PAST MASTERS 186

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PAST MASTERS 186

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

13 November 2024

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1: Delilah's Daughter

Douglas Newton

1884-1951

The Passing Show, 9 May 1936

One of several wildly improbable adventures of the equally improbable adventurer Savaran, whose stamping ground was the African continent in the 1920s and '30s. Most of the stories were collection in "I, Savaran!"

THE GURGUR QUARTER of Mamee Yorga is a home from home for Hades. Its pretty name means "filth eater" and African terminology is always apt— only the denizens of the Gurgur do not stop at eating. It is a multi-race slum built on a sand spit where two jungle rivers join, and, being in a Latin colony, it nuzzles in all its vices against a "white town" that looks exactly as soft guitars playing in milk-white moonlight sound.

A pretty place Mamee Yorga proper with its dreamy palms and patios, if morally a cross between a graveyard and a garden of sleep; that is because, as an outpost town, it is right at the bottom of civilisation's bag. It is in fact so hopelessly cut off by the lowering African bush that the stern-wheel river boats can only bring it news of the outer world every three months. Between boats there is nothing for the government *bulamatari* to do but eat and sleep, flirt languidly with a colleague's wife and dream endlessly of the day when he will retire to Europe with a fat pension and fatter pickings.

The pickings are certainly fat, since the only reason for Mamee Yorga's existence is riches. To it by its two great rivers and its five caravan routes comes the vast and easy wealth of the African interior, and quite a lot of that wealth can be made to stick to the fingers of the intelligent. The local official knows this well, so does the African underworld— hence the Gurgur. In the Gurgur foregathers that human scum that snatches at easy money either through the medium of thieving fingers, the administration of the dagger or by encouraging trail-weary men to pleasures as expensive as they are vile.

A place to make Hades blush, the Gurgur; at the same time it was a haven of refuge for gentlemen such as Savaran, with prices on their heads. The police of Mamee Yorga could be stern enough, in their own quarter, especially where there was blood money to be gained, but being Latin they were also both indolent and wise. It was better to shut their eyes to the Gurgur than to stir up trouble that might be disastrous to white rule so far from help. Thus official Mamee Yorga ignored the Gurgur, white men were rarely seen in its cramped and smelly streets, and any sort of white woman never. It can thus be understood that even Savaran was startled when a white lady called on him.

Savaran had no liking for the Gurgur, but it was convenient. He could look after himself, he could defy the police, he had money to spend, and it was the one place where he could organise an expedition that should set all Africa ringing with his name again before many months were out... Meanwhile he halted at the end of the blind alley in which his house stood and looked with calm eyes at a mob of multi-coloured cut-throats milling about a victim.

Someone, he saw, was being robbed, probably murdered, but local habits intrigued him so little that he was about to return to Poison Charley's and drink coffee until the fracas was over, when a voice called:

"Savaran! Mr. Savaran! Help!"

The call was English. The voice was a woman's.

It was quite remarkable— and so was Savaran. In ninety seconds the snarling street was as peaceful as a tomb and rather like one. Two black figures lay very still in the filth while another crawled away on hands and knees. The rest had scattered like disturbed flies at the mere knowledge that Zavarani was among them. A slim-legged Arab boy leant against a wall holding back his panting sobs with the haik that half covered his face, and Savaran, slipping his dagger back into its jewelled sheath, twitched the haik aside. Then he laughed his harsh laugh, caught up this boy, who was no boy, in his long, spider arms and stalked towards his house. There was the form of another Arab boy lying across the door, but Savaran took it and the door step in his long stride.

"My *chouach*," cried a voice from his arms. "Is he hurt?"

Savaran put his burden down into the house yard and returned to the still form.

"Not he," he said with ferocious geniality. "He's got his pay for bringing a sight-seeing efferengi into the Gurgur— he's dead."

The Arab boy, who was no boy. was sitting on the gold and silk divan of Savaran's inner room, trying to tuck her slim, round, very shapely and very bare legs away from the sardonic glance of Savaran.

Savaran had eyes for her face too. She made a good boy, short-featured and gallant looking, her boldness was softened by her undoubted femininity to an alluring charm. She was young and full of fire, and browned to a glowing berry-brown by tropic sun— even her slim calves— she was handsome even as a boy. As herself she would be adorable his expert eye told him.

"Well, was it worth it?" he asked with his eagle smile; he hadn't a doubt she was a sensation-hunting globe-trotter.

"I came to see you-Savaran," she said.

"That," he grinned fiercely, "naturally makes all the difference. Yet had you only sent your photograph I should have flown straight to your hotel."

She flushed richly. She really was young and fresh and delicious. Yet she had her strengths; her good, quick, steady-glancing eyes told that.

"There are two warrants waiting for you if you step outside the Gurgur," she said quietly.

"What are two among so many?" he laughed. "And for beauty less than yours I have, before now, cut my way through armies."

"Yes," she breathed. "I know of your exploits. That is why I came. I am told you are the finest soldier in Africa; that you spend your life raising armies and fighting tribes."

"And making kings and queens!" he said with a flash of white teeth "Even rumour tells the truth at times. And, like Cleopatra, you are drawn— "

"Why," she asked coolly, "do you treat me like a flattery-hunting flapper?"

"It is a waste of precious opportunity," he smiled and sat beside her.

And at that she rose quietly, stripped the haik from her slim figure, and. shaking down the white undergarment, modern and skimpy at it was, stood revealed in a nurse's uniform.

Savaran's eyes glinted at the new. the workmanlike creature and his keen, gipsy head went back in laughter.

"You tricked Savaran," he cried. "I, Savaran, expert in women, thought you only a debutante greedy for thrills... You're the new American nurse at the Magdelena Hospital, Ruth Dacre."

"You know me?" she cried, surprised.

"You must be terribly overworked there now that young Dr. Felton is down with fever," he said, and perhaps there was a touch of irony in his tone, and perhaps she saw that he, being Savaran, knew all there was to know, for she flushed again as girls in love do, even if she said with a brave little lift to her chin:

"He has worn himself out with work, nearly killed himself... One can scarcely do less with such an example."

"And you'll have to go on doing it for months," he said, his eyes gleaming.

"Yes, Dr. Pelton will be helpless for months," she admitted and she looked at him strangely. "Three months at least. And he won't leave Mamee Yorga even if we tried to force him."

Savaran went still. Something in her tone rather than her words made him look at her with a quick, fierce grimness.

"And you want him to leave?" he asked.

'You know he ought to leave," she said, looking at him steadily. "You are Savaran, you know about the Forofangora."

He frowned savagely over harsh eyes, then shrugged in his large way.

"Naturally I know— I am Savaran. But you— how do you know, a green-horn only just come to Africa? It is but a bush whisper."

"You forget we have men from the bush in our wards," she said. "As I dressed the hurts of one of them he whispered that I must run away from Mamee Yorga because the Forofangora were coming to slay."

"And you believed him?" his eyes were keen.

"I had to believe him; he swore on the stone."

"Did he give details?"

"It is to be in three weeks' time," she said. "When the Gelem Caravan comes in. That caravan carries record loads of gold dust and ivory."

"And diamonds from a new field," said Savaran, never able to resist a gesture.

"He did not tell me about the diamonds," said Ruth Dacre. "But he is certain that the Forofangora will stop at nothing to take such rich loot; they will sweep Mamee Yorga with death. And it will hap-pen three days after the caravan comes in, two months before the steamer arrives to take the gold and ivory to the coast... Months before any sort of help can get to us." She looked at him steadily. "You know all this is true?"

"I know," he grunted fiercely. "Mamee Yorga will be a burnt-out shambles before a month has gone. The Forofangora have been saving this up for years." He sat back and regarded her with a fierce and mocking smile. "And what does His Excellency, 'The Big Vegetable,' say to it all?"

"The Big Vegetable" is a highly disrespectful term for any official big wig in that colony's officialdom. In this case it referred to the important if lethargic Adjunct Commissaire, who ruled over Mamee Yorga and all these frontier marches.

"You know I've been to him?" she cried.

"I guessed, my dear," he said, with a grin of satisfaction at his own shrewdness. "You went straight to His Excellency with your terrible news as a good citizen should— and what did he say? But no— Savaran will tell you... The fat little gentleman chucked you under your pretty chin with his fat pink hand, giggled sleepily, and said: 'There! There, my pretty flower, do not trouble your small charming head. We know all about these rumours. We have been listening to them since before you were the baby, and they signify— nothing. Nothing at all, little cabbage... and, even, they signify less in the matter of the Porofangora. We know them, those niggers. Twenty-five years ago we whipped them most severely for being naughty, and since then they have been so meek, so meek. Women-men, but most loyal subjects; glad even of our rule, never as much as grudging the collector a centime of the hut tax. No! No, little

one, some bad men we know of might revolt, but the Forofangora, *never*. So fear not and do not listen to this silly talk: no harm will come to us.' "

Savaran's voice as he spoke took on the fat, drowsy, fatherly unction of His Excellency so marvellously that Ruth Dacre cried:

"You might almost have heard him!"

"Oh, Savaran knows the soul of that warthog in all its laziness, incompetence and folly."

"But all the officials are like him," cried Ruth Dacre. "None of them will listen to me."

"What did you expect," he said scornfully, "when they do not even listen to Savaran?"

"You have warned them!" she gasped.

"Savaran is also a white man," he grinned fiercely. "Yes, I even sent them a messenger— they thought it comic, I hear, or possibly some trick by which Savaran hoped to feather his own nest... And then they all went to sleep again."

"And yet the Porofangora will come," she cried.

"They will come," he said grimly. "Their babies of twenty-five years ago have been reared with but one thoughts— to take revenge for that defeat of twenty-five years ago. A new race has arisen since that old war, a cunning race that can pretend meekness and prepare vengeance by stealth. There are seventy-thousand fighting spears waiting but the word to slay. They will roll over Mamee Yorga and half the colony before any defence can concentrate. Be wise, obey your bushman, my dear— and run for it."

"Couldn't Mamee Yorga be defended?"

"With ease," he shrugged. "The old pioneers were real soldiers. They chose an admirable position as you can see, with the broad rivers guarding three sides. Even the old land wall could stop mere spear fighters like the Forofangora if properly defended. And the town could hold out. There is unlimited water, food in plenty and the local inhabitant is good fighting stuff--I know, I am employing him myself. A good leader could sit safe and tight here for half a year, certainly long enough for help to be rushed up to him."

"You alone can save Mamee Yorga," she cried.

"I have," he said with sardonic politeness, "another appointment."

"Another black tribe to be crushed?"

"Not precisely," he answered. "Diamonds to be collected."

"Diamonds--from this neighborhood?" she frowned.

"You forget," he smiled. "A new field has just been found. The Mbamsef in the hills to the north-west made the find. They are a race of dogs that I ought

to have punished long ago for a treachery, but they were not worth the effort. But having diamonds— that is a different story."

"You could leave your diamond stealing until after you had saved Mamee Yorga," she said, contemptuously.

"Few women," he grinned, "understand the finer points of strategy. I, Napoleon and in fact all the really great conquerors get our results through swift action. The Forofangora know about these diamonds too, The mere act of their striking at Mamee Yorga, even if they only besiege it for months, will gain them the support of other tribes, the Sammo and the Laro-Laro, for In-stance, and they will use some ol those tribes to attack the Mbamsef; they will want those diamonds to buy arms. Naturally, I must get to thc Mbamsef, beat them and turn them into a practical fighting force to meet the Porofangora before they come for those diamonds. I have no time to waste if I am to triumph."

He caught her hands.

"Come, my pretty, Join me. You will be safe then and a throne await at the end of our adventure. You have Savaran's spirit, too, you can dare."

She tore her hands away, and not merely anger, but fear of his queer, compelling power, was in the gesture.

"You can stay and defend Mamee Yorga," she cried passionately. "You are already collecting your forces for the attack on the Mbamsef, you have arms. With these as the back-bone of the defence and with your genius you could hold the Forofangora until help came."

"Certainly you have charm," he smiled grimly. "You make your patients whisper too many secrets. And did you tell all this to The Big Vegetable'?"

"Am I a police spy?" she cried fiercely. "I knew what he would do to you if he heard you were here." Suddenly she put both her hands on his shoulders. "Savaran, save Mamee Yorga as only you can!"

That Francois Villon recklessness that could make him toss a crown over his shoulder for the sake of a woman's smile swung him. His arms went about her. She had won him— had she not stiffened at his touch. He laughed sardonically

"Save Mamee Yorga— but particularly young Dr. Felton, eh?" he cried. "You are no more disinterested than Savaran. Also it is impossible. You yourself have told why. You dare not tell the authorities I am here; they would clap me in gaol, even if I appeared to defend their wretched little town."

"But— you are Savaran. You could find a way?" she pleaded.

"YOU are very beautiful," he smiled, pinching her cheek. "Almost you make Savaran forget his common sense. But not quite. I know these overfed pigs, they are hopeless. I know also that unless I leave Mamee Yorga before the Forofangora can block the trail I too shall be in a plight as hopeless. So, then, within three weeks I leave. It is the only thing to do. And you— if you are wise

you will come, too. There is only death here for you, but with me there is the love of Savaran and a throne and your name, with his, in history. Yes, you had better come."

"Never," she cried fiercely. "I won't desert."

"Well," he grinned fiercely. "You have three weeks to dwell upon the thought of what death at savage hands will be like, and, remember, just one little message to me at any time during those weeks and you will be safe."

She picked up her haik, flung it about her silently, contemptuously. But Savaran only smiled his dark, hard, mocking smile. He knew human nature too well, this strange adventurer. Heroism in the abstract is so easy, but three weeks' reflection on death might beget quite another mood. He saw the beginning of it, in fact, in the ready, even the clinging willingness with which she accepted his escort through the evil stews of the Gurgur.

HE WAS RIGHT. Ruth Dacre fought long against her fear; her courage, in fact, held out until two days before he was to march— but then it broke, and a hospital orderly crept through the streets of the Gurgur to Savaran's house with a note.

He read that note with his harsh, mocking smile. Was he disappointed in her, or was he elated at another triumph over beauty? Hard to say. Savaran in his moods was as baffling as a weather-cock in a whirl-wind. His arrangements were practically completed. His force of nearly five hundred hand-picked askari and carriers was scattered through the Gurgur and the nearby villages ready to concentrate at a single word. He had his rifles, machine-guns and ammunition stored in various go-downs under his hands. He had little or nothing to hold him back.

Her note told him plainly that, woman-like, she needed a final persuasion. She must talk to him again, she said, before he left. She would meet him that night by the tomb of the Lonely Saint in the bare piece of ground between Mamee Yorga and the Gurgur.

Well, it was all very much as he had expected, though he had felt that her gallant little face spoke of sterner stuff. Still she was coming, and Savaran, after giving precise and careful Instructions for any eventuality to Abn Zayd, his head man, robed himself in a fine silk tobi and went largely to the meeting

SHE was waiting for him in the shadow of the tomb, and he went straight to her, caught her and kissed her. A dashing attack both in war and women was his favourite method.

"No," she cried tremulously, thrusting him off. "We must talk... You are ready to leave, all your forces, everything is ready?"

"You can ride out on a silk saddled mule at any hour you like," he said, smiling down on her fiercely.

"And— and you still think the Forofangora mean to blot out Mamee Yorga?" she panted.

"Are you beginning to doubt that?" he mocked.

"No," she said huskily. "Another man has told me it is true. But— but the Commissaire laughs at it more than ever. The Forofangora have sent five chieftains' sons to him begging him to keep them in his palace and train them in European ways. He says the Forofangora would not dare attack when he holds such hostages."

"That is exactly what the Forofangora want him to think," said Savaran grimly. "They are wily people, the Forofangora, they know that some rumours of their intentions must get about, so they send these hostages to lull our fat Commissaire's fears. Those young men gave themselves willingly for that purpose. They are ready to die to help their tribe to victory."

"You're sure?"

"Even now the Forofangora are sharpening their spear blades. Even now their best marksmen are practising with the twelve hundred Belgian rifles that have been smuggled to them. Even now their women are stirring the braves to frenzy with the singing of the war vaunts."

"Then Mamee Yorga is doomed?" she said in a strangled voice.

"That is not a matter for you to worry about, for I am taking you with me," he smiled.

He stepped close and caught her up In his arms. He chuckled as she did not resist. She sighed, relaxed against him, and, as he held her high, her arms went about him, holding him tight. It was triumph. He turned to stride back to the Gurgur with his spoils, and as he turned he saw the glint of rifles pointed at his chest, and the moonlight revealed three members of the local police standing about him looking determined and grim. Then a couple of dapper white officers stepped from the shadows and they bristled with firearms, too. One blew a whistle, and from almost every angle of the compass armed men began closing in. Scores of them. Mamee Yorga knew Savaran and was not taking risks.

The spider-spare adventurer backed a step and tried to drop the girl to get at his pistol. She only clung tighter, holding his arms and crying anxiously:

"Don't fight them, Savaran. They're ready to shoot at any excuse. They mean to take you dead or alive."

Savaran stood stock still and laughed savagely.

"Delilah can boast at least one worthy daughter," he cried.

She came to him four days later. Two days after he should have left Mamee Yorga and a day after he could leave it, for already, he knew, the Porofangora were blocking the trails out.

The big Arab gaoler would not let her pass through the barred gate into the cell.

"It is not permitted, O Lioness," he said gruffly. "See, this is the mighty Zaravani. Give him but a loophole and he vanishes away."

They were taking no risks with Savaran. A double guard of newer, more businesslike askari filled the prison buildings and two armed sentinels stood each side of the door. As she grew accustomed to the gloom she saw the leg and wrist Irons that linked up to his steel girdle, saw the strong chain that stretched from that to a staple in the wall. He sat up on his stone bench with a clink of metal as he saw her, throwing his cigarette away.

"Little Delilah comes to gloat over the fallen Samson," he said fiercely. "But one so dainty should not have risked it. The fleas of Mamee Yorga's prisons are the most redoubtable of their breed."

"Savaran— don't," she cried huskily. "You know it was the only way."

"To keep a lover near you?" he mocked.

"To save Mamee Yorga," she faltered.

He deliberately jingled his Irons.

"Listen to the armour of the fighting man," he said grimly. "Could anyone but a woman have decided that the best way to save a town was by betraying into prison the one man who could do it?"

"I had to keep you back until the Porofangora came," she said. "There was no other way. Only with you on the spot is there any hope for us."

"Well, I am on the spot," he grinned. "Where is the hope?"

"You are Savaran. You will find a way," she cried desperately. .

"Count my guards," he said. "It is because I am Savaran that they mean to give me no chances."

Even as he spoke the big Arab warder touched her arms, for she had stretched them through the gate bars in a gesture of appeal.

"You must not do that, O Lioness," he said sullenly. "This is Zavarani. He is a devil. He can find ways of escaping that no other man can think of. We can take no risks. It will be the garotte for me if he gets free."

"You see," said the spider-lean man with fierce geniality. "They mean business."

She drew back shuddering; she cried frantically:

"But--tomorrow the caravan will be in, and three days after the slaughter starts."

"My latest information is that they have postponed lt until the fourth," he said, ferociously affable. "After all, they have plenty of time."

She caught the bars of the door as though it were he she wanted to clutch and shake.

"You can't convince me," she cried with a sob in her voice, "that you, Savaran, will allow yourself to be wiped out by these brutes without striking a blow."

"How can mere man fight Fate, the folly of Commissaires and the wiles of women?" he shrugged.

"You saw His Excellency?" she cried, catching at that.

"An interesting interview," he jeered. "He was practically awake; calculation of his share of the reward for my capture had given him a sleepless day."

"Don't joke," she wailed. "It is too horrible... You told him of this peril?"

"I did, with full facts and details. That made him double my guard and order this girdle and chain. He thought it was just some trick of mine for engineering an escape and robbing him of his hard-earned blood money."

The Arab gaoler touched her arm the man was nervous of every word she exchanged with his redoubtable prisoner. She must go now.

"And— we can do nothing!" she wailed.

"We can pray that our deaths will be quick," he said grimly. "Also you can send me some real American cigarettes if you, or Dr. Felton have any; this Kafir tobacco is ruining my palate."

SHE sent him cigarettes, she sent him good foods and wines. She even made the mistake of sending him a file in a long loaf; she did not realise what it meant to capture Savaran The big Arab gaoler pawing through cigarettes and food under the eye of a white officer broke the loaf and tossed the file free with a sneering snarl, while the officer laughed contempt in Savaran's face and patted the gaoler's broad back. And she heard of that, too, and read in it the fate of Mamee Yorga. Savaran would never be freed, the town was doomed. When she went to him again she was a desperate and contrite woman.

The big, scowling gaoler stood at her elbow more watchfully than ever; she turned on him fiercely.

"Stand back," she cried. "I am going away. I shall never see him again. I must speak with him alone."

The man shrank back before the fire in her tone, but he hesitated and with a splendid gesture she threw wide her arms.

"Could I carry any tools to help him?" she cried angrily. She wore a sleeveless and, to the big Arab, a shameless pocket handkerchief of a frock. It

was difficult to see how she could have concealed even a penknife about her. As the man hung sheepishly, Savaran snapped at him:

"Do as you are told, black dog. it is not good for your ears to hear the farewells of white lords."

The whiplash in the lean adventurer's tone completed the gaoler's discomfiture. He turned and shuffled off, and as he went Ruth Dacre leant against the wall fanning herself with her sun-hat, overcome by the heat of the place as much as the strain. It was only as the big gaoler turned at the door of the prison to watch her that she nerved herself to go to the bars of the cell door.

"Savaran," she said hoarsely. "Kiss my hand In farewell ... It holds a pocket revolver. I brought it in my hat... Not much... but I could not bear to think of you going out without striking a fighting blow."

He bent over that fine, strong, sweet hand with the grace of kings.

"Ruth," he said softly. "You are one of the world's great hearts. I am your worshipper."

"Don't," she choked, "I have been a fool, Savaran. But I meant only to be wise. I did it for Mamee Yorga, for all these men and women and children, all my helpless hospital cases... "

"And young Dr. Pelton?" he smiled.

"Yes," she said sharply, "I love him, Savaran. And I love him, too, for the great work he is doing. I wanted to save him to do greater. It was a mean trick I played on you, but I did not know, I hadn't your wisdom. I felt that if I kept you here, even against your will, you would find a way to fight and beat the Forofangora for the very preservation of your genius."

"That, my dear, is the greatest tribute my genius has had," he said quietly.

"I always did believe in you," she said wearily, "but I did not know what these officials were... And now it is all over. The Forofangora strike the day after to-morrow, and we all die. There is little doubt about it, even the Commissaire begins to suspect it."

"And what does that mountain of sleep do?" asked Savaran.

"He can't quite admit it yet... the Forofangora are such loyal and meek people, he bleats... but he has given out that he will hang all those hostages In a row if the Forofangora do anything to annoy him."

"And then he fell asleep again," Savaran laughed grimly. "And the rest of the Government crew?"

"One or two are overhauling the armoury stores and crying in despair over them," she told him. "And some took canoes last night and slipped down river."

"Their throats are cut by now," he said cheerfully. "But I'm glad you came today, Ruth. Even I begin to find this prison and its fleas Irksome."

"But— what do you mean?" she cried. "Have you found a way?"

"I am Savaran— which, of course, is saying yes," he said; he turned to his scowling gaoler, rapped: "Is all ready Abn Zayd?"

The sullen Arab was no longer sullen. He sprang to attention, he was grinning all over his face.

"All is ready," he beamed. "We wait but the word of the lord Zavarani."

"Pass the word to the guard to muster at once," rapped the lean adventurer. "Send runners to the Gurgur to bid my men parade before Government House in fighting order and now."

The big gaoler ran from the place shouting. The sentries at the door became alive and vanished from view. There came the bustle of men gathering outside, the clang of rifle butts on sun-baked earth. The big gaoler came running back; as he put his key into the lock of the cell door he cried happily:

"Does the lord who laughs at lions need his slave's help?"

"Just a match," Savaran grinned, for he could not resist the dramatic. His hands had gone down to his chains. He shook them a little and then tossed the formidable collection aside like discarded undergarments; no man, it was to be seen, was needed to release Savaran. He strolled out of his cell cigarette In hand at the precise moment that Abn Zayd held up the match.

Ruth Dacre leant again a wall, gasping.

"You have released yourself, could have at any time?" she cried bewildered. "But this man, your gaoler— "

"Allow me to Introduce Abn Zayd,' grinned Savaran. "My headman in many expeditions."

"And— and you got him in here as your own gaoler?" she gasped. "How-how?"

"Here is Zavarani," beamed the man. "Wonders are natural to him."

"Less than a wonder here," said Savaran largely, for he was enjoying this. "The officials are so sleepy that when the real gaoler went down with fever and recommended his cousin Abn Zayd, they did not push their inquiries very deep. But let us go out and review my army."

"Even the soldiers are yours?" she laughed hysterically.

"I had five hundred men on my pay roll," he grinned. "It was a pity to let them waste their time in idleness, especially as the Government forces were eager for recruits owing to slackness in enlistments. Quite a number joined up and spread the news of Savaran through the ranks of the all-too-ready regulars, for an army will always back a real leader to a man."

They went out and five grinning ranks of hard-bitten askari came to the salute like veterans at the barked command of Abn Zayd. The two officers of the guard were sitting blinking at rifle muzzles in the little mess-room of the prison barracks.

Savaran stalked like an outsize Napoleon along the ranks. Spoke a handful of harsh words in Yorgi which sent two hundred well-oiled rifles tossing in the air as the men cheered, and called for horses. Two horses. Ruth Dacre rode with him as he marched in triumph through the sleek and sleepy streets of Mamee Yorga to Government House. But there was no sleep In Mamee Yorga once Savaran had passed. Savaran left no details unthought-of. He had even provided a band.

So behind the blood quickening scream of native instruments they swung into the huge parade ground facing the official palace. It was already full of black fighting men. Regulars of the Colonial force marshalled in companies with new machine-guns ominously trained on the Commissaire's dwelling, and masses of Savaran's even more formidable irregulars drawn up behind. A huddle of white officers stood about the palace steps uneasily fingering their pistols as Savaran strode largely up to them.

"Gentlemen," he said grimly, "draw your weapons and it is a massacre. On the other hand wait patiently a little while and I will find you plenty of use for them."

He walked straight through that little crowd, though every man of it was ready to cut him down— if he only had the nerve.

His Excellency the Commissaire was as yet only half awake to what had happened. He heaved his gross body from his chair and, blinking across his great desk, mumbled:

"What's this? Most irregular... a prisoner without an armed guard Most improper . "

"Fat one," said Savaran with ferocious geniality. "Go back to your dozing. You are temporarily deposed. Since you can neither govern nor protect Mamee Yorga an expert has been called In." He turned to two frightened secretaries. "Take away this— bundle," he said. "Savaran needs his chair of state."

THE Forofangora attacked to time table. They came out of the jungle mists Into the red sun at dawn, their great head-plumes making a sea of dancing lights, their rhino shields drumming thunder as their spear hafts beat out their war challenge. They moved In an exultant swarm tight-packed because, thanks to the two great rivers, only one side of the town could be approached. But that did not bother them. They were contemptuous of Mamee Yorga. They knew that the watch was half asleep, the defences nil.

It seemed they were right. Dawn sun showed them a broken old wall behind which drowsed a sleep-sodden town. No man stirred in it

No movement, no sound at all from Mamee Yorga until the mass of naked braves were no more than forty feet from the wall, and even then no sound from the wall— only a new sound from the Forofangora warriors...

A strange sound. A shrill outcry, a screaming. The foremost ranks were suddenly yelling and leaping and trying to twist back in a panic of pain. They hurled themselves back into the mob that hurled itself forward with a force that plied up the whole mass in a wild squirm of tangled confusion. And they screamed that the ground beneath their feet was aswarm with devils.

This was not quite correct. Savaran had merely ordered that through every door and every flat plank in Mamee Yorga there should be driven eight-inch nails sharpened to needle point. Those doors and planks had been burled m the sandy soil outside the wall so that they formed a broad band, thirty feet deep, right across the front of the wall. The Fororanga were now stepping with bare feet on those needle points set as close as cornstalks, and the effect was distressing. And as they shrieked and milled and formed themselves into a matted mob Savaran, smiling fiercely, leant outward from Mamee Yorga's wall and shot Fodi Kabba, king of the Forofangora, and three of his chiefs as fast as his remarkable pistol could spit bullets.

And even before his third shot rang out the front of Mamee Yorga was a blaze of flame. Machine guns and rifles pumped in a continuous blaze into the brown of that milling, tight-packed, helpless mob It was point-blank killing at non-stop rates. The pelt of shots blew great holes in the writhing mass, and pressure from behind Ailed up those holes ready for mort killing In time it was impossible to say how many died, so dense was the swathe of dead and living...

The shambles that the Forofangora had planned for Mamee Yorga had come to meet them. In twenty minutes there was no more war.

There was a lame, feeble sort of siege for a week or two until word that flotillas were being rushed up river finished even that. It was always half-hearted, never dangerous. The Forofangora ran from Mamee Yorga beaten.

"THOSE first twenty minutes finished them," Savaran explained to Ruth Dacre. "They taught them that a master was in command, and that there was no hope for them."

Savaran told her this as they stood on the banks of the river by the canoe that was to take him across to Abn Zayd and his expedition waiting on the frontier bank.

"Savaran!" cried Ruth Dacre huskily. "Stay to enjoy your triumph."

Savaran looked into eyes that told him how personal that triumph might be and he turned quickly to nod at the two stern-wheelers that were disembarking white regiments and artillery on to Mamee Yorga's quay

"It is wiser for Savaran to go before the official mind remembers there is a reward for his capture."

"They won't do it," she cried. "Why, all Mamee Yorga is petitioning to have you made Commissaire."

"Horrible," he grinned. "Imagine Savaran developing an His Excellency paunch!"

"That's not Savaran's way," she said, searching his eagle face with overbright eyes "You are making excuses."

"Possibly," he grinned. "You see, I still think I can get those diamonds."

"Diamonds!" she cried scornfully. 'Diamonds— Savaran, I am more than diamonds. I— I want you."

"And Dr. Felton wants you," said Savaran grimly. "And I've taken a liking to him... And you're a lovely thing, Ruth, and Savaran is an Ismael... only fit for diamonds."

He bent and kissed her and sprang into his canoe. And half-way across the stream his fierce grin broke out.

"I wonder," he asked himself, "which of us has made the luckier escape?"

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2: The Château of Phantasies

E. Phillips Oppenheim

1866-1946

Collier's Weekly, 28 Jan 1928

"YOU are nothing more or less than a snob," my friend Denham declared as we sat side by side on a bench watching the sunlight filter through the pine trees behind the first tee at Cagnes.

"Because I object to *char-à-bancs*?" I protested.

"Because you object to the principle which riding in a *char-à-bancs* implies. None could possibly object to *char-à-bancs* for any sane reason. They are better hung than motor cars; their seats are more luxurious, the cost is trifling. All that you lose is your cursed exclusiveness. You object to other people sharing the same privieges as yourself. You prefer the expense of a private automobile, which not all of us can afford, or else to remain at home when you might be exploring beautiful country rather than do so in company with your neighbors. I call that snobbishness."

"Very well," I agreed meekly, "take the seats, and I will come with you."

ON the whole, I was glad that I had allowed my friends to persuade me. We had a fine day for our excursion, and we crept sluggishly but safely across some of the mountainous roads at the back of Nice, through the heart of that hilly but richly fertile country of old villages, of flower farms and tucked-away homesteads, from behind the gates of which the peasant folk stared at us, still with a touch of that dumb wonder which seems always lurking in the mind of the yokel who lives in the quiet places.

Toward afternoon we came to a standstill halfway up a precipitous hill, and the driver of the car descended to effect some slight repairs. It was a picturesque although a wild spot. On one side of us was a precipice; on the other a wood, cut through by one of those straight, formal drives, leading to a château, weather-stained, forbidding-looking, with its rows of narrow, empty windows. I pointed it out to the conductor of the *char-à- bancs*.

"A lonely place for a large house," I remarked. "Who lives up there?"

To my surprise— for the French people of that order today are far from being a religious race— the man crossed himself.

"One believes," he replied, "the Comte de Trebault. The house is never visited, though."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I have heard something of this," my friend intervened from his place by my side. So that is the Château Trebault! The Trebaults of hundreds of years ago were supposed to welcome their visitors with the *oubliette*, the dungeon

opening only at the top. There are legends about the present man. Is it not so?" he inquired of the conductor.

"The country people talk," the man acknowledged. "Their stories are wild, but the fact remains— there is no one who visits the Château Trebault."

He descended to help the driver of the *char-à-bancs* with his task. I looked up the stony, winding road above, unprotected on either side, twisting and curving its way almost around the summit of one of the spurs of the mountain range which we had to cross before we dropped into the plain of the Mediterranean. Then I looked back at the château, and a curious sensation came to me. There was no actual change in that long front of sightless windows, yet, whereas I had looked at them only a few moments before in dumb and passive curiosity, I was now suddenly and profoundly intrigued.

The spirit of enterprise which in my younger days had led me into so many strange places seemed, without reason or incentive, rekindled. I felt that the apparent desertion of the house was a farce, that the broad, uninviting avenue, with the dank weeds and grass-grown borders, was in effect one of those passages opening out from the lives of all of us, at the far end of which shines the lamp of adventure. I rose and prepared to climb down.

"Where are you off to?" my friend Denham asked.

"I am going to speak to the driver of the *char-à-bancs*," I replied.

Denham knew that I was something of a mechanic, and he let me go. It was not in my mind, however, to offer help. I stood by the man's side for a moment, watching him lay out his tools.

"Shall we be long?" I asked.

"One cannot say, sir," he replied, a little surlily. "Half an hour at least. If one of you gentlemen would take the trouble, it would be a good thing to walk on to the next bend and prevent anything coming round. They could not pass here."

I glanced up the zigzag road, which in the far distance seemed little more than a goat track. I fancied that I saw some disturbance upon the horizon— or was it merely a cloud of dust blown into a cyclone by the wind which was sobbing around us? One of the bystanders started off to the corner, but I turned away, approached the fine but rusty gates of the Château Trebault, shook the chain which locked them together, and, finding it secure, stepped round the side through a gap in the prickly hedge, and started off up the deserted avenue. Even as I did so I fancied that I heard a clamor of voices behind; nevertheless I held on my way.

The gale, which had been blowing in great gusts from mountains and booming through which the the valleys, seemed, even in this sheltered spot, to be spending itself in a sort of fantastic fury. Besides the black cypress trees on

each side of me, bending this way and that with a lack of unison which seemed somehow grotesque, there was a medley of other trees and shrubs, among which the wind was making havoc. Little twigs of deadwood were blown down upon my head, delicate leaves of oleander blossom floated in the air, sometimes caught up by eddies of wind until they sailed over the tops of the trees, sometimes falling like huge flakes of snow upon the avenue; and, all along, until I reached the great round opening with its dead fountain in the middle of a jungle of weedy grass, there was no sign that any human being had traversed its desolate way.

The French are not used to neglect any yard of tillable land, yet, as I came out into the open spaces surrounding the château, on one side of me were uncared-for vineyards, where the vines, without pruning, had been allowed to run riot, and on the other side a wilderness of pasture land upon which no cattle had fed or reaping machine taken toll. The front of the house was longer and more imposing than I had imagined from the road. There must have been a dozen windows at least on each side of the huge front door, and on each of the corners of the building were the four Provençal towers.

Upon the step in front of the door lay the remains of a rusty bell, dragged from its socket. I leaned forward and struck the panels with a walking stick which I was carrying. Thick though it must have been, I seemed to hear the echoes of my summons resounding in caverns of emptiness within.

"No one will come," I said to myself. "There could be no one here alive." Yet I struck again and again, until, much to my amazement (a little also to my fear!) I heard the sound of footsteps approaching the entrance— slow, solemn footsteps— the footsteps, so far as I could gather, of a heavy man.

I stepped a yard back into the windy twilight and waited. The footsteps ceased; a lock was turned; the door was thrown open. I found myself face to face with a man who, save for his beard and his worn clothes, might very well have been the butler of such a house. The very way in which he leaned deferentially forward was professional. He left me to speak.

"Is your master at home?" I asked.

"Monsieur le Comte is at home, but he does not receive," was the stolid reply.

I produced a card.

"I am an English tourist," I told the man, "stranded here by a mishap. I wondered whether it would be possible for me to look over the château?"

"Monsieur will be pleased to step inside," he invited.

I followed him into what seemed to be at first a chasm of twilight. Then, as my eyes became accustomed to the change, I saw that we had passed into a great hall, the size of which, considering the external architecture, was a

surprise to me. It was barely but in a way magnificently furnished. There were some oak chests of prodigious size and wonderfully carved against the white walls.

The atmosphere of the place seemed to me, coming from the stormy freshness outside, dank, chill as the air of a mausoleum. One could well believe that the door which had rolled open to admit me had been kept fast closed for a hundred years. The greater my surprise, therefore, when I was ushered into a room of no particular size, furnished still, it is true, in the fashion of generations ago, but with many evidences of modern civilization.

The solitary occupant of the room was almost invisible in the depths of an easy-chair with protruding sides. He rose to his feet, however, at the first sound of the servant's voice, and stood confronting me.

"This gentleman. Monsieur le Comte, asked if it were permitted to see over the house?"

The Comte de Trebault, as I judged him to be, looked at me with an air of well-bred surprise. I felt that I had been guilty of an impertinence.

"But what could there be about my house to interest Monsieur?" he demanded.

"I offer you a thousand apologies, sir," I said, as the man withdrew, closing the door behind him. "The fact of it is that I am a tourist, and I have a natural fondness for old places, old furniture, old pictures. Your house looked as though it might well contain such treasures."

"But my house is not a museum," was the cold response.

"I can only offer you my apologies," I concluded, turning toward the door.

His attitude suddenly changed. He held out his hand.

"Give yourself the trouble to pause for a moment, monsieur," he begged. "Since you are here, you shall have your wish. You shall see the treasures of the House of Trebault."

He lifted the lamp from the table, and led me from the room, pausing first in the center of the great hall. By the light of the lamp, which he held over his head, I could see clearly now three empty spaces where some time or other huge pictures must have hung. Now only the black outline of where the frames had rested remained.

