou essay’st to play me false, thou art at once undone.”

“Harm us not friend Hugues, thou know’st I weigh not my pounds of meat with thee; I shall take care to keep my troth. It is Branda, my niece, who goes with me tonight to buy wares at Canterbury.”

“Branda with thee? By the mass ’tis she indeed, more buxom and rosy too, than ever; come pretty one, descend and tarry awhile, that I may have speech with thee.”

“I conjure thee, good Hugues, terrify not so cruelly my poor wench, who is wellnigh dead already with fear; suffer us to; hold our way, for we have far to go, and the morrow is early, market-day.”

“Go thy ways then alone, uncle Willieblud, ’tis thy niece I would have speech with, in all courtesy and honour; the which, if thou permittest not readily, and of a good grace, I will rend thee both to death.”

All in vain was it that Willieblud exhausted himself in prayers and lamentations in hopes of softening the bloodthirsty wer-wolf, as he believed him to be, refusing as the latter did, every sort of compromise in avoidance of his demand, and at last replying only by horrible threats, which froze the hearts of both. Branda, although especially interested in the debate, neither stirred foot, or opened her mouth, so greatly had terror and surprise overwhelmed her; she kept her eyes fixed upon the wolf, who peered at her likewise through his mask, and felt incapable of offering resistance when she found herself forcibly dragged out of the vehicle, and deposited by an invisible power, as it seemed to her, beside the piles of stones; she swooned without uttering a single scream.

The flesher was no less dumbfounded at the turn which the adventure had taken, and he, too, fell back among his meat as though stricken by a blinding blow; he fancied that the wolf had swept his bushy tail violently across his eyes, and on recovering the use of his senses found himself alone in the cart, which rolled joltingly at a swift pace towards Canterbury. At first he listened, but in vain, for the wind bringing him either the shrieks of his niece, or the howlings of the wolf; but stop his beast he could not, which, panic-stricken, kept trotting as though bewitched, or felt the spur of some fiend pricking her flanks.

Willieblud, however, reached his journey’s end in safety, sold his meat, and returned to Ashford, reckoning full sure upon having to say a De Profundis for his niece, whose fate he had not ceased to bemoan during the whole night. But how great was his astonishment to find her safe at home, a little pale, from recent fright and want of sleep, but without a scratch; still more was he astonished to hear that the wolf had done her no injury whatsoever, contenting himself, after she had recovered from her swoon, with conducting

her back to their dwelling, and acting in every respect like a loyal suitor, rather than a sanguinary wer-wolf. Willieblud knew not what to think of it.

This nocturnal gallantry towards his niece had additionally irritated the burly Saxon against the wer-wolf, and although the fear of reprisals kept him from making a direct and public attack upon Hugues, he ruminated not the less upon taking some sure and secret revenge; but previous to putting his design into execution, it struck him that he could not do better than relate his misadventures to the ancient sacristan and parish grave-digger of St. Michael's, a worthy of profound sagacity in those sort of matters, endowed with a clerk-like erudition, and consulted as an oracle by all the old crones and lovelorn maidens throughout the township of Ashford and its vicinity.

"Slay a wer-wolf thou canst not," was the repeated rejoinder of the wiseacre to the earnest queries of the tormented flesher; "for his hide is proof against spear or arrow, though vulnerable to the edge of a cutting weapon of steel. I counsel thee to deal him a slight flesh wound, or cut him over the paw, in order to know of a surety whether it really be Hugues or no; thou'lt run no danger, save thou strikest him a blow from which blood flows not therefrom, for, so soon as his skin is severed he taketh flight."

Resolving implicitly to follow the advice of the sacristan, Willieblud that same evening determined to know with what wer-wolf it was with whom he had to do, and with that view hid his cleaver, newly sharpened for the occasion, under the load in his cart, and resolutely prepared to make use of it as a preparatory step towards proving the identity of Hugues with the audacious spoiler of his meat, and eke his peace. The wolf presented himself as usual, and anxiously inquired after Branda, which stimulated the flesher the more firmly to follow out his design.