"The center one you doubtless recognize from its description," he said. "It is the Andrea del Sarto stolen by mercenaries while on its way from Florence to the Court of King Francis. That on the left— the smaller painting— is by an artist unknown. You yourself, however, being a connoisseur, will doubtless divine its history. On the right is the only Murillo which ever came into the possession of my family."

I stared at the empty spaces, and I stared back at the tall, gaunt man who stood by my side. Not a muscle in his face moved.

A little dazed, I followed my *cicerone*. He threw open an oak door which rolled back as though it had been the entrance to a cathedral, and we passed into a gallery which must have taken up the whole of one side of the château. In the middle of the floor there were two long glass-topped cabinets— cabinets of oak with quaintly turned legs— and as far as I could see, along each side of the wall were those empty spaces where pictures had hung.

"The oak carving you see there," he went on, "was all the work of one man— the monk Ducellini, whom you will remember as having served under Michelangelo. It carries the history of the world from the birth of Christ through troublous periods to the dawn of the Renaissance. The picture above is a genuine Leonardo da Vinci."

He held up the lamp as though for me better to survey the gauntly empty space.

As my guide held the lamp still a little higher, I saw coming toward us a girl dressed in a lovely dark-colored gown with red about it, a girl who in that uncertain light seemed to me as though she might have stepped down from one of the frames of those non-existent masters.

My guide set down the lamp upon one of the ancient cases, and turned to me.

"Sir," he announced, with the air of one who has wearied of his task, "here is a guide who knows more than I. I beg you to excuse me."

He turned and left us, and I looked at the newcomer, tongue-tied. For, matter-of-fact person though I am, I was not sure whether she was human.

"I fear, monsieur," she regretted, "that my father has been indulging in one of his usual grim jests. He has been taking you for a tour to see treasures which do not exist."

"It was my own fault, mademoiselle," I acknowledged. "I had no right to intrude."

"If it was the love of beautiful things which brought you, monsieur," she rejoined, "you had certainly a right to come, but, you see, everything that we once owned has gone. "This is a house of emptiness."

I shivered, for even as she spoke the atmosphere of that great room seemed to chill my blood. And then it suddenly went warm again, for my companion's eyes lit, and my heart began to beat fast. Never before had I stood near anything so beautiful.

"Mademoiselle," I ventured, "I wish that there were indeed treasures here, that you might show them to me."

She laughed softly, but she led me imperceptibly toward the door.

"There are no longer any treasures under this roof," she repeated.

"Mademoiselle," I said, and I found it hard to control my voice, "I speak, believe me, with all respect, I speak from my heart, with great humility— there is a treasure which still remains here greater than any masterpiece which has ever adorned tuese walls."

"Are you trying to flatter me, sir?" she asked me.

"I am trying to find words, mademoiselle," I answered, "to tell you that you are more wonderful than anything I have ever dreamed of in life. If you send me away without a hope that we may meet again, you will make me the most miserable of men."

She laid her fingers upon my arm. Their touch was almost a caress. "Then you must come back," she whispered, "for I would make no one miserable."

IT seemed to me that I had closed my eyes in a wave of ecstasy, and I opened them to horror. For a moment or two I could make nothing of my surroundings. I was lying upon a rug by the side of the road, with my back to a low stone wall. Opposite me were four or five figures, all stretched out, motionless, their faces covered. Only a few yards away, strange and grotesque, was a huge misshapen mass of metal and wood and upholstery—an overturned *char-à-bancs*, with the steam still hissing out from the smashed radiator and drifting away down the valley. In my ears was a sound of sobbing and here and there a shriek of pain. Two men, who might have been doctors, were hurrying about; one, with a woman in nun's habit, was bending over another prostrate figure close at hand. A little way down the road a gendarme was keeping back an ever-increasing stream of carts and cars.

"What is it?" I gasped. "How did I come here?"

Then a voice answered me from underneath the great wide cap by my side, and I fancied that I must be back again in that mausoleum of a château:

"There has been an accident. Your *char-à-bancs* was run into by another. It was a very bad accident. If you can keep quiet until the ambulances come—"

I tried to turn to see if the face, too, were the same, and for the time that was the end of me.

THERE was a slight injury to my head, and for a time I was forbidden questions. In due course, however, more rapidly than they had expected, convalescence came in earnest. Soon I was able to sit up.

My first visitor was Denham, the man who had called me a snob because I disliked *char-à-bancs*!

"Tell me what happened?" I begged.

"We were drawn up for some slight repair," he recounted— "you remember that, don't you?— by the side of the road. You decided to get out and see what was wrong. There was a blind corner about fifty yards up the hill, and round this came a new motor diligence from the other side, out of control. The brakes had given out; the driver was helpless. He simply sat there trying to steer his machine and shrieking. With our vehicle blocking the road, of course it was all up. I took a flying jump over the side, and just missed the collision. You were dashed against the *char-à-bancs* when it crumpled up. We won't talk about it too much. My nerves aren't what they were. There were sixteen of us in the thing, you know, and eight were killed outright."

Now, many things had seemed strange to me during these first days of my convalescence, and I had made up my mind to go quietly with my questions and speculations.

"Listen," I said to Denham, "as a cross-examination barrister would put it, I suggest to you that I had left the *char-à-bancs*, had entered the grounds of the château by a gap near the gates, and was at least halfway down the avenue before the collision took place."

Denham looked at me gravely.

"Forester," he advised; "try and get that idea out of your head. We are all a little dazed even now, but your injuries should speak for themselves. You were unconscious for at least ten days after you were picked up, and not only I but every other one of the survivors saw you trying in vain to get out of the way of the diligence."

I closed my eyes.

"Very well," I yielded. "Tell me the English news."

I HAVE a reasonably strong will, and, notwithstanding all temptations, I asked my friend no more questions then or at any other time. I set myself to the task of getting well, and I succeeded beyond the expectations of everyone. Soon I was permitted to sit out of doors, and, later on, to take short motor rides. Even then I did not hurry. I waited until I felt strength once more in my body and myself a man again. Then I hired a motor car and drove to the scene of the accident. I made my chauffeur pull up opposite the gates. Here once more I was puzzled. The man when he saw me descend crossed himself.

"Monsieur will not enter there," he begged quickly.

"I shall return in half an hour," I told him. "I am going to have a look at the château."

I made my way to the door. I missed the rusty bell handle which I seemed to remember, but I knocked, as before, on the panels, and listened. I went on

knocking— but I listened in vain. All that I heard was the hollow echo of my tapping. In time I desisted, and, standing back, made a tour of the place.

It was two o'clock when I walked down that avenue with all the joy of the sunlit afternoon quivering in my pulses, and it seemed to me that I was stepping toward a new world. It was four o'clock before I retraced my weary steps, to find my chauffeur halfway down the avenue, looking fearfully toward the château. He exclaimed with joy on seeing me.

"Ah, it is Monsieur who returns!" he cried. "Good!"

He evidently seemed to imagine that I had escaped some great danger. I followed him listlessly into the automobile.

"Stop at the nearest café," I instructed him.

He obeyed. We found one about half a mile off, where I drank coffee and brandy, of which I was in need. It was merely a country inn, but the proprietor had an intelligent face. I called him to my table.

"Do you know anything of the deserted château down the hill?" I asked.

"There is little enough to know, monsieur," he replied. "It was once part of the domaine of the seigneurs of Trebault, as Monsieur may have heard. For many years it has remained unoccupied."

THE months dragged on for me a little wearily. The season at Monte Carlo, which, in my quiet way, I always enjoy, drew toward its close, but before the end came I tired of it. One day, just before the hour for *déjeuner*, I drove up to one of my secret havens— a small little-known pension not far from Venice.

I presented myself to Madame, who greeted me warmly as an old client and who herself escorted me to the little salon where luncheon was already being served. Then, as she was placing me at my table, one of those moments came in which the throb of the world seemed suddenly to cease. My hand gripped the back of my chair fiercely. Madame departed, unnoticing. I stood rigid. At the next table was a man whose back was toward me, and, facing him, unless I was going mad, was the *châtelaine* of the Château Trebault!

The singing in my ears passed. The fragment of my life to which these things belonged had been so clear-cut and detached that the capacity for wonder with regard to them had become dulled. It was only the sight of her eyes and that wonderful smile which had for the moment unnerved me. The smile remained— most amazing thing of all, there was recognition in her eyes. I let go the back of the chair, and found, to my immense relief, that I could stand upright. I moved to the table and bowed. The man glanced up— the very same man. The girl leaned forward.

"Monsieur has recovered?" she inquired.

"Perfectly," I answered.

It seemed to me that she must know everything. Perhaps she did. Who knows? At any rate, she knew the right thing to do, as she always has done— then and ever since.

"I can see," she went on, "that you only half remember me. I was at a training home for nurses close to where your accident took place, and I hurried down with some of the others when we heard of it. It was I who was with you when you came back to consciousness."

"I remember," I acknowledged. "And your—?"

"My father," she confided. "You have never met my father."

"My name is Forester," I told her— "Major Forester."

He bowed.

"My father, the Comte de Trebault," she announced, with a little gesture. We shook hands as strangers.

"I owe so much to your daughter," I murmured.

He smiled, not unpleasantly.

"You are alone," he remarked. "Pray join us."

I sat at their table. We three lunched together as though it were the most natural thing in the world. With our coffee I summoned up my courage, and alluded, as casually as possible, to the château.

"Your home is quite empty?" I ventured. "You never think of visiting it?"

"Never, monsieur," he answered, with a touch of that former bitterness. "I have not crossed the threshold for twenty years."

"My father," the girl explained softly, "very much resented the sale of all our family treasures by my uncle, but it had to be— there were debts to be paid."

"Naturally," I concurred gravely.

AFTER LUNCHEON Monsieur le Comte retired. He was an invalid and needed much rest. I walked with Angèle in the gardens. I flatter myself that I have always been a philosopher. I do not seek to probe those mysteries which are in themselves insoluble. And, in any case, about the greatest mystery of all there was nothing terrifying. It was a vital and human thing— the love which revealed itself so amazingly that the very words I faltered when I took her into my arms that afternoon in Madame's arbor seemed unnecessary. It was as though somewhere else they had been already spoken.

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English-born Australian Marcus Clarke's master work, "For the Term of his Natural Life," is a harrowing novel of an English gentleman wrongly convicted and transported for life to the notorious penal settlement in Van Diemen's Land. He wrote a few short stories, and was just 35 when he died. This story is in the tradition of the Christmas "ghost" or "weird".

3: The Man with the Oblong Box

Marcus Clarke

1846-1881

Singleton Argus and Upper Hunter General Advocate (NSW) 25 Dec 1878

(and several other country newspapers)

"MARSTON," said I, "your assumption of knowledge is always fatal to us. We are bushed!"

"It would not surprise me, dear boy," said Marston, coolly, "to learn that we were."

If you take the train to Brandy Creek, spend a week in the mountains, and then attempt to take a short cut to Dandenong, you will probably find yourself somewhere near the spot where I made the above remark. If the day of the month should happen to be the twenty-third of December, and the weather stormy, with a falling barometer, the condition of time and place will most nearly accord, "And we promised to be home for our Christmas Dinner."

"The fulfilment of promises is always contingent upon certain recognised phenomena," said Marston. "I doubt much if we shall dine anywhere for some days."

At this moment there appeared, from behind one of the huge gum trees which pierced the fern, the figure of a man, wearing a largo flapped hat, and carrying at his back an Oblong Box.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said he. "You are somewhat out of the usual track of travellers."

"We are trying to make Dandenong," said I, "and we were told of a shanty in the mountains where we could get a shake-down for the night."

The stranger eyed us, not without some humour in his glance.

"I know the place," said he. "It is thirteen miles away. You have missed the track."

"My friend reasons on sound premises," said Marston. "He guessed the fact just before you overtook us. Pray tell us which way we should go."

"It is late now," replied the man with the box, "and the weather is threatening. If you will come to my hut I will give you supper and blankets, and put you on the road in the morning."

"Sir, you are a gentleman," said Marston,

"Humph," said" the man with the box. "That is as it may be."

As we followed our new-found friend along the winding track. I had opportunity of observing him. He was of singular but not unpleasing aspect. Of the middle height, his frame was wiry and his hands, though brown and muscular, were, small and well-shaped. His face was clear cut and bronzed, while a closely trimmed white beard relieved his black hair and strongly marked eyebrows

By-and-bye we reached a little clearing in the immense forest. The hidden brook, which had been murmuring along by bur side, following the windings of the ravine, now emerged into daylight, and passing round a rock, descended over a ledge some twelve feet high, into a little pool, again escaping by a series of miniature cascades into the valley. On the other side of the pool the ground rose with a gentle slope to a hill, where stood, under the shade of three splendid trees, a hut built of squared logs.

Leading the way across a plank bridge, wet with the spray of the waterfall, the stranger bid us welcome to his little domain. The stranger's hut was commodious, containing, as it appeared, three spacious rooms, and having windows looking to the south from beneath a verandah of bark.

"Here," said the stranger, opening a door, "is your camping place for the night."

Truly a comfortable camping place enough. Two bunks, filled with dry fern, stood in each corner, and a wash-stand, of the kind supplied to emigrants of moderate means by the all-providing Silver, was faced by a cane lounge, similar to those in use in the cabins of well appointed steamers.

"Wash off the dust of your journey," said our host, "while I get supper ready."

A few moments sufficed for our toilet, and when we rejoined our beneficent stranger in the parlour, an exclamation of astonishment broke from each of us.

The room was plainly but comfortably furnished. Shelves of books lined tho walls, and a table in the centre of the room was already covered with a clean cloth, and bore, in addition to a smoking tureen of soup, three long-necked bottles and a cold pie.

"The soup is kangaroo," said our host, seating himself. "I have just returned in time to save it from boiling over. That is parrot pie, and the bottles contain some wine, which I hope you will not find the less palatable because it is of native growth. There are some cherries and apples on the side-table, and after dinner I can promise you a glass of as good *liqueur* as you can find in the city."

Politeness forbade comment, and we ate and drank in wondering silence. The fare was certainly irreproachable. The soup, flavoured with Tarragon vinegar, and enhanced in nutritive quality by a bountiful besprinkling of onions

and pot-herbs, was excellent. The parrot pie reminded Marston of the spring raids upon his father's rookery, and the fruit was of the finest quality.

"You are not Monte Cristo?" I asked, as I filled a tiny glass with the greenish *liqueur*.

"No," said the man with the box; "but though I cannot give you haschich, I can promise you tobacco."

"Benedictine, by the hammer of Thor!" said Marston, setting down his glass. "I have four cigars left. Permit me to offer you one of them."

"Nay, I will not desert my old friend," said the stranger, drawing from his pocket a venerable meerschaum, which he loaded with that lingering delight which marks the practised smoker.

"Draw up your chairs and let us sacrifice to the Great Soother."

The threatened storm had broken at last, and the crash of the wind and rain in the forest contrasted very pleasantly with the snug retreat into which, our good fortune had led us.

"If anyone should ask me whether I am sorry that I missed my-way," said Marston, "I should reply as did Sir Boyle Roche, 'Mr. Speaker, I distinctly answer in the affirmative— No!' "

"As pleasant a bull," said the man with the box, "as that told me by Harry Bushe, concerning the Irish Squire, who entertained his tenants upon some occasion with claret, at two guineas a bottle, and upon, being remonstrated with by a friend for his improvidence, said, 'Sure, I could have given 'em whisky-punch, but would ye have me run in debt for the lemons?' "

"I have heard," said I, "that when a new gaol was to be built in Dublin, some member moved that the new gaol shall be built from the materials of the old one, and that the prisoners shall remain in the latter until the former be ready."

"That is Doctor Sheridan's story," said our host, quickly, "and he always added to it that the same gentleman revised an Act of Parliament changing a sentence of fine into one of transportation for seven years, and omitted to strike out 'half to go to the king, and the other half to the informer!' "

"Is it in Curran's Memoir," asked Marston, "that something like the following is to be found— case of bribery at election: 'Did you vote at the election?' 'I did, sir.' 'Whom did you vote for?' 'Mr. Bowes Daly, sir.' 'Were you bribed?' 'I was, sir.' 'How much did you get?' 'Five guineas, sir.' 'What did you do with it?' 'I spint it, sir.' 'You may go.' 'I will, sir.' "

"Yes, and when Bowes Daly was told this, he said that it was all true, except the fellow having got the money."

The flow of anecdote was now unrestrained, but the man with the box was never to be beaten. In vain we racked our brains for memories of good things.

The *bon-mots* of all nations seemed behind his lips. Marston attempted a translation of Hafiz, and the stranger was down upon him at once with an account of an Indian officer, who, having learned nothing before he entered the service, obtained acquaintance with literature through the medium of the Persian books he was compelled to translate. He read Aristotle in this way, and when one day a friend gave him a copy of Bacon's *Works*, as a corrective to tho good Greek's method of philosophy, said, "Bacon! Bacon! Who the devil's he? What trash people do publish now-a-days!"

I related an anecdote, *un peu risque*, of the comment of a French gentleman upon the modern school of English art, and he reminded me of the *naif* remark of the young officer who, seeing Guido's Magdalen for the first time, cried, "Oh! what a lovely picture. I have always liked Magdalens in every stage of their existence!"

Apropos, however, of the story of Gibbon and the French physician, who disputed with him upon his attentions to the invalided Lady Elizabeth Foster, [*Medecin*— Quand Miladi Foster sera i malado de vos fadaises, jè la guérirai. *Gibbon*—Quand Miladi Foster, sera morte de vos reçettes je lim— mor— taliserai!] he told one of the most ridiculous anecdotes of the enthusiasm of the medical mind that I have ever heard.

"My old friend, Doctor Barzelius," said the man with the box, "was an enthusiast in his profession. To him, a human being in any condition of existence was a case, and nothing more. He measured mankind not by their clothes, their manners, or their position in society, but by their pulses, their vital energies and their freedom from disease. An old valetudinarian, who had suffered much from many physicians, sent for Barzelius. The terror of the invalid was extreme, and the fee was proportionately great. Barzelius attended, and set himself to perfunctorily hear a history of symptoms. The patient had proceeded for some minutes, detailing in woeful accents the details of his malady, and, as the catalogue of grief proceeded, the physician became interested. 'I have acute pains in my right ear, like the grinding of large butchers' knives upon soft grindstone,' said the invalid. 'Certainly, certainly!' cried Dr. Barzelius. 'Every morning, upon waking, I feel a pang through my heart, as though some *maladroit friseur* was thrusting a curling-iron through the loft ventricle.' 'Precisely, dear sir, precisely.' 'And every night, on going to bed, it seems to me that an iron hand seizes my liver, and expresses from it all the bile in my system.' 'You delight me; you delight me!' 'I have no appetite.' 'Good!' 'I cannot drink.' 'Better and better!' 'The sight of one eye is quite gone.' 'To be sure it is!' 'And I am losing my hearing.' 'Glorious! glorious!' 'My brain—' 'I know, I know!' cried Barzelius, starting from his chair; 'left hemisphere affected, use of right hand going, epilepsy, insanity, wasting,

death! My dear, dear sir,' seizing the patient warmly by both hands; 'let me congratulate you! You have a disease which I have long believed to be unhappily extinct.' "

When Marston had done laughing, I said, "These things are mere force of habit. I remember being on a visit last month to a bachelor friend. I fell asleep after dinner, and the cat knocked down the fire-irons with a tremendous crash. 'What!' I cried, waking, 'going to bed, darlings, without one kiss?' I thought of my young barbarians. "

"And this from the poet of the hearthstone," cried Marston. "My friend," he added, to the man with the box, "has written poetry. He is always in debt, and when things got too hard for him, he threatens to publish these poems; his friends then flock to his assistance."

"Talking of friends," said our host, "I remember once saying to De Morgan, the father of the insurance system, that I had lost to many friends in a certain number of years. 'So you ought, sir,' says De Morgan, jotting down some figures on paper, 'and *three* more.' "

"You appear to have known many people of note," said Marston, with just enough of inquiry in his voice to cause our host to raise his head.

"Yes," said he. " I have in my time known a great many people," and he rose to fill the meerschaum for the eighth time.

"I wonder who the deuce he is?" said Marston to me.

"I wonder what the deuce he has in that box?" said l to Marston.

"My business," said the man with the box, returning, "has I brought me into contact with many people."

"And since you have mentioned it, sir," said Marston, "may I ask what that business is?"

"Assuredly," said the man with the box, lighting his pipe. "I am a collector of objects of natural history."

The glare of the match shed a lurid glow over his swarthy features. My eyes fell on the Oblong Box. It looked hideously like a coffin.

"Yours is a very lonely life," I said, shifting my chair a few inches nearer to my friend. "Have you many visitors— like— like ourselves, for instance?"

"Very few," said our host; "very few. And they seldom re-visit me."

As he spoke he dropped the match into the spittoon, where it expired with a hissing noise.

"The noblest study of mankind, is man," said Marston, whose glance likewise rested on the mysterious casket. "Do you ever collect—?"

"Bodies? Frequently. But I have no proper appliances here for rightly stuffing the cavity of the thorax after the removal of the softer tissues, and that branch of my business, however lucrative, I have been compelled to

abandon. Still, when I do fall in with a stray specimen or two, I endeavour to add them to my little collection."

"I think I'll go to bed," said Marston.

"Sleep seems to suddenly overpower *me*," said I.

"Well, gentlemen; well, by all means; you sleep together. Another glass of Benedictine? No! Well, good night, and pleasant waking," and, puffing at his pipe, he showed us to the door of our chamber. In a trice Marston had it shut, and turned to me with terror in his eyes.

"The man is a murderer!" said he.

"And we are his victims!" said I.

We did not sleep a wink that night.

Marston dragged his blankets to the door, and I sat in a chair in order to watch the window. I know not what ghastly stories we did not whisper one to the other. I know not what grisly spectres we did not conjure up for our mutual terrifying. When morning broke, it found us exhausted, pale; and sleepless, but alive.

"I will raise the lid of that Asian Mystery or die!" cried Marston.

"In heaven's name," l said, collecting my shuddering limbs together, "let us quickly make an end of suspense."

Together we advanced into the little parlour. Grim and hideous in the grey light of morning was the Oblong Box, and beside it crouched the form of our mysterious host.

At our approach he roused himself. His face was ghastly pale, and tears hung upon his eyelids

"See!" he cried, with a laugh which agony rendered almost a sob— "see that which I keep in this accursed chest!—"

And he flung wide the lid.

THE PLEA of insanity set up by the skilful I—a—d failed. The wretched man was condemned on the 21st of February, and executed eight days afterwards.

The police records of Victoria furnish the fitting key to the— Oblong Box.

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4: The Supernatural Agent
Silas Snell

Edward Dyson, 1865–1931
Punch (Melbourne) 23 July 1914

One of a series os short stories by Dyson under the general heading "Miss Trigg, Domestic" published in the Melbourne Punch *during 1914.*

WE DISCOVER MISS TRIGG with her ear at the keyhole of her mistress's "stoodio."

The situation is not unique. Domestics have been discovered in a like position earlier in history. It is on record. In fact, there is a widespread belief among civilised peoples that this is an ingrained habit and custom with domestics, and one no kindness and no form of drastic treatment will eradicate.

Madame Annette Holmes, clairvoyant, futurist, and expounder of the human palm, was with a client, and Miss Minnie Trigg was piecing up a good general knowledge of that client's affairs.

It is worth recording that the clients of futurists and fortune-tellers of all sorts and complexions, gipsies or Albinos, go to these people and pay them their prices to be told about their own affairs, and invariably stay to tell much more than they are told.

In fact, the chief feature of the art of the fortune-teller is the ability to make the sitter tell the things she expects to be told. A stranger entering the dim, dusty parlor of a modern witch masquerading in a wig devised from the tail of a black horse, and a fresh-laid walnut complexion, presents a problem to the operative— she must be made to talk, for the great revealer can only reveal to the client what the client has already revealed to her.

Madame Annette Holmes was past-mistress m the delicate business of drawing-out a caller. She had an ingratiating and sympathetic manner, she had tact, patience, discernment, and a wide knowledge of woman-nature, which is very like human nature in many respects.

Madame was gently drawing-out the small, fair client, who had already become tearful and confidential. Presently. Madame would enter into a perfunctory kind of trance, communicate with an affinity or two in Spookland, and reveal to the fair and ingenious client sundry things the distressed little lady had herself revealed to Madame. The revelation would be touched up and given an air of spectral versimilitude by reason of certain astute deductions, all Madame's own, and the silly little lady with the fluffy, golden hair and the wide-open, absurd, childish eyes, would go away amazed at the superhuman wisdom of the medium.

Meanwhile Miss Minnie Trigg, at the keyhole, was taking in all the material facts of the case, and coming to conclusions even more exact and satisfactory than tnose of Madame.

Minnie had caught a glimpse of this particular client at a former "sitting," and her sentimental interests had been violently aroused. The young lady was very young, and looked younger. She was slim and pretty, her grey eyes had an infantile simplicity, and she wore a wedding ring.

It was Madame's policy to advise her patrons to come again. Every call meant a fee, and one must live. The necessity of living is apparently as strong in a spiritualistic medium who recognises the futility of this existence as it is in the most sceptical materialist of the bunch.

The grey-eyed client came again, and apparently her sorrows were accumulating. Now and again Minnie's tears splashed on the linoleum as she bent with her dexter ear glued to the keyhole, and there they might have been discovered, eloquent evidence of Miss Trigg's transgression, had Madame been an accurate observer of trifles.

"Pore little beggar!" Minnie said, addressing her best friend, Miss 'Arriet Brown ; "she's worryin' 'erself into her grave, an' she: orter be sittin' in 'her mother's lap, bein' coaxed an' petted instead iv tearin' her 'eart out over a 'ulkin' 'usb'and."

"All 'usbands is brutes," said Miss Brown dully, but oracularly.

"They are," Minnie admitted, "an' has t' be treated as such. But we pore women gets tied to 'em, an' it's up to us t' make the best iv a bad job."

"The better yeh do fer 'em the worse they get," murmured 'Arriet, with the conviction of a servant with a wide range of experience.

"Mostly because their wives dunno how to 'andle them," Minnie persisted. "There's silly bits iv girls what would scream themselves into a fit if put in the same room with a rat, an' what wouldn't fer their lives go into the same cage with a fat, ole, flat-footed, 'armless lion, will marry a man without a wink or a tremor, an' start out t' face life with him, ez ignorant of the ways iv the hanimal ez a toothless babby. Naturally, they butt up against trouble in next to no time. They find their bloomin' 'ero iv romance is a greedy slob, sullish. hard, an' given t' ways iv wickedness, not 't' mention whisky; an' then they're beat— they ain't got no more idea what t' do than if they was turned in t' train a wild helephant."

"There ain't nothink to do," said 'Ariet, with the air of one resigned to the worst, "but t' 'it 'im on the 'ead with a cruet now an' agin! That's what the missus does 'ere."

"G-arrt ! " snorted Minnie, "There's ways iv 'andlin' tihe worst iv them. I've seen a reg'lar tough brought down be a bit iv a woman what had sav-ee, and

fair taught t' eat out of her 'and. That's what this little girl orter 'ave bin taught afore she married. Then she wouldn't be 'elpless ez a sick kitten when her John plays it up a bit in the bars, or takes a taxi load iv pink barmaid fer an airin' in the cool iv the evenin' "

"Goes orn, does he?"

"Somethin' iv that like. An' she's askin' Madame' t' use her influence with the ghosts t' find out his little games an' track him down. Fat lot o' good the ghosts'll do 'er. I'm done with spirits. They're a most unrelierable lot. What this little girl's naughty boy wants is fer someone big ez a house t' get to him with a clo's-prop. There orter be a public persecuter t' deal it out to evil disposed 'usbands that way.

"No court bizness," Minnie continued, "no tales in the paper; jist a quiet little investigation, an' then the public persecutor t' take John into the stable, an' dust his bones with a yard iv hardwood till he promises faithful on his oath never t' do so no more. But more'n everythink else, young, girls should be taught what 'usbands is likely t' be like. All girls can't go into service an' learn fer theirselves, so there should be what they call a preparrotary school for girls what's about t' marry, where cute old married women an' servant girls like me, what's seen a thing or two, could learn 'em all about 'usbands, an' 'ow t' 'andle them.

"Me 'eart fair cracks 'earin iv this poor little woman's troubles, an' she pretty enough fer any sensible bloke t' want t' tend her close an' careful all his life. Madame don't seen t' mind it much. She's used to 'em. Besides, she ain't romantic like me. I cry in bed over the pore girl."

"Ain't it lovely, cryin' in bed?" said Arriet.

The fair little lady with the grey, infantile eyes made several calls upon Madame, at all of which Miinnie was present in the spirit, so to speak, though unavoidably detained on the other side of the door.

"I've found out all about 'er," Minnie told Miss Brown. " 'Er name's Clarice. I know where she lives, an' I'm v ateliin' over 'er."

" 'Ow?" asked the phlegmatic 'Arriet.

"I'm her guardyin angel. But' I dunno what t' do fer 'er. I've seen 'i n, too. Saw 'im an' 'er together in the garding day afore yesterday. He ain't bad lookin', an' he's quite young hisself. If he had that public persecutor what I was talkin about t' give him a good hidin' every first Chewsdee in the month for a year 'r so, he might be a all-right John. What's more, he seemed fond iv 'er, but she was lookin' very broken spirited. I never wanted t' be a mother to no one so much in all my life." Minnie wiped a moist eve

'"Gaar-rn!" said 'Arriet heavily. "You mother to a grown-up? Why, you ain't much more'n a kid yerself."

"Some is born mothers," said Minnie. "I'm one iv that sort."

IT WAS three days after this that Madame Holmes fell ill. She had an attack of an old complaint, and was forced to take to her bed.

"I was to get two guineas to run a gipsy's tent at a big charity garden party at Whitwold to-morrow," she said to Minnie. "Do you think you could manage it?"

"Me, a gipsy's tent?" gasped Minnie. "Why, I dunno what it is."

Madame Annette explained. "They rig up a tent in the grounds, and you are supposed to be a gipsy living in it. The guests come to you to have their hands read, and you tell them anything that comes into your head. Surely you know enough to manage that after all you have seen here?"

"Oh, I could do that all right," said Minnie confidently.

"Then you go. I'll give you half the fee. There's a costume here will suit you. Put on the black wig, brown your skin a bit with Condy's, and you'll have a good time."

Minnie appeared at the Whitwold garden party in the guise of a wicked gipsy, and was the most popular item. In the course of three hours she filled a small sand bucket with the silver with which her laughing clients crossed her palm. Her earnings, however, went to charity.

Miss Trigg looked the part. She was an impudent and vivacious gipsy maiden, resembling a madder Carmen, and the fortunes she told were sometimes broadly comic, sometimes extravagantly melodramatic.

When she had been driving a thriving business for about two hours, a young girl, who had been busying herself cajoling clients to the tent, came, towing a tall, dark-eyed, clean-shaven man of about twenty-six.

"You must, Mr. Clement," she said. "Everybody's doing it. Read his palm, Gipsy, and charge him five shillings for giving me so much trouble."

Minnie looked the newcomer over, and her heart, nearly "jumped the gate," as she put it in a subsequent explanation of events.

" 'Tis well you came," she said in sepulchral tones.

The man laughed. "Came?" he said, "I've been dragged. I'm an unwilling agent, and now I'm to be robbed."

"Trifle not with the mysteries," warned Minnie, using Madame's pet phrase.

"The mysteries? Rubbish! I know more of my fate and fortune than all. tlie sages, witches and seers on earth, and all the spooks above can ever tell me. But here you are. Have a shot."

Minnie took Mr. Clement's palm, and examined it closely, following line by line with a trembling finger.

"There's one thing you. don't know," she said; "you're smashin' up your own 'appiness."

The young girl laughed. "Be hard on him," she said."I'll hunt up some, more."

"What the deuce do you mean by that?" said the man somewhat coldly, looking into Minnie's cold eye.

"I mean," said the mock Gipsy, "that you dunno what a fool you're makin' of yourself, much as you think "you know, Mr. Clever'ead, an' I'm dead serious when I say it. There's a dark woman here, and here she is again, and here, and here!" She stabbed his palm in several places. "An' she's no business here. Wherever she crops up in your 'and she means mischiff."

"A dark woman? What the deuce do you mean?" Mr. Clement was no longer jocular.

"Do you wanter know? Well she's dark, she has blue eyes, she is a little older than you, she knows more of the world than you, she's wrecked other lives." Minnie had adopted Madame's manner and Madame's language. "She will wreck your life if you go on. And there is another here whose happiness she is crushing out." (The Gipsy peered closer.) "A fair child. 'Yes, a mere child in heart. She has grey eyes, she has a sweet spirit, but her heart bleeds— she suffers. She suspects— nay, she knows! Her spies follow you. You are watched. Everything is known. The end is near, and if it comes the crash will wreck your life. The fair girl will die. The dark woman—let me see, let me see. She goes across the water. You are alone."

Clement, snatched his hand away. "What infernal rot is this ?" he said, but his face was pale.

"Gimme yer 'and," said Miss Trigg, " 'n' I'll tell yell m'ore. Let me look closer, let me think, 'n' I'll tell yeh everythin'. You're married. The fair girl's your wife. She loved you, but her poor heart is bein' eaten out."

Again he snatched his hand away "You're an insolent cat," he said. "You have been prying into my affairs."

"Never saw yeh before in all my life," said Minnie, solemnly. "Never wanter see yeh again; but that fair girl seems worth savin', 'n' there's time. It's not too late. She knows you. She's had you watched. She means to break from you; but she loves you, and it's not too late."

"It's not true," he said. "It's not true."

"Every word is true," said the gipsy. "I have fooled with the others, but there's tragedy in your palm. Beware!"

It was three weeks later that. Minnie confided the sequel to her friend, 'Arriet Brown.

"She's called on Madame agin t'day," she said. "I mean the pretty, fair woman with the baby eyes. She was ez appy ez a blessed lark, 'n' a blessed lark it was. It seems 'er 'usband 'ad found out she'd got privit detectives on his track; 'n' he'd confessed everythin', 'n' begged her t' forgive 'im, 'n' promised t' be a good, true 'usband fer ever 'n' ever, amen."

" 'N' she's forgive 'im, iv course," said 'Arriet. "They alwiz do."

"Yes; but he's never t' see the dark woman no more, 'n' it seems how the truth was revealed to 'im be soopernatural agency."

"Soopernatural hagency— what's that?"

"By way iv the spirits. That's what he told his wife, and that's what she told Madame; but I happen t' know a thing or two myself."

"Which is what?"

"Well, *I* was the soopernatural agent."

"Ah, garn! How yeh talk."

"I was. Wasn't I the gipsy what read his palm, 'n' wasn't he Mr. Clement, the bloke whose fortune I told at the Whitwold garding party?"

"My word," gasped 'Arriet, "you are a one!"

5: A Property Deal

(Which is nevertheless a story of love and cunning, with casual goblins thrown in.)

Dy Edwardson

Edward Dyson, 1865–1931

Punch (Melbourne) 13 Aug 1914

FRANK WRILE was twenty-six, and lived for the moment; Mr. Henry Strand was sixty two, and gave much consideration to the morrow. A man looks to the future when he hasn't any.

Frank Wrile's vast unconcern with regard to the days to come, rainy or otherwise, gave Mr. Henry Strand no little concern. Cause why? Frank Wriles was doing his utmost to engage himself to Mr. Strand's daughter, Ada, and Ada seemed rather inclined to be an aider and abettor of the improvident Mr. Wriles.

True, the young man was fairly well off. He had an income of at least £1,100 a year; but it was derived from mining stock, and as a man of the world, and one who had seen many shifts and changes of fortune, Mr. Strand had no great faith in the lasting qualities of an income derived from mining stock.

The late lamented James Wriles, father of the said Henry Wriles, having certain definite ideas of his son's irresponsiblity, and his frivolous methods of finance, and great faith in the future of the New Big Hills Mining Company's property, had left Henry the income from the Big Hills shares; but had thoughtfully deprived him of the power to sell, so that Henry's fortune was irretrievably bound up with the fortune of the New Big Hills Mine, and Mr. Strand, affectionate father of Ada Strand, thought the Big Hills mine might be worked out one of these days.

Fathers of sixty-two will discover a certain amount of sound sense in the reluctance of Henry Strand to hand his daughter over to Mr. Frank Wrile; sons of wenty-six will think him a nervous old curmudgeon.

"I should not mind, my dear," said Mr. Strand to Miss Strand, "if the boy showed any ability."

"Oh, pa, he waltzes lovely."

"Confound it, Ada, do you want to be dependent for a crust on a confounded dancing master?"

"He's a good rider, too. And I'm sure no one can handle motor better than Frank."

"To be sure, if the worst comes, he may fend off starvation as a steeplechase jockey, till he breaks his precious neck over a stone wall; or he may provide you with bread and treacle as a chauffeur at £3 a week, till he runs his singularly empty head against a telegraph post, as he nearly ran mine a week ago No, my dear, that young fellow will habe to show me there's

something more in him that the capabilities of a third-class dancing m!aster and a fifth-class chauffeur— labelled dangerous— before I can willingly trust your future into his hands.''

"Oh, bother my future!"

"Better bother your future than have your future bother you; and that's what I foresee. Has the boy ever earned a penny in his life? Let him prove to me that he can earn, say, a couple of hundred pounds off his own bat, and I may change my mind."

When Ada put her parent's views before Frank that cheerful young gentleman was little disturbed.

"This comes of letting your old people go to picture shows," he said. "They have the old such romantic notions. I've seen half-a-dozen films lately in which Her pa wanted him to sail in, and prove his powers as a money-maker before handing out the usual formula— 'Bless you, my children.' If I had my way no one over fifty would be admitted to picture shows. Fortunately, it doesn't matter much in this case— we shall just have to save pa the wear and tear of giving consent and bestowing blessings."

"How, dear ?."

"By dispensing with non-essentials. By marrying without."

"Oh, no, no, no,, no ! You mustn't think of it. I won't. I won't."

And she wouldn't. Frank was compelled to admit after a fortnight's trial that she really wouldn't.

"Very well," said Mr. Frank Wrile, "I'll humour the old boy. I'll earn a hundred. I don't know just how just yet; but give a man air, allow my mind elbow room, I'm settling back to think."

Mr. Strand fixed the sum at £400 when Ada (and abettor) brought the parties together to arrive at a definite understanding.

"Make £400, make it how you like, by business, speculation, work, any way you please, only show me it's your own doing, and I'll probably relent. Meanwhile you and my daughter are mere acquaintances."

"Of course it's all frantically absurd and wildly unreasonable," said Frank. "Why should I be set to earn money when I've got a lot of Johnnies busy making it for me? But if you insist, of course, I'll get this four hundred. It'll be useful, I dare say— four hundred often is— and I must have Ada anyhow.''

So Frank took elbow-room for his giant intellect, and plunged into the mysteries of finance, high and low, He thought of taking a job as a chauffeur, but found it would take him at least 20 years to earn the money stipulated. Then he bought a motor for £300, and tried to sell it to a Hebrew blind in one eye for £500. But, as I have said, the Hebrew gentleman was only blind in one

eye, and eventually he got the motor for £250. This left Frank £50 to the bad. He did not mention that transaction to Mr. Strand.

"It wouldn't interest the old fellow," he said.

"But it proves you can sell motor-cars, doesn't it?" said Ada.

ABOUT A WEEK after this the rumour that "Arcadia" was haunted began to get about the suburb. People were talking of the wraith that had been seen through the front window by three responsible citizens, one a J .P., and quite a dozen witnesses could be found who had heard "The Noises."

"The Noises" were the chief items in the haunting of "Arcadia" villa. The presiding ghost or ghosts were featuring noises— peculiar, long, low, dismal noises, with here and there a distinguishable word, but no intelligible sentence. It was as if a choking spook were trying to voice its agony, and give the assassin away.

Now, "Arcadia" was owned by Mr. Henry Strand, and Mr. Strand had been drawing £2:5:0 a week rent for years. The former tenant had not complained of ghosts, and suspicion had attached itself to the place only during the period in which the villa was uninhabited. Mr. Strand himself had heard "The Noises.'' Peeping through the front window at night, he had seen in the Haunted Bedroom something he could not quite explain— the passing of lone, pale, trailing presence in the darkness, a Something the vulgar ahd superstitious might easily have mistaken for a true ghost.

Mr. Strand was reluctantly compelled to reduce his rent to £1:15:0 to accommodate a bold person who declared he cared little for man or devil. The new tenant moved in on Monday. He moved out on Friday.

"Like your infernal impudence, sir," he said to Strand, "begulin' a nan's family into a dashed hotbed of blasted spooks. Had my three daughters in hysterics for three nights running with your beggaring ghosts dripping moisture and exuding germs all over the place, and last night my wife had a fit across my chest in bed, sir, and, let me tell you, my wife weighs 17 stone, sir!"

"I'm sorry— I'm very sorry," replied Straad; "but you don't imagine for one moment I keen these ghosts, or goblins, or what the deuce ever they are, about the place for my amusement."

"I don't care a dump what you keep them for if you'll only keep 'em to yourself, sir. Dashed, damp, nasty things trailing over a man's face in his sleep. Horrible dying noises round one place, piling one's daughters in heaps of hysterics. Demmed if I haven't half a mind to sue you for damages, sir."

That tenant left; but before going he allowed himself to be interviewed by a newspaper man, and the tale he told fixed "Arcadia's" reputation as a haunted home.

The tenant had heard strange noises at night. An occasional word like "Blood," or "Death," or "Help" was distinguishable, but the sentence was-smothered in a horrible, gurgling cry. The tenant's wife had heard this, so had the tenant's daughters. Furthermore, the tenant and the tenant's wife had been awakened in the dark, early and awful hours by the trailing of dank draperies across their faces, and had seen a sort of pale, ghostly shapelessness disappear in the darkness.

"Arcadia" was suddenly notorious. People flocked from adjoining suburbs to look at the haunted house. They augmented the crowds of local residents who gathered in the street at night and watched at a respectful distance in a state of delirious tremor, expecting ghostly manifestations. In any such crowd you might easily have found a score ready to swear they had seen a ghost, and had heard its blood-curdling maunderings.

Once when a party of three ventured to the window of the Haunted Bedroom they actually saw the pale shapeliness, and heard "The Noises." They fled pell-mell, and two rushing over the third, who had fallen in the gateway, trod, on him so severely that two ribs were broken, and his nose, was never again the ornamental organ it had been.

When the house had been empty eight weeks, Henry Strand was a willing listener to a city agent who called with talk of a buyer. Bellweather, the proposed buyer, was a man interested in psychological research. He was buying solely because he desired to possess a ghost, and to be in a position to study ghostly habits and customs at first hand.

Naturally Mr. Strand did not stick out for a fancy price. He was glad to have the haunted villa off his hands, and actually accepted £1,075. Bellweather, the new resident, shifted into "Arcadia"— a tall, dark gentleman in dingy black, who had the quaint similarity to an improvident undertaker that seems to go with specialists of the sort. Within a week he expressed himself a. bitterly disappointed man.

"You have deceived me," he said. "You have perpetrated an imposition— a fraud. There is no ghost in 'Arcadia'. I don't believe there ever was a ghost."

"Well, Mrs. Strand mildly remonstrated. "I did not really sell you a ghost. I did not guarantee a ghost."

"Nevertheless, you knew I was buying this place on a definite understanding that a ghost went with it. I have been deceived, defrauded. I shall write to the papers!"

Bellweather did write to the papers, making an elaborate'exposure of r'he fatuous story of the alleged ghosts at "Arcadia". He even scoffed at "The Noises." There were no more noises than the wind made in a couple; of

peculiarly constructed drain pipes, and the only trailing draperies that crossed his face were casual cool draughts from an ill-placed ventilator.

"Arcadia's" reputation fled as quickly as it had been raised. Within two months its condition in the real-estate market: wan normal again, and a good, commonplace tenant who had succeeded Bellweather was paying two pounds a week.

Then Frank Wrile made a special business mil on Mr Strand.

"I want to fix the date of my marriage with Ada," he said, "and arrange the little preliminaries "

"Yes," replied Mr. Strand with a trace of sarcasm. "You have made that £400, of course."

"Don't let us talk about it, Mr. Strand. A mere trifle."

"Oh, but we shall talk about it. Four hundred, I said."

"So you did. I almost wish you had made it £4,000. I should have been so much the better off."

"Do you mean to tell me you have made £400?"

"I do. I made it in one single deal. I could grin at the importance you business men attach to the simple gift of money-making."

"What was the deal?"

"A house and land transaction. I bought the villa, 'Arcadia,' for £1,075. I have been offered £1,500 for it."

"You bought 'Arcadia'?"

"Yes, with a little assistance from one of the financial institutions. However, the profit is all mine—£425."

"I want proof of this. Proof, too, that there is a buyer at £1,500."

Frank furnished the necessary proofs, and Mr. Strand admitted— "You seem to have scored. I will take one week for meditation and prayer before going further."

FRANK showed Ada how he had managed it all.

"Arcadia" was next to his own house. With the aid of a length of garden hose tucked into a ventilator, and used as a talking-tube, he had simulated "The Noises." With the assistance of a ladder and a roof-light he had gained the ceiling, and worked the piece of cheese-cloth that served as a spectre through a hole dug behind a cornice in the ceiling. Bellweather was merely a hired assistant in the scheme.

"To make a pile in the real estate market you just knock down values and buy, then boost up values and sell," he said. "That's what I did with 'Arcadia." The ghost dodge was the easiest way to bring down the price. I'll work the idea

on big lines if, as your father seems to think probable, I'm ever compelled to earn a crust."

Ada did not seem to like the idea too well. She told pa all about it.

When Frank called for a definite reply, Mr. Strand had it ready for him.

"There's the door, young man," he said. "My daughter is going abroad for a year. She does not want to see you again."

"But your promise," wailed Frank. "I've made the four hundred."

"Oh, dear, no. You see, I intended giving that villa, 'Arcadia,' as a wedding present to my daughter, so that instead of making £425 you would, if you married Ada, be losing £1,075, the price you gave for it. I could never entrust my daughter's future to such a bungler. Good day!"

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6: The Spectre Bridegroom

*A Traveler's Tale**

Washington Irving

1783-1859

The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent, 10 Nov 1819

** The erudite reader, well versed in good-for-nothing lore, will perceive that the above Tale must have been suggested to the old Swiss by a little French anecdote of a circumstance said to have taken place at Paris.*

"He that supper for is dight,
He lyes full cold, I trow, this night!
Yestreen to chamber I him led,
This night Gray-steel has made his bed!"
—Sir Eger, Sir Grahame and Sir Gray-steel

ON THE SUMMIT of one of the heights of the Odenwald, a wild and romantic tract of Upper Germany that lies not far from the confluence of the Main and the Rhine, there stood, many, many years since, the Castle of the Baron Von Landshort. It is now quite fallen to decay, and almost buried among beech trees and dark firs; above which, however, its old watch-tower may still be seen struggling, like the former possessor I have mentioned, to carry a high head, and look down upon a neighboring country.

The Baron was a dry branch of the great family of Katzenellenbogen,* and inherited the relics of the property and all the pride of his ancestors. Though the warlike disposition of his predecessors had much impaired the family possessions, yet the Baron still endeavored to keep up some show of former state. The times were peaceable, and the German nobles, in general, had abandoned their inconvenient old castles, perched like eagles' nests among the mountains, and had built more convenient residences in the valleys; still the Baron remained proudly drawn up in his little fortress, cherishing with hereditary inveteracy all the old family feuds; so that he was on ill terms with some of his nearest neighbors, on account of disputes that had happened between their great-great-grandfathers.

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** I.e., Cat's Elbow— the name of a family of those parts, very powerful in former times. The appellation, we are told, was given in compliment to a peerless dame of the family, celebrated for a fine arm.*

The Baron had but one child, a daughter; but Nature, when she grants but one child, always compensates by making it a prodigy; and so it was with the daughter of the Baron. All the nurses, gossips, and country cousins, assured

her father that she had not her equal for beauty in all Germany; and who should know better than they? She had, moreover, been brought up with great care, under the superintendence of two maiden aunts, who had spent some years of their early life at one of the little German courts, and were skilled in all the branches of knowledge necessary to the education of a fine lady. Under their instructions, she became a miracle of accomplishments. By the time she was eighteen she could embroider to admiration, and had worked whole histories of the saints in tapestry with such strength of expression in their countenances that they looked like so many souls in purgatory. She could read without great difficulty, and had spelled her way through several church legends, and almost all the chivalric wonders of the Heldenbuch. She had even made considerable proficiency in writing, could sign her own name without missing a letter, and so legibly that her aunts could read it without spectacles. She excelled in making little good-for-nothing lady-like knickknacks of all kinds; was versed in the most abstruse dancing of the day; played a number of airs on the harp and guitar; and knew all the tender ballads of the Minnie-lieders by heart.

Her aunts, too, having been great flirts and coquettes in their younger days, were admirably calculated to be vigilant guardians and strict censors of the conduct of their niece; for there is no duenna so rigidly prudent, and inexorably decorous, as a superannuated coquette. She was rarely suffered out of their sight; never went beyond the domains of the castle, unless well attended, or, rather, well watched; had continual lectures read to her about strict decorum and implicit obedience; and, as to the men— *pah*! she was taught to hold them at such distance and distrust that, unless properly authorized, she would not have cast a glance upon the handsomest cavalier in the world— no, not if he were even dying at her feet.

The good effects of this system were wonderfully apparent. The young lady was a pattern of docility and correctness. While others were wasting their sweetness in the glare of the world, and liable to be plucked and thrown aside by every hand, she was coyly blooming into fresh and lovely womanhood under the protection of those immaculate spinsters, like a rose-bud blushing forth among guardian thorns. Her aunts looked upon her with pride and exultation, and vaunted that though all the other young ladies in the world might go astray, yet, thank Heaven, nothing of the kind could happen to the heiress of Katzenellenbogen.

But however scantily the Baron Von Landshort might be provided with children, his household was by no means a small one, for Providence had enriched him with abundance of poor relations. They, one and all, possessed the affectionate disposition common to humble relatives; were wonderfully

attached to the Baron, and took every possible occasion to come in swarms and enliven the castle. All family festivals were commemorated by these good people at the Baron's expense; and when they were filled with good cheer, they would declare that there was nothing on earth so delightful as these family meetings, these jubilees of the heart.

The Baron, though a small man, had a large soul, and it swelled with satisfaction at the consciousness of being the greatest man in the little world about him. He loved to tell long stories about the stark old warriors whose portraits looked grimly down from the walls around, and he found no listeners equal to those who fed at his expense. He was much given to the marvelous, and a firm believer in all those supernatural tales with which every mountain and valley in Germany abounds. The faith of his guests even exceeded his own: they listened to every tale of wonder with open eyes and mouth, and never failed to be astonished, even though repeated for the hundredth time. Thus lived the Baron Von Landshort, the oracle of his table, the absolute monarch of his little territory, and happy, above all things, in the persuasion that he was the wisest man of the age.

At the time of which my story treats there was a great family gathering at the castle, on an affair of the utmost importance: it was to receive the destined bridegroom of the Baron's daughter. A negotiation had been carried on between the father and an old nobleman of Bavaria, to unite the dignity of their houses by the marriage of their children. The preliminaries had been conducted with proper punctilio. The young people were betrothed without seeing each other, and the time was appointed for the marriage ceremony. The young Count Von Altenburg had been recalled from the army for the purpose, and was actually on his way to the Baron's to receive his bride. Missives had even been received from him, from Wurtzburg, where he was accidentally detained, mentioning the day and hour when he might be expected to arrive.

The castle was in a tumult of preparation to give him a suitable welcome. The fair bride had been decked out with uncommon care. The two aunts had superintended her toilet, and quarreled the whole morning about every article of her dress. The young lady had taken advantage of their contest to follow the bent of her own taste; and fortunately it was a good one. She looked as lovely as youthful bridegroom could desire; and the flutter of expectation heightened the lustre of her charms.

The suffusions that mantled her face and neck, the gentle heaving of the bosom, the eye now and then lost in reverie, all betrayed the soft tumult that was going on in her little heart. The aunts were continually hovering around her; for maiden aunts are apt to take great interest in affairs of this nature:

they were giving her a world of staid counsel how to deport herself, what to say, and in what manner to receive the expected lover.

The Baron was no less busied in preparations. He had, in truth, nothing exactly to do; but he was naturally a fuming, bustling little man, and could not remain passive when all the world was in a hurry. He worried from top to bottom of the castle, with an air of infinite anxiety; he continually called the servants from their work to exhort them to be diligent, and buzzed about every hall and chamber, as idly, restless, and importunate as a bluebottle fly of a warm summer's day.

In the meantime, the fatted calf had been killed; the forests had rung with the clamor of the huntsmen; the kitchen was crowded with good cheer; the cellars had yielded up whole oceans of *Rhein-wein* and *Ferne-wein*, and even the great Heidelberg Tun had been laid under contribution. Everything was ready to receive the distinguished guest with *Saus and Braus* in the true spirit of German hospitality— but the guest delayed to make his appearance. Hour rolled after hour. The sun that had poured his downward rays upon the rich forests of the Odenwald, now just gleamed along the summits of the mountains. The Baron mounted the highest tower, and strained his eyes in hopes of catching a distant sight of the Count and his attendants. Once he thought he beheld them; the sound of horns came floating from the valley, prolonged by the mountain echoes: a number of horsemen were seen far below, slowly advancing along the road; but when they had nearly reached the foot of the mountain they suddenly struck off in a different direction. The last ray of sunshine departed— the boats began to flit by in the twilight— the road grew dimmer and dimmer to the view; and nothing appeared stirring in it but now and then a peasant lagging homeward from his labor.

While the old castle of Landshort was in this state of perplexity, a very interesting scene was transacting in a different part of the Odenwald.

The young Count Von Altenburg was tranquilly pursuing his route in that sober jog-trot way in which a man travels toward matrimony when his friends have taken all the trouble and uncertainty of courtship off his hands, and a bride is waiting for him, as certainly as a dinner, at the end of his journey. He had encountered at Wurtzburg a youthful companion in arms, with whom he had seen some service on the frontiers: Herman Von Starkenfaust, one of the stoutest hands and worthiest hearts of German chivalry, who was now returning from the army. His father's castle was not far distant from the old fortress of Landshort, although a hereditary feud rendered the families hostile and strangers to each other.

In the warm-hearted moment of recognition, the young friends related all their past adventures and fortunes, and the Count gave the whole history of

his intended nuptials with a young lady whom he had never seen, but of whose charms he had received the most enrapturing descriptions.

As the route of the friends lay in the same direction, they agreed to perform the rest of their journey together; and, that they might do it more leisurely, set off from Wurtzburg at an early hour, the Count having given directions for his retinue to follow and overtake him.

They beguiled their wayfaring with recollections of their military scenes and adventures; but the Count was apt to be a little tedious, now and then, about the reputed charms of his bride, and the felicity that awaited him.

In this way they had entered among the mountains of the Odenwald, and were traversing one of its most lonely and thickly wooded passes. It is well known that the forests of Germany have always been as much infested with robbers as its castles by spectres; and, at this time, the former were particularly numerous, from the hordes of disbanded soldiers wandering about the country. It will not appear extraordinary, therefore, that the cavaliers were attacked by a gang of these stragglers in the midst of the forest. They defended themselves with bravery, but were nearly overpowered when the Count's retinue arrived to their assistance. At sight of them the robbers fled, but not until the Count had received a mortal wound. He was slowly and carefully conveyed back to the city of Wurtzburg, and a friar summoned from a neighboring convent, who was famous for his skill in administering to both soul and body. But half of his skill was superfluous; the moments of the unfortunate Count were numbered.

With his dying breath he entreated his friend to repair instantly to the castle of Landshort, and explain the fatal cause of his not keeping his appointment with his bride. Though not the most ardent of lovers, he was one of the most punctilious of men, and appeared earnestly solicitous that this mission should be speedily and courteously executed. "Unless this is done," said he, "I shall not sleep quietly in my grave!" He repeated these last words with peculiar solemnity. A request, at a moment so impressive, admitted no hesitation. Starkenfaust endeavored to soothe him to calmness; promised faithfully to execute his wish, and gave him his hand in solemn pledge. The dying man pressed it in acknowledgment, but soon lapsed into delirium— raved about his bride— his engagements— his plighted word; ordered his horse, that he might ride to the castle of Landshort, and expired in the fancied act of vaulting into the saddle.

Starkenfaust bestowed a sigh and a soldier's tear on the untimely fate of his comrade; and then pondered on the awkward mission he had undertaken. His heart was heavy, and his head perplexed; for he was to present himself an unbidden guest among hostile people, and to damp their festivity with tidings

fatal to their hopes. Still there were certain whisperings of curiosity in his bosom to see this far-famed beauty of Katzenellenbogen so cautiously shut up from the world; for he was a passionate admirer of the sex, and there was a dash of eccentricity and enterprise in his character that made him fond of all singular adventure.

Previous to his departure, he made all due arrangements with the holy fraternity of the convent for the funeral solemnities of his friend, who was to be buried in the cathedral of Wurtzburg, near some of his illustrious relatives; and the mourning retinue of the Count took charge of his remains.

It is now high time that we should return to the ancient family of Katzenellenbogen, who were impatient for their guest, and still more for their dinner; and to the worthy little Baron, whom we left airing himself on the watch-tower.

Night closed in, but still no guest arrived. The Baron descended from the tower in despair. The banquet, which had been delayed from hour to hour, could no longer be postponed. The meats were already overdone, the cook in an agony, and the whole household had the look of a garrison that had been reduced by famine. The Baron was obliged reluctantly to give orders for the feast without the presence of the guest. All were seated at table, and just on the point of commencing, when the sound of a horn from without the gate gave notice of the approach of a stranger. Another long blast filled the old courts of the castle with its echoes, and was answered by the warder from the walls. The Baron hastened to receive his future son-in-law.

The drawbridge had been let down, and the stranger was before the gate. He was a tall gallant cavalier, mounted on a black steed. His countenance was pale, but he had a beaming, romantic eye, and an air of stately melancholy. The Baron was a little mortified that he should have come in this simple, solitary style. His dignity for a moment was ruffled, and he felt disposed to consider it a want of proper respect for the important occasion, and the important family with which he was to be connected. He pacified himself, however, with the conclusion that it must have been youthful impatience which had induced him thus to spur on sooner than his attendants.

"I am sorry," said the stranger, "to break in upon you thus unseasonably—"

Here the Baron interrupted him with a world of compliments and greetings; for, to tell the truth, he prided himself upon his courtesy and his eloquence. The stranger attempted, once or twice, to stem the torrent of words, but in vain; so he bowed his head and suffered it to flow on. By the time the Baron had come to a pause they had reached the inner court of the castle; and the stranger was again about to speak, when he was once more interrupted by the appearance of the female part of the family, leading forth

the shrinking and blushing bride. He gazed on her for a moment as one entranced; it seemed as if his whole soul beamed forth in the gaze, and rested upon that lovely form. One of the maiden aunts whispered something in her ear; she made an effort to speak; her moist blue eye was timidly raised, gave a shy glance of inquiry on the stranger, and was cast again to the ground. The words died away; but there was a sweet smile playing about her lips, and a soft dimpling of the cheek, that showed her glance had not been unsatisfactory. It was impossible for a girl of the fond age of eighteen, highly predisposed for love and matrimony, not to be pleased with so gallant a cavalier.

The late hour at which the guest had arrived left no time for parley. The Baron was peremptory, and deferred all particular conversation until the morning, and led the way to the untasted banquet.

It was served up in the great hall of the castle. Around the walls hung the hard-favored portraits of the heroes of the house of Katzenellenbogen, and the trophies which they had gained in the field and in the chase. Hacked corselets, splintered jousting spears, and tattered banners, were mingled with the spoils of sylvan warfare: the jaws of the wolf, and the tusks of the boar, grinned horribly among crossbows and battle-axes, and a huge pair of antlers branched immediately over the head of the youthful bridegroom.

The cavalier took but little notice of the company or the entertainment. He scarcely tasted the banquet, but seemed absorbed in admiration of his bride. He conversed in a low tone, that could not be overheard— for the language of love is never loud; but where is the female ear so dull that it can not catch the softest whisper of the lover? There was a mingled tenderness and gravity in his manner that appeared to have a powerful effect upon the young lady. Her color came and went, as she listened with deep attention. Now and then she made some blushing reply, and when his eye was turned away she would steal a sidelong glance at his romantic countenance, and heave a gentle sigh of tender happiness. It was evident that the young couple were completely enamored. The aunts, who were deeply versed in the mysteries of the heart, declared that they had fallen in love with each other at first sight.

The feast went on merrily, or at least noisily, for the guests were all blessed with those keen appetites that attend upon light purses and mountain air. The Baron told his best and longest stories, and never had he told them so well, or with such great effect. If there was anything marvelous, his auditors were lost in astonishment; and if anything facetious, they were sure to laugh exactly in the right place. The Baron, it is true, like most great men, was too dignified to utter any joke but a dull one: it was always enforced, however, by a bumper of excellent Hoch-heimer; and even a dull joke, at one's own table, served up with jolly old wine, is irresistible. Many good things were said by poorer and

keener wits that would not bear repeating, except on similar occasions; many sly speeches whispered in ladies' ears that almost convulsed them with suppressed laughter; and a song or two roared out by a poor, but merry and broad-faced cousin of the Baron, that absolutely made the maiden aunts hold up their fans.

Amid all this revelry, the stranger-guest maintained a most singular and unseasonable gravity. His countenance assumed a deeper cast of dejection as the evening advanced, and, strange as it may appear, even the Baron's jokes seemed only to render him the more melancholy. At times he was lost in thought, and at times there was a perturbed and restless wandering of the eye that bespoke a mind but ill at ease. His conversation with the bride became more and more earnest and mysterious. Lowering clouds began to steal over the fair serenity of her brow, and tremors to run through her tender frame.

All this could not escape the notice of the company. Their gaiety was chilled by the unaccountable gloom of the bridegroom; their spirits were infected; whispers and glances were interchanged, accompanied by shrugs and dubious shakes of the head. The song and the laugh grew less and less frequent: there were dreary pauses in the conversation, which were at length succeeded by wild tales, and supernatural legends. One dismal story produced another still more dismal, and the Baron nearly frightened some of the ladies into hysterics with the history of the goblin horseman that carried away the fair Leonora— a dreadful, but true story, which has since been put into excellent verse, and is read and believed by all the world.

The bridegroom listened to this tale with profound attention. He kept his eyes steadily fixed on the Baron, and, as the story drew to a close, began gradually to rise from his seat, growing taller and taller, until, in the Baron's entranced eye, he seemed almost to tower into a giant. The moment the tale was finished, he heaved a deep sigh, and took a solemn farewell of the company. They were all amazement. The Baron was perfectly thunderstruck.

"What! going to leave the castle at midnight? Why, everything was prepared for his reception; a chamber was ready for him if he wished to retire."

The stranger shook his head mournfully and mysteriously: "I must lay my head in a different chamber to-night!"

There was something in this reply, and the tone in which it was uttered, that made the Baron's heart misgive him; but he rallied his forces, and repeated his hospitable entreaties. The stranger shook his head silently, but positively, at every offer; and, waving his farewell to the company, stalked slowly out of the hall. The maiden aunts were absolutely petrified— the bride hung her head, and a tear stole to her eye.

The Baron followed the stranger to the great court of the castle, where the black charger stood pawing the earth and snorting with impatience. When they had reached the portal, whose deep archway was dimly lighted by a cresset, the stranger paused, and addressed the Baron in a hollow tone of voice, which the vaulted roof rendered still more sepulchral. "Now that we are alone," said he, "I will impart to you the reason of my going. I have a solemn, an indispensable engagement—"

"Why," said the Baron, "can not you send some one in your place?"

"It admits of no substitute— I must attend it in person— I must away to Wurtzburg cathedral—"

"Ay," said the Baron, plucking up spirit, "but not until to-morrow— to-morrow you shall take your bride there."

"No! no!" replied the stranger, with tenfold solemnity, "my engagement is with no bride— the worms! the worms expect me! I am a dead man— I have been slain by robbers— my body lies at Wurtzburg— at midnight I am to be buried— the grave is waiting for me— I must keep my appointment!"

He sprang on his black charger, dashed over the drawbridge, and the clattering of his horse's hoofs was lost in the whistling of the night-blast.

The Baron returned to the hall in the utmost consternation, and related what had passed. Two ladies fainted outright; others sickened at the idea of having banqueted with a spectre. It was the opinion of some that this might be the wild huntsman famous in German legend. Some talked of mountain sprites, of wood-demons, and of other supernatural beings, with which the good people of Germany have been so grievously harassed since time immemorial. One of the poor relations ventured to suggest that it might be some sportive evasion of the young cavalier, and that the very gloominess of the caprice seemed to accord with so melancholy a personage. This, however, drew on him the indignation of the whole company, and especially of the Baron, who looked upon him as little better than an infidel; so that he was fain to abjure his heresy as speedily as possible, and come into the faith of the true believers.

But, whatever may have been the doubts entertained, they were completely put to an end by the arrival, next day, of regular missives confirming the intelligence of the young Count's murder, and his interment in Wurtzburg cathedral.

The dismay at the castle may well be imagined. The Baron shut himself up in his chamber. The guests who had come to rejoice with him could not think of abandoning him in his distress. They wandered about the courts, or collected in groups in the hall, shaking their heads and shrugging their shoulders at the troubles of so good a man; and sat longer than ever at table,

and ate and drank more stoutly than ever, by way of keeping up their spirits. But the situation of the widowed bride was the most pitiable. To have lost a husband before she had even embraced him— and such a husband! if the very spectre could be so gracious and noble, what must have been the living man? She filled the house with lamentations.

On the night of the second day of her widowhood, she had retired to her chamber, accompanied by one of her aunts, who insisted on sleeping with her. The aunt, who was one of the best tellers of ghost stories in all Germany, had just been recounting one of her longest, and had fallen asleep in the very midst of it. The chamber was remote, and overlooked a small garden. The niece lay pensively gazing at the beams of the rising moon, as they trembled on the leaves of an aspen tree before the lattice. The castle clock had just tolled midnight, when a soft strain of music stole up from the garden. She rose hastily from her bed and stepped lightly to the window. A tall figure stood among the shadows of the trees. As it raised its head, a beam of moonlight fell upon the countenance. Heaven and earth! she beheld the Spectre Bridegroom! A loud shriek at that moment burst upon her ear, and her aunt, who had been awakened by the music, and had followed her silently to the window, fell into her arms. When she looked again, the spectre had disappeared.

Of the two females, the aunt now required the most soothing, for she was perfectly beside herself with terror. As to the young lady, there was something, even in the spectre of her lover, that seemed endearing. There was still the semblance of manly beauty; and though the shadow of a man is but little calculated to satisfy the affections of a love-sick girl, yet, where the substance is not to be had, even that is consoling. The aunt declared she would never sleep in that chamber again; the niece, for once, was refractory, and declared as strongly that she would sleep in no other in the castle: the consequence was that she had to sleep in it alone; but she drew a promise from her aunt not to relate the story of the spectre, lest she should be denied the only melancholy pleasure left her on earth— that of inhabiting the chamber over which the guardian shade of her lover kept its nightly vigils.

How long the good old lady would have observed this promise is uncertain, for she dearly loved to talk of the marvelous, and there is a triumph in being the first to tell a frightful story; it is, however, still quoted in the neighborhood, as a memorable instance of female secrecy, that she kept it to herself for a whole week; when she was suddenly absolved from all further restraint by intelligence brought to the breakfast-table one morning that the young lady was not to be found. Her room was empty— the bed had not been slept in— the window was open— and the bird had flown!

The astonishment and concern with which the intelligence was received can only be imagined by those who have witnessed the agitation which the mishaps of a great man cause among his friends. Even the poor relations paused for a moment from the indefatigable labors of the trencher; when the aunt, who had at first been struck speechless, wrung her hands and shrieked out, "The goblin! the goblin! She's carried away by the goblin!"

In a few words she related the fearful scene of the garden, and concluded that the spectre must have carried off his bride. Two of the domestics corroborated the opinion, for they had heard the clattering of a horse's hoofs down the mountain about midnight, and had no doubt that it was the spectre on his black charger, bearing her away to the tomb. All present were struck with the direful probability; for events of the kind are extremely common in Germany, as many well-authenticated histories bear witness.

What a lamentable situation was that of the poor Baron! What a heartrending dilemma for a fond father, and a member of the great family of Katzenellenbogen! His only daughter had either been rapt away to the grave, or he was to have some wood-demon for a son-in-law, and, perchance, a troop of goblin grandchildren. As usual, he was completely bewildered, and all the castle in an uproar. The men were ordered to take horse and scour every road and path and glen of the Odenwald. The Baron himself had just drawn on his jack-boots, girded on his sword, and was about to mount his steed to sally forth on the doubtful quest, when he was brought to a pause by a new apparition. A lady was seen approaching the castle, mounted on a palfrey attended by a cavalier on horseback. She galloped up to the gate, sprang from her horse, and falling at the Baron's feet, embraced his knees. It was his lost daughter, and her companion— the Spectre Bridegroom! The Baron was astounded. He looked at his daughter, then at the spectre, and almost doubted the evidence of his senses. The latter, too, was wonderfully improved in his appearance, since his visit to the world of spirits. His dress was splendid, and set off a noble figure of manly symmetry. He was no longer pale and melancholy. His fine countenance was flushed with the glow of youth, and joy rioted in his large dark eye.

The mystery was soon cleared up. The cavalier (for, in truth, as you must have known all the while, he was no goblin) announced himself as Sir Herman Von Starkenfaust. He related his adventure with the young Count. He told how he had hastened to the castle to deliver the unwelcome tidings, but that the eloquence of the Baron had interrupted him in every attempt to tell his tale. How the sight of the bride had completely captivated him, and that to pass a few hours near her he had tacitly suffered the mistake to continue. How he had been sorely perplexed in what way to make a decent retreat, until the

Baron's goblin stories had suggested his eccentric exit. How, fearing the feudal hostility of the family, he had repeated his visits by stealth— had haunted the garden beneath the young lady's window— had wooed— had won— had borne away in triumph— and, in a word, had wedded the fair.

Under any other circumstances the Baron would have been inflexible, for he was tenacious of paternal authority and devoutly obstinate in all family feuds; but he loved his daughter; he had lamented her as lost; he rejoiced to find her still alive; and, though her husband was of a hostile house, yet, thank Heaven, he was not a goblin. There was something, it must be acknowledged, that did not exactly accord with his notions of strict veracity, in the joke the knight had passed upon him of his being a dead man; but several old friends present, who had served in the wars, assured him that every stratagem was excusable in love, and that the cavalier was entitled to especial privilege, having lately served as a trooper.

Matters, therefore, were happily arranged. The Baron pardoned the young couple on the spot. The revels at the castle were resumed. The poor relations overwhelmed this new member of the family with loving-kindness; he was so gallant, so generous— and so rich. The aunts, it is true, were somewhat scandalized that their system of strict seclusion, and passive obedience, should be so badly exemplified, but attributed it all to their negligence in not having the windows grated. One of them was particularly mortified at having her marvelous story marred, and that the only spectre she had ever seen should turn out a counterfeit; but the niece seemed perfectly happy at having found him substantial flesh and blood— and so the story ends.

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7: The Deadly Tiger-Snake

Arthur Gask

1869-1951

Chronicle (Adelaide) 20 Feb 1941

FOR FIVE AND FIFTY YEARS old Mrs. Bevan had lived at Milton Grange, just outside the little village of High Roding, in Essex. She had come there when, as a young girl just out of her teens, she had married Mark Bevan, only a few years older, and every nook and cranny of the old house was hallowed to her in rapturous memories of those first wedded days.

The Grange had belonged to the Bevan family for many generations, and stood in extensive high-walled grounds, containing beautiful old-world gardens, lawns whose velvet softness it was a delight to tread, and a large lake, whose reeds and rushes were a sanctuary for wild birds.

She had been a very lovely bride, and her husband a very handsome groom. All the joys which life can hold seemed to stretch before the young couple, for they had good health, ample means and were devoted to each other. It was in the days before the world had come to her dreadful travail with Progress and New Orders. There were no telephones, no electric lights, no motor cars, and no Dictators. Flying was a madman's dream, and the bomber in the skies had never entered into men's minds, even as a nightmare. The countryside of England was all peace and rest. The squire was still the benign god-father in the countless little villages scattered throughout the length and breadth of the land, and the old ivy covered church still gave its benediction to the births, deaths, and marriages of those whose destiny it was to live beneath its shadow.

Margaret Bevan and her husband had been supremely happy, experiencing only one great sorrow. No babies had come to Milton Grange, and the laughter of little children had not echoed in its many spacious rooms. For many years it had been a great grief to them, but gradually time had softened their disappointment, and they had become content with each others' love and respect.

When Margaret was 60 her husband died, and then commenced long years of lonely widowhood for her. She was not a woman who had ever made many friends, and she had no relatives of her own. Also, the only one of her husband was his nephew, a young doctor, recently qualified and practising in London. She was very fond of the latter, and told him frankly that one day he would come into all she possessed.

"But I don't want you to look forward to my death," she smiled, "and so I am going to make you an allowance, straightaway, of £1,000 a year. That will

make you quite independent of your profession, and you will be able to go in for research, as you've always wanted to."

Dr. Bevan was most grateful, and he and his young wife were frequent guests at the Grange. "But why do you go on living here, Aunt Margaret?" he pleaded. "What good to you is this large and lonely house, with all these servants? You would be much happier if you came to town and had a cosy little flat, with only two maids to look after."

But Mrs. Bevan had smilingly shaken her head.

"For nearly two hundred years, Robert, there's always been a Bevan here, and I shan't leave it until I die. Everything reminds me of my dear husband, and I am sure it would have been his wish that I should remain on. Don't forget, I have my tenants in the village to look after. They depend so much upon me."

So she continued on at the Grange, keeping three maids, a butler and a gardener, living as closely as possible the same life she had lived when her husband had been alive. Every night she dined in state, eating very little, but waited upon in solemn silence by the butler and the parlormaid. The only day she went out was upon Sunday, and then in the morning, at a quarter to eleven precisely, she was driven by the gardener, attired in the grey Bevan livery, in an old-fashioned landau to the village church. There, in the Bevan family pew, she sat a dignified and sad old lady, with her eyes fixed for the greater part of the service upon a brass plate upon the wall, commemorating the passing of one, Mark Bevan, justice of the peace for the County of Essex, in the sixty-second year of his life.

The years rolled on and then, when she was nearly seventy-five, she developed heart trouble, and Dr. Bevan insisted she must always have some one by her in case she was taken with a sudden attack. He wanted her to have a properly-qualified nurse, but always of a most determined disposition, she engaged one only semi-trained, whom the vicar of the village recommended and who happened to be a relation of one of her tenants. Nurse Bateman— she called herself "Nurse" because she had had a few months' experience in a cottage hospital— gave her age as thirty. Undoubtedly, she had been quite good looking once, but now her prettiness was a decidedly faded character. She was shrewd and intelligent, with sense enough not to attempt to dominate the old lady. She gave herself no airs and got on well with the servants, particularly so with the butler.

So things went on uneventfully for some six months, and then the shadow of a dreadful terror fell upon Milton Grange, for it came to be believed a deadly poisonous snake had somehow found it way into the house, one of those which had escaped when, a few weeks previously, a fire had taken place

in a travelling circus and menagerie, visiting Great Dunmow, a small town only a few miles distant.

It was Martha, the cook, who suspected its presence, first. One night, when the last to be going to bed, she was in the kitchen by herself except for Sloper, the big black cat, who was asleep upon a chair. She had lit her candle to go upstairs and just turned out the hanging lamp. Mrs. Bevan still clung to the old ways and there was neither gas nor electricity in the house. Then suddenly she heard a hiss, a long fierce hiss which lasted, she thought, for quite three seconds. She could not tell with any certainty from where the sound came, but she believed it was from the direction of the long kitchen dresser. Very astonished, but not frightened, for somehow for the moment she did not associate the sound with any living creature, she lifted the candle-stick high above her head to spread the light round. Seeing nothing upon the floor or anywhere about, and the hiss not being repeated, she would have thought she had been mistaken in the nature of the sound if her eyes had not suddenly happened to fall upon the cat.

The big black Tom, no longer in restful slumber, was now upon his feet, his back arched, his fur ruffled and with all appearance of being badly frightened. He was holding his head stiffly and his eyes were strained and staring.

The next morning, when telling the others what had happened, she admitted that then she did begin to feel a little bit afraid and not quite so certain she had been imagining everything. However, the hiss did not come again, the cat sank down once more upon the chair and, very puzzled, she took herself off to bed. But it was a long time before she got off to sleep.