"Here, Wolf," said Willieblud, stooping down as if to choose a piece of meat; "I give thee double portion tonight; up with thy paw, take toll, and be mindful of my frank alms."

"Sooth, I will remember me, gossip," rejoined our wer-wolf; "but when shall the marriage be solemnized for certain, betwixt the fair Branda and myself?"

Hugues believing he had nothing to fear from the flesher, whose meats he so readily appropriated to himself, and of whose fair niece he hoped shortly no less to make lawful possession; both that he really loved, and viewed his union with her as the surest means of placing him within the pale of that sociality from which he had been so unjustly exiled, could he but succeed in making intercession with the holy fathers of the church to remove their interdict. Hugues placed his extended paw upon the edge of the cart; but instead of handing him his joint of beef, or mutton, Willieblud raised his cleaver, and at a

single blow lopped off the paw laid there as fittingly for the purpose as though upon a block. The flesher flung down his weapon, and belaboured his beast, the wer-wolf roared aloud with agony, and disappeared amid the dark shades of the forest, in which, aided by the wind, his howling was soon lost.

The next day, on his return, the flesher, chuckling and laughing, deposited a gory cloth upon the table, among the trenchers with which his niece was busied in preparing his noonday meal, and which, on being opened, displayed to her horrified gaze a freshly severed human hand enveloped in wolf-skin. Branda, comprehending what had occurred, shrieked aloud, shed a flood of tears, and then hurriedly throwing her mantle round her, whilst her uncle amused himself by turning and twitching the hand about with a ferocious delight, exclaiming, whilst he staunched the blood which still flowed:

"The sacristan said sooth; the wer-wolf has his need I trow, at last, and now I wot of his nature, I fear no more his witchcraft."

Although the day was far advanced, Hugues lay writhing in torture upon his couch, his coverings drenched with blood, as well also the floor of his habitation; his countenance of a ghastly pallor, expressed as much moral, as physical pain; tears gushed from beneath his reddened eyelids, and he listened to every noise without, with an increased inquietude, painfully visible upon his distorted features. Footsteps were heard rapidly approaching, the door was hurriedly flung open, and a female threw herself beside his couch, and with mingled sobs and imprecations sought tenderly for his mutilated arm, which, rudely bound round with hempen wrappings, no longer dissembled the absence of its wrist, and from which a crimson stream still trickled. At this piteous spectacle she grew loud in her denunciations against the sanguinary flesher, and sympathetically mingled her lamentations with those of his victim.

These effusions of love and dolour, however, were doomed to sudden interruption; someone knocked at the door. Branda ran to the window that she might recognize who the visitor was that had dared to penetrate the lair of a wer-wolf, and on perceiving who it was, she raised her eyes and hands on high, in token of her extremity of despair, whilst the knocking momentarily grew louder.

" 'Tis my uncle," faltered she. "Ah! woe's me, how shall I escape hence without his seeing me? Whither hide? Oh, here, here, nigh to thee, Hugues, and we will die together," and she crouched herself into an obscure recess behind his couch. "If Willieblud should raise his cleaver to slay thee, he shall first strike through his kinswoman's body."

Branda hastily concealed herself amidst a pile of hemp, whispering Hugues to summon all his courage, who, however, scarce found strength sufficient to

raise himself to a sitting posture, whilst his eyes vainly sought around for some weapon of defence.

"A good morrow to thee, Wulfric!" exclaimed Willieblud, as he entered, holding in his hand a napkin tied in a knot, which he proceeded to place upon the coffer beside the sufferer. "I come to offer thee some work, to bind and stack me a faggot-pile, knowing that thou art no laggard at bill-hook and wattle. Wilt do it?"

"I am sick," replied Hugues, repressing the wrath which, despite of pain, sparkled in his wild glance; "I am not in fitting state to work."