At breakfast she told the two girls and Mr. Snap, the butler, all about having heard the hiss, and they thought it a good joke, Mr. Snap asking jocularly if she'd been at the old lady's port. Later, Nurse Bateman thought it very amusing, too. Cook did not mind their joking, but the laugh was upon her side when that same night Jane, the housemaid, came running into the kitchen with a very white face and called out chokingly that something had just hissed at her in the passage.

All the others were in the kitchen at the time, waiting for the nurse to come into supper and, accordingly, headed by Mr. Snap with his electric torch and the cook with the poker, they all ran out together and made a thorough search of the passage and adjoining rooms. Nurse Bateman, appearing at that moment, joined with them in the search. But they found nothing and, returning to the kitchen, sat down to their meal. The girls were certainly feeling rather scared, but Mr. Snap would still not believe any hiss had really been heard. Very tactlessly, he made things worse for them by recalling to their recollections the recent fire at the travelling menagerie.

"Don't forget they've never been at all certain," he went on, "how many of the snakes were burnt up or got away, it will always be a mystery."

His eyes twinkled. "So it's quite possible one of the deadly tiger ones escaped and has travelled all this distance and made his home here. I've heard that in India snakes prefer old houses."

Cook and the girls shuddered, but the nurse spoke very sharply to him.

"You shouldn't have said that, Mr. Snap. You've no business to have put the idea into their heads. It's very silly of you."

The butler took the reproof meekly and, indeed, looked rather crestfallen. He was stout, amorous and fifty, and known to be very sweet on the nurse. It was supposed he had saved money, and everyone was curious as to whether he would induce her to marry him.

"It was only a joke, Nurse," he said apologetically, "and, of course I didn't mean anything."

"But if the mistress came to hear of it," went on Nurse sternly, "with her weak heart it would be very dangerous. It might frighten her into leaving the house."

"Then you don't understand Mrs. Bevan," scoffed Cook instantly. "Nothing on earth would induce her to leave here. She'd think it her duty to die rather than to go away. Why, she's not slept one single night away from the house since poor Master died!"

"Well, at any rate," nodded the nurse, "none of us must mention anything about it to her. I won't have it."

"But I don't suppose we shall hear the hissing again," grinned the butler. "In my opinion we've heard the last of it."

It was destined, however, that Mr. Snap should speedily learn of what little worth his opinion was, for that very night he heard the hiss himself and was quite as frightened as the girls had been. He had just come out of his pantry, he said, and there came a loud and long hiss from the direction of the kitchen dresser. He didn't mind admitting that he'd instantly grabbed up the poker and rushed for the door as quickly as he could. Then he had stood waiting for quite five minutes but, seeing nothing and hearing no more hisses, he had at length ventured back into the room to put out the lamp before going off to bed.

The next morning he apologised most contritely to both the cook and Jane for having misbelieved them. He was convinced now that it was some living creature which had frightened them.

"But we'll find out what it is," he added fiercely. "We'll move out that old dresser at once and see if there are any snake-holes behind."

The dresser, of solid oak, was huge and heavy. It had not been disturbed for many years, never in the cook's time, and she had been at the Grange since

she was twenty and she now admitted to being forty-two. With some effort it was moved away from the wall and, sure enough, a big hole in the wainscoting was at once seen.

"Large enough for a dozen snakes to jump through at a time," announced the perspiring Mr. Snap. "Well, we'll nail a piece of board over it and see what that does." He smiled a sickly smile. "Then snake, owl, or whistling rat, whatever he is, he'll have to do his hissing where it's less likely to be heard. "You see," he went on in explanation, "snakes are nocturnal like rabbits, which means they mostly come out to feed at nights. So, if we nail him up now, we've probably caught him when he's at home, and there he'll have to stay until he starves to death."

Accordingly the hole was nailed over and the dresser put back.

Unhappily, however it did not bring the result anticipated, for the hissing continued, and soon everyone in the house had heard it, except Mrs. Bevan. Cook heard it again, in the scullery this time; Elsie, the housemaid, heard it twice in the hall; Mr. Snap heard it three times in his pantry; Jane heard it when she was coming down the stairs, and Nurse Bateman, the last to be converted, heard it most distinctly in the library. They all came to hear it, too, not only when by themselves but also when in company with the others.

The horror of it began to get on their nerves. Cook moved her bed into the girls' room, Mr. Snap nightly blocked up the crack under his bedroom door with thick wads of newspapers, and Nurse Bateman banked up strong disinfectants, sprinkled generously about.

Still no one had ever seen anything. There had only been that fierce, dreadful hissing, now, seemingly, coming from all directions. To the credit of them all they determined Mrs. Bevan should learn nothing. Neither did they discuss the matter with anyone outside the house, except the gardener.

So things went on for just a week from the day when cook had first heard the hissing, and then a happening took place which made it impossible to keep things any longer from Mrs. Bevan.

One morning, Sloper, the big Tom cat, was found dead in the kitchen, stretched out stiff and arched, and there was no doubt he had died from snake bite. Thomson, the gardener, was sure of it. Years ago he had made a voyage to Australia upon a sailing-boat, and during a short stay in the Commonwealth had once seen the body of a dog who had been bitten by a snake, and it had looked just as the body of the cat looked now. Besides, there were those two small bite marks upon the leg, plain for every-one to see. They held a conclave in the kitchen and very reluctantly decided Mrs. Bevan must be told at once. Sloper had been her pet, always partaking of his midday meal with her. He never missed a day, always being upon the spot the exact minute when her

lunch was served. So, if he did not arrive now at the usual hour, she would start

to worry dreadfully, wondering what could have become of him and if he had been caught in some trap. It was considered the suspense would be far worse for the old lady than learning what had actually happened. The business of telling the dreadful story was entrusted to the cook, Mr. Snap and the nurse being present to corroborate all she said. Mrs. Bevan received the news bravely, although, at first, with absolute incredulity.

"But it's impossible!" she exclaimed. "No snake would have come all that way from Great Dunmow. It can't be a snake at all."

"But it must be, Mum," said Mr. Snap firmly, but respectfully. "There are two fang marks upon one of poor Sloper's legs and that is how poisonous snakes bite." He spoke very sadly. "Should I bring him to you to let you see them."

"No, no," replied the old lady shudderingly, "I don't want to see anything."

She shed a few tears over the passing of her favorite, and then sat down to write a letter to Dr. Bevan, telling him everything that had happened. She sent Snap straightaway into the village to post it, knowing that if it caught the eleven o'clock post her nephew would receive it that same afternoon. She expected he would come down that night. But there was no appearance of the doctor, as so confidently hoped for, and then, when being assisted by Nurse Bateman to get ready for bed, the old lady received such a truly terrible shock that no one could have been really surprised if it had proved fatal.

Both she and the nurse heard the hissing of the snake, loud, fierce and reverberating. Also, the latter actually saw the reptile, this time. Mrs. Bevan's knees gave way under her and she fell back into an arm chair which was, providently, just behind her. She was paralysed and inarticulate in her fright. The snake hissed three times, but it was not the hissing which so affected the old lady. It was the blood curdling screams which Nurse Bateman emitted, one after the other. They rang out like sirens, so Cook declared afterwards.

Cook had been right away at the other end of the house at the time and, hearing the cries and thinking more of her loved mistress than of any danger to herself, she raced upstairs with no thought in her mind that any second she might be treading upon a deadly reptile. She found both her mistress and the nurse in dead faints, but gave her attention only to the former, lifting her upon the bed and forcing brandy between her lips.

Mrs. Bevan soon revived and whispered shakingly what had taken place. The nurse, too, had by then recovered, feeling very ashamed that she had screamed so loudly. She said, however, that she had seen, most distinctly, a

long black snake slither across the floor and pass through the mercifully partly opened door.

"Never you mind, mistress," said Cook bravely. "I promise you you shan't go through it again. I'll bring my mattress in here and make up a bed for myself upon the floor. Then there'll be three of us if the snake comes again." She affected a bravery she did not feel. "It seems that snakes don't frighten me as much as they do some people. I am not at all afraid."

Dr. Bevan arrived the next day, before eleven o'clock. He had only received the letter that morning and was very concerned when he learnt what had taken place the previous night.

"But the whole thing's nonsense, Aunt Margaret," he said angrily. "It's impossible there could be any poisonous snake here. It's mass hysteria among you all. The cook imagined things, first, and then scared all the others into imagining they had heard the hissing when, in reality, they had heard nothing at all. It's been all imagination, nothing more and nothing less."

"But it isn't imagination, Robert," insisted his aunt tearfully. "I heard the hisses as plainly as I am hearing you now." Her voice choked. "And think of my dear Sloper. He wasn't bitten to death by imagining it."

"Ah the cat!" exclaimed Dr. Bevan instantly. "I'll go and look at him. I'll be able to tell at once if he's died of a snake bite."

But to the doctor's intense annoyance the cat's body had been burnt.

It appeared Mr. Snap thought that because the animal had died of snake-bite the body would be dangerous for anyone to touch. So he had made a big bonfire in the garden, and, carrying the body out in the kitchen tongs, had thrown it into the middle of the flames, taking great care that every particle of it should be consumed.

"You're a fool!" exclaimed the doctor angrily. "You've spoilt the only chance I had of convincing you all how silly you've been. Well, now I'm going to talk to you all, perfectly plainly."

But the talk brought no satisfaction to him; indeed, rather the reverse, for, instead of convincing the servants that their imaginations had been running riot, he himself was left with the uneasy feeling that, after all, there might be something in what they said. They all stuck to their stories, and he could not make them contradict themselves. So, his mind made up what he would do, he returned to Mrs. Bevan.

"Well, Aunt," he said, "I suppose there's no chance of getting you to come away for a week or two until things blow over. No, no, I won't argue with you, but this is what I'll do. Professor James, of the Zoological Gardens is a friend of mine, and I'll go straight back to town to see him. He'll tell me at once if it is possible for an escaped snake to have made his way here. In the meantime,

from the first moment when it begins to get dark you're to have cook with you, as well as nurse. Now, don't worry. I'll do the best I can."

And certainly he was as good as his word, for he returned that afternoon, bringing the head keeper of the snake house of the zoo with him.

"Professor James couldn't manage to get away, or he'd have come himself," he explained, "but he's sent this gentleman, who knows all about snakes. He's brought a tame Indian mongoose with him, and we'll soon know if there's any snake hiding in the house."

"If there's one here, mum," corroborated the keeper reassuringly, "Rikky will nose him out at once." He shook his head doubtfully. "But I don't think there can be one. If any snake did escape from that menagerie it'd be almost a miracle if he'd found his way as far as here."

He produced the mongoose from a box for Mrs. Bevan's inspection. Slender and about 18 inches long, it was covered with a greyish fur and had a long sweeping tail. The old lady thought it looked very fierce.

"But where will you put it to find the snake?" she asked.

"The snake only comes out at night."

"Behind the wainscoting, mum," replied the keeper. "That'll be the best place, so that he can get under the foundations of the house. That's where the snake'll be if he's anywhere."

So a piece of the wainscoting in the passage by the kitchen was prized away, and the mongoose put through.

"Now, if he comes upon any reptile," the keeper informed those standing round, "we shall know it at once, for he'll get excited and make a noise like the humming of a hive of bees. There'll be no mistaking the sound."

But no noise came to gladden their hearts. Five, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour passed, and then the mongoose reappeared, looking disinerested in everything. He was taken into the kitchen and, in turn, to every room and place where the hissing of the snake had been heard, but nothing happened, and, in the end, he wanted to curl up and go to sleep.

"No snake here," announced the keeper decisively. "He'd have smelt him if there was."

There was general disappointment, and Dr. Bevan returned to town in a very worried frame of mind. He had left strict orders that the cook was to continue to sleep in his aunt's room, and the butler to report to him every-night and morning from the telephone in the village.

The following morning the report was a negative one. No more hissing had been heard, and Mrs. Bevan had passed an undisturbed, if rather anxious night. Still the doctor was by no means easy in his mind. Although quite convinced now that there was no snake in the house, that something of the

nature of hissing had been heard he was equally certain, and until he found out what it was there could be no peace or freedom from anxiety for his aunt.

So it was in that frame of mind he went out to lunch that day with another medical man, an old hospital friend of his who practised in Norfolk, but who was now up in town upon holiday for a few days.

They sat at a table by themselves in the fashionable Semiris restaurant, and during the course of the meal, told his friend about the mysterious happenings at the Grange. The other was most interested, but could suggest no explanation for what had taken place. Then suddenly the latter whistled.

"But I say, I say," he exclaimed with animation, "there's a chap over there who could probably hazard a good guess. That man at the table by the window, who's just lighting a cigarette. He lives not far from me, and I know him pretty well. He's Gilbert Larose, and used to be a famous detective once, but he married the wealthy Lady Ardane and, of course, has retired from Scotland Yard."

"By Jove, I've heard of him!" exclaimed Dr. Bevan interestedly. "The man who never failed! Introduce him, George. Perhaps he'll help us. Be quick. He's getting up to go!"

So a well-dressed, smiling-looking man in the middle thirties was brought up to the table and the introduction took place.

"Look here, Mr. Larose," said Dr. Bevan's friend laughingly, "we've got a little problem which would just suit your subtle mind. Now can you spare a few minutes for us to tell you about it?"

"Certainly," replied Larose, "but let's go out into the foyer. We can talk better there."

Dr. Bevan told his tale, and Larose listened with increasing interest as he proceeded.

"And do any ideas come to you, sir?" asked the doctor when he had finished.

Larose nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, some do." He considered for a few moments. "Now you say the anxiety is likely to have a serious effect upon your aunt?"

"A very serious one. In fact, another such a shock as she had the night before last may easily prove fatal to her."

"And then who would benefit by her death?" asked Larose.

Dr. Bevan frowned. "Oh, a lot of people. I, for one, all the servants, except the nurse, and a number of her tenants in the village. She is a well-to-do woman and her estate will be quite a big one."

"Do you know to what extent the servants will benefit?"

"The cook and the butler get £500 each, and the two maids £100."

"And they know that?" frowned Larose.

"Certainly not," replied the doctor quickly. "My aunt is always reticent about her affairs and is not likely to have told them anything." He spoke warmly, "You're on the wrong tack there, sir, for even if they did know it they'd be the last people to wish her harm. The cook has been with her for more than twenty years and the butler for nearly as long. The girls are above suspicion, too. They are both the daughters of former servants. They are all devoted to her." He looked incredulous. "You don't for a moment imagine they have been making those hisses?"

Larose smiled. "Well, on the face of it, it doesn't seem probable, does it?" He hesitated. "Still, you never can—"

"Then, goodness gracious, they must all be in the conspiracy," broke in the doctor testily, "for not only have they, one by one, heard the hissing, but it has been heard when they have all been together."

A short silence followed, and then Larose said briskly, "Well, look here. If you like you can run me down and I'll see what I can make of it. No, no, you needn't thank me. It's quite an interesting case and will amuse me. Yes, I can come straight away. I'm quite free this afternoon."

So, little more than an hour and a half later Larose had arrived at the Grange and was listening to the stories as told by Mrs. Bevan and Nurse Bateman. It had been his express wish that they should be together when he started to question them in the drawing-room. His questions over, he left them and was taken into the library. There, one by one, and commencing with the butler, he interviewed the other servants, with Dr. Bevan being present all the time. Half an hour and longer went by, and then the doctor returned to the drawing-room and said Larose wanted to speak to the nurse again. Another half-hour passed and Larose came into the drawing-room once more. He was by himself this time and holding a piece of paper in his hand.

"Have they helped you at all?" asked Mrs. Bevan nervously. "Have you any news?"

Larose nodded very solemnly. "Yes, both good and bad. We've found out about—"

But the old lady interrupted him suddenly. Through the window, she had caught sight of her nephew's car going down the drive, with him at the wheel.

"But what does that mean?" she cried plaintively. "Why's Robert, why's my nephew going off without seeing me?"

"Oh, it's quite all right," replied Larose reassuringly. "He'll be back again in a few minutes." He laughed. "He's only gone off to give the snakes a lift to the railway station."

"The snakes!" ejaculated Mrs. Bevan. "Then you've found them and there were more than one?"

"Yes, we found them," nodded Larose, "and there were two of them."

He spoke in a grave tone. "I'm sorry to tell you that your butler and the nurse were the snakes. It was they who had been doing the hissing all along, and Dr. Bevan insisted they should leave instantly. We stood over them while they packed and now he's driven them away."

The old lady's face was the very picture of horror and distress. In her emotion, she could hardly get her breath, and Larose went on quickly to distract her attention from herself.

"Yes, of course, it's terribly upsetting for you to learn it, but it's only the old, old story of an elderly man's infatuation for a much younger woman goading him on to commit any kind of wickedness."

He held up the paper in his hand.

"Here's his signed confession. The nurse was at the bottom of everything. One night about a month ago, she looked into your desk and read the draft of your new will. She saw the butler was to get £500 at your death, and the dreadful idea came to her of giving you a fatal shock, so that he would receive the money at once. Snap was horrified when she first suggested it to him, but in the end she won him over by promising to marry him directly he got the money, they were going to take a publichouse in Saffron Walden, and the matter had to be settled soon."

"How awful, how awful!" wailed Mrs. Bevan. "I've always tried to be so kind to Snap, and he's seemed to be so grateful."

Larose took a little folded piece of tin out of his pocket. "She showed him how to make the loud hissing with this. It's like a plaything schoolboys used to startle one another."

"But how did you come to find this all out?" asked the old lady, shakily, and now beginning to get over her amazement. "What made you suspect them at all?"

Larose laughed.

"Well, directly Dr. Bateman told me about your having left money to the servants my thoughts turned to them, but when I saw Snap as he opened the door to us I felt sure he would not have had the imagination to think of such an idea. He looked much too simple. That, however, was not my opinion of the nurse, and directly I saw her she gave me a rather bad impression. For one thing, she struck me as one of the last kind of women to lose her head and shriek as she had done when, as she said, she had both heard the hissing and seen the snake. Later, too, I knew she was lying to me when she declared the snake had been hissing as it glided away. I've killed lots of wild snakes in

Australia, and they don't hiss when they're on the run. They can't, for to hiss they have to have their heads up, which means they must be standing still. So, I suspected her at once of something— I didn't know exactly what— as I could not see then how she stood to benefit if anything happened to you. However, things became clearer when I got out of cook that Snap was paying court to the nurse and was completely under her thumb." He paused for a moment and then went on. "But I really worked out everything by means of a pencil and piece of paper. I put down every time the hissing had been heard and who had been on the spot to hear it. All the servants had heard it, not only when they were alone, but also and quite a number of times, when they had been in company with some of the others. Then, when I had questioned everyone and put down what they told me upon a piece of paper, the significant fact emerged that never once had the hissing been heard when both the butler and the nurse had been present among them at the same time."

"You mean that they had taken it in turn to do the hissing?" quavered the old lady.

"Yes, and when they wanted to frighten anyone they used to get the steps and hiss through the ventila-tor of one of the adjoining rooms. That's what Snap did when you heard the hissing in your bedroom the other night."

"Oh, how wicked!" exclaimed poor Mrs. Bevan. She started up suddenly. "But if there was no real snake how did poor Sloper come to die?"

"Nurse Bateman poisoned him with strychnine,"replied Larose very solemnly. "She put mouse poison in his saucer of milk and made bite marks afterwards on his leg with a pair of scissors. She put them there in case you wanted to see the body, and then she made Snap burn the body before the doctor had had time to get here. That letter you wrote your nephew was, purposely, not posted until the evening."

Larose nodded.

"Yes, I bluffed him into it. After I had finished with the others I had him in the library again. I could see that he was frightened at being called back, for his forehead was perspiring and his hands were twitching. So I looked at him furiously and asked him why he had been lying to us and telling a different tale from that of Nurse Bateman. He thought at once, as I had intended him to, that we had found out something, and he began to breathe hard and stammer. Then I thundered at him that the game was up, and he'd better make a clean breast of it and confess. He started to whimper and then blurted out everything. He blamed the nurse for it all, and produced the piece of tin she had made from his pocket."

"And did nurse confess, too?" choked Mrs. Bevan.

"Not she!" scoffed Larose. "She confessed nothing, but you should have seen the look she gave Snap when, as she was being brought back into the library, I made him hiss through the piece of tin to show me how he'd done it. She went white to the lips, and I thought she was going to faint. No, she didn't confess, but she never denied anything. She just flung her clothes into her box, too, as if she didn't care what happened. Oh, she was guilty right enough! She didn't even ask for the money due to her."

"Poor Snap!" sighed the tender-hearted old lady. "Both my husband and I thought such a lot of him. I expect he's very sorry now."

"Oh, he is," agreed Larose instantly. "He cried like a little child, and implored us to let him come to ask your forgiveness. When we refused he said that would be his greatest punishment. Yes, I'm sure his remorse was quite real."

He nodded.

"Well, he's got his deserts and is certainly well punished."

But life is not always just, and the butler's punishment was by no means as great as it should have been, for the excitement of the day proving too much for Mrs. Bevan, she passed away that night in another heart attack, having had no time to alter her will.

So Snap got his £500 after all. Still he did not marry Nurse Bateman, although she tried her hardest to make him, even to threatening an action for breach of promise. However, he would have nothing at all to do with her, and started a pig farm instead.

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8: Arpeggio

Stacy Aumonier

1877-1928

The London Magazine, May 1927

IT WAS NOT a pretty company. There was Diehl, who apparently occupied the position of president. He had a square black beard, and sinister blood-shot eyes. His thin sneering voice was pitched on a high monotonous level. In this rather shabby little salon the fourth floor of the Hotel St. Just in the Rue Papiniére, he dominated the rest by his bulk, and his insolent sense of mental superiority. It was apparent that he utterly despised the other four. A stranger entering the room would undoubtedly have been impressed by one characteristic of the whole company. To glance at them it was almost impossible to tell either their ages or even their nationalities. The plump little man they called Max, with his waxed moustache and his heavy eyelids, might have been Portuguese. On the other hand he might have been Belgian; his age anything between thirty-five and fifty-five. The thin, highly-strung Luigi, with his wild mop of dark hair and glittering eyes, might have been Levantine. On the other hand, he might easily have come from the mining districts of Yorkshire. His age was also indeterminate. Orman, with his reddish hair, pale pink cheeks, and clear expressionless eyes, was surely Irish. And yet there are many Scandinavian people like him, especially among the Swedes. Kettner was essentially Russian, but what does "Russian," with its sixty odd varied races, mean? As for Diehl, with the square black beard, he might have been the proprietor of unmentionable establishments in Singapore, the director of an Art Museum at Dresden, or the commissioner of a bible society in Boston. With a little more spirituality of mien he might even have passed as the Metropolitan of Constantinople.

But if this unpleasant quintette was divers in outward form and bearing, it appeared to be solid in its opinion on certain matters. That its mood was tense and "edgy" was evident from the way in which the members spoke and behaved, and their united irritation over the fact that a piano in an adjoining room was audible.

DURING the whole time the "conference" had been sitting— nearly an hour and a half— someone had been playing an arpeggio scale in the next room. Over and over again, up and down the keys raced the invisible fingers. There is something about this ceaseless repetition to try the strongest nerves. Every now and then one of the men would break off to curse "that confounded piano."

But now the "conference" was finished, and Diehl leant back, a cigar in the corner of his mouth, to give his last instructions.

"Well, Max and Luigi, my fine cabbages, we must congratulate you. Owing to the perfection of our arrangements, I fail to see how anything could go wrong. The good fortune of this opportunity of achievement has fallen to you. And if you carry it out with that discretion which you, Luigi, showed in connection with the Grand Duchess at Zurich, the blessings of the Fraternity will go with you. What is the matter with you, Luigi? You seem all on edge."

Luigi was swaying restlessly, and passing his hands through his tousled hair.

"I wish there wasn't forty-eight hours to wait. That's all. And— and— that confounded piano gets on my nerves..."

Diehl laughed. "The piano! my dear comrade, when we have gone, why don't you call on the young lady with a bouquet? I'm sure that with your well-known fascination over the fair sex, the young lady will gladly desist, if indeed she is not willing to be more companionable. We will leave you and Max to make your final arrangements. Now listen to me once more.

"It was the genius of Orman which foresaw the magnificent opportunity afforded by this empty suite of rooms on the top floor of the block of office buildings in the rue St. Augustin. It commands on both the north and the east side the exact juncture where the president's carriage will pass on Friday afternoon. It also has command of the roof. While paying tribute to Orman, we must also congratulate Kettner on the skilful way he has endeared himself to the old concierge of the building. The old dear has a curious penchant for anisette, it seems. Kettner is also a connoisseur of anisette. You will have no trouble on that score. At the moment when the— the— er— episode happens, the concierge will be enjoying, shall we say, a profound afternoon nap. The key of the top floor will be given you."

He looked round with a sigh of relief, noticing that the arpeggio had ceased, and then continued:

"The work of our skilful young chemist, Cosimo Malatesti, is also complete. He will arrive from Lyons on Friday morning, carrying a small black bag, the kind usually carried by piano-tuners. He will go straight to the Café Pigalle, where you will all lunch together. And I implore you eat plenty and drink nothing but one glass of cognac. You should be in your position at 2.15. The carriage passes at 2.30. You want time to take your bearings, but not long enough to draw attention to yourselves. As to which of you has the honour to carry the piano-tuner's bag, and to— er— administer, the last coup of justice, that of course you may settle between yourselves."

The arpeggio started again, and the president scowled. Luigi mopped his brow and muttered:

"Damn that piano!"

Max took a long drink of water, and Kettner—perhaps the most fervent member present— exclaimed:

"Down with presidents, kings and capitalists!"

"And pianists!" interjected Orman. This frivolous addition made the company laugh uneasily. Diehl rose and put some papers together.

"These papers," he said. "You had better keep till the morning of—till Friday morning, when they will be fetched. Remember they are the most secret papers of the Fraternity. There are here the two lists, one French and one foreign. There is also here the code. You will want these for warning our friends in Vienna, Rome, Berlin, and London. Never let these papers out of your sight."

He re-lit the stump of his cigar, which had gone out, and reached for his hat.

"One moment," said Luigi, with an hysterical catch in his voice. "Is it true that— that— the Mole is working against us?"

"Why should you think so?" said the president, frowning.

"You know, it's— it's common gossip. And after all it was he who got Schlotz in Vienna, and the Pirelli brothers in Amsterdam, and others..."

"How do you know? it was never proved."

"No. It was never proved because— he works in the dark, underground. That's why."

"Nonsense!" replied Diehl. "The Mole is a figment of the imagination. He has no reality. Hysteria invented him."

"Moles can be caught in traps," interjected Kettner.

"How is it all these Brothers met their death in the same way— a bullet through the keyhole or out of the darkness just a day or a few hours before—?"

"There are, of course, risks in our community. But it is absurd to ascribe these— er— accidents to the work of one man. Your nerves are in a bad way, Luigi."

"Who is the Mole supposed to be, anyway?" said Orman.

"That's the point," said Luigi. "No one knows. No one has seen him. I heard that he was an officer, a colonel who fought with the White army under Deniken. But his nationality no one knows. They say he's as clever as the devil, can speak eight languages, and is a dead shot with a revolver. Apart from that..."

Max twirled the ends of his little waxed moustaches.

"I'm not afraid of the Mole," he said, a little unconvincingly. "It's the building I want to know about. Suppose we are seen coming out of the empty flat just after..."

"I have already pointed out to you," said Diehl, with a peevish drawl, as though reprimanding timorous school children, "there is no danger at all. The block of offices is eight storeys high, the roof concealed by buttresses and low brick walls. It will take several minutes to focus from which direction this bolt from Heaven, this engine of justice has fallen. Within a few seconds you may be back in the corridors or staircases. There will probably be a thousand people in the building on that occasion. It is a gala day, and the good bourgeoisie will be entertaining their wives and daughters. Who should take any notice of two handsome well-dressed men like you, mingling with this crowd? There are four exits, and Kettner will be waiting with a taxi, under the lamp-post by Lucien Bahar's *comestible* establishment round the corner."

He flung his cloak around him, with a gesture of finality and added:

"Good luck go with you!"

Kettner and Orman came forward and solemnly shook hands without saying a word, and the three of them trouped out. Max sat staring in front of him, occasionally twirling his moustaches, and then turning over the papers on the table, without looking at them. Luigi paced the room. In the middle of one turn he stopped, and exclaimed:

"Listen! that confounded scale has left off."

"You didn't want it to go on, did you?" said Max sullenly. "Now that they've gone I'm going to have a drink." He rose and rang the bell by the fireplace. After an interval of some seconds the door opened and a waiter with a pale, impassive face entered.

"Bring up a small bottle of brandy and a seltzer," said Max.

"Certainly sir," said the waiter. He was just about to leave the room when the arpeggio started again. Luigi called out:

"Wait!" Nervously plastering down his recalcitrant locks, he said:

"Will you please ask the young lady in the next room if she could desist from playing her scales for a bit, as there is a gentleman in here who is unwell."

The waiter bowed and went out. After an interval the arpeggio stopped. Luigi heaved a sigh of relief, and continued his prowl. Max began to peruse the papers. Their respite was short-lived, however. Just as the waiter re-entered with the brandy, seltzer, and glasses the arpeggio started again.

"Did you give her my message?" said Max savagely.

The waiter set down the tray, and said gravely:

"The pianist said the request was impossible, sir."

The two men were so surprised they could think of no comment until the waiter had retired, when Max exclaimed:

"Confounded impertinence! some beastly Conservatoire student practising for a concert. Why the devil doesn't she play a tune anyway?"

Then he growled:

"Come along, Luigi, let's check this list together. We've got to go through with it anyway. Have a drink first."

He poured himself a generous portion of brandy and added a little seltzer. Luigi, who was trembling, did the same, and sat down by his side.

"Now, then," said Max. "There's Karl Bonnard. He's at Abbeville, I see..."

Luigi was staring abstractedly at the door. Suddenly he remarked:

"Did you notice one thing, Max?"

"What?"

"He said the pianist. He didn't say the lady pianist."

"Well, what does that matter to us, whether it's a man or a woman making the damned row?"

"No. I was only wondering..."

"Don't be an imbecile. With the help of the code book we've got to frame a general notification. So far as I can see it need be only three words."

Luigi, who was not listening had again rung the bell.

"What are you ringing for?" said Max.

"I want to ask the waiter something."

"Idiot!" growled Max.

The waiter entered noiselessly.

"Waiter," said Luigi. "Just now you referred to the pianist. Is the pianist a man or a woman?"

The waiter appeared to hesitate, then he replied:

"A gentleman, sir."

"Ah! what is his name?"

"It is not my custom, sir, to enquire the name of hotel guests."

"Oh, well, look here. Will you go back to him, and ask him if he will kindly not practise for a bit as there are two gentlemen in the adjoining room engaged on important business. Perhaps he will understand that."

"Certainly, sir."

The door closed, and a moment later the arpeggio stopped again. But only for half a minute. Then it started again with renewed vigour. The two men glanced at each other and muttered curses. The waiter re-entered.

"The gentleman says he regrets he cannot comply with your request. He says he does not doubt the importance of the business you gentlemen have to

discuss, but he himself has an important appointment this evening, and he is getting his fingers in."

"He's getting his fingers in!" exclaimed Luigi.

"An expression common, I believe, in the musical profession," said Max.

"Getting his fingers in for what?"

"He's playing at a concert, I suppose. All right, waiter, you can go. I shall ring up the manager's office."

When the waiter had gone Max shrugged his shoulders.

"After all, why should we worry about it? We're not a couple of hysterical women. If I remember rightly, old cauliflower, over the affair of the Grand Duchess there was a Jazz band playing all the afternoon in the Square beneath."

"A Jazz band! Yes, I could stand a Jazz band. It's this infernal repetition, on and on, and on it goes, no change, no variety...It's like a kind of fate..."

"Come now, I'll tick off the addresses. There are only about seventeen in all. If you'll help me to frame the code message. We can finish the whole thing in half an hour, and go out."

"It'll be playing when we come back."

"How do you know?"

"I feel it. I feel it!" He went up and banged violently on the wall with his fist and shouted: "Shut up, you devil!" The arpeggio did not stop. Then Luigi snatched up the telephone, lifted the receiver, and vibrated the bell. He called out: "Hullo! hullo! hullo!" He continued to call, but there was no answer. "The confounded thing's out of order," he barked.

His eye began to wander restlessly around the room, as though he were taking stock of an eventuality. The room had only one door, but opposite it was a French window leading on to a small iron balcony which ran along the front of the hotel. Between the division of each room the balcony was dissected by a low iron grille, less than a metre in height. As it was evening a curtain was drawn across the window which was nevertheless open, for the night was close.

"Come and sit down," said Max. "You're getting on my nerves. Why should I have to do all the work. Which brings me to the point— you know, the point the president has left to us to settle between us."

"What point?"

"On Friday we meet Cosimo at the Café Pigalle. Unless your wits have gone completely astray you may remember that Cosimo will have with him a small black piano-tuner's bag. One of us is to have the honour of carrying it to the rue St. Augustin. One of us is to have the honour of delivering it to its final destination. Hein?"

An expression of cunning and fear crept into the face of Luigi.

"Honour?" he whispered.

"Yes, isn't it an honour?"

"If you consider it an honour you are welcome to it."

"Come, my old cauliflower, is that quite the way to speak? I'm afraid such an expression getting to the ears of the president— in our Fraternity you know the iron law 'There is no going back.' There are special arrangements made for anyone who either retires from the brotherhood, or goes back on his obligations."

"Yes, yes, I know, I know...well?"

Max drew a pack of cards from the drawer.

"We have the same rule, I take it. One cut, and the honour to the highest. Shall I cut or will you?"

Luigi trembled, but his eyes were still wandering. Suddenly he went up close to Max and whispered breathlessly:

"Do you see we could get him?— get him while he's sitting there at the piano— The balcony!— the door is open— his door too— one spring and we could settle him for ever—"

He produced a steel knife from his hip-pocket.

The eyes of Max rolled.

"What are you talking about? You can't knife a man for playing the piano just because it gets on your nerves. Don't be a fool!"

"Yes, but..."

"Since you seem all over the place I will cut first. Do you agree?"

Luigi suddenly seemed curiously indifferent. He merely nodded, his eye wandering from the pack of cards to the curtain. He saw Max cut, and hold the card up to him. It was the ten of clubs. Almost mechanically he cut the pack himself and drew the knave. He heard Max utter a gasp of relief, and then say in his suave voice:

"The honour is to you, comrade."

Luigi put down the card and continued to prowl around the room like a beast of prey. Sometimes he drew his knife, stood by the curtain, then replaced it. Max said abruptly:

"I fail to understand your extravagant interest in this pianist."

Luigi stared at him, took another turn up and down, and then came close up to him and whispered:

"You do, do you? You haven't yet grasped the truth of the whole matter then?"

"Truth? what do you mean?"

"That man in there playing the piano is The Mole!"

Almost as though he had been overheard the music stopped. Luigi started and the slow sense of panic began to invade Max. It was Max this time who muttered:

"What has he stopped for!" Then as if to reassure himself he said:

"Nonsense! what makes you think so?"

Luigi again began to creep about the room. It was as though the moment had come when the silence was more nerve-racking than the playing. After some minutes to their relief the arpeggio started again.

Again approaching his comrade Luigi said:

"Don't you remember the first thing we heard about 'The Mole?' Before he went into the army, before he took up politics actively, he used to be a famous pianist. He played at concerts all over the world. I believe they said he was a Lithuanian or a Pole. He only took up politics in middle life and even now he goes back to his first love for spells. He mixes the two, they say. Listen, Max, he's playing now. Can't you see while he's playing there—his back to us probably..."

"Yes, you fool, but they would be bound to suspect us. They'd get us. What about our Cause? the president?"

"What better service could we render the Cause than to rid it of its greatest enemy?"

Max rang the bell.

"What did you ring the bell for?"

"I want to get a newspaper."

"Why?"

"If he's playing at a concert perhaps we can find out the name?"

"What does the name matter? It will convey nothing to us."

"No, but we can tell the president. This is someone else's job. We've got on all we want."

"Yes, but in the meantime..."

"Why doesn't that damned waiter come!"

He stood up and walked across to the door, and angrily turned the handle. To his amazement he could not open the door. He rattled the handle and banged on the panel. Then turned to Luigi:

"What does this mean? The bell, the telephone, the door— we're locked in, we're cornered, do you see! Oh, my God!"

It was apparent that Max had worked himself up into a greater panic than the highly-strung Luigi. Indeed the latter suddenly revealed himself as a man of action. Carrying his knife in his sleeve he made a gesture as though to calm the other.

"That settles it, then. There is only one way. And that while he's playing."

He made three stealthy strides across the room, and then the arpeggio stopped suddenly in the middle of a passage. He gave a low cry and dropped his knife, knelt and groped for it on the floor. While he was fumbling for it Max cowered in the corner and screamed faintly:

"Oh, God! hurry, hurry, Luigi! Get him. Oh, for a gun! Why the devil didn't I have one? Turn the light off. Blast you!"

Luigi was on his feet again, the knife in his hand, moving towards the curtain.

Max continued:

"Hurry, damn you! he'll shoot us! Mind the curtains! Look out! I saw it move. Hullo! Hullo! who is that there behind the curtain? Curse you!"

Luigi was within a yard of the curtain when two shots rang out in rapid succession. Luigi fell forward on his face; Max crumpled up against the wall. The curtain moved almost imperceptibly, and there was a silence. After a time the arpeggio started again.

Almost at the same instant the door opened quietly and the impassive waiter entered. He was wearing wash-leather gloves and in one hand he carried two revolvers. He shut the door after him and locked it. Then he glanced through the papers. He sorted out several, folded them neatly together, and put them in his pocket. Having satisfied himself that this part of the performance was in order he went over to Max and put one of the revolvers in his right hand. He then crossed to Luigi, twisted the body round and placed the other revolver on the ground near the body. He then proceeded to turn over the side table quietly, scattering ornaments, vases and bottles over the floor. He did the same with two chairs and a screen. He then turned and surveyed his work, with his head on one side, like an artist regarding a picture to which he has put the finishing touches. No further accents apparently being required, he sat at the table and picked up the telephone receiver. After a brief pause he said quietly:

"Will you please give me room twenty-four."