"Sick, gossip, sick, art thou indeed? Or is it but a sloth fit? Come, what ails thee? Where lieth the evil? Your hand, that I may feel thy pulse."

Hugues reddened, and for an instant hesitated whether he should resist a solicitation, the bent of which he too readily comprehended; but in order to avoid exposing Branda to discovery, he thrust forth his left hand from beneath the coverlid, all imbrued in dried gore.

"Not that hand, Hugues, but the other, the right one. Alack, and well-a-day, hast thou lost thy hand, and I must find it for thee?"

Hugues, whose purpling flush of rage changed quickly to a death-like hue, replied not to this taunt, nor testified by the slightest gesture or movement that he was preparing to satisfy a request as cruel in its preconception as the object of it was slenderly cloaked. Willieblud laughed, and ground his teeth in savage glee, maliciously revelling in the tortures he had inflicted upon the sufferer. He seemed already disposed to use violence, rather than allow himself to be baffled in the attainment of the decisive proof he aimed at. Already had he commenced untying the napkin, giving vent all the while to his implacable taunts; one hand alone displaying itself upon the coverlid, and which Hugues, wellnigh senseless with anguish, thought not of withdrawing.

"Why tender me that hand?" continued his unrelenting persecutor, as he imagined himself on the eve of arriving at the conviction he so ardently desired— "That I should lop it off? quick, quick, Master Wulfric, and do my bidding; I demanded to see your right hand."

"Behold it then!" ejaculated a suppressed voice, which belonged to no supernatural being, however it might seem appertaining to such; and Willieblud to his utter confusion and dismay saw a second hand, sound and unmutilated, extend itself towards him as though in silent accusation. He started back; he stammered out a cry for mercy, bent his knees for an instant, and raising himself, palsied with terror, fled from the hut, which he firmly believed under the possession of the foul fiend.

He carried not with him the severed hand, which henceforward became a perpetual vision ever present before his eyes, and which all the potent

exorcisms of the sacristan, at whose hands he continually sought council and consolation, signally failed to dispel.

"Oh, that hand! To whom then, belongs that accursed hand?" groaned he, continually. "Is it really the fiend's, or that of some wer-wolf? Certain 'tis, that Hugues is innocent, for have I not seen both his hands? But wherefore was one bloody? There's sorcery at bottom of it."

The next morning, early, the first object that struck his sight on entering his stall, was the severed hand that he had left the preceding night upon the coffer in the forest hut; it was stripped of its wolf's-skin covering, and lay among the viands. He dared no longer touch that hand, which now, he verily believed to be enchanted; but in hopes of getting rid of it for ever, he had it flung down a well, and it was with no small increase of despair that he found it shortly afterwards again lying upon his block. He buried it in his garden, but still without being able to rid himself of it; it returned livid and loathsome to infect his shop, and augment the remorse which was unceasingly revived by the reproaches of his niece.

At last, flattering himself to escape all further persecution from that fatal hand, it struck him that he would have it carried to the cemetery at Canterbury, and try whether exorcism, and supulture in holy ground would effectually bar its return to the light of day. This was also done; but lo! on the following morning he perceived it nailed to his shutter. Disheartened by these dumb, yet awful reproaches, which wholly robbed him of his peace, and impatient to annihilate all trace of an action with which heaven itself seemed to upbraid him, he quitted Ashford one morning without bidding adieu to his niece, and some days after was found drowned in the river Stour. They drew out his swollen and discoloured body, which was discovered floating on the surface among the sedge, and it was only by piecemeal that they succeeded in tearing away from his death-contracted clutch, the phantom hand, which, in his suicidal convulsions he had retained firmly grasped.

A year after this event, Hugues, although minus a hand, and consequently a confirmed wer-wolf, married Branda, sole heiress to the stock and chattels of the late unhappy flesher of Ashford.

End