A minute passed and the piano stopped abruptly. Speaking in a low voice he said:

"Everything in order, colonel. My hearty congratulations! I have both the lists and the code. Exactly. I will now inform the management of this deplorable tragedy. There are all the evidence of a grim struggle. It may never be known what caused this quarrel which has ended so tragically. Exactly. Not at all, not at all. By the way, Monsieur Doumergue, the Conductor of the Philharmonic, rang up. He begged me not to disturb you if you were working. He only wanted to ask you if you would be so kind as to be at the concert to-night ten minutes early. Exactly. He just wants to consult you about a passage

in the slow movement. He said he was under the impression at the rehearsal yesterday that you thought he took it a shade too slowly. Exactly. That will be eight-twenty, then, colonel. Very good. Not at all. Au revoir."

The waiter hung up the receiver and looked around him. The piano started again, but this time the invisible pianist was not playing an arpeggio but the slow movement of the Emperor Concerto. The waiter smiled and sat there for a moment as though entranced, murmuring to himself:

"Exquisite! exquisite!"

Then, as though starting out of a dream, he arose, surveyed the scene once more, took off his wash-leather gloves and put them in his pocket. Having gone to the door, and unlocked it, he returned to the telephone, picked up the receiver, and said in an agitated voice:

"For God's sake give me the manager's office..."

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9: On The Very Threshold

H. Bedford Jones

1887-1949

Pearson's Magazine May 1922

Journal (Adelaide), 12 July 1922

GOLD is where you find it, says the time-worn proverb of prospectors. So is luck. So is the one woman. Randolph knew because, in his day he had found all three.

He had found the gold, and other men had reaped it. He had found the luck, and under his grip it invariably turned sour. He had found the one woman— a slim, gold-crowned girl with pure eyes, who took looked once into his soul and had turned away from him, shivering.

Randolph tramped down the world alone, unloving and unloved. He went from bad to worse, thieving, drinking, and lending himself to any crime or vice for the means of support. Out on the borders of China, where the dregs of the world foregather, he became one of the white harpies who prey upon white and yellow and brown alike, and he learnt terrible thing.

In Shanghai he neared the end, serving there as tout for a Chinese gambling house and smuggling opium out of the Japanese quarter to his master in the native city. But Randolph went even a step lower than this when he murdered his master one night, got away uncaught, and took passage for home with a big suit case crammed full of gold and banknotes.

He never read the papers, and be slunk away from every one else on the ship; thus he knew nothing of the war until the customs men in San Francisco demanded his papers. Randolph tried to lie, and fell into hot water that grew hotter all the time. So he threw up the sponge, and after depositing his blood-stained money in a local bank let himself be inducted into the United States Army. The army unanimously agreed that he was one of the worst men ever whelped, and instead of being sent to France he was shipped to the Mexican border.

There Randolph kept company with 300 other men, lost an a desert camp on the brink of perdition, during month after month of nothing but blue sky and white desert until he was whipped into a lean, hardness of body and mind. Much of the evil was blown out of him by the blazing sunlight, and shamed out of him by the lean brown strength of the men around item. Much of the crafty sin of Asia was wiped from his eyes, but it festered within him like a maggot.

Thus Randolph became much like the man he had been three years previously. Put a man in a monastery, give him no chance whatever to sin, or set him on a pillar in the desert, and you have a saint in the making. This is the

theory on which penitentiaries stand. Like all theories, it is very fine, but in practise it works out only about once in 10,000 cases.

Following these things, Randolph contracted influenza. and pneumonia, and was in hospital for a month, where be remained later as orderly. Then, when the epidemic became general, he was of so much use that he was transferred to New Orleans. He was a valuable man, more valuable by reason of having an education. His bad reputation was forgotten. A quiet, slender man, with-reddish hair, regular features, and a pair of steady blue eyes, he became liked. Only his eyes never matched his lips in a smile. They were unsmiling, those eyes, and very keen.

Oddly enough, in these days hiss thoughts turned much towards the, slim, gold-crowned girl with pure eyes. In all his life she had been the one flaming desire, the one unquenched passion, quiescent for long intervals, but certain, sooner or later, to awaken and torture him anew.

After the armistice, foreseeing discharge, Randolph drew on his bank account in San Francisco, and kept the draft on his person. Those army men who knew his record— what there was to know it— said that here was a man reborn, made anew, turned from a scoundrel into a credit, and all by means of military discipline. The chaplain who had attended him in hospital said that here was a man drawn to the Lord, who had seen the error of his ways, and had found salvation, and all by means of lying sick unto death

Randolph himself said nothing at all, but took his honourable discharge, bought himself the habiliments of civilian life and with the calm, pure eyes of a girl burning into his soul, disappeared.

ii

A great university town is, in many ways, a place of paradoxes. It has its little iron-bound cliques, yet is open to all the world. It is usually a sleepy little ' place yet more *au courant* with the world than most cities. Its entire attention is aptly riveted upon collegiate life and activities— upon that little cosmos of undergraduate life which gives the town its *raison d'être*.

In such a town a man may hide himself admirably from the world, or be may expose himself to all the world, according to his desire. Randolph, well aware that in all this town there was not one person who knew him, came using, his own name, deposited a large sum of money in the bank, and rented a furnished room. It was late summer. Within a short while the college activities would spring into full being.

Seeming to know his way around, Randolph walked down the hill past the railway station to the river, and rented a canoe at the boat house. There,

morning after morning, he paddled up the widening reaches of the stream, past the stone quarries and the bridge, as far as the narrows, and then floated down again, drifting in mind and body. It was his first holiday in a long while, and he set himself to enjoy it thoroughly.

Later, he went over to the college library, introduced himself to tae 1 librarian, and asked help in preparing a work upon China. He proved to have a surprising knowledge of China, and was urged to make himself at home in the library, which he did. The librarian was so impressed that he gave Randolph a card to the University Club— a club composed of professors mainly, occupying the basement of one of the buildings. There Randolph met gentlemen with whom he moved on an even footing. This was not hard. A university man himself in the fled, lost days of youth, he had little there of which to be ashamed. It was later that his record drew blank.

After this Randolph visited one of the professors in the medical school— a red Scotsman, a dynamic little man, of vast repute and skill— and was treated for stomach trouble, which be did not have. Dr Murray was a second father to many of the college girls, having the quality of acquiring confidences from those who knew.

He gave Randolph a cigar and chatted about certain Chinese diseases.

"By the way, said Randolph, meditatively, "I used to know a girl years ago who came here, I believe, to take up some college work. Shannon her name was, Elsie Shannon—"

"What's that?" Murray bounced out of his chair with eager interest. "Why, my dear chap, she's one of my girls—has been for years! You know her?"

"I used to," Randolph lowered his lids to hide the flame in his eyes, "Is she here now?"

"Will be next week. Why, Elsie is the loveliest girl that ever lived— one of the finest! She has charge of the women's hostel you know; a perfect mother to all the girls, yet she's only a girl herself— a slender sweet flower, brimful of loveliness. Are you to be here long?"

"Don't know yet, " said Randolph. "I'm doing some research work, you know"

"Yes, I heard."

RANDOLPH walked to the river. There he got his canoe and paddled hard and furiously. Murray's words were burning into him, awakening all the quiescent fever that lay in his soul. Not until dark did he come home again, the fever burnt out.

She would be here in a week!

Upon the following day a chance remark of his friend, the librarian, decided that he had better get busy. He engaged a typist and began to dictate what he knew about China and its worst aspects; he was not engaged with the iniquities of the Chinese, but rather of the foreign settlements. Randolph undertook the work in an ironical mood, merely to have something to show in case be were called upon to show anything.

He knew his subject— knew it down to ground. He knew it so thoroughly that after two days his typist decided that was no work for a lady and threw up her job. Randolph only laughed, engaged a student typist of the male sex, and let himself go to the limit in his dictation. He found himself enjoying it in a grim way, and it is certain that his typist was kept interested.

Randolph took some of his completed work to the librarian, who delved into with a fierce avidity, and directed him to a certain professor of English, the author of many textbooks on writing and construction, who himself had never been able to write an acceptable story.

The professor of English was keenly intrigued by Randolph's pages, called them utterly hopeless as a manuscript, yet gave him directions as to publishers. All this was thoroughly enjoyable to Randolph, who chuckled many and many a time over the game he was playing with these gentry of the college world.

One afternoon he was engaged in a rubber of bridge at the club, and Dr. Murray cut in. Randolph casually mentioned Elsie Shannon.

"She's not here yet, I understand, said one of the other men.

"No," said Murray, with a keen glance which, despite its kindliness, suddenly alarmed Randolph.

"No. Her mother is very ill, and she has been given leave of absence for a little while—"

"Ah!" said the professor of French, who was dealing. "An angel that girl, if ever one lived! But did you ever notice, gentlemen, that in all the sacred writings we invariably hear of the angels as beings of the male sex? There's a queer thing for you to ponder, Mr. Randolph! Put it in a book some time."

"Thanks; perhaps I shall," said Randolph, glancing at his hand from beneath lowered lids. "You pass? Two hearts."

"Another odd thing," observed Murray during the next deal, "is that it is just such a woman as Miss Shannon who seems to attract the most brutal and debased men in the world. You're not a fictionist, Randolph? Well, it's often struck me that there the fictionists hit the nail of human mature squarely on the head. The attraction of opposites I presume."

"All nonsense!" said the professor of French, ruffling up his spade beard and watching Randolph deal. "A girl like Miss Shannon can't be fooled. That type, my friends, looks through to the spirit of a man. Externals do not matter."

Randolph wondered that the cards did not tremble in his hands. He was thinking of the day, well over the years, when Elsie Shannon had looked into his soul and turned away, shivering.

iii

ONE DAY Randolph was talking to the librarian, who suddenly broke off and glanced from the door of his office.

"Wait a minute, Randolph, there's a chap here you ought to meet. Perhaps you can make him useful, too. He was here last year, and has returned to finish his course—a very bright young fellow indeed " The librarian darted out, and presently returned. Accompanying him was a smiling young man with yellow skin and large spectacles. Randolph started slightly, realizing he was a Chinese student.

"Mr. Randolph, I'd like to introduce Mr. Li Huan, of Shanghai. You were speaking to me about your typist difficulties, and, in case you need a good man, I can recommend Mr. Li absolutely!"

Randolph shook hands. Li Huan was very polite; he seemed to be a quiet, efficient sort of chap, and his English, was of the clear-cut, excellent smoothness that educated foreigners so often acquire. "Not a half-bad idea," said Randolph.

"My present typist is poor in spelling, and I'm rather weak on Chinese words. If you care to come and see me—"

"Another thing," went on the librarian. "Mr. Li is very keenly interested in regenerating his country, like many educated Chinese of to-day, and, I think that he might be able to give you some additional information on the sort of stuff you're writing about. It would fall right in his line."

That evening Randolph had the Chinaman for a caller. Li Huan proved to be a merry soul, but earnest withal. When he had glanced over a few pages of Randolph's much-touted work, he glanced up in surprise.

"This is extraordinary, Mr. Randolph!" he said. "I had hoped some day to write such a book, exposing fully the ways in which the foreign settlements and foreigners generally treat and exploit the vices and weaknesses of my countrymen; but I could never hope to accomplish such a thing as you have here produced! I would be extremely glad to help on it; I would count it a privilege!"

Randolph swore to himself. He had no desire whatever to be pushed into writing any real book, and he foresaw future complications. Nevertheless, he realized that his position would be firmly established in this community if he seized the chance thus offered to him. He engaged Li Huan.

The amazing earnestness of this young man gave him much cynical amusement. Li Huan, who was admitted working his way through college, and needed money, worked night and day on typing over again what the others had done— be put the manuscript into excellent shape, added much, changed much, until Randolph was astonished at his own work when he read over the pages.

As he had nothing better to occupy his time, he threw himself into the work with Li Huan. It served to keep down the flame hammering at his pulses whenever he thought of Elsie Shannon. Still she did not come to town.

A little afraid of Murray, Randolph went one day to the registrar and made direct enquiries. He found that Elsie Shannon's mother was very ill, and that Elsie might not be here for another month; but she would come ultimately. So Randolph went home again, flinging himself into work in order to keep down the burning desire that gripped him whenever he spoke of her, heard of her, dared to think of her.

He was in no hurry for her to come. Every week that she delayed established him here more securely. It was upon this firm establishment that he must depend for everything. He meant that she should hear much of him before he saw her; she must be looking forward a little to seeing him, to seeing the young wastrel she had known in other days, who had now made of himself a man of mark. Once he saw her be must act quickly, swiftly, put his well-conceived plan into operation without the least delay. He must see her one day, and on the following day— act! He dared take no chances on himself, the quivering passion that might unmask him if he waited; he dared take no chances on Elsie Shannon piercing once again to his very soul with her calm, pure gaze! She would do it he knew well, if she had the opportunity. He resolved to give her none.

One day a brief meeting, very brief and the appointment for the day following. He must arrange this for a Saturday and Sunday, of course. He trembled at the thought of how brief the first meeting must be! In the interim she would hear much of him, he knew; she would look forward to the talk with him, to the little dinner. That much she would not refuse because of old -times, and because she would have heard that he was liked and respected here. She would be curious— that would be bait! Randolph had not the least compunction in that world over what he meant to do. He had laid himself bare, dissented himself calmly and coolly during those long desert months down on

the Mexican border, and afterward. He knew that he had been made into a lean, powerful instrument, and he had chosen deliberately between good and evil.

He might have chosen good had he thought there was the least possibility that Elsie Shannon would ever care for him. But he knew better. He knew what a slender, pure flower she was, and how she could read into his soul with those calm eyes. He knew that she could never love him— that his past would be like a frightful thing to her, blasting him even from the pale of friendship. And so he had chosen evil, careless of what came afterward yet building up his own way of escape; careless of the sin that he was scheming, careless of everything except the burning flame that had devoured his vitals these years past, torturing him anew after period of dormant slumbering. He would possess her, at whatever cost!

Each little detail was planned, ready, bulwarked. The dinner invitation— her acceptance of that would depend upon the briefness of that first meeting, and what she heard about him; upon his position here, upon the bait of curiosity to see how he had made a man of himself! So he built his foundations carefully, step by step, neglecting nothing.

He bought a two-seater and learnt to run it. Often he drove over to the city, only hour's drive away from the town and there he carefully scanned, with the eye of a somewhat scornful connoisseur, the places where they could dine. He made arrangements for everything in his mind, planning each detail of the event. He had the little drug that he would put into her coffee, and knew just how every detail would be worked.

There was nothing to do but to await her coming. Meanwhile he worked with Li Huan, and the book drew rapidly together— almost too rapidly, thought Randolph, seeing that it would be completed in a short while now. After all, there was only so much that he could put into it. Li Huan helped him. grandly, proving to have a pretty good acquaintance himself with the evils that afflicted his people in the Treaty Ports.

Often they worked late into the night, Li Huan brewing over a spirit lamp rich orange-blossom tea that was sent to him by his family in Shanghai, and serving little sweet Chinese cakes that came to him by parcel post. And at last Randolph had word that she was coming.

iv

"IT IS DONE, Mr. Randolph," said Li d Huan, taking the final page from the typewriter. Randolph lay back in his chair and chewed his cigar, looking at the sheaf of pages that Li Huan was jostling together into a solid mass. "Finis" had

been typed; the manuscript was complete. In good time, too, thought Randolph.

On the previous day Elsie Shannon had arrived to take up her work. On the following afternoon he was going to see her the first time, going to pay the first brief visit. The following day was Saturday; things fitted in well; at last the gods— or the devils— were working on his side!

"Wrap it up, Li Huan," said Randolph. "Send it to the publisher we agreed upon."

What a joke that book was, he reflected! He was glad to have the wretched thing done with, and Li Huan out of the way for a time. Already his pulses were hammering at the very thought of Elsie Shannon being here in town. He forced himself into a grim control. The sight of Li Huan wrapping up the completed manuscript amused him; the little yellow man was so dreadfully serious, so monumentally in earnest about it all!

Randolph chuckled suddenly and leant forward.

"Tell you what I'll do, Li Huan," he said, chuckling again, as the other blinked toward him through his large spectacles. "You've worked like a dog on this book, and I don't need the money— in fact, I don't think it'll bring much, to be frank. I'll make you a present of it."

Li Huan stared at him a long moment, a puzzled frown creasing his yellow face.

"A present!" he said slowly. "How do you mean, Mr. Randolph?"

"Why, anything it brings goes to you!" Randolph laughed, not striving to hide his amusement over the whole business. "Send the publishers a letter saying that I've given you the manuscript, and all future correspondence is to be handled by you."

"That— that is most generous of you, Mr. Randolph!" Li Huan gazed at him, then slowly shook his head. "But I have enquired how these things are done, sir, and what you suggest would hardly do. The manuscript bears your name, you know; that is only just and fair— "Then, sir, the publishers would have to know from you that I had the right to handle the manuscript," said the yellow man earnestly.

"All right," Randolph laughed. "Type off a letter and I'll sign it."

The typewriter began to bang once more, hurriedly and frantically, as though Li Huan doubted that his good fortune would linger. Randolph chewed his cigar, his thoughts going to Elsie Shannon, excitement fevering him until he swore to himself and got a grip on his senses. hi Huan handed him the typed sheet, and he scrawled his signature across it.

"Shall I get the tea and cake now, sir?"

Randolph nodded, thinking he needed something to calm him.

"If you like."

Thank heaven, this would be the last bit of work with that confounded China boy in the room, silently efficient, a dynamo throttled down and muffled completely beneath yellow velvet! Murray was a dynamo, too— the word made him think of the doctor, somewhat uneasily. He must take precautions, there; Dr. Murray was a queer little man, brimful of violent impulse, and red-headed.

Presently Li Huan set the tray on the table, the cups brimming with golden liquid brewed from the finest-buds, orange scented, beside the cups a plate of the sweetish cakes of rice-flour. Randolph took his cup in his lap. Li Huan swung about his typist's chair and faced him.

"An odd tang to this tea!" said Randolph, smacking his lips over the slightly astringent fluid. He took one of the cakes and dipped it into the tea, eating it. "Is this a new shipment from your family, Li Huan?"

"No, Mr. Randolph. This is some old tea that I had on hand."

Li Huan took off his spectacles and burnished them with his handkerchief, leaving his tea untasted. "I ran out of my last lot, unfortunately. This is some very fine old tea that I was keeping out of sentiment. It is some that my father had, and used only on very important occasions."

"So? I appreciate the honour," said Randolph, and swallowed the tea hurriedly. He could hardly pretend that he liked it, but forced himself to courtesy.

"Yon never told me much about yourself, Li Huan. What was your father's business?"

Li Huan smiled apologetically. Randolph felt a queer sensation, as though that tea bad not agreed with him.

"My father," said the young Chinaman, blandly, "cherished this tea as the choicest of his possessions. You see, I am not ashamed. In China it is quite honourable to gamble, as you know. That chapter you wrote on gambling houses was a masterpiece! Well, my father kept a gambling house in Hu-tsen, the native city of Shanghai. Some years ago he was basely murdered by an American ruffian whom he had befriended."

Randolph tried to leap out of his chair, but found himself perfectly helpless to move. As through a mist he saw the features of Li Huan blinking at him, and now they wore a new and terrible expression.

"You see, Mr. Randolph, I knew who that American was. This tea has peculiar properties. To-morrow they will find that you died from heart failure. It was a tea that my father cherished very highly. I waited until now to give it to you in order that the took might be finished. I expect great things of that book.

now, it was kind of you to give it to me and sign the letter, for that removed one of my chief problems.

"I hope, Mr. Randolph," pursued the bland voice, now blurred to the ears of Randolph, "that the book will pay me well. It must! Because that will only he justice; you took my father's money, you know, and this will be an excellent way of paying me."

Randolph tried to hear more— tried frantically and horribly— but he could not.

v

Dr. Murray and the university librarian were alone in their easy chairs in the corner of the club. They were old cronies, these two.

"You remember Randolph?" said the librarian. "It's a most remarkable thing the way that book of his has been selling. As an exposé it's been marvelous; but the book itself has a very queer flavour to it— an ironic tang all through the thing."

The doctor nodded. "Yes. its success has been phenomenal. Randolph led a rather hard life out there in China, I believe—got a good deal of his information at first hand." "

"I didn't know that," said the librarian reflectively. "At any rate, Li Huan has been enriched through Randolph's giving him the manuscript. Most have been about the last thing poor Randolph did, too. That chap must have had a big heart; many taciturn men are like that. I suppose he knew that he'd go out suddenly some day."

"It was a tragedy," said Dr. Murray— "a tragedy in more ways than one. His death gave me a pretty stiff jolt, I can tell you."

"You?" repeated the librarian, "I didn't know you were such friends '

"Oh, not on his account primarily," said the doctor." You remember Elsie Shannon— how she gave up her work here altogether and has gone home to take care of her mother?"

The librarian's brows lifted. "Eh? You don't mean to say there was any connection?"

"There was," stated Murray gruffly— "damn it! I've never been so broken up in my life. You see, she had known Randolph some years previously. He was a bit wild then, I fancy, from what she's told me. The girl loved him, but could not accept his wildness, and he went away.

"Well, Randolph turned up here, after making a man of himself, in order to meet her again. Elsie had given me some idea of the story. Almost the first time I met Randolph I realized that he was the man she had always loved. You

see, Elsie had always had a strange faith in him, had always believed that he'd turn out right and come back a real man— just as he did. I saw her the night after she came to town, had a long talk with her about Randolph; and man— man, you never saw the mystery of womanhood as I saw it in her eyes that night! It was the next day we heard of his death."

"Then— they never saw each other?" queried the librarian softly. Murray shook his head.

"He died on the very threshold," he said— on the very threshold."

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10: Cavesson's Success

Guy Boothby

1867-1905

Adelaide Observer, 10 Dec 1904

Collected in: *For Love of Her*, 1905

The Monthly Story Magazine, August 1906

IT IS JUST POSSIBLE that you may remember the attempts made by Inspector Cavesson, of the Queensland Mounted Police, to effect the capture of the Centipede, the notorious bushranger, who, for a longer time than Cavesson ever likes to think of now, had kept the pastoral districts within a radius of 300 miles of the town of Mulga Flat a state of continual terror.

One of the metropolitan papers, not inaptly, spoke of him as a criminal will-o'-the-wisp, and the term describes him as well, if not much better, than I can possibly hope to do. As a matter of fact he was here to-day and gone to-morrow! Sticking up a station on the eastern side of Mulga Flat one day, and plundering a bank a hundred miles distant the next.

Try how Cavesson would he could not lay his hands upon him, and when on several occasions he thought he had ready got him the rascal, by some ingenious means of his own demising, managed to slip through his fingers, and be off about his evil business once more.

Meanwhile, as I have already told you, Parliament made nasty remarks, the Commissioner of Police officially reprimanded him, a special Magistrate was sent up to take charge of the district, while several of the papers went so far as to affirm that he was not only in league with the enemy, but that his failures to effect his capture were only the natural results of the bribes he had received. As may be supposed, between one and the other, Cavesson's life was made about as miserable as a man's could well be. At last, as has been already narrated, he had the good fortune to secure the capture of the Centipede's lieutenant. How the man contrived to escape, assisted by his notorious employer, a perusal of the story, entitled "Cavesson's Blunder," will reveal. It is sufficient for the present that, when the news reached the public ears, the inspector's position became even more unbearable than it had been before. Madly in love with Minnie Walkett, as he was, he had to remember her father's own words, which were to the effect that unless he could come to him and say that he had captured the Centipede he should not dream of giving him his daughter's hand in marriage. But how on earth was that capture to be effected? He had tried every conceivable plan, but without success. He had schemed and plotted in vain. Not only his marriage, but his own good name, depended upon his bringing the outlaw to book, but, puzzle his brains as he would, he could not see how it was to be accomplished.

"I've got three hundred and fifty pounds standing to my credit at the bank," he said to himself as he paced up and down his office one hot summer morning, "and, by Jove! I'd willingly plank it down if I could lay my hand upon the rascal in return. He's separating me from Minnie, and he's ruining my career. What have I done that fate should saddle me with such a load?"

He went to the window and looked out upon the street, it was by no means a cheerful prospect that he saw there. The heat was terrific, and the road was inches deep in dust. The iron roofs of the houses opposite reflected the glare, and when a scorching blast drove down the street it was like a sandstorm in the Great Sahara.

"And to think that if I could only capture the fellow I could be out of this for ever," he said, glaring at a small dog who was scratching himself against the verandah post outside. Then the sound of wheels, attracted his attention, and a moment later the mail coach, a cumbrous, unwieldy affair, covered with dust, and drawn by five panting horses, appeared in sight, passed the police office, and rolled slowly on down the street: towards the principal hotel. Cavesson touched the bell upon his desk.

"The coach has just passed," he said to the sergeant who appeared in answer to his summons. "Go down to the post office, and bring me the letters as quickly as possible."

Then, when the man had vanished once more, he sat down at his desk and amused himself spearing his blotting pad with his pen.

"More wiggings from the Commissioner, I suppose," he said gloomily. "More letters from kind friends, enclosing cuttings from the metropolitan papers, each of which will refer to what they call my gross neglect of duty, my inability to capture the Centipede, and will insinuate that I am taking bribes to allow him to remain at large. Oh, it's a beautiful, beautiful world, and if it weren't for Minnie, by Jove! I could almost wish myself out of it."

A quarter of an hour later the sergeant returned with his superior's letters, which he placed upon the table. Cavesson glanced at the various missives, and then selected cue, the envelope of which was addressed in a lady's handwriting. The contents must have been distinctly pleasing, for he read the letter several times before he placed it in his pocket.

"God bless her," he said, and added a moment later, with equal sincerity, "and confound the Centipede."

After that he turned his attention to the remainder of his correspondence.

Selecting a long, official-looking envelope bearing the letters O.H.M.S. upon its face, he opened it. If the expression upon his face might be taken as any criterion, it was by no manner of means as pleasant as the last. It ran as follows:—

Sir—

I am directed by the Commissioner of Police to inform yon that, in consequence of your continual failure to effect the arrest of the notorious criminal known as the Centipede, who for so long a time has been troubling your district, it has been decided to transfer you from your post at Mulga Flat to another station. Inspector Dickson will relieve you on the 13th of this present month, when you are directed to hand over to him the men in your charge, and to report yourself at, this office as promptly as possible.

I have the honour to be,
Your obedient servant,
J. Whittaker Bell,
Secretary to the Commissioner.

Cavesson groaned aloud. . .

"This is the end of everything," he said to himself. "I'm proved incompetent, and Dickson is sent up to relieve me."

He brought his list down with such a bang upon the table that the inkpot jumped into the air, and it came within an ace of overturning. It would have been a bad day for the Centipede if he had stood before the irate officer at that moment. After a while he picked up the letter and read it again.

"Dickson will he here on the 13th," he said to himself. "If that is so, I have still five days' grace allowed me. Five days in which to win Jennie, five days in which to show them that I am not as incompetent as they suppose me. But there, what can I do in such a short time? If only that brute would give me one clue as to his whereabouts I might accomplish something. But, as it is, I might as well stretch out my hand and try to touch the moon us hope for such a bit of luck. I'm a miserable beggar if ever there was one in this world."

That afternoon he informed Mr. Hablett, the Magistrate in charge of the district, of the fact that he was to be superseded, and could see that the latter was by no means displeased at the turn affairs had taken. Ever since his own misadventure with the Centipede the other had cherished a dislike to Cavesson; and, though he did not say so, he had the satisfaction of knowing that it was in a great measure due to his communication to headquarters that the inspector was being recalled.

For the next three days Cavesson galloped about his district like a madman, making enquiries in every possible direction, and sparing neither himself nor his men in his endeavours to bring the enemy to book before the new inspector should arrive, he was no more successful, however, than before, and when on the Wednesday night he retired to rest it was with the feeling that, so far as the Centipede was concerned, his doom was sealed.

According to custom he slept with his window open. In Mulga Flat, burglars were unknown luxuries, and indeed, if there had been a stray gentleman of the

craft in the district, the bedroom of the inspector of police would scarcely have been the crib be would have been likely to crack. Nevertheless Cavesson's bedroom was visited that night by a stranger from the outside world, but who that stranger was, and how he get in without rousing the inhabitants has never yet been discovered.

When the owner of the room went to his dressing table next morning he was surprised to find a grimy letter addressed to himself standing against the looking glass. The writing was quite unknown to him, and the spelling of his name betraying the fact that, whatever else might be, spelling was evidently not the author's strong point.

"How the deuce did it get here?" Cavesson asked himself as he picked it up. "It wasn't there. I'll swear, when I went to bed last night, and surely no one would have had the cheek to enter my room while I was asleep."

And yet the fact remained that the letter had reached him. and that if was intended for himself. He accordingly opened it, and scanned the contents with a considerable amount of curiosity. It was short, but, as it transpired, very much to the point.

"If Inspeckter Cavesin," it ran*, "wants to catch the Sentipeed, he'd better take a friend's advise, and be at the 'Jolly Bushmen' grog shanty on the Yarrawatta Crossing on Thursday night, when the man he wants so bad will be there disgised as a preest. You'd best catch him then, as he's cleering out of the Country, and you won't get another chanst."*

Cavesson put the letter down and donned his considering cap.

"Is it genuine, or is it only a hoax to lure me off in another direction, in order that he shall work one of his villainies in the neighbourhood while I am absent?"

He scarcely knew what to think or what action to take. The writing was plainly disguised, the paper told him nothing. He finished dressing, and sat down to breakfast with the weight of tin's new complication lying heavily upon his mind. If it were not a hoax how gladly would he embrace the opportunity it offered him of getting even with his foe; if it were, and he should act upon it, and anything ill should result, then he would vacate his position, and take his departure for the south in one last furious storm of ridicule and abuse. It was by no means a pleasant position for a sensitive man to find himself placed in. and Cavesson grew almost dizzy as he thought of it. After breakfast he discussed the matter with his faithful adherent Burke; the Magistrate he resolved to leave out of his calculations altogether. And, as the sequel proved, it was just as well that he did so.

"Well, sir," said Burke, when he had heard everything, "if you'll excuse me, it seems to me to be, in a manner of speaking, like our last chance. The

Centipede, as we all know, has got his enemies as well as friends in the district, and it's as likely as not that one of them has turned rusty. Why not give it a trial, sir? You can leave me here with three of the men, and you may be quite sure that I will keep my eyes open, if only for your sake. It's a black shame, sir, that you should he recalled because you can't manage to catch the chap. The devil himself couldn't do it. so I'm thinking. Fix yourself up a bit different, sir; like a working man, so to speak, and go to the grog shanty. If a priest turns up, arrest him. It's just possible you may turn the tables on your enemies after all."

"By Jove! I've a good mind to take your advice, and to risk it, Burke," said Cavesson. "Things couldn't be much worse with me than they are at present; while it is just probable that one of the Centipede's enemies may be giving him away after all."

In this fashion it was settled, and for the remainder of the morning Cavesson busied himself preparing for the adventure that lay before him. Shortly after midday, had there been any one there to see it, a most unusual sight might have been witnessed on the road that led from Mulga Flat across the plains to the crossing on the Yarrawatta River. A gigantic table-topped wagon such as is used by carriers for conveying goods from civilization out to the Far West, drawn by 30 oxen, might have beep observed slowly crawling along the track. It was loaded with bales of wool, but instead of being conducted only by the carrier and his mate, it was accompanied by four stalwart men, who, though dressed after the fashion of ordinary bushmen, in reality comprised the inspector of police and three of his most trustworthy subordinates. Hour after hour the wagon crawled on its way, and at least half a dozen times in every 60 minutes Cavesson and the hands on the top of the load called down maledictions on the bullocks for their slow travelling.

Comparatively short though the distance was, night had fallen before they reached their destination and were able to call a halt by one of the large waterholes that were all that remained of what in winter was a river of more than a quarter of a mile wide. Once in camp, the work of unyoking commenced, and after this had been satisfactorily accomplished and the animals had been conducted to the water and good grass, it was time to think about carrying out the plot they had arranged. A fire was accordingly lighted, and the cooking of the evening meal commenced. In the meantime a space had been cleared among the wool bales, and in this a bed was arranged, upon which one of the troopers, a somewhat cadaverous fellow, rejoicing in the name of Brown, was to act the part of an invalid. Then the evening meal was eaten, and after that Cavesson called his men together.

"Now, my lads," he began, "I want to say a few words to you. As you are aware, this morning I received some information that may possibly enable me

to got hold of the man who has outwitted us for so long. I believe you are as anxious to bring him to book as I myself, and if you play your parts well to-night, as I feel sure you will do, I see no reason why the arrest should not take place. In a quarter of an hour the carrier and I will set off for the grog shanty; you, Brown, will go to bed on the load, while the rest of you will lake up your stations among the bushes close at hand. When we are ready to capture the prisoner you will take your signal from me as I direct. If he escapes it will not be our fault."

"You can trust to us, sir," said one of the men, and the others echoed his remark.

Everything having been arranged, Cavesson and the teamster set out for the grog shanty, which was situated something like a quarter of a mile further down the river bank. It was a place that possessed a far from good reputation, and on more occasions than one Cavesson had had the best of reasons for suspecting that the proprietor had given the information to the bushrangers which had enabled them to escape from the trap that he had set for them. On reaching the house the two men entered the bar. The teamster, according to the arrangement previously agreed upon, called for drinks, and the landlord, who was behind the bar, served them. One of the daughters of the house, who was wiping glasses at the further end of the room, looked up as they entered, and Cavesson could have sworn that he detected an anxious look upon her face as she took stock of them.

"If the Centipede is here I should not be surprised to find that she is the woman who has given him away,'' he said to himself.

The landlord and the teamster, as Cavesson was well aware, were old friends. For this reason, when the latter stated that he had a dying man out at his camp, the other's suspicions were not aroused.

"Surely you remember him," said the teamster. "Jim Heggarty, him as used to be on the Boulia road before he came south?"'

"In course, I remember him," the landlord replied. "Poor Jim, and so he is real bad, is he?"

"Had, why he's as close as death as ever he'll he in this world," the carrier answered. "He's moanin' and groanin' out there as if he'd never know no comfort again, which it's my belief he won't. When he was up and about he never believed in nothink, didn't give a cuss for anything, alive or dead, he used to say. But now he's down it's all the other way. He can't rest no-ways, because he laughed at religion, he says, and mother church, and such-like."

Cavesson noticed that the woman behind the bar gave a sudden start on hearing this. Next moment, however, his attention was attracted by the sound of horse's hoofs outside the house. Presently the door at the further end of the

bar, which led out into the stockyard, opened, and a Roman Catholic priest entered the room. Although dusty and travel-stained, he was neat and natty, and seemed to be on the best possible terms not only with himself, but also with the world in general.

"Good evening, landlord," he said, approaching the counter. "I presume you can give me a room to-night?"

"With pleasure, your reverence," the landlord replied. "Have you ridden far to day?"

"Only from Rumford Station," the other answered. "You may doubtless have heard that the eldest daughter was married yesterday to young Mr. McPherson, of Cootnambrilla. I went out to perform the ceremony."

Cavesson looked at the man, and took particular notice of the dark, restless eyes and the clear cut features, also of the small scar on the left side of the mouth. He was the Centipede without a doubt. After a nobbler of brandy and a few more unimportant remarks the priest ordered his supper to be prepared for him, and then made as if he would leave the room. The teamster, however, in the meantime had said something in an undertone to the landlord, who, in reply, somewhat unwillingly addressed the clergyman.

"This man, your reverence," he said in an apologetic tone, "asks me to inform you that one of his mates lies dying out in the camp yonder, and wants to know if you would have any objection to going out to see him. He says he don't think the poor chap will live till morning."

The priest looked intently at the carrier, and then from him at the landlord. Cavesson could see that he was placed in an awkward position. By all the rules of his cloth it would never have done for him to have declined to go, and yet, remembering who he was, and how necessary it was for him to be close, he had no desire to run the risks of being drawn into a trap.

"Do you know this man?" he enquired of the landlord.

"Know him?" returned the landlord with a laugh. "Lor' bless you. I've known him for years."

"You are quite sure that I can trust myself with him?"

This was a speech, as Cavesson could see, that was possessed of a double meaning.

"I'll pledge my word on it," answered the landlord, who, as may be supposed, had no notion of the teamster's connection with Cavesson and the police.

"Very well, then, I'll go," the other replied. "While I am absent let my supper be prepared, and see that it is ready for me by the time I return. Now, my friend, lead the way; and if the comforts of the church can help to assuage

the spiritual sorrows of your unhappy friend you may rest assured that they shall be given in the most fit and proper manner."

They left the house together, and Cavesson, who had at that moment been lolling up against the counter, prepared to follow them. As he did so the girl behind the bar allowed a glass to fall from her hand.

"What did you do that for, you hussy?" asked her father angrily. "It ain't like you to go chucking the crockery about. Go and get his reverence's supper, and look sharp about it. Do you hear me?''

Ten minutes later the strangely assorted trio reached the rendezvous, where the grey outline of the wagon could be plainly distinguished, thrown into relief as it was by the leaping flames of the camp fire. If the priest had any suspicions left, this familiar sight must have tended to relieve him of them, for he approached the wagon, with all his old confidence.

"Where is the invalid?" he enquired as he passed the fire.

"Upon the loading," the carrier replied. "How's it with you now, Jim?"

"Bad, bad, mortal had," the sick man replied in a husky voice, "Are you going to let me die like a dog, without the blessings of the Holy Church?"

"No, no, my friend," said the supposed priest. "It is fortunate for you that I am here to minister to your requirements."

"If your reverence would be pleased to mount the wagon," said the carrier, "you'd be able to see him for yourself. Here, you, Dick, hand us the steps, and look sharp about it."

Thus abjured, Cavesson produced the ladder, and propped it against the tailboard of the wagon. A moment later the priest had mounted, and was on top of the load. Kneeling beside the supposed sick man he enquired the nature of his ailments. At the same moment a woman's shriek rang out on the still night air, and the innkeeper's daughter was to be seen hastening towards the camp.

"What's that?" cried the priest, leaping to his feet.

"It means that so far as you are concerned the game is up," answered Cavesson coolly, producing a revolver from his pocket as he spoke. "Put your hands above your head, Centipede, or you're a dead man."

"My dear fellow, there's not the least necessity for that," returned the Centipede with a gentle little laugh that was more an expression of amusement than of anything else. "So you're really Cavesson, are you? Well, it seems as if you've scored after all, does it not? I did not expect to be caught in this simple fashion, and just as I was leaving the country, too." Then he added, looking round him at the others, "I suppose it would be no use my attempting to make a fight for it?"

"Not in the least," Cavesson replied, and as he spoke he blew his whistle, and the troopers, who had hitherto lain hidden among the brushwood, rose and approached the wagon.

"Just put the handcuffs on him to make sure, Brown," said Cavesson, and in reply to the order the invalid rose from his couch and produced a pair of manacles, with which he encircled the Centipede's wrists.

"Fancy my having allowed myself to be caught in this ridiculously simple fashion," said the Centipede, as he descended the ladder and stood before the fire. "After this you'll be the hero of the hour, Cavesson!"

"It's about time I had a little success," answered the other grimly. And then to make assurance doubly sure he ordered that one of the handcuffs should be made fast to his own left wrist. That done he dispatched two of his men to requisition horses from the innkeeper, being desirous of returning to the township and setting his prisoner under lock and key with as little delay as possible.

"It is all my own fault," said the Centipede, as they stood together before the fire awaiting the arrival of the transport service. "If I had not played fast and loose with that girl who, by the way, has cleared out, I should not be in the predicament I am now. I suppose she gave me away?"

"You don't expect me to commit myself, I hope '' answered Cavesson. "It is sufficient for my purpose that I have got you,"

"You're quite right," the Centipede replied, without the least sign of ill-humour. "It would not be business-like to say where one derives one's information."

Half an hour later they were on their way back to the township, and for the first time in many weeks Cavesson was able to look upon himself in the light of a really happy man. Inasmuch as he had effected the capture of the Centipede, nothing could deprive him of the right to say that he had complied with his future father-in-law's stipulation. Moreover, he had vindicated his honour, and shown his detractors that he was far from being the fool they had not only supposed, but declared him to be.

Something under three hours after leaving the crossing, and just as the police station clock was striking 12, they rode into the township. Not a soul was about, and, in consequence, he was able to stow his prisoner carefully away in one of the cells without any one but Burke and his troopers being the wiser that the notorious Centipede was in the town.

It was a happy man who retired to rest that night.

NEXT morning he was aroused from sleep by the sergeant, who invaded his sleeping apartment with the information that the new inspector had arrived;

and that, after calling at the police station, he had gone on to pay his respects to the Magistrate.

"The deuce he has!" said Cavesson, twirling his moustache. "He knows nothing about the Centipede, I suppose?"

"No more than any one else, sir," said Burke. "There's not a soul in the township dreams he's here. I've taken good care of that."

"All right," said Cavesson. "Now I will dress, and when I've done that I'll go along to Hablett's house and drop a shell into their camp."

On reaching the Magistrate's house he found the new inspector and his host at breakfast. They were more than a little surprised to see him.

"How do, Dickson?" said Cavesson coolly, after he had saluted his superior. "Had a pleasant journey up from Brisbane?"

"So-so," said Dickson. "It's too hot for travelling. Any news of the Centipede?"

"I fancy we should have heard something about it before tills if there had been," put in Hablett vindictively. "When Cavesson catches him I shall expect to hear the church bell going, to let us know there's something important on hand."

Cavesson bit his lip, but managed, with an effort, to keep his temper. Pretending to ignore the question, he asked Dickson when it would he convenient for him to inspect the station and to take over command, according to the tenor of the Commissioner's letter.

"I am prepared to start as soon as possible," the latter replied. "The sooner the better."

"Will half an hour's time suit you?" asked Cavesson.

"Admirably," returned the other.

Thereupon Cavesson bade them goodbye, and left the house. At the time arranged Dickson and the Magistrate arrived at the police station. They inspected the charge room, the various offices, the inspector's quarters, and the stables and the harness room, and at last found themselves at the cells.

"What charges have you?" enquired Hablett.

"In No. I a case of petty larceny," said Cavesson. "In No. 2 a drunken shearer. No. 3. however, is more interesting."

As he spoke he signed to the sergeant to unlock the door.

"Who is the prisoner?" Dickson enquired.

"The Centipede," Cavesson answered simply, and the surprise and chagrin he saw on the faces of the two men was sufficient recompense for him for all he had suffered at their hands.

Two hours later the notorious criminal who had kept the district in such a state of terror for so long a time past, was brought before the Magistrate and

remanded, in order that further evidence against him might be obtained. Three days later he was committed for trial, and was ordered to be taken to Marywonga to stand his trial at the next assizes. Much to Cavesson's delight a letter from headquarters instructed his successor to attend to the matter of transportation.

"Take my advice, Dickson," Cavesson said, when they discussed the matter, "and have him handcuffed to your wrist night and day. I know the gentleman with whom we have to deal, and if you give him half a chance he'll be off and away, and you'll never set eyes on him again."

"I'll take good care that he doesn't do that," answered Dickson, haughtily. "If he can get away from me he's a cleverer man than I take him for."

"I am only giving you fair warning," said Cavesson, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Thanks," answered Dickson, laconically. "When I want your advice I'll ask you for it."

Next day the party started for Marywonga, and Cavesson, who had no further reason for remaining in Mulga Flat, decided to accompany them, for the first 100 miles of their journey. Then he was to branch off to the south, and eventually catch the train for Brisbane. At the last moment the police Magistrate, to avoid having to accomplish the journey alone later on, also made up his mind to accompany the party, and when the sun rose next morning they set off, the prisoner riding a quiet horse, and having his right wrist handcuffed to Dickson's left. for several reasons it was far from being a jovial party, and Cavesson was not sorry when the time arrived for him to say farewell to it. Then he bade Dickson and the Magistrate goodbye, and afterwards turned to the Centipede, who was watching him with his usual quiet smile upon his face.

"Goodbye, my friend," he said; "we shall not see each other again until we meet in Court. You have caused me a great deal of trouble and anxiety, but. clever as you were. I think you must confess I beat you in the end."

"You wouldn't have beaten me then," answered the Centipede, "had it not been for a woman's treachery. However, I bear you no malice. Will you shake hands?"

"Of course I will," said Cavesson; and he did so, while Hablett and Dickson exchanged glances of disapproval.

Then bidding the party goodbye, he rode off down a side track.

THREE DAYS LATER he arrived in Brisbane, called upon the Commissioner, obtained a fortnight's leave of absence, and was on the mail train on his way south in order to remind Mr. Walkett of the promise he had given him.

"Well, well," said the old gentleman, when they had discussed the matter, "as Minnie loves you, and I told you that I would consider the matter when you had caught the Centipede, there is nothing for it but for me to surrender."

He was as good as his word, and that very day the engagement was announced. Next morning, however, a surprise was in store for them.

"God bless my soul alive!" cried the millionaire, bustling out. newspaper in hand, into the verandah, where the happy couple wore seated together; "just listen to this."

So saying, he unfolded the paper and commenced to read.

As our readers will doubtless remember, the capture of the redoubtable bushranger Centipede, who for the past 14 months has been defying law and order in south-western Queensland, was effected by Police-inspector Cavesson, on the 12th, on the Yarrawatta River. In due course the Magistrate at Mulga Flat committed him for trial at the next criminal sessions, to be held in the town of Marywonga, some 200 miles distant. In order to make sure of his due arrival, the prisoner was personally conducted on the journey by Police-Inspector Dickson, an officer of high repute, who was therefore answerable for his safe custody and delivery. The Magistrate who had committed him, the inspector who effected his capture, and four troopers constituted the remainder of the escort. In due course Inspector Cavesson, who had received orders to report himself at headquarters as soon as possible, said farewell to them and turned south. All went well with the remainder of the party until they were within 50 miles of their destination. When they camped beside a creek and retired to rest in the customary fashion the prisoner was sleeping between the Police Magistrate and Inspector Dickson, to whose wrist he was as usual securely handcuffed. Judge, therefore, of the surprise of the party when they woke next morning at finding the Magistrate and inspector manacled together and the prisoner gone, both gentlemen, and also the troopers, declare, most positively that they did not notice him moving about during the night, and are at a complete loss to understand how he managed to outwit them as he did. As soon as the fact was discovered, a thorough search was made of the neighbourhood, but entirely without success. For the time, being the Centipede has vanished an completely as he has so often done before. Needless to say, the result of this curious business is being anxiously awaited in southern Queensland.

THREE MONTHS after the appearance of the above paragraph Cavesson, who, acting in accordance with his future father-in-law's express wishes, had sent in his resignation of the office of police inspector, in order to become a pastoralist and a husband, was married to Miss Walkett in the cathedral. It was a grand affair, and many important people were present— including myself of course. When the ceremony was at an end we returned to Mr. Walkett's residence for the reception.

"By the way, Cavesson," said the Commissioner of Police, buttonholing the bridegroom after the cutting of the cake, "this packet reached me this morning, with an anonymous letter, asking me to convey it personally to you

on your wedding day, and stating that it was a little present from a well-wisher, who was not conversant with your address."

"I wonder what on earth it can be?" said Cavesson, and forthwith broke the seals and unwrapped the paper that enclosed it.

A small cardboard box next came into view, on opening which a magnificent gold watch with an equally costly chain was discovered.

"What a strange thing," he said; "who on earth can it be from?"

"Is there no inscription that will throw light upon it?" enquired his wife.

He turned it over and examined the back.

"Yes, there is," he answered, and read the following:—

From the Centipede to Inspector Cavesson, with all good wishes for his future.

11: A Goldfields Christmas Eve

Valerie Jameson

fl. 1900-1930s

Swan Express (WA), 25 Dec 1909

The action of this story is at "Fly Flat", a section of flat land on the outskirts of Coolgardie which was populated by shallow gold dust deposits and extracted with dry-blowers: the "poverty row" of Western Australian prospecting in the 1890s. The last reference I can find to this author is a mention, in a small par in a weekly magazine in the late 30s that she was in "poor health".

IT MATTERS NOT what high-sounding names are selected by ambitious parents and sealed by the orthodox baptismal rites on infant brows, for, in after-life, school age or manhood, the cherished appellation is ruthlessly swept aside for a more convenient nickname, arising often from some personal, characteristic or the disposition of the owner.

My mate, Archibald, forfeited his at Coolgardie by giving rein to a crotchety humour, and henceforth was known amongst intimate associates as Narkie. He didn't like it, but it fitted so well that he could not shake it off. Though turned forty-two, I did not betray that mature age, and secretly rejoiced in the appellation of "young fellow" when familarly addressed.

Narkie, though a whole year my junior, was commonly dubbed "old." The truth is, he was born old, and could not grow out of it. He was scrupulously clean, and an excellent camp-sergeant. As fastidious as a woman over details. His two-roomed camp was the pride and envy of Toorak in those Bohemian days.

Though generally admired, no one rushed to share it.

In a weak moment I yielded to a pathetic appeal from the lonely hatter, and forsook the hang-drudgery society of four jovial bachelors on Fly Flat to go mates with Narkie.

From the first he assumed an attitude of paternal severity towards me. and mortgaged my freedom. Certain inexorable rules of conduct were enforced. Punctuality at meal hours; lock out if not home at eleven on nights-out. No smoking allowed indoors; and other womanish restrictions too numerous to catalogue.

"Dunno how you stand 'im," my sympathisers said. But the climax of endurance came on Christmas Eve. I had spent the night in right jolly style with a company of friends, and sauntered home in a convivial mood, my banjo tucked under my arm. It was a glorious night. The moon, new-risen, faced me

beamingly, and solemnly asserted it was not quite eleven, being timed to appear just before that hour.

Reaching camp, I gently raised the latch, but found the door obdurate. I tried the small window of our sleeping apartment, but that was also secured. Then I tapped gently on the pane.

"Who's there?" growled Narkie.

"Only me," I replied in the tone that is alleged to turn away wrath.

"Go 'way, you drunken wretch— hic; it's after midnight."

"The moon's just up," I remonstrated; "so it's quite early."

"You know th'— hic— regulations of this establishment. I don't give a hang for the moon; I go by the clock."

"But it's Christmas Eve," I urged. "Don't be disagreeable."

"Go 'way an'— hic— git sober." I was righteously offended at such insulting accusations, but, of course. I knew he was intoxicated.

A happy inspiration seized me. If it really was Christmas morning. I could give the neighbourhood a treat by singing Christmas carols to a banjo accompaniment. This decided, I sought first the residence of the Barnes family, and, not being well up in the right kind of carol. I started on "Good Old Jeff."

An unexpected shower of missiles compelled me to flee ignominiously. with no worse injury, happily, than a slight concussion of the elbow, which I had used to shield my cherished instrument. I recollected that the Barnes family were not musical, but, nothing daunted, I proceeded to charm another sleeping camp with the soulful strains of "Home, Sweet Home."

A child's howling interfered with the melody, and I heard a peevish voice cxclaim: "Go an' stoush that lunatic, John; he's woke the baby."

I didn't wait for John.

After a few more unsuccessful attempts to extort some appreciation from that ungodly neighbourhood, I resolved to serenade Narkie, in the hope that the persuasion of musical eloquence would melt him into a penitent frame of mind. Seating myself on a kerosene tin below the window, I crooned that pathetic coon song, "I want yer, ma Honey!"

Before completing the first verse ominous mutterings and growlings within threatened an eruption likely to burst in some form from the window above. I discreetly moved my kerosene tin to a sheltering tree-stump at a safe distance, and then varied the melody with "Go to' sleep, my Little Piccaninny." The "silv'ry summer moon" was a reality, shining affably over my shoulder. projecting my own shadow and the shadow of the stump at my feet,

WAS it a stump? Horror!!! It moved.

My eyes became glued to the shadow. Suddenly it developed horns. Recollections of well-authenticated reports of midnight apparitons swarmed upon me. I dared, not raise my eyes till, with a mighty effort, I screwed up sufficient courage for a brief glance behind. My fears were confirmed. A saturnine visage peered curiously over my shoulder. A saturnine laugh sounded in my horrified ears. The banjo fell from my nerveless grasp as, panic-stricken, I rushed forward and flung myself against the locked door.

"Open, quick!" I gasped. "The devil's after me!"

"Glad to hear it," was the heartless response, followed by a snore.

In desperation I cried, "You don't realise my peril, Archibald. Open the door, or I'm lost! It's a real devil."

Narkie's callous guffaw was maddening. "Ain't there a few snakes as well? Keep your devils, my boy; I don't want 'em in 'ere."

The approaching sound of pattering hoofs increased my terror. I glanced behind. There, close at my shoulder, leered two blazing eyes, surmounted by menacing horns.

Thought was paralysed. Impelled by fear, I ran. keeping close to the camp-walls, and always conscious that the awful thing pursued. When I was almost exhausted. I made for a neighbour's fowl enclosure, and shut myself in, to the noisy consternation of its feathered inmates. Then, as my pursuer ambled up, I scrutinised it closely, and, with feeling's of mingled disgust and relief, found it to be a frolicsome goat.

I was then launched into fresh tribulation. The owner of the fowls appeared on the scene, and accused me of attempting to steal his birds. Things looked pretty black for a time. I could not get in a word of explanation. I was to be hauled before the Warden as a common poultry thief. What possible defence could I make when caught red-handed in a neighbour's fowl-pen at 3 a.m. Christmas Day? In vain I protested my innocence. I could not stem the torrent of abuse. Nothing short of a miracle could free me from my embarrassing situation.

"What, then," demanded my wrathful accuser, "is your justification for invading my premises?"

At that instant the goat, that had probably grown tired of so much talk and desired to resume his former frolic, made an abrupt attack from the rear. My pyjama-clad foe somersaulted and landed heavily at my feet.

Assisting him to rise, I replied. "That is my justification, and I think it will satisfy the Warden."

Ruefully rubbing his bruised anatomy with one hand, the enlightened foe extended the other to grip mine. With that fraternal grip he escorted me to his camp. We toasted the newborn Christmas Day, the mischievous goat, and then

we broke into Narkie's camp and pulled him out of bed. We broke the "rules of his estabishment," including the windows and the doors, then spent the remainder of Christmas with the jovial bachelors of Fly Flat.

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12: A Story of John Long

Anonymous

Punch (Melbourne) 23 April 1903

Whether they're highwaymen in Britian, bushrangers in Australia, or outlaws of the Old West, the gentlemen of the road always have that romantic aura.

TROOPER HAYNES was particularly anxious to catch John Long, known throughout the country as Long Jack, a smart young bushman who, like so many of the bushranging fraternity, had graduated from, the comparatively innocent game of cattle lifting, to the more exciting and more remunerative business of sticking up station homesteads, and compelling young rural bank mangers to hand over their cash balance under cover of a revolver.

Trooper Haynes had set his heart so strongly on capturing Long that he had scarcely been able to think of anything else for a month, and found himself plotting and making deep schemes even over his meals.

And yet Trooper Haynes was not ambitious. He had no particular desire to rise in the force, and did not aspire to end his days on a superintendent's pension. When he did think of his future he invariably pictured himself as a prosperous farmer, with a nice wife, three or four fine children, a good gun, and the best horse in the district. That this was a very worthy aspiration in Trooper Haynes no reasonable man will deny.

True, there was a small matter of £500 the head of Long Jack, the bushranger, and it was true, too, that the squatters would be slow to recognise the signal service done to the community by the man who laid Long by the heels in the nearest gaol. But Haynes was not an avaricious man, either, and the £500 had little to do with the craving he had to see Long Jack lying helpless at his feet, with the darbies of Trooper Haynes clipped on his wrist.

What remained? Henrietta Irons! That insinuation brings the blood to the tanned checks of Trooper Haynes in hot patches. When Tim Haynes pictured himself as a prosperous farmer, with a nice wife and the other appurtenances, it was always "Harry" Irons who occupied the proud position of the nice wife. Here, too, Trooper Haynes must be held justified. "Harry" Irons was the finest, handsomest, merriest devil in the district, and her good heart was admitted even by those who deplored her lack of womanliness.

Harry was voted unwomanly by the gentler members of the gentle sex, because of the qualities of her character that differed from their own. She was exuberant, boisterously healthy, her merriment was a madcap emotion, every action of hers betrayed her spirit. It was said she was in love with John Long.

"It's like enough," said old Larry; "the devil himself not bein' here for her to fall in love wid! "

It was "like enough," Long Jack being certainly the man most likely to appeal to the adventurous heart of Henrietta Irons, a girl with an almost piratical craving for life and action. Besides, Jack was the finest figure of a man in Australia, and as handsome a brute as ever stepped in shoe-leather. He had the buccaneer's pride and spirit, and although he could do fine things, he did not disdain to do evil, and in the teeth of every danger had a loud laugh for his enemies. How could Harry help loving him?

When she first met him he came riding along the road, sitting loosely on his horse, and dangling a rifle that picked her father out and promised mischief.

"I want the two hundred you got for those steers in at B——to-day, Mr. Irons," he said. "I've heard of you, old man, and you've kept me waiting these two hours." '

"And who the devil are you?" asked old Irons.

"I'm John Long. If you've heard of me you won't stop to bargain and argue."

Harry snatched her father's revolver from his pocket at this.

"Fight him, father— fight him!" she cried, presenting the pistol within a foot of Jacks head. But he was too quick for her, and snatched it from her hand. The bushranger looked at the girl for a moment, with open, bold admiration, and then handed the revolver back.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "A man shouldn't snatch things from a lady. My manners are becoming shameful."

Harry looked into his eyes, her expression changed, and she laughed heartily.

"We'll excuse your manners if you'll mend your morals," she said.

"You've no right to blame me, who're a high-way robber yourself," he answered. "I came to rob the father; I've been robbed by the daughter. Go on, the pair of you; I'll never get my own back; You are taking my heart with you, my girl."

Harry looked back as he rode away, and threw the flower from her breast at the bushranger. And that was why Long Jack risked much in hanging about Black Dog, and gave Trooper Haynes so much trouble and uneasiness.

Trooper Tim Haynes was a fine man too but since the Long episode Harry had scarcely looked his way. Haynes gnawed his long, fair moustache, and pondered and plotted. He saw some things, he heard of more, but, alas for poor human nature, sympathy was with the handsome outlaw, not with the handsome policeman. Tim hated his rival, and that was not to his discredit, for despite his clever tongue, his bright air, and the gallant little tricks that gave a touch of romance to his escapades, Long Jack was a criminal and a scourge. Tim did not hate him for this, it is true, but for the good reason that he was driven by him from the heart of the woman he loved.

"She'd 'a' been mine right enough, but for him," Tim told himself, "an' she'll be mine yet, when I've hanged him!"

So the tremendous zeal of Trooper Haynes in pursuit of Long Jack is accounted for.

But Long Jack baffled his pursuers every time.

There was a band of police in the district, devoting its whole attention to him, but the range and the thick timber beyond Black Dog offered cover in which Long couid defy his enemies. Trooper Haynes was located in the district, and had one or two men in his service who were willing to play spy on the understanding that nothing should ever be known of it, and that much of the blood money went their way.

It was when acting upon information received from one of these that Trooper Haynes stole to the Irons' homestead one dark night, and, peeping at a crack through which the light shone, discovered Henrietta Irons and John Long sitting together. He could see only the side face of the bushranger and his long legs, as Harry sat between the wall and her lawless lover.

What Haynes saw turned him cold with jealous malignity. Harry's arms were about Long's neck, her cheek rested upon his shoulder. The bushranger was perfectly at his ease, he suspected nothing, and his laugh was free from care.

Trooper Haynes watched them, and his jealous hatred grew and warmed within him, but he was cautious; he crushed down the impulse to rush in upon his rival, and seize him, or kill him before Harry's eyes, realising that that must mean failure. He regretted now that in his haste he had not taken steps to give warning to the men at Kyley's. But he had hoped to do this great thing alone—to take Long single-handed.

Suddenly as he watched he saw Long turn to snatch a kiss. Harry's arm went out quickly, and the candle was overturned. Haynes drew his revolver and waited— a flash of suspicion had crossed his mind. But in a minute or so the candle was relit, and, looking saw the figure of Long still resting in Harry;s arms. What was he to do?

As he stood cogitating a figure came upon him from the turn of the road just beyond the house. Haynes dropped his revolver, recognising Testro's limp and his twisted back.

"That you, Testro? What the devil are you doine here?"

" 'Tis-a me," replied the Italian humbly through his black beard, "I go to Kyley's, buy-a the wine.

"Testro, would you like to earn ten pounds?"

"My word, I like-a the ten poun' ver' much."

"Well, go to Kyley's, see the sergeant, say to him 'Strap.' Just the one word 'Strap.' "

"Good." The Italian thrust his bearded face towards Haynes and whispered: "Suppose I take the black horse tied in the bend."

"His horse!" cried Haynes involuntarily. "Is it there then? Yes, take it. Ride like the devil!"

Testro limped off, and Haynes was left waiting. He waited three-quarters of an hour, consumed with a fever of impatience, increasing his agony every now and again by a glance at his, rival and the girl he loved, sitting happily together, suspecting nothing.

The word "Strap" was the signal that would bring the troopers to the house in hot haste. They came at length, very quietly, and Haynes whispered his news to the sergeant. The house was surrounded, and Haynes and the sergeant stole to the door.

To Trooper Haynes' great surprise he found it neither barred nor bolted. The pair marched straight to the room where the lover sat.

"John Long, I arrest you in the Queen's name," cried Haynes at the door. "Damnation!" The cry that sprang from his lips was justified. The man sitting by the side of Henrietta Irons was not Long Jack, but Phil Henty, the son of a neighbouring cockie.*

"What the deuce does this mean, Haynes?" ejaculated the sergeant.

"It means," said the trooper, who had gone deadly pale under his tan, "that we have been tiricked. Long Jack was with you," he said, turning fiercely on Henrietta. "This man took his place when the light was extinguished. Somebody was spying on me all the time, and warned him."

The girl laughed in his face. "How wise you grow," she said.

"I saw his profile distinctly," continued Haynes. "By Heaven, he got away disguised as Testro." The truth had flashed upon him.

"Who is Testro?" asked the sergeant.

"The man who brought you the word."

"No man brought the word— it was a woman."

"Long Jack has tricked us— fooled us."

"Fooled you— tricked you, Haynes!"

"Yes, by heaven! And I let him take his own horse. He told the woman to pass the word on to you in a fit of devilment."

"When you have quite finished, Mr. Haynes, will you please remember that two's company?" said Harry.

Haynes swung upon his heels and marched from the house.

Long Jack has not been seen in Australia since, and Henrietta Irons left these shores a few months after the events narrated. Nobody about Black Dog knew where she went, and Phil Henty did not go with her.

An Australian traveller swears that he can identify Peter Tillotson, a wealthy Texan rancher, with John Long, the Australian bushranger, and says that Mrs. Tillitson is just the woman Henrietta Irons would be at 45, but John Long has no enemies now, and ex-Trooper Haynes is a fairly successful farmer himself.

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** "Cockie" is Australian shortening of cockatoo, a bird of which there are many species in Australia,. Via a convoluted route the word was attached first to pioneering wheat farmers, and then to farmers generally.*

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13: Cuckoo Valley Railway

Arthur Quiller-Couch

1863-1944

The Argosy (UK) July 1933

THIS CENTURY was still young and ardent when ruin fell upon Cuckoo Valley. Its head rested on the slope of a high and sombre moorland, scattered with granite and china-clay; and by the small town of Ponteglos, where it widened out into arable and grey pasture-land, the Cuckoo River grew deep enough to float up vessels of small tonnage from the coast at the spring tides. I have seen there the boom of a trading schooner brush the grasses on the river-bank as she came before a westerly wind, and the hay-makers stop and almost crick their necks staring up at her topsails. But between the moors and Ponteglos the valley wound for fourteen miles or so between secular woods, so steeply converging that for the most part no more room was left at the bottom of the V than the river itself filled. The fisherman beside it trampled on pimpernels, sundew, water-mint, and asphodels, or pushed between clumps of *Osmunda regalis* that overtopped him by more than a foot. If he took to wading, there was much ado to stand against the current. Only here and there it spread into a still black pool, greased with eddies; and beside such a pool, it was odds that he found a diminutive meadow, green and flat as a billiard table, and edged with clumps of fern. To think of Cuckoo Valley is to call up the smell of that fern as it wrapped at the bottom of the creel the day's catch of salmon-peal and trout.

THE TOWN of Tregarrick (which possessed a jail, a workhouse, and a lunatic asylum, and called itself the centre of the Duchy) stood three miles back from the lip of this happy valley, whither on summer evenings its burghers rambled to eat cream and junket at the Dairy Farm by the river-bank, and afterwards sit to watch the fish rise, while the youngsters and maidens played at hide-and-seek in the woods. But there came a day when the names of Watt and Stephenson waxed great in the land, and these slow citizens caught the railway frenzy. They took it, however, in their own fashion. They never dreamed of connecting themselves with other towns and a larger world, but of aggrandizement by means of a railway that should run from Tregarrick to nowhere in particular, and bring the intervening wealth to their doors. They planned a railway that should join Tregarrick with Cuckoo Valley, and there divide into two branches, the one bringing ore and clay from the moors, the other fetching up sand and coal from the sea. Surveyors and engineers descended upon the woods; then a cloud of navvies. The days were filled with the crash of falling timber and the rush of emptied trucks. The stream was

polluted, the fish died, the fairies were evicted from their rings beneath the oak, the morals of the junketing houses underwent change. The vale knew itself no longer; its smoke went up day by day, week by week, with the noise of pickaxes and oaths.

On 13th August 1834 the Mayor of Tregarrick declared the new line open, and a locomotive was run along its rails to Dunford Bridge, at the foot of the moors. The engine was christened *The Wonder of the Age*; and I have before me a handbill of the festivities of that proud day, which tells me that the Mayor himself rode in an open truck, 'embellished with Union Jacks, lions and unicorns, and other loyal devices.' And then Nature settled down to heal her wounds, and the Cuckoo Valley Railway to pay no dividend to its promoters.

It is now two years and more since, on an August day, I wound up my line by Dunford Bridge, and sauntered towards the Light Horseman Inn, two gunshots up the road. The time was four o'clock, or thereabouts, and a young couple sat on a bench by the inn-door, drinking cocoa out of one cup. Above their heads and along the house-front a pine-tree straggled, but its foliage was too thin to afford a speck of shade as they sat there in the eye of the westering sun. The man (aged about one-and-twenty) wore the uncomfortable Sunday-best of a mechanic, with a shrivelled, but still enormous, bunch of Sweet-William in his button-hole. The girl was dressed in a bright green gown and a white bonnet. Both were flushed and perspiring, and I still think they must have ordered hot cocoa in haste, and were repenting it at leisure. They lifted their eyes, and blushed with a yet warmer red as I passed into the porch.

Two men were seated in the cool tap-room, each with a pasty and a mug of beer. A composition of sweat and coal-dust had caked their faces, and so deftly smoothed all distinction out of their features that it seemed at the moment natural and proper to take them for twins. Perhaps this was an error: perhaps, too, their appearance of extreme age was produced by the dark grey dust that overlaid so much of them as showed above the table. As twins, however, I remember them, and cannot shake off the impression that they had remained twins for an unusual number of years.

One addressed me. 'Parties outside pretty comfortable?' he asked.

'They were drinking out of the same cup,' I answered.

He nodded. 'Made man and wife this mornin'. I don't fairly know what's best to do. Lord knows I wouldn't hurry their soft looks and dilly-dallyin'; but did 'ee notice how much beverage was left in the cup?'

'They was mated at Tregarrick half-after-nine this mornin',' observed the other twin, pulling out a great watch, 'and we brought 'em down here in a truck for their honeymoon. The agreement was for an afternoon in the woods;

but by crum! sir, they've sat there and held one another's hand for up'ards of an hour after the stated time to start. And we ha'n't the heart to tell 'em so.'

He walked across to the window and peered for a few seconds over the blind.

'There's a mort of grounds in the cocoa that's sold here,' he went on, after a look, 'and 'tisn't the sort that does the stomach good, neither. For their own sakes, I'll give the word to start, and chance their thankin' me some day later, when they learn what things be made of.'

The other twin arose, shook the crumbs off his trousers, and stretched himself. I guessed now that this newly married pair had delayed traffic at the Dunford terminus of the Cuckoo Valley Railway for almost an hour and a half; and I determined to travel into Tregarrick by the same train.

So we strolled out of the inn towards the line, the lovers following, arm-in-arm, some fifty paces behind.

'How far is it to the station?' I inquired.

The twins stared at me.

Presently we turned down a lane scored with dry ruts, passed an oak plantation, and came on a clearing where the train stood ready. The line did not finish: it ended in a heap of sand. There were eight trucks, seven of them laden with granite, and an engine, with a prodigiously long funnel, bearing the name, *The Wonder of the Age*, in brass letters along its boiler.

'Now,' said one of the twins, while the other raked up the furnace, 'you can ride in the empty truck with the lovers, or on the engine along with us— which you like.'

I chose the engine. We climbed on board, gave a loud whistle, and jolted off. Far down, on our right, the river shone between the trees, and these trees, encroaching on the track, almost joined their branches above us. Ahead, the moss that grew upon the sleepers gave the line the appearance of a green glade, and the grasses, starred with golden-rod and mallow, grew tall to the very edge of the rails. It seemed that in a few more years Nature would cover this scar of 1834, and score the return match against man. Rails, engine, officials, were already no better than ghosts: youth and progress lay in the pushing trees, the salmon leaping against the dam below, the young man and maid sitting with clasped hands and amatory looks in the hindmost truck.

At the end of three miles or so we gave an alarming whistle, and slowed down a bit. The trees were thinner here, and I saw that a high road came down the hill, and cut across our track some fifty yards ahead. We prepared to cross it cautiously.

'Ho-o-y! Stop!'

The brake was applied, and as we came to a standstill a party of men and women descended the hill towards us.

‘ ’Tis Susan Warne’s seventh goin’ to be christen’d, by the look of it,’ said the engine-driver beside me; ‘an’, by crum! we’ve got the Kimbly.’

The procession advanced. In the midst walked a stout woman, carrying a baby in long clothes, and in front a man bearing in both hands a plate covered with a white cloth. He stepped up beside the train, and, almost before I had time to be astonished, a large yellow cake was thrust into my hands. Engine-driver and stoker were also presented with a cake apiece, and then the newly married pair, who took and ate with some shyness and giggling.

‘Is it a boy or girl?’ asked the stoker, with his mouth full.

‘A boy,’ the man answered; ‘and I count it good luck that you men of modern ways should be the first we meet on our way to church. The child’ll be a go-ahead if there’s truth in omens.’

‘You’re right, naybour. We’re the speediest men in this part of the universe, I do believe. Here’s luck to ’ee, Susan Warne!’ he piped out, addressing one of the women; ‘an’ if you want a name for your seventh, you may christen ’en after the engine here, *The Wonder of the Age*.’

We waved our hats and jolted off again towards Tregarrick. At the end of the journey the railway officials declined to charge for the pleasure of my company. But after some dispute, they agreed to compromise by adjourning to the Railway Inn, and drinking prosperity to Susan Warne’s seventh.

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14: Neat Strip

Damon Runyon

1880-1946

Collier's, 9 April 1938

NOW THIS Rose Viola is twenty years old and is five feet five inches tall in her high-heeled shoes, and weighs one hundred and twenty pounds, net, and has a twenty-six waist, and a thirty-six bust, and wears a four and one-half shoe.

Moreover, she has a seven-inch ankle, and an eleven-inch calf, and the reason I know all these intimate details is because a friend of mine by the name of Rube Goldstein has Rose Viola in a burlesque show and advertises her as the American Venus, and he always prints these specifications in his ads.

But of course Rube Goldstein has no way of putting down in figures how beautiful Rose Viola is, because after all any pancake may have the same specifications and still be a rutabaga. All Rube can do is to show photographs of Rose Viola and after you see these photographs and then see Rose Viola herself you have half a mind to look the photographer up and ask him what he means by so grossly underestimating the situation.

She has big blue eyes, and hair the colour of sun-up, and furthermore this colour is as natural as a six and five. Her skin is as white and as smooth as ivory and her teeth are like rows of new corn on the cob and she has a smile that starts slow and easy on her lips and in her eyes and seems to sort of flow over the rest of her face until any male characters observing same are wishing there is a murder handy that they can commit for her.

Well, I suppose by this time you are saying to yourself what is such a darberoo doing in a burlesque turkey, for burlesque is by no means an intellectual form of entertainment, and the answer to this question is that Rube Goldstein pays Rose Viola four hundred dollars per week, and this is by no means tin.

And the reason Rube Goldstein pays her such a sum is not because Rube is any philanthropist but because Rose Viola draws like a flaxseed poultice, for besides her looks she has that certain something that goes out across the footlights and hits every male character present smack-dab in the kisser and makes him hate to go home and gaze upon his ever-loving wife. In fact, I hear that for three weeks after Rose Viola plays a town the percentage of missing husbands appals the authorities.

It seems that the first time Rube Goldstein sees Rose Viola is in the city of Baltimore, Md., where his show is playing the old Gaiety, and one of Rube's chorus Judys, a sod widow who is with him nearly thirteen years and raises up three sons to manhood under him, runs off and marries a joskin from over on the eastern shore.

Naturally, Rube considers this a dirty trick, as he is so accustomed to seeing this Judy in his chorus that he feels his show will never look the same to him again; but the same night the widow is missing, Rose Viola appears before him asking for a situation. Rube tells me he is greatly surprised at such a looking Judy seeking a place in a burlesque show and he explains to Rose Viola that it is a very tough life, to be sure, and that the pay is small, and that she will probably do better for herself if she gets a job dealing them off her arm in a beanery, or some such, but she requests Rube to kindly omit the alfalfa and give her a job, and Rube can see at once by the way she talks that she has personality.

So he hires her at twenty-five slugs per week to start with and raises her to half a C and makes her a principal the second night when he finds eighteen blokes lined up at the stage door after the show looking to date her up. In three weeks she is his star and he is three-sheeting her as if she is Katherine Cornell.

She comes out on the stage all dressed up in a beautiful evening gown and sings a little song, and as soon as she begins singing you wonder, unless you see her before, what she really is, as you can see by her voice that she is scarcely a singer by trade.

Her voice is not at all the same as Lily Pons's and in fact it is more like an old-fashioned coffee grinder, and about the time you commence to figure that she must be something like a magician and will soon start pulling rabbits out of a hat, Rose Viola begins to dance.

It is not a regular dance, to be sure. It is more of a hop and a skip and a jump back and forth across the stage, and as she is hopping and skipping and jumping, Rose Viola is also feeling around for zippers here and there about her person, and finally the evening gown disappears and she seems to be slightly dishabille but in a genteel manner, and then you can see by her shape that she is indeed a great artist.

Sometimes she will come down off the stage and work along the centre aisle, and this is when the audience really enjoys her most, as she will always stop before some bald-headed old character in an aisle seat where bald-headed characters are generally found, and will pretend to make a great fuss over him, singing to him, and maybe kissing him on top of the bald head and leaving the print of her lips in rouge there, which sometimes puts bald-headed characters to a lot of bother explaining when they get home.

She has a way of laughing and talking back to an audience and keeping it in good humour while she is working, although outside the theatre Rose Viola is very serious, and seldom has much to say. In fact, Rose Viola has so little to say that there are rumours in some quarters that she is a trifle dumb, but

personally I would not mind being dumb myself at four hundred boffoes per week.

Well, it seems that a character by the name of Newsbaum, who runs a spot called the Pigeon Club, hears of Rose Viola, and he goes to see her one night at the old Mid Theatre on Broadway where Rube's show is playing a New York engagement, and this Newsbaum is such a character as is always looking for novelties for his club and he decides that Rose Viola will go good there.

So he offers her a chance to double at his club, working there after she gets through with her regular show, and Rube Goldstein advises her to take it, as Rube is very fond of Rose and he says this may be a first step upward in her career because the Pigeon Club is patronized only by very high-class rumpots.

So Rose Viola opens one night at the Pigeon Club, and she is working on the dance floor close to the tables, and doing the same act she does in burlesque, when a large young character who is sitting at one of the front tables with a bunch of other young characters, including several nice-looking Judys, reaches out and touches Rose Viola with the end of a cigarette in a spot she just unzippers.

Now of course this is all in a spirit of fun, but it is something that never happens in a burlesque house, and naturally Rose is startled no little, and quite some, and in addition to this she is greatly pained, as it seems that it is the lighted end of the cigarette that the large young character touches her with.

So she begins letting out screams, and these screams attract the attention of Rube Goldstein, who is present to see how she gets along at her opening, and although Rube is nearly seventy years old, and is fat and slow and sleepy-looking, he steps forward and flattens the large young character with a dish of chicken a la king, which he picks up off a near-by table.

Well, it seems that the large young character is nobody but a character by the name of Mr. Choicer, who has great sums of money, and a fine social position, and this incident creates some little confusion, especially as old Rube Goldstein also flattens Newsbaum with another plate, this one containing lobster Newberg, when Newsbaum comes along complaining about Rube ruining his chinaware and also one of his best-paying customers.

Then Rube puts his arm around Rose Viola and makes her get dressed and leads her out of the Pigeon Club and up to Mindy's Restaurant on Broadway, where I am personally present to observe much of what follows.

They sit down at my table and order up a couple of oyster stews, and Rose Viola is still crying at intervals, especially when she happens to rub the spot where the lighted cigarette hits, and Rube Goldstein is saying that for two cents he will go back to the Pigeon Club and flatten somebody again, when all of a sudden the door opens and in comes a young character in dinner clothes.

He is without a hat, and he is looking rumpled up no little, and on observing him, Rose Viola lets out a small cry, and Rube Goldstein picks up his bowl of oyster stew and starts getting to his feet, for it seems that they both recognize the young character as one of the characters at Mr. Choicer's table in the Pigeon Club.

This young character rushes up in great excitement, and grabs Rube's arm before Rube can let fly with the oyster stew, and he holds Rube down in his chair, and looks at Rose Viola and speaks to her as follows:

'Oh,' he says, 'I search everywhere for you after you leave the Pigeon Club. I wish to beg your pardon for what happens there. I am ashamed of my friend Mr. Choicer. I will never speak to him again as long as I live. He is a scoundrel. Furthermore, he is in bad shape from the chicken *a la* king. Oh,' the young character says, 'please forgive me for ever knowing him.'

Well, all the time he is talking, he is holding Rube Goldstein down and looking at Rose Viola, and she is looking back at him, and in five minutes more they do not know Rube Goldstein and me are in the restaurant, and in fact they are off by themselves at another table so the young character can make his apologies clearer, and Rube Goldstein is saying to me that after nearly seventy years he comes to the conclusion that the Judys never change.

So, then, this is the beginning of a wonderful romance, and in fact it is love at first sight on both sides, and very pleasant to behold, at that.

It seems that the name of the young character is Daniel Frame, and that he is twenty-six years of age, and in his last year in law school at Yale, and that he comes to New York for a week-end visit and runs into his old college chum, Mr. Choicer, and now here he is in love.

I learn these details afterward from Rose Viola, and I also learn that this Daniel Frame is an only child, and lives with his widowed mother in a two-story white colonial house with ivy on the walls, and a yard around it, just outside the city of Manchester, N.H.

I learn that his mother has an old poodle dog by the name of Rags, and three servants, and that she lives very quietly, and never goes anywhere much except maybe to church and that the moonlight is something wonderful up around Manchester, N.H.

Furthermore, I learn that Daniel Frame comes of the best people in New England, and that he likes ski-ing, and Benny Goodman's band, and hates mufflers around his neck, and is very fond of pop-overs for breakfast, and that his eyes are dark brown, and that he is six feet even and weighs one hundred and eighty pounds and that he never goes to a dentist in his life.

I also learn that the ring he wears on the little finger of his left hand is his family crest, and that he sings baritone with a glee club, and the chances are I

will learn plenty more about Daniel Frame if I care to listen any further to Rose Viola.

'He wishes to marry me,' Rose says. 'He wishes to take me to the white colonial house outside of Manchester, N.H., where we can raise Sealyham terriers, and maybe children. I love Sealyham terriers,' she says. 'They are awfully cute. Daniel wishes me to quit burlesque entirely. He sees me work at the Mid the other night and he thinks I am wonderful, but,' Rose says, 'he says it worries him constantly to think of me out there on that stage running the risk of catching colds.

'Another thing,' Rose Viola says, 'Daniel wishes me to meet his mother, but he is afraid she will be greatly horrified if she finds out the way I am exposed to the danger of catching colds. He says,' Rose says, 'that his mother is very strict about such things.'

Personally, I consider Daniel Frame a very wishy-washy sort of character, and by no means suitable to a strong personality such as Rose Viola, but when I ask Rube Goldstein what he thinks about it, Rube says to me like this:

'Well,' he says, 'I think it will be a fine thing for her to marry this young character, although,' Rube says, 'from what he tells her of his mother, I do not see how they are going to get past her. I know these old New England broads,' he says. 'They consider burlesque anything but a worthy amusement. Still,' he says, 'I have no kick coming about the male characters of New England. They are always excellent customers of mine.'

'Why,' I say, 'Rose Viola is a fine artist, and does not need such a thing as marriage.'

'Yes,' Rube says, 'she is the finest artist in her line I ever see but one. Laura Legayo is still tops with me. She retires on me away back yonder before you ever see one of my shows. But,' he says, 'if Rose marries this young character, she will have a home, and a future. Rose needs a future.

'This burlesque business is about done around here for a while,' Rube says. 'I can see the signs. The blats are beefing, and the cops are complaining about this and that, and one thing and another. They have no soul for art, and besides we are the easiest marks around when the reformers start rousing the cops for anything whatever.

'It is always this way with burlesque,' Rube says. 'It is up and down. It is on the way down now, and Rose may not still be young enough by the time it goes up again. Yes,' he says, 'Rose needs a future.'

Well, it seems that old Rube is a pretty good guesser, because a couple of nights later he gets an order from the police commissioner that there must be no more of this and that, and one thing and another, in his show, and what is

more the police commissioner puts cops in all the burlesque houses to see that his order is obeyed.

At first Rube Goldstein figures that he may as well close down his New York run at once, and move to some city that is more hospitable to art, but he is wedged in at the Mid on a contract to pay rent for a few weeks longer, so while he is trying to think what is the best thing to do, he lets the show go on just the same, but omitting this and that, and one thing and another, so as not to offend the police commissioner in case he comes around looking for offence, or the cop the commissioner places on duty in the Mid, who is a character by the name of Halligan.

So there is Rose Viola out on the stage of the Mid doing her number in full costume without ever reaching for as much as a single zipper, and I can see what Rube Goldstein means when he says Rose needs a future, because looking at Rose in full costume really becomes quite monotonous after a while.

To tell the truth, the only one who seems to appreciate Rose in full costume is Daniel Frame when he comes down from Yale one week-end and finds her in this condition. In fact, Daniel Frame is really quite delighted with her.

'It is wonderful,' he says. 'It is especially wonderful because I tell my mother all about you, and she is talking of coming down from Manchester, N.H., to see you perform, and I have been worrying myself sick over her beholding you out there in danger of catching colds. I know she will be greatly pleased with you now, because,' he says, 'you look so sweet and modest and so well dressed.'

Naturally, as long as he is pleased, Rose Viola is pleased too, except that she suffers somewhat from the heat, for there is no doubt but what Rose is greatly in love with him and she scarcely ever talks about anything else, and does not seem to care if her art suffers from the change.

Now it comes on another Saturday night and I am backstage at the Mid talking to Rube Goldstein and he is telling me that he is greatly surprised to find business holding up so good. The house is packed to the doors, and I tell Rube that maybe he is wrong all these years and that the public appreciates art even when it has clothes on, but Rube says he thinks not. He says he thinks it is more likely that the customers are just naturally optimists.

Rose Viola is on the stage in full costume singing her song when all of a sudden somebody in the back of the audience lets out a yell of fire and this is an alarming cry in any theatre, to be sure, and especially in a spot like the Mid as it is an old house, and about as well fixed to stand off a fire as a barrel of grease. Then a duty fireman by the name of Rossoffsky, who is always on duty

in the Mid when a show is on, comes rushing backstage and says it is a fire all right.

It seems that a cafeteria next door to the Mid is blazing inside and the flames are eating their way through the theatre wall at the front of the house by the main entrance, and in fact when the alarm is raised the whole wall is blazing on both sides, and it is a most disturbing situation, to be sure.

Well, the audience in the Mid is composed mostly of male characters, because male characters always appreciate burlesque much more than females or children, and these male characters now rise from their seats and start looking for the exits nearest to them, but by now they are shut off from the main entrance by the fire.

So they commence looking for other exits, and there are several of these, but it seems from what Rossoffsky says afterward that these exits are not used for so long that nobody figures it will ever be necessary to use them again, and the doors do not come open so easy, especially with so many trying to open them at once.

Then the male characters begin fighting with each other for the privilege of opening the doors, and also of getting out through the doors after they are opened, and this results in some confusion. In fact, it is not long before the male characters are fighting all over the premises, and knocking each other down, and stepping on each other's faces in a most discourteous manner.

While it is well known to one and all that a burlesque theatre is no place to take an ever-loving wife to begin with, it seems that some of these male characters have their wives with them, and these wives start screaming, but of course they are among the first knocked down and stepped on, so not much is heard of them until afterward.

A few of the male characters are smart enough to leap up on the stage and high-tail it out of there by the back way, but most of them are so busy fighting on the floor of the theatre that they do not think of this means of exit, and it is just as well that they do not think of it all at once, at that, as there is but one narrow stage door, and a rush will soon pile them up like jack-rabbits there.

The orchestra quits playing and the musicians are dropping their instruments and getting ready to duck under the stage and Rose Viola is standing still in the centre of the stage with her mouth open, looking this way and that in some astonishment and alarm, when all of a sudden a tall, stern-looking old Judy with white hair, and dressed in grey, stands up on a seat in the front row right back of the orchestra leader, and says to Rose Viola like this:

'Quick,' she says. 'Go into your routine.'

Well, Rose Viola still stands there as if she cannot figure out what the old Judy is talking about, and the old Judy makes motions at her with her hands,

and then slowly unbuttons a little grey jacket she is wearing, and tosses it aside, and Rose gets the idea.

Now the stern-looking old Judy looks over to the orchestra leader, who is a character by the name of Butwell, and who is with Rube Goldstein's burlesque show since about the year one, and says to him:

'Hit 'er, Buttsy.'

Well, old Buttsy takes a look at her, and then he takes another look, and then he raises his hand, and his musicians settle back in their chairs, and as Buttsy lets his hand fall, they start playing Rose Viola's music, and the tall, stern-looking old Judy stands there on the seat in the front row pointing at the stage and hollering so loud her voice is heard above all the confusion of the male characters at their fighting.

'Look, boys,' she hollers.

And there on the stage is Rose Viola doing her hop, skip and a jump back and forth and feeling for the zippers here and there about her person, and finding same.

Now, on hearing the old Judy's voice, and on observing the scene on the stage, the customers gradually stop fighting with each other and begin easing themselves back into the seats, and paying strict attention to Rose Viola's performance, and all this time the wall behind them is blazing, and it is hotter than one hundred and six in the shade, and smoke is pouring into the Mid, and anybody will tell you that Rose Viola's feat of holding an audience against a house fire is really quite unsurpassed in theatrical history.

The tall, stern-looking old Judy remains standing on the seat in the front row until there are cries behind her to sit down, because it seems she is obstructing the view of some of those back of her, so finally she takes her seat, and Rose Viola keeps right on working.

By this time the fire department arrives and has the situation in the cafeteria under control, and the fire in the wall extinguished, and a fire captain and a squad of men come into the Mid, because it seems that rumours are abroad that a great catastrophe takes place in the theatre. In fact, the captain and his men are greatly alarmed because they cannot see a thing inside the Mid when they first enter on account of the smoke, and the captain sings out as follows:

'Is everybody dead in here?'

Then he sees through the smoke what is going on there on the stage, and he stops and begins enjoying the scene himself, and his men join him, and a good time is being had by one and all until all of a sudden Rose Viola keels over in a faint from her exertions. Rube orders the curtain down but the audience,

including the firemen, remain for some time afterward in the theatre, hoping they may get an encore.

While I am standing near the stage door in readiness to take it on the Jesse Owens out of there in case the fire gets close, who comes running up all out of breath but Daniel Frame.

'I just get off the train from New Haven,' he says. 'I run all the way from the station on hearing a report that the Mid is on fire. Is anybody hurt?' he says. 'Is Rose safe?'

Well, I suggest that the best way to find out about this is to go inside and see, so we enter together, and there among the scenery we find Rube Goldstein and a bunch of actors still in their make-ups gathered about Rose Viola, who is just getting to her feet and looking somewhat nonplussed.

At this same moment, Halligan, the cop stationed in the Mid, comes backstage, and pushes his way through the bunch around Rose Viola and taps her on the shoulder and says to her: 'You are under arrest,' Halligan says. 'I guess I will have to take you, too, Mr. Goldstein,' he says.

'My goodness,' Daniel Frame says. 'What is Miss Viola under arrest for?'

'For putting on that number out there just now,' Halligan says. 'It's a violation of the police commissioner's order.'

'Heavens and earth,' Daniel Frame says. 'Rose, do not tell me you are out there tonight running the risk of catching cold, as before?'

'Yes,' Rose says.

'Oh, my goodness,' Daniel Frame says, 'and all the time my mother is sitting out there in the audience. I figure this week is a great time for her to see you perform, Rose,' he says. 'I cannot get down from New Haven in time to go with her, but I send her alone to see you, and I am to meet her after the theatre with you and introduce you to her. What will she think?'

'Well,' Halligan says, 'I have plenty of evidence against this party. In fact, I see her myself. Not bad,' he says. 'Not bad.'

Rose Viola is standing there looking at Daniel Frame in a sad way, and Daniel Frame is looking at Rose Viola in even a sadder way, when Rossoffsky, the fireman, shoves his way into the gathering, and says to Halligan:

'Copper,' he says, 'I overhear your remarks. Kindly take a walk,' he says. 'If it is not for this party putting on that number out there, the chances are there will be a hundred dead in the aisles from the panic. In fact,' he says, 'I remember seeing you yourself knock over six guys trying to reach an exit before she starts dancing. She is a heroine,' he says. 'That is what she is, and I will testify to it in court.'

At this point who steps in through the stage door but the tall, stern-looking old Judy in grey, and when he sees her, Daniel Frame runs up to her and says:

'Oh, Mother,' he says, 'I am so mortified. Still,' he says, 'I love her just the same.'

But the old Judy scarcely notices him because by this time Rube Goldstein is shaking both of her hands and then over Rube's shoulder she sees Rose Viola, and she says to Rose like this:

'Well, miss,' she says, 'that is a right neat strip you do out there just now, although,' she says, 'you are mighty slow getting into it. You need polishing in spots, and then you will be okay. Rube,' she says, 'speaking of neat strips, who is the best you ever see?'

'Well,' Rube Goldstein says, 'if you are talking of the matter as art, I will say that thirty years ago, if they happen to be holding any competitions anywhere, I will be betting on you against the world, Laura.'

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15: The Secret of the Dead Mate

W. Clarke Russell

1844-1911

In: *The Phantom Death*, 1895

BLACK IN THE wake of the moon, in the heart of the trembling spread of white splendour, floated a boat. The night was breathless: beyond the verge of the eclipsing brightness of the moon the sky was full of stars. A man sat in the stern-sheets of the boat motionless with his chin on his breast and his arms in lifeless posture beside him. From time to time he groaned, and after he had been sitting as though dead for an hour he raised his head and lifted up his eyes to the moon, and cursed the thirst that was burning his throat, then shifted his figure close to the gunwale, over which he lay, with both hands in the water for the chill of it.

The moonshine was nigh as bright as day. The sea-line ran firm as a sweep of painted circle through the silver mist in the far recesses. An oar was stepped as a mast in the boat, and athwart it was lashed another oar from which hung a man's shirt and coat. She looked dry as a midsummer ditch in that piercing moonlight. At the feet of the man, distinctly visible, were two or three little pellets or lumps of rag, which he had been chewing throughout the day; but his jaws were now locked, the saliva had run dry, his sailor's teeth, blunted by junk and ship's bread, could bite no more moisture out of the fragment of stuff he had cut off his back. Oh! it is dreadful to suffer the agony of thirst, the froth, the baked and cracking lip, the strangled throat, whilst beholding a vast breast of cold sea glazed into the beauty of ice by the moon, and whilst hearing the fountain-like murmur and refreshing ripple of water alongside!

The moon rolled slowly into the south-west, trailing her bright wake with her, and the boat and its solitary occupant floated into the shadow. Again the man lifted his head and looked around him. A soft breeze, but hot as the human breath, was blowing, and the shirt and coat dangling from the athwartship oar were lifting to the light pressure. The man saw that the boat was moving over the sea, but made no attempt to help her with the helm; once more he cast his eyes up at the moon and cursed the thirst that was choking him. But a boat, like a ship, has a life and a spirit of her own. The little fabric ran as though, with the sentience of a living organism, she knew there was something to hope for in the darkness ahead; her wake was a short, arrow-like line, and it streamed from her in emerald bubbles and circling wreaths of fire.

The sun rose, and the shadow of the earth rolled off the sea, which was feathering into the south-west to the steady pouring of the north-east wind. The boat ran straight, and now, the day being come, when the man looked up

and ahead, he saw the shadow of land over the bows. Life sprang up in him with the sight, and a grin of hope twisted his face. With a husky groan he shifted himself for a grasp of the helm, and, laying his trembling hand upon the tiller, he held the boat— but not more steadily than she had been going— for the land.

He was a man of about forty-five years of age; half his clothes were aloft, and he was attired in fearnaught trousers of the boatman's pattern, and a waistcoat buttoned over his vest. Suffering had sifted a pallor into the sun-brown of his skin, and his face was ghastly with famine and thirst. His short yellow beard stood straight out. His yellow hair was mixed with grey, and lay clotted with the sweat of pain into long streaks over his brow and ears, covering his eyes as though he was too weak or heedless to clear his vision.

The speed of the boat quickly raised the land, and by noon under the roasting sun it lay within a mile. It was one of the Bahama Cays— a flat island, with a low hill in the midst of it, to the right of which was a green wood; the rest of the island was green with some sort of tropic growth as of guinea-grass. The breeze was now very light— the sun had eaten it up, as the Spaniards say. The man thought he saw the sparkle of a waterfall, and the sight made him mad, and as strong in that hour as in his heartiest time. He sprang from his seat, pulled down his queer fabric of oar and flapping shirt and coat, and flinging the two blades over, bent his back and drove the boat along. In a quarter of an hour her forefoot grounded on a coral-white beach that swept round a point clear of the foam of the breaker, and the man reeling out of her on to the shore, grasped her painter, and secured it to an oar, which he jammed into a thickness of some sort of bush that grew close to the wash of the water, and then, rocking and stumbling, he went up the beach.

It was an uninhabited island, and nothing was in sight upon the whole circle of the white shining sea saving the dim blue haze of land in the north and a like film or delicate discoloration of the atmosphere in the south-west. The man with rounded back and hanging arms and staggering gait searched for water. The heat was frightful; the sunshine blazed in the white sand, and seemed to strike upwards into the face in darting and tingling needles, white hot. He went towards the wood, wading painfully on his trembling legs through the guinea-grass and thick undergrowth, with toadstools in it like red shields and astir with armoured creatures, finger-long reptiles of glorious hue, and spiders like bunches of jewels.

Suddenly he stopped; his ears had caught a distant noise of water; he turned his back upon the sun, and, thrusting onwards, came presently to a little stream, in which the grass stood thick, green, and sweet. He fell on his knees, and, putting his lips to the crystal surface, sucked up the water like a

horse, till, being full nearly to bursting, he fell back with a moan of gratitude, his face hidden in his hands. He sat till the broiling sunshine forced him to rise. The slender stream narrowed in the direction of the wood, and he walked beside it; presently, after pushing a little way into the green shade, he found the source in a rock rich with verdure and enamelled with many strange and beautiful flowers. The trees in this wood stood well apart, but their branches mingled in many places, and the shade they made was nearly continuous.

He threw himself down beside the source of the little stream to rest himself. The surf seethed with a noise of boiling through the silent, blazing atmosphere outside. The miserable castaway now directed his eyes round in search of food. He saw several kinds of berries, and things like apples, but durst not eat of them for fear of being poisoned. Being now rested and immeasurably refreshed, he cooled his head in the stream and walked to the beach, and picked up a number of crabs. He saw to his boat, hauling her almost high and dry. All that she contained besides the clothes which had served him for a sail, was a carpenter's hammer and a bag of spikes. He whipped off his waistcoat and put his coat on, and dropping the hammer into his pocket, returned to the wood with his collection of crabs; then with his knife he cut down a quantity of dry brushwood and set fire to it with the old-fashioned tinder-box that seamen of this man's rating sometimes carried in those days to light their pipes. He roasted the crabs artfully, as one who has served an apprenticeship to hardship, and having eaten, he drank again, and then folded his arms to consider what he should do.

He knew that the island was one of the Bahama Cays, though which he could not imagine. But other islands were in sight. He guessed that New Providence was not out of reach of his boat, nor was the Florida coast remote, and then there was all the traffic of the Gulf of Mexico. He determined, whilst he reflected, to cook plenty of crabs and to seek for turtle, and so store himself with provisions. But how about watering his little craft? Fresh water, cold and sweet, there was in plenty, but he had nothing to put it in, and what could he contrive or invent to serve as a breaker? He thought to himself, if he could find cocoanuts he would let the milk drain, and fill the fruit with water, and so carry away enough to last him until he should be picked up or make a port.

He cast his eyes up aloft with a fancy of beholding in the trees something growing that would answer his purpose, and started, still looking and staring, as though fascinated or lightning-struck.

His eye had sought a tree whose long lower branches overshadowed the little stream, and amidst the foliage he thought he saw the figure of a man! The shape jockeyed a bough; its back was upon the tree; and now, straining his vision steadily under the sharp of his hand, the man saw that it was the

skeleton of a human being, apparently lashed or secured to the bough, and completely clothed, from the sugar-loaf hat upon his skull down to the rusty yellow sea-boats which dangled amidst the leaves.

The sailor was alone, and the ghastly sight shocked him; the sense of his loneliness was intensified by it; he thought he had been cast away upon the principality of death himself. The diabolic grin in the tree froze the blood in his veins, and for awhile he could do no more than stare and mutter fragments of the Lord's Prayer.

He guessed from the costume that the figure had been lodged for a great number of years in that tree. He recollected that when he was a boy he had seen foreign seamen dressed as that skeleton up there was. It was now late in the afternoon, and with a shuddering glance aloft he began to consider how and where he should sleep. He walked out of the wood and gained the highest point of the little central hill, and looked about him for a sail. There was nothing in sight, saving the dim shadows of land red in the ether of sunset. The skeleton, as though it had been a devil, took possession of the castaway's soul. He could think of nothing else— not even of how he was to get away, how he was to store fresh water for his voyage. He did not mean to sleep in a tree: but the leaves provided a roof as sheltering as an awning, and he determined to lie down in the wood, and take his chance of snakes. Yet, before he could rest, he must have the skeleton out of it: the shadows would be frightful with the fancy of that figure above riding the bough and rattling its bones to every sigh of wind.

So with a resolved heart made desperate by superstition and fear, the sailor walked to the wood, and coming to the tree, climbed it by the aid of the strong tendrils of parasites which lay coiled round the trunk stout and stiff as ropes. He bestrode a thick bough close to the skeleton. It was a ghastly sight in that green glimmering dusk, darkening swiftly with the sinking of the sun. The flesh of the face was gone; the cloak hanging from the shoulders was lean, dusty, ragged as any twelfth-century banner drooping motionless in the gloom of a cathedral. The sailor saw that time and weather had rotted everything saving the bones of the thing. It was secured to the bough by what was, or had been, a scarf, as though the man had feared to fall in his sleep. The seaman stretched forth his hand, and to the first touch the scarf parted as though it had been formed of smoke; the figure reeled, dropped, and went to pieces at the foot of the tree.

The sailor had not expected this. He was almost afraid to descend. When he reached the ground he fled towards his boat, and lay in her all night.

He went for a drink of water at daybreak, and passing the scattered remains of the skeleton— with some degree of heart, for daylight brought

courage, and a few hours of sleep had given him confidence— he spied something glittering amongst the rags of the skeleton's apparel. He picked it up. It was a silver snuff-box. He opened it, and inside found a piece of paper folded to the shape of the box. It was covered with a scrawl in pencil, faint, yet decipherable. To the man it would have been all one, whether the writing had been Chinese or English: he could not read. But he was a wary and cunning old sailor; every instinct of perception and suspicion was set a-crawling by the sight of this queer faintly pencilled document, and by the look of the silver snuff-box which weighed very handsomely in his horny palm, yellow with tar. He pocketed the toy, and having refreshed himself with a drink of water, returned to the fragments of wearing apparel and old bones, no longer afraid, and with the handle of his hammer turned the stuff over, and in the course of a few minutes met with and pocketed the following articles: a stump of common lead pencil, three pieces of silver Spanish money, a clay pipe mounted in silver in the bone of an albatross's wing, a silver watch and hair guard, and a small gold cross.

He talked to himself with a composed countenance as he examined these trifles; then, having hunted after more relics to no purpose, he turned his back upon the bones and rags, and went about the business of the day.

During the morning he collected many crabs, but all the while he could not imagine how he was to carry away a store of water, till, chancing to look along the brilliant curve of beach, he spied a turtle of about three hundred pounds coming out of the sea, and then he made up his mind to turn a turtle over after dark, and cut its throat, and make a tub of the shell.

Happily for this castaway he was spared the distress of passing another night upon the island. Two or three hours before sundown, a steady breeze then blowing from the north, a large schooner suddenly rounded the western point of the island at the distance of a couple of miles, heading east, and steering so as to keep the island fair abeam. The man had collected plenty of brushwood to roast his crabs with; he swiftly kindled a fire, and made a smoke with damp leaves, and whilst this signal was feathering down the wind, he launched and jumped into his boat, and, with the nimble experienced hands of the seaman, crossed his oars and set his sail of shirt and coat, and slowly blew away right before the wind towards the schooner. She saw the smoke and then the boat, and hove to, and in three-quarters of an hour the man was aboard.

"Who are you?" said the master of the schooner, when the man stood upon the deck.

"Christian Hawke, carpenter of the *Morning Star*," he answered.

"What's become of your ship?" said the other.

"Don't know," answered Hawke.

"What's your yarn?"

"Why," answered Hawke, speaking in a hoarse level growling voice, "we was becalmed, and the captain told me to get into a boat and nail a piece of copper, which had worked loose, on the rudder. We was flying-light."

"Where from?" said the captain, suspiciously.

"From New Orleans to Havannah, for orders."

"Well?" said the captain.

"Well," continued Hawke, "I was hammering away all right, and doing my bit, when a squall came along, and the ship, with a kick-up of her stern, let go the painter of her own accord and bolted into the thickness; 'twas like muck when that squall bursted, with me a-hollering; I lost sight of the vessel, and should have been a dead man if it hadn't been for that there island." After a pause. "What island is it, sir?" he asked.

"An island fifteen mile east of Rum Cay," answered the captain.

Hawke had got it into his head that the paper in the snuff-box was the record of a treasure secret, but he was afraid to exhibit it and ask questions. He did not know in what language it was written, whether, in fact, it might not be in good English, and he thought if he showed the paper and it proved a confession of money-burial, or something of that sort, the man who read it, knowing where the island was, would forestall him.

On the arrival of the schooner at Kingston, Jamaica, Christian Hawke went ashore. He was without money or clothes, and at once sold the skeleton's watch and hair guard, for which he received thirty dollars. The purchaser of the watch looked at Hawke curiously across the counter after paying down the money, and said—

"Vere did you get this?"

"It's a family hairloom," answered Hawke, pointing to the watchguard with a singular grin.

"This here vatch," said Mr. Solomons, "is a hundred year old, and a vast curiosity in her vurks. Have you more of this sort of thing to sell? If so, I was the most liberal dealer of any man in Jamaica."

Hawke gave him a nod and walked out. He found a ship next morning and signed articles as carpenter and second mate. She was sailing for England in a week from that date, and was a plump, old-fashioned barque of four hundred tons. At the sailors' lodging-house he had put up at he fell into conversation one evening, a day or two before he sailed, with a dark, black-eyed, handsome, intelligent foreign seaman, who called himself simply Pedro. This fellow did not scruple to hint at experiences gained both as a contrabandist and piccaroon.

"D'ye speak many languages?" said Hawke, puffing at a long clay pipe, and casting his grave, slow-moving little eyes upon a tumbler of amber rum at his elbow.

"I can speak three or four languages," said the foreign seaman.

Hawke surveyed him thoughtfully and then, putting down his pipe, thrust his hand in his pocket, and extracted the paper from the snuff-box without exposing the box.

"What language is this wrote in?" said he, handing the paper to his companion.

The man looked at it, frowning with the severity of his gaze, so dim was the pencil scrawl, so queer the characters, as though the handwriting were the march of a spider's legs over the page. He then exclaimed suddenly, "Yes, I have it. It is my own language. It is Spanish."

"Ha!" exclaimed Hawke, "and what's it all about, mate?"

"How did you come by it?" said the man.

"Found it in an old French *Testament*," answered Hawke.

The man glanced at him, and then fixed his eyes upon the paper and began to read. He read very slowly, with difficulty deciphering the Spanish, and with greater difficulty interpreting it. The two men were alone. The foreign seaman made out the writing to signify this:—

"I who write am Luis de Argensola, that was second in command of the Gil Polo*, commanded by Leonardo de Leon. In a terrible hurricane the ship that was bound from the Havannah to old Spain was lost. I escaped in a boat with Dona Mariana de Mesa and two seamen; both men went mad, and cast themselves overboard in the night. The Dona Mariana was my cousin. She was following her husband to Madrid. He had preceded her by two months. She had many valuable jewels, the gift of her husband, and some had been for many centuries in possession of her own family, who were nobles of Spain. Before the ship foundered the Dona urged me to save these jewels, which were in a box in her cabin. I found the box and threw it into the boat, and shortly afterwards the ship went down.*

"After five days of anguish we arrived at a little island, and twenty-four hours afterwards the Dona Mariana expired. I had no spade to dig a grave, and placed her body in a cave on the left-hand side of a little bay opposite the wood or grove where the fresh water stream begins. I have now been here six weeks, and have beheld no ship, and am without hope and feel as a dying man. Oh, stranger, who shall discover this my writing, to your honour as a man and to your charity as a Christian do I appeal. My own bones may rest in the place where I die— I care not, but I entreat that the remains of the Dona Mariana

may be enclosed in a box, and carefully conveyed for interment to her relatives at Madrid, and that this may prove no profitless duty to him who undertakes it, behold! in the foot of the tree I am accustomed to climb at night, that I may sleep free from the sting of the scorpion, you shall find a hole. There, within easy reach of your hand lies the box of jewels. This box and the remains of Dona Mariana I entreat of your Christian charity to convey to Alonzo Reyes, Villagarcia, Spain, and I pledge the honour of a Spaniard that one-half the value of the jewels shall be given to you.— Luis de Argensola. July, 1840."

"That's twenty year ago," said Hawke, sucking at his pipe.

"What'll you take for the secret?" said his companion.

"Eh!"

"If I can find some one to help you to recover those jewels, what share will you give me?"

Hawke pocketed the paper with a sour smile and went out of the room.

His ship sailed and all went well with her. On his arrival in England, as soon as he had taken up his wages and purchased a suit of clothes, he went down to Ramsgate, where, in a little off street not far from the entrance to the pier, dwelt his brother Reuben. This man was by trade a boat-builder. He also owned some bathing-machines. The brothers had not met for some years, nor had they heard from or of each other since they were last together. Yet when Christian, after beating with a little brass knocker upon a little green door, turned the handle and entered straight into a dwelling-room, his brother Reuben, who sat at tea with his wife, two girls, and his wife's grandfather, exhibited no surprise. Their greeting was simply, "Hallo, Christian!" "Well, Rube!"

Christian sat down and partook of tea with the family, and related his adventures to the great entertainment of the grandfather, who laughed till his cheeks were wet at all the pathetic parts— such as Hawke's description of his thirst and his feelings of loneliness when upon the ocean and when lying in the boat at the island. The women cleared away the tea-things and went out; the old grandfather fell asleep; then said Christian to his brother—

"Rube, I'm down here to have an airnest chat along with yer."

"So I guessed," said Reuben, who resembled his brother in face, manner, and tone of voice.

"Still got that cutter o' yourn?"

"D'yer mean the Petrel?"

"Ay."

"Yes, she's a-lying in the west gully. She airnt me some good money last year as a pleasure-boat. I've been thinking of sending her out a-fishing."

"What's her tonnage?"

"Eighteen. Want to buy her, Christian?"

"Not I. Suppose you and me goes down and takes a look at her."

Reuben put on his coat and cap, and the brothers issued forth. Two square figures, the shoregoer rolling in his gait like the seafarer, as though, in fact, he was as fresh from the heave of the sea as the other. They walked along the pier till they came abreast of a stout little cutter lying at her moorings in the thick of a fleet of smacks hailing from Gravelines, Penzance, and other places. Christian viewed her in silence with the critical eye of an old sailor and a ship's carpenter to boot.

"How old's she, Rube?"

"Nine year."

"She'll do," said Christian. "Rube, I'm going to spin yer a yarn."

They went leisurely along the pier, and as they walked Christian told his brother about the skeleton in the tree and the document in Spanish which he had found in the dead man's snuff-box. He produced the snuff-box and the paper, also the clay pipe mounted in the bone of an albatross's wing, and the small gold cross. Reuben listened with an eye bright and keen with interest and conviction. The mere sight of the silver box was as convincing to his mind as though he had been carried to the island, and stood looking at Argensola's bones and the hole in the tree in which the box of jewels lay hid.

That night the two brothers sat up late, deep in discourse. Christian put ten pounds upon the table.

"That's all I own in the world," said he. "It'll help to victual the boat."

"We shall want a navigator," said Reuben. "I'm rather ignorant, myself, of that art, and I don't suppose you've learnt yourself to read yet, ha' ye, Christian? There's young Bob Maxted knows all about shooting of the sun. Us two and him'll be hands enough. Shall we make shares?"

"No," said Christian; "you and me divides. T'other'll come along on wages."

"There's no doubt about the situation of the island, I suppose?" said Reuben.

"No."

"Let's look at that there Spanish writing again."

Christian produced the snuff-box and Reuben opened the paper.

"Are you cocksure," said Reuben, fastening his eyes upon the dim scrawl, "that that there Pedro, as you call him, gave you the right meaning of this writing?"

"Yes; and there was my own ixpurrience to back his varsion."

"I'm rather for having it made into English again, Christian," said Reuben, thoughtfully. "Young Jones down at Consul Hammond's office speaks Spanish. What d'yer say?"

"No; I'm not a-going to trust any man but yourself with the secret. See here: if we come back rich— as'll follow— and you've bin meanwhile and shown that there paper to some one who understands it, what'll be thought? The gaff'll be blowed; the relaytives of that there Mary Ann'll be getting wind of our haul, and'll come upon us for the jewels."

This and the like reasoning satisfied Reuben, who presently returned the paper to Christian, and, after drinking a final glass of grog, the two brothers went to bed.

Next day, and for some days afterwards, they were full of business. Young Maxted was willing to sail with them; they gave out vaguely that they were bound to the West Indies, partly on pleasure, partly on business. The true character of their errand was not revealed to Maxted, who had agreed for six pounds a month to navigate the little ship into the West Indian seas and back again. Reuben drew all his savings from the bank; twenty pounds and Christian's ten pounds formed their capital. They provisioned themselves with forecastle fare, adding some bottled beer and a few gallons of rum, and on a fine morning at daybreak, when Ramsgate still slumbered, and the hush of the night yet brooded over the harbour, the three men hoisted their mainsail and jib, and blew softly down the gulley and round the head of the pier into the English Channel, which was by this time white with the risen sun, and beautiful in the south-west, where a hundred ships that had lain wind-bound in the Downs were flashing into canvas, and moving like a cloud before the light easterly breeze.

All went well down-Channel with the little craft. She was a stout and buoyant sea boat, with a dominant sheer of bow, coppered to the bends like a revenue cutter, and uncommonly stout of scantling for a vessel of her class. She was in good trim, and she plunged along stoutly, making fine weather of some ugly seas which ridged to her bow as she drove aslant through the Bay. By this time young Maxted had been made acquainted with the cutter's destination, and was steering a course for the little island. He plied his sextant nimbly, and clearly understood his business. The brothers represented to him that the object of their voyage was to recover some treasure which had been washed ashore out of a small Spanish plate ship and buried.

"We ain't sure," Christian Hawke told him, "that the island we're bound to is the island where the wreck took place. But the herrant's worth the cost and the time, and we mean to have a look round, anyhow."

Maxted was silent; perhaps with the proverbial heedlessness of the sailor he was satisfied to take things as they happened. The actual motive of the voyage could be of no interest to him. All that he had to do was to steer the little ship to an island and receive so many sovereigns in wages on their return.

They made a swift run for so small a keel; in fact, the island was in sight at the grey of dawn thirty-three days after the start from Ramsgate. Christian Hawke with a telescope at his eye quickly recognized the central hill, the soft, cloud-like mass of green shadow made by the wood or grove on the right, and the slope of the green land to the ivory dazzle of sand vanishing in the foam of the charging comber. He warmly commended Maxted's navigation, and both brothers stared with flushed faces and nostrils wide with expectation at the beautiful little cay that lay floating like a jewel full of gleams upon the calm blue brine right ahead.

They hove-to and rounded at about a mile from the land, and then let go their anchor in sixteen fathoms of water. They next launched their little fat jolly-boat smack-fashion through the gangway, and Christian and Reuben entered her and pulled away for the land, leaving Maxted in charge of the cutter; but little vigilance was needed in such weather as that; the sea was flat, and bare, and as brilliant as the sky; under the sun the water trembled in a glory of diamonds to the delicate brushing of a hot, light breeze. Nothing broke the silence upon the deep save the low, organ-like music of the surf beating on the western and northern boards of the island.

Whilst Christian pulled, Reuben steering the boat with an oar, he talked of his sufferings when in these parts, how his jaws had been fixed in a horrid gape by thirst, and of the terror that had besieged him when he looked up into the trees and beheld the skeleton. They made direct for the little creek into which Christian had driven his boat, and where he had slept on that first and only night he had passed on the island; and when her forefoot grounded they sprang out and hauled the boat high and dry, and then with hearts loud in their ears and restless eyes, directed their steps towards the little wood. Christian glanced wildly about him, imagining that in everything his sight went to, he beheld a token of the island having been recently visited.

"How long'll it be since you was here, Christian?" rumbled Reuben, in a note subdued by expectation and other passions.

"Five month," answered Christian, hoarsely.

They walked to the margin of the little wood, and arrived at the source of the stream that ran glittering and straying like pearls amidst the tall sweet green grass that grew in the bed of it. Reuben grasped Christian by the arm.

"What's that?" he cried.

It was a human skull, and close beside it were the complete bones of a human skeleton, together with a little heap of rags. It looked as though the stuff had been raked together for removal and forgotten.

"That wasn't how they was left," exclaimed Christian, coming to a halt and looking at the bones and rags. "There's been a hand arter me here in that job."

"A boat's crew may ha' landed and shovelled the stuff together out of a sort o' respect for the remains of something that might have been a sailor," exclaimed Reuben. "Where's the tree with the hole in it?"

Christian walked to the place where he had been seated when his eye went to the skeleton aloft.

"That'll be the tree," said he.

It was a large tree, the trunk of the bigness of an English chestnut, but dwarfed in altitude; its beauty was in the spread and curve of its branches. In the hinder part of the trunk— speaking with regard to its bearings from the source of the stream— about five feet above the ground, was a large hole, partly concealed by the festooning drapery of the leaves of a rich and vigorous parasite, which soared in coils to the summit of the tree. Christian put his hand in.

"Stand by for snakes!" shouted Reuben.

The other drew out a little common brass tobacco-box.

"What's here?" cried he.

"Try for the jewel box!" exclaimed Reuben.

Christian entered his hand again and felt round.

"There's nothen more here," said he.

"Has it fallen to the bottom?"

"There ain't no hole for it to fall through," cried Christian, still feeling. "It's tight as a locker."

He looked at the common little brass tobacco-box, then opened it, and found inside a slip of paper, folded to the shape of the box, as though in imitation of the snuff-box document in Christian's possession. The handwriting was a bold scrawl in ink. With a trembling hand and ashen face the poor fellow presented the paper to his brother, who, putting on his glasses, read aloud as follows:—

"I would have been glad to take a small share to help you to find the jewels, but you would not put a little money in my way, though by interpreting Luis de Argensola's dying request in writing I was the instrument of your discovering that there lay a treasure to your hand. I therefore arranged with another to seek for the jewels: the situation being exactly known to me, because of your ignorance of the Spanish language, and perhaps of the art of reading, for at the

end of the document, in three lines which it did not suit my purpose to interpret to you, Don Luis states how the island bears— that, in short, it is between ten and fifteen miles east of Rum Cay. My friend, I have found the jewels, and thank you for a fortune. They consist of pearl and diamond necklaces, brooches, bracelets, earrings, smelling-bottles, rings, and diamond ornaments for the hair. I should say they will not fetch less than £10,000.

—Your amigo of Kingston,Pedro.

"I have left the skeletons to your pious care to coffin and carry to the representative at Villagarcia. You will find the remains of the Lady Mariana de Mesa in a cave on the west side of the island."

The two men burst into a storm of oaths, and the little wood rang with forecastle and longshore imprecations. When they had exhausted their passions they knelt and drank from the spring of water, then walked to the boat, launched her, and returned to the cutter.

They arrived in England safely in due course, but some time later Reuben was obliged to compound with his creditors. Christian Hawke died in 1868 on board ship, still a carpenter.

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16: The Madness of Charles Tranter

"Sapper"

H. C. McNeile, 1888-1937

The Strand Magazine, Oct 1933

ON a certain warm day in June a cat was taking its evening walk through Huckleberry Mews. The cat was not particularly prepossessing, nor, incidentally, was the scene of its promenade. So the matter would hardly be worth while recording but for the fact that that stroll was the direct cause of a man being murdered. And this was the way of it.

The cat having explored several dustbins without any great success, came in due course to an open window, from which there exuded a smell so appetising that after a cautious look round puss jumped on to the sill. And not being greeted by a saucepan at her head she remained there prospecting. The smell came from a pot that sizzled on the range, but her attention did not turn as far afield as that. There, literally under her nose, was a succulent fillet of fish, and what more could any cat desire? Wherefore it came about that as the door opened and Mrs. Rubicon entered, she was just in time to see the cat and the fillet disappearing through the window at speed.

I will refrain from quoting Mrs. Rubicon's remarks, but shortly afterwards the good lady might have been seen to leave the house on her way to the nearest fish shop. It was getting late, and at any moment Mr. Rubicon would return and demand his supper in no uncertain voice. Which was why his wife did not take quite her usual care when she selected a portion of haddock to replace the stolen fillet. And it is also why both she and Mr. Rubicon awoke in the middle of the night in considerable pain. The haddock had done it on them, and Mr. Rubicon's language would have appalled the lady members of the Princess Club, which, as all the world knows, is a very exclusive mansion in the heart of the West End.

At this point it may well be asked why the lady members of the Princess Club should betray the smallest interest in Mr. Rubicon, or his remarks, and the matter shall be cleared up at once. Mr. Rubicon was the hall-porter, and daily sat in his office, controlling with genial firmness the destinies of mere men who ventured through the portals, the destinies of the members themselves, and above all, the destinies of their correspondence. And it was the last of these three items on which he prided himself most. Looking back over his ten years' service he could conscientiously say that he had never made a mistake. Letters which should be forwarded were forwarded at once, and letters which were not intended to be forwarded were safely pigeonholed. For it is a regrettable fact that quite a number of letters were wont to arrive for members which were marked "To await arrival" or "Not to be forwarded," and that almost

invariably they were in male handwriting. The safety and discretion of Mr. Rubicon were well known, and further comment is unnecessary.

And so it transpired that the next morning, while Mr. Rubicon was still saying unprintable things in Huckleberry Mews, a letter arrived at the Princess Club addressed to Mrs. C. Tranter, and marked with both the warnings given above. Which should have been sufficient. Unfortunately Mr. Rubicon's assistant, who was temporarily holding the fort, was under notice to leave because of his extreme uncleanliness. And Mrs. C. Tranter was one of the several members who had on past occasions commented audibly on the dirt of his finger-nails. So the temporary arbiter of fate seized a pen and, with black malice, deliberately readdressed the letter to Mrs. C. Tranter's home in Surrey. Then, with exultation in his heart, and muttering words, one of which at any rate was more applicable to the canine breed than to Mrs. C. Tranter, he dropped the letter in the post-box. And from that moment cats, Rubicons, and temporary assistants fade out of the picture, and the timbre of the story must change. Up to date, certain levity has been not only permissible but almost necessary; now a more serious note must be struck.

MR. CHARLES TRANTER was not a very pleasant individual. He was fifty, so that he was in the early thirties when things were occurring in France. And for a man of that age to have made a fortune on indispensable work at home was not a good thing. But Charles Tranter did so, and once again further comment is unnecessary. He made it in something to do with chemicals, and he had the mind and appearance of the conventional chemist of fiction. He wore pince-nez and had a slight stoop, and owing to his being short-sighted he had a habit of thrusting his head forward when he spoke to one, so that he rather resembled a bird of prey.

However, a man cannot be blamed for his physical appearance, though it is frequently a guide to what lies underneath. And it was in his mental make-up that Charles Tranter failed to inspire any enthusiasm. His income was great; his meanness greater. And though, when he wished, he could be quite pleasant, he rarely wished. He was a bad mixer, and very touchy over what he considered his rights. All things which were hidden from Janet Fenton when she married him shortly after the War.

Why she did so is one of those mysteries which none of her friends could fathom. He had money, of course, and she had none. But no one could have put her in that category. Personally, I believe she was genuinely fond of him: it was one of those strange— to the onlooker— aberrations of mind which are unaccountable. But whatever the cause she married him, and in due course became the mistress of his house near Dorking.

The marriage, without being a failure, was not a success. He was still actively concerned in his business and went up to London every day; she, after a brief period of disillusionment, proceeded to make the best of things. Always a cheerful little soul, she realised that though she had made a bad bargain, it was not too bad to carry on with. He was kind according to his lights; in fact, but for one thing, she would have been quite happy. His jealousy was inconceivable.

At first she could hardly believe it. The most harmless conversation at a dinner party with the man next to her was sufficient to upset her husband; an occasion on which she had danced three times with the same partner caused a scene which lasted well into the small hours. And during that scene she told Charles Tranter one or two home truths; she was not a girl who baulked at her fences. She said nothing that caused a break, but she informed him quite clearly that she had not the slightest intention of giving up any of her friends, female or male; and that if he objected to her talking to a man for twenty minutes at a garden party it was his funeral. In fact, she handled the situation exactly as it should have been handled, and outwardly her husband acquiesced. Inwardly the leopard had not changed its spots. And so, when the leopard, who now only went to London twice a week, examined the afternoon post on the day following the events in Huckleberry Mews, he received a very definite shock. Why should a letter addressed to his wife at her club, in a handwriting unknown to him, but which looked more like a man's than a woman's be marked "To await arrival"? Why should "Not to be forwarded" be underlined twice? Obviously the hall-porter had blundered, but that had nothing to do with the letter he held in his hand.

Charles Tranter looked round the hall— it was deserted. And temptation grew on him. Janet was playing tennis with friends and would not be back for hours: it so happened that he himself had taken the letters from the box. And the temptation grew still more.

After a while he put his wife's other letters on the table and went to his study. He opened his own pile more slowly and methodically than usual: he docketed three receipts: he filed two bills. He even read through an advertisement for a patent manure... And all the while temptation grew and grew and grew. "To await arrival": "Not to be forwarded"...Who was it from?

He lit a cigarette, and found that his hand was shaking a little. Who was writing to Janet at the Princess Club? He picked up the letter and turned it over: there was no seal. He studied the postmark: N— something— BURY. Newbury! Janet had been to Newbury races some weeks previously: had stopped with friends. At least, so she had said: he did not know them himself. She had been several times lately: the wife was a very sick woman.

He put down the letter, and found that his hand was still shaking a little. And his mouth was dry. Why had the letter been sent to the club? There could only be one answer to that question— an answer he did not like. A clandestine correspondence which he would never have discovered but for this error on the part of one of the club staff. And Charles Tranter's eyes fumed to the ring of the gas-fire on which stood a kettle of water... Should he steam the letter open?

He pressed out his cigarette: the house seemed strangely still. The servants were at the other end: he would not be disturbed for hours. Time in plenty to do it, and then put back the refastened envelope. Janet would never know: no one would ever know.

Suddenly he made up his mind. If there was nothing in the contents that mattered no harm would have been done: if there was something, then it was his duty to find out about it. It was his plain right as Janet's husband to know what it was. And so Charles Tranter yielded to temptation and lit the gas in the ring.

The envelope opened more easily than he had expected: not the slightest suspicion of a tear, he reflected, with satisfaction. Naturally, the flap was damp, but it would soon dry. And then with the help of a gum bottle no trace of any tampering would be left. Of course, there was nothing in the letter: he knew Janet far too well. Some friend writing about frocks: women always plastered instructions on envelopes. Someone who did not know her home address, or had forgotten it... Someone who...And at that moment the whole room went black: he had seen the opening sentence.

"My utterly adored woman."

The letter dropped from his shaking hands, and lay on the carpet at his feet. A pulse that almost choked him was hammering in his throat: a wave of physical nausea swept over him.

"My utterly adored woman."

That, to his wife, from another man...

At last he controlled himself sufficiently to stoop down and pick up the letter. And then, with a certain grim deliberation, he read, very slowly, every single damning sentence that the man had written. He read them a second time: he read them a third. And having done so, he put the letter on the desk in front of him with hands that had ceased to shake.

There are sentences and sentences: there are phrases which can be taken in two ways, and phrases which can mean only one thing. And every single word of that letter came into the latter category. I know: I read it myself. Not the very faintest shadow of doubt could exist in anyone's mind as to what the relationship was between the writer who signed himself "Jacko" and the

woman to whom it was written. He was her lover, and what he had written burned white hot.

The afternoon wore on and Charles Tranter sat motionless at his desk. The kettle had scorched a ring on the leather: the gas still burned in the grate. Every now and then he would pick up the letter and torture himself afresh, until he writhed with the mental agony of it and his nails bit into his flesh. His imagination grew more and more vivid, and gradually in his subconscious mind the certainty of what he was going to do took form. But it would have to be done carefully.

He replaced the kettle and turned out the gas. Then, putting the letter and envelope in his pocket, he rang the bell.

"Pack a suitcase for me, Garton," he said, when the butler appeared. "And tell Mrs. Tranter when she returns that I have been suddenly called up to London and shall be away for a couple of nights."

"Very good, sir," answered the man. "But Williams is over with the mistress."

"I will drive myself," said Tranter curtly, and the butler concealed his surprise. It was a new departure for Tranter to drive himself— generally he detested taking the wheel. So when, half an hour later, he watched his master turn into the main road, he voiced his feelings aloud.

"Wonder what's happened," he muttered to himself. "I've never seen the bloke look like he does this evening. Queer fish."

But had he known the cause of the bulge in the queer fish's pocket he might not have returned whistling to his pantry.

Now I want to be fair to Charles Tranter, and I like to think that his madness began that afternoon, when all the devils of jealousy assailed him in his study. Even to an ordinary man that letter would have been hell: to him it must have meant the uttermost depths of the pit. It was all so painfully clear: the sick friend— the visits to Newbury. Once he had telephoned her there, and the wife had answered. Janet was out, but she rang up shortly after, and he had suspected nothing. Why should he? But now he saw it all: the two women hanging together as women always did.

"Come round, darling: your fool of a husband has just rung up. I've told him you're out, but you'd better put a call through to him to keep him quiet."

His grip tightened on the steering wheel till his knuckles showed white and the car swerved dangerously. Steady! That sort of thing would not do: there must be no question of his being laid out by an accident now. Not, at any rate, until he had killed the man who signed himself Jacko.

He thought out his plans as he drove along. The address was on the paper, so that there would be no difficulty in finding him, and since he had got away

from his own house without seeing Janet, she would not be able to warn her lover. That was why he had gone before her return: he could never have kept his knowledge from her quick eye. She could be dealt with later: he had not made up his mind yet what he was going to do with her. For the present Jacko was enough.

He arrived at Newbury about eight o'clock and, registering under the name of Johnson, he took a room at the Bull. Then, having ordered a large whisky and soda and some sandwiches, he sat down with the local telephone book in front of him. He had to find out the name of the man he was going to murder.

The number was 005, and he methodically went down every column. At last he came to it. 'Captain Jack Featherston, of Avondale Farm. That was the address on the letter: he had got his man.

He rose and went into the bar, leaving his sandwiches untouched. There was no hurry now; he could afford to bide his time. Another whisky and soda was what he wanted, and, taking it from the girl, he crossed to a corner. Two men by the bar looked at him covertly: Charles Tranter did not know that his face was like that of a corpse save for his eyes. And his eyes were not good to look on. Suddenly the name Avondale caught his ears, and something about old Feathers. So that was the devil's nickname, was it, Feathers?

He listened intently: a morbid curiosity possessed him to learn all he could about this man who had stolen his wife. But the men began talking of other things, and after a while he got up and joined them at the bar.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," he said, "but I could not help overhearing one of your remarks about Avondale Farm. Is it, by any chance, a Captain Jack Featherston who lives there?"

"That's right," said one of them.

"I wonder if it is a man I knew. Tall and dark— about forty."

"Wrong bird," answered the other promptly. "This Featherston is fair, and not a day more than thirty."

"Married?" queried Tranter, casually.

"No," was the answer. "Poor old Feathers can't afford the luxury of a wife."

"But he could afford the luxury of someone else's," thought Tranter. "Does he live there alone?" he asked.

"Yes, except for a deaf old woman who looks after him."

Tranter turned away, lest they should see the triumph in his eyes. Only one deaf old woman. And as he left the bar the two men glanced at each other.

"Rum customer." said one. "Seemed damned curious about Feathers."

"Rather too curious," answered the other uneasily. "I didn't like his looks at all. Still, Feathers is quite able to take care of himself. Do you know that fellow who has just gone out, Maud?"

The barmaid shook her head. "Just arrived," she said. "Name of Johnson. And that dial of his would turn the milk sour."

Quite unconscious of the interest he had aroused, Charles Tranter went to the garage. Alone— save for one old deaf woman! Luck was with him.

"Avondale Farm, sir?" said the man in charge. "Captain Featherston's. It's about five miles out on the Andover road. Will you be coming back tonight?"

"I shall," answered Tranter, and drove out of the yard. He drove slowly. Now that the moment had arrived he felt strangely cool. His scheme was mapped out in its main outline: details would have to take care of themselves. It was going to be a nuisance if Featherston had people dining with him, but it would only mean postponing it for two or three hours. And he did not mind waiting.

A notice-board loomed up, announcing that fresh eggs could be bought at Avondale Farm, a hundred yards farther on, and Charles Tranter stopped the car. He would walk the last bit, he decided, as he fingered the revolver in his pocket for the hundredth time. It was easier to reconnoitre on foot, and he must make sure Featherston was alone.

The farm stood back some fifty yards from the road, and for a while he stood by the gate, examining it. Light was streaming out from one of the downstairs rooms. Seated in a chair was a man with his feet on the leather fender that ringed the fireplace. He was smoking a pipe, and a reading lamp stood on a table beside him. Fair, with a short clipped moustache, he sat studying a small book in which he occasionally jotted something down.

Suddenly with a weary little gesture he flung it on the table, and, standing up, he stretched himself. Then he turned to a wireless set, and a moment later the time signal from Greenwich sounded. Nine o'clock.

"This is the National programme from London... Here is an S O S..."

A thin smile hovered round Tranter's lips as he stood in the shadow of some bushes on the other side of the drive. S O S! One would be wanted here soon. And then he began to shake with overmastering rage. There, standing by the open window, with his hands in his pockets, was the devil who had wrecked his life. In that very room Janet had sat: had been kissed. But never again. Nemesis was at hand. Not too quickly, of course: he would first play with "Jacko" a little. And with a great effort he pulled himself together and stepped out on to the drive.

The man at the window leaned forward. "Who's that?" he called out sharply. Tranter came into the light and Featherston stared at him.

"Good Lord!" he said. "Are you ill?" It was not a surprising question. Tranter looked like a man consumed with fever.

"Am I disturbing you?" Try as he would he could not prevent his voice from shaking, and Featherston whistled softly under his breath. Undoubtedly a very sick man.

"Disturbing me!" he laughed. "Not a bit. I've been balancing up my budget, and after that anything is an anti-climax. It strikes me you'd better have a drink."

He stopped the wireless, while Tranter climbed in through the window. Then, leaving the door open, Featherston went out of the room, to return a few moments later with tantalus and glasses. A queer-looking sort of tiger, he reflected, this sudden arrival out of the blue. But the man looked like death, and common humanity dictated asking him in. "Brandy or whisky?" he said genially. "They're both here. Help yourself."

But Tranter made no reply: with his hand gripping the revolver in his pocket, he stared at Featherston and went on staring. And at length Featherston frowned: sick his unexpected visitor might be, and undoubtedly was, but the fellow was proving a damned bore.

"When you've quite finished staring at me," he said curtly, "you might let me know what I can do for you. You don't appear to want a drink."

And Tranter spoke. "Are you Captain Featherston?"

Featherston raised his eyebrows. "I am. Who are you?"

"Do you ever sign your letters. 'Jacko'?"

Featherston stiffened, his pipe half-way to his mouth. "What the devil has that got to do with you?" he said slowly. "Are you crazy?"

"To do with me." croaked Tranter. "That's a good one, you swine: that's a good one."

He threw back his head and laughed: then, taking the letter from his pocket, he brandished it in front of Featherston.

"Do you recognise that, Jacko?" he shouted. "'My own adored woman.' And who is your own adored woman, you devil? My wife. I'm Tranter— "

"Put it away, you fool," roared Featherston, as Tranter's other hand came out of his pocket. Came a sharp report— then silence.

Curiously, dispassionately, Tranter stared at the body lying at his feet. Now that he had done it; now that he had killed his man, he felt strangely cool and collected. Featherston was quite dead: the bullet had gone through his heart. A motor-bus rumbled by on the road and Tranter went to the window. There was no one to be seen. All he had to do was to walk out of the house, get into his car and drive away. Everything had been so easy as to be almost laughable. Just one shot, and the man who had stolen his wife was dead. Of regret he felt not the slightest twinge: Captain Jack Featherston had richly deserved all he got. He would have liked to prolong things a little, but perhaps it had been

better as it was. And "Jacko" had known before he died who it was who was going to kill him.

Moreover, he was safe: who would identify Mr. Johnson of the Bull, Newbury, with Charles Tranter of Dorking? He had no intention whatever of returning to the hotel: the body would almost certainly be discovered before he could get away in the morning. So by then he proposed to be at his club in London, having spent the night there. Safe! And with one last gloating look at the dead man sprawling on the floor, Charles Tranter turned out the light and left the house.

Now it is just conceivable that he might have got away with it for a time but for the fact that the man in charge of the garage at the Bull had noted, as was his invariable custom, the number of his car. And that being so, the chase was the swiftest on record. In fact, it was just before lunch next day that an inspector and a sergeant of police arrived at Charles Tranter's house. I was having a cocktail with Janet at the time.

"XYZ23," she said, in reply to their question. "Yes: that's the number of one of our cars. My husband has it in London at the moment. Why do you ask?"

"Your husband, madam? Is that Mr. Charles Tranter?"

"Yes," said Janet. And then, with quick alarm: "The poor old dear hasn't had an accident, has he?"

"Oh no, madam. Might I ask you to describe your husband?"

"Of course. He's fifty: tall, grey, with a stoop. And he wears pince-nez."

The inspector stared at the sergeant: the sergeant stared at the inspector. And for a space no one spoke.

"What is all the mystery, Inspector?" cried Janet irritably. "Why are you asking these questions?"

"Mrs. Tranter," said the inspector gravely, "do you know a man called Featherston? Captain Jack Featherston, who has a house near Newbury?"

"Featherston! Newbury! As a matter of fact I do— very slightly. I met him at my club the other day. There's another Mrs. Tranter who has just joined: and what is so confusing is that she is Mrs. C. Tranter, too. Mrs. Cyril Tranter. We're continually getting one another's letters. And the last time I was at the club, this Captain Featherston came to see her and was brought to me in mistake by a page-boy. She came up almost at once and called him Jack. So that must be the man you mean, though what it has to do with me I can't imagine."

She found out very soon. One of the most dreadful sounds I have ever heard came from just outside the open window. It rose and fell in hideous cachinnations— peal upon peal of wild, maniacal laughter. And while Janet, white-faced, shrank back in her chair, I followed the two policemen outside.

Charles Tranter had returned: Charles Tranter had learned the truth— too late. He was sitting on the grass with a revolver in one hand and the letter in the other. And he offered no resistance to the two officers when they took both things away from him. He only laughed and went on laughing. As he still does in Broadmoor, where he is detained during His Majesty's pleasure.

17: Buller Intervening

Logan Pearsall Smith

1865-1946

In: *The Youth of Parnassus and Other Stories*, 1895

American born British essayist, educated at Harvard, Berlin and then Oxford. His first book was a series of short stories of Oxford University life in his time.

AS VAUGHAN was walking towards the underground station one of those bleak mornings last winter, he saw, coming the same way, a man who had been at College in his time— one Buller by name; and Buller, when he caught sight of Vaughan, began to smile, but when they met, he exclaimed, in a mock mournful voice, "I say, have you heard about poor Crabbe?"

"You mean his political speech, when his spectacles were smashed, and he had to take to the woods?" asked Vaughan, beating his hands and stamping, for the cold was bitter.

"Oh no, that's ancient. I mean"— and Buller's voice broke with laughter— "I mean his engagement!"

"Crabbe! oh, nonsense!"

"Gospel fact, I'll take my oath on it. Fancy Crabbe!" and again his laughter froze into white puffs of breath about his head. They went into the station together, and bought their tickets. Crabbe engaged! Vaughan tried to picture him as an accepted lover. Poor Crabbe! They had all hoped that his Fellowship and his work on the metres of Catullus would keep him out of mischief. But they might have known— those prize fellows, with so much time on their hands; and Crabbe above all, with his fixed idea that he was cut out for a man of action!

"But tell me about Crabbe," Vaughan said, as they waited on the platform; "have you seen him?"

"Oh yes. The other day I ran up to have a look at the 'Torpid.' It's all right now."

"The Torpid?"

"No; I mean about Crabbe."

"You think it's a good match, then?"

"Good match! No, I mean that I went and talked to him myself."

"And he was engaged?"

"He *was*," said Buller, laughing; "poor old beast!" The train drew in, and when they had taken their seats, Buller leaned over, and, with a low voice, went on telling his story in Vaughan's ear. "You see, I went up to Oxford, and down at the barge Blunt tells me about old Crabbe; and when I go into College

the first person I meet is the Dean, looking as chirpy as ever. How those old parsons do keep it up!

" 'Well, sir,' says I, 'and what do you think of Crabbe's engagement?'

" 'Perfect rot,' says the Dean. 'The girl had no money; how were they going to live? Crabbe would have to chuck his Catullus— everything.'

" 'How did it happen?' I asked. 'Crabbe never used to be sweet on the ladies.' 'No; but in reading Catullus, Crabbe had got some ideas,' the Dean said, with a kind of wink."

Here Vaughan could not help interrupting the story. "Come, Buller," he whispered, "it must have been Blunt who said that. The old Dean couldn't talk in that way."

But Buller felt sure it was the Dean. "You see, you don't know the old boy; he's quite another person with me. Anyhow, that's the way Crabbe got into it. And he went on, the Dean said, to read all sorts of other poetry, especially that man— what you may call him? They had a society—"

"Browning?"

"Yes, that's the man. Well, Crabbe thought it all very fine and exciting, the Dean said; he used to read them Browning in the Common Room, and there was one thing he seemed specially taken with— Browning's theory of love."

"What was that?" Vaughan asked, for it was a joy to hear Buller talking of literature.

"Well," Buller whispered, "you see this man Browning hates all your shilly-shallying about; he thinks that when you fall in love, you ought to go your whole pile, even if you come a cropper after. It's all rot, of course, the Dean said; but poor Crabbe thought it was real, and went and proposed to a young woman he had met once or twice. So there he was, engaged! And he seemed to think himself the hell of a duke, the Dean said; but everyone else in Oxford thought he was making a bl—"

"Oh, Buller," Vaughan interposed, "really, you mustn't put such words into the Dean's mouth!"

"Well, I don't quite remember the old boy's lingo, but, at any rate, the Dean thought Crabbe was making a fool of himself. 'I think I can settle it,' says I to the Dean. 'I wish you would,' said the Dean; so off I go to Crabbe's rooms. He came in just as I got there; I wish you could have seen him— a frock-coat, top-hat, flower in his button-hole, his hair plastered down. And only last year, it was, that he got up as a Socialist, with a red silk handkerchief in his hat! But now he shook hands with me up in the air; was most affable and condescending; assured me he was glad to see his old pals—especially friends from London. Oxford people were very well in their way, but narrow, and rather donnish. Didn't I notice it in coming from London?

"Well, this was almost too much from Crabbe, but I thought it would be more sport to draw him out a bit. So we got to talking; I didn't let on I knew he was engaged, but after a bit I began to talk about marriage and love and all that in a general sort of way. Old Crabbe swallows it all, talks a lot of literary stuff. 'Fall in love, Buller,' says he, 'fall in love, and live! Let me read you what thing-a-majig says,' and he gets down a book— who did you say he was? Browning, yes, that's the man— he gets down a book of Browning's and begins to read— you ought to have seen him, his face got pink; and at the end he says, with a proud smile, as if the poem was all about him, 'Isn't that ripping, Buller, isn't that brave, isn't that the way to take life!'

" 'Do you mind if I smoke?' said I.

" 'Smoke? Oh, do certainly,' and Crabbe sits down looking rather foolish. But after a moment, he says in an easy sort of way, 'Ah, I meant to ask you about all the chaps in London— getting on all right? any of them married?'

" 'Married!' says I, 'O Lord, no; *they* don't want to dish themselves.'

" 'Dish themselves,' says Crabbe, 'why, what do you mean?'

" 'I mean what I say; if you get married without any money, you're dished, that's all— I mean practical people, who want to get on.'

"Then Crabbe began to talk big; one shouldn't care only for success— it might be practical, perhaps, but he did not mean to sacrifice the greatest thing in life for money.

" 'The greatest thing in life— what's that?'"

Buller laughed so loudly at this part of his story, that the other people in the carriage began to stare at him and Vaughan. So he went on in a lower whisper. " 'What's that?' says I.

" 'I mean,' says Crabbe, 'why, what I have been talking about.'

" 'Well, what is it?'

" 'What I was saying a little while ago.'

" 'But you talked too fast— I couldn't catch it; give us the tip, out with it.'

" 'I mean love, passion,' says he.

" What? say it again.'

" 'Well, I mean— and it's always said that love— the poets—'

" 'The who?'

" 'The poets.'" Again Buller laughed out loud.

"'Oh, poets!' says I, 'I thought you said porters. Poets! so you've been reading poets, have you? but you oughtn't to believe all that— why, they don't mean it themselves; they write it because they're expected to, but it's all faked up— I know how it's done.'

"Old Crabbe begins to talk in his big way. I let him go on for a while, but then I said, 'See here, Crabbe, it's all very well to read that literary stuff, and I

suppose it's what you're paid for doing. But don't go and think it's all true, because it isn't, and the sooner you know it the better.' 'There was a man I knew once,' says I, 'who got fearfully let in by just this sort of thing; Oxford don too, Fellow of Queen's named Peake; took to reading poetry; he went to Brighton in the Long, with his head full of it all. Wild sea waves, the moon and all the rest of it; and back comes Peake married; had to turn out of his College rooms, went to live at the other end of nowhere, stuffy little house, full of babies, had to work like a nigger, beastly work too; coached me for Smalls, that's how I know him; no time for moon and sea waves now; and it all came from reading poetry.'

"Old Crabbe begins to sit up at this. 'But I don't see,' he says, 'I don't see why— didn't he have his Fellowship money?'

" 'But you don't suppose that's going to support a wife and a lot of children.'

" 'Oh, if he had children,' says Crabbe, and the old boy begins to blush and says, 'I don't see the need.'

" 'Much you know about it, Crabbe,' says I, and I couldn't help laughing, he looked such an idiot.

" 'Well, anyhow,' he says, 'your friend may have been unfortunate, but I respect him all the same; he was bold, he lived.'

" 'What does all that mean?— he didn't die, of course!'

" 'I mean he loved— he had that.'

" 'Oh yes, he had, but I rather think he wished he hadn't. He said it didn't come to much— and even when he was engaged she used to bore him sometimes.'

" 'Really!' says old Crabbe, 'that's odd now,' and then he goes on, as if he was talking to himself, 'I wonder if everyone feels like that?'

" 'Of course they do! But after you're married, just think of it— never quiet, never alone; Peake said it nearly drove him wild. And to think he was tied up like that for the rest of his life!'

" 'Yes, it is a long time.' Crabbe began to look rather green. 'Your friend— his name was Peake, I think you said— I suppose he couldn't have broken off the engagement?' and he smiled in a sort of sea-sick way.

" 'Of course he could,' says I, as I got up to go. 'Perfect ass not to— but good-bye, Crabbe, you've got jolly rooms here.'

" 'Yes, they are nice,' says Crabbe in a kind of sinking voice.

"So, a day or two after, I meet the Dean; the old boy seems very much pleased. 'Well Buller, I think you've done the biz,' says he; 'I don't believe old Crabbe will do it after all.'"

When he had finished his story, Buller leaned comfortably back. "I felt sure he would get out of it somehow," he said aloud, "I think that story finished him." "You know what I mean," he added, nodding significantly, "that story of Peake."

"I don't believe Peake ever existed!" Vaughan answered, as low as he could.

Buller leaned forward again, he was almost bursting with laughter. "Of course he didn't!" he hissed in Vaughan's ear. "But wasn't Crabbe in a blue funk though!"

"Oh, I don't believe Crabbe minded you a bit. I'm sure he won't break it off," Vaughan whispered indignantly. "And what right had you to talk that way? I never heard of such impertinent meddling!"

"Bet you three to one he does," Buller whispered back. "Come, man, make it a bet!" The train drew into the Temple station and Vaughan got up.

"I won't bet on anything of the kind," he said, as he stood at the door. "And what do you know about love anyhow, Buller? Then think of the poor girl, she probably believes that Crabbe is a hero, a god—"

"Well, she won't for long," Buller chuckled.

18: Circumstantial Evidence

Valentine Williams

1883-1946

The Bunbury Herald and Blackwood Express (W Australia) 8 Oct 1926

MR. ALBERT EDWARD BIRKINSHAW, a rather prim figure in his alpaca coat, black tie, and well-worn dark-grey trousers, handed the card back to the office-boy.

"Mr. Salsbrigg is engaged," he said. "Anyway, he doesn't see people except by appointment; you know that as well as I do, Percy. Tell him to write in."

" 'Sjes' wot I told 'im, Mr. Birkinshaw, but 'e sez: 'You tell the boss it's Mr. Claud Merritone,' 'e sez, 'an' 'e'll see me quick enough,' 'e sez."

"I can't help what *he* says, Percy," rejoined Mr. Birkinshaw, in the mild tone that was familiar to him. "A rule is a rule. He'll have to write for an appointment!"

"Guv'nor busy?" said a voice.

Mr. Birkinshaw looked up from the high desk which, during the working days of sixteen years, he had occupied in the clerks' office at Mr. Salsbrigg's. Mr. Salsbrigg liked to call it the clerks' office, though, in reality, it was the principal of the three rooms which Mr. Salsbrigg rented in Casino House, E.C.2, for his many enterprises.

A tall man, wearing a waisted overcoat, white doeskin gloves, and a top-hat that shone with some extraneous lubricant rather than its own innate effulgence, stood in the doorway. He had a sallow face, a small black moustache, and a pair of dark and restless eyes.

"Mr. Salsbrigg is engaged," said the clerk severely.

"Righto!" remarked the stranger easily, "I'll wait!"

And he dropped into the chair at the typewriter which Miss Ruby Pattinson, the typist— "my secretary," Mr. Salsbrigg was fond of calling her— had vacated for the purpose of clearing away the office tea.

"It's no good waiting," said Mr. Birkinshaw, peering at the stranger over his pince-nez. "Mr. Salsbrigg won't see you without you have an appointment. That's an inflexible rule, and..."

But voices resounded from the other side of the door in the glass partition separating the clerks' room from Mr. Salsbrigg's sanctum.

"I'll let you out by my private door into the corridor, Mr. Goldstein!"

"That's all right. I put me 'at down in the outer office, thank yer."

Mr. Goldstein appeared at the door, as black and sleek and squat as the other, who was ushering him out, was rubicund and fat and burly.

"Good-day to you," said Salsbrigg, in velvety, throaty tones, "and glad I am that everything is satisfactorily settled. It has been a pleasure to do business with you, Mr. Goldstein."

The Jew wagged his head humorously as he buttoned up his overcoat.

"A terrible hard man, you are," he sighed. "We're all mugs when we're up against a tough proposition like you, Salsbrigg!"

Mr. Salsbrigg's florid face was wreathed in a gratified smile that sent the wrinkles sagging across the features from the narrow blue eyes down to the receding chin that sloped into the folds of the pink throat.

"Very good, ha-ha! Oh, very good!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands. "You're a deep one, Goldstein. I'd have to get up very early in the morning to make money out of a hot case like you. Good-evening, friend Goldstein, good-evening! Going to be wet again, I fear! Percy, Mr. Goldstein's hat!"

All smiles, he waved a fat hand as the Jew stumped his way across the office. But when the plump bowed back had disappeared, the friendliness fled from the pink face.

"Mr. Birkinshaw, I want you," Mr. Salsbrigg snapped, and went back into his room. As the clerk, blinking mildly, followed him across the threshold, the tornado struck him full.

"Are you mad, Mr. Birkinshaw?" shouted the throaty voice, now grown fiercely irate. "Have you taken to drink? Miss Pattinson says you're the dam' fool that gave Goldstein an appointment after banking hours. You know he's the crookedest little reptile in the trade: you know that I take nothing but hard cash from the likes of him; and yet, just because I'm up in Manchester, you let him come here and saddle me with a matter of eighteen hundred pound and the bank shut. Don't you answer me back, Mr. Birkinshaw! I've only got to go out on Finsbury Pavement and whistle on my fingers, and I can get twenty, two hundred clerks as good as you. As good? By God, a dam' sight better! Here I sit sweating my guts out day after day, trying to make both ends meet, with trade as flat as flat, and the City that rotten you couldn't float a cork, and there's not a man in the office I can depend on! Has it occurred to you, may I know, that there will be a matter of eighteen hundred pound in that safe from now until to-morrow morning?

"I'm shore I'm very sorry, Mr. Salsbrigg," faltered the clerk, "but I didn't realise that Mr. Goldstein would settle in cash..."

"Didn't realise? My God!" A fist crashed heavily down on the desk, "you're no more use than a sick headache!

"What a noise you're making, Alfred!"

The pale face of the stranger suddenly appeared round the glass door. As abruptly as it had broken out, the tornado ceased to rage. A rather stiff smile brightened Mr. Salsbrigg's red face.

"Come in, Claud," he said feebly, and, addressing the clerk, he added: "You want to smarten yourself up, Mr. Birkinshaw; dull, that's what you are— and half asleep!"

The door shut with a bang, and Mr. Birkinshaw returned to his desk, his head in a whirl. Inwardly he reproached himself bitterly. Why did he a always let old Salsbrigg take him unawares? Why did those calm, unanswerable retorts to his employer's insulting gibes only occur to him after the storm was past and Salsbrigg, having vented his ill-humour on his three-pound-ten a week employee, had returned to his wonted air of Olympic condescension in his treatment of him?

"Old man got his rag out again?" said Cradock, the other clerk, who was brushing his long fair hair before the office glass.

"Yes," said Birkinshaw. "It's more than flesh and blood will stand, Crad, as some day he'll find out, the— the devil!"

"My word, Mr. Birkinshaw," said Miss Pattinson, a chemical blonde with bobbed hair and skirt, "what lengwidge!"

"Humph!" grunted the clerk. "How'd you like to be talked to the way he talks to me? Swearing— and that. But I'll get even with the old beast. You see if I don't!"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Miss Pattinson. "How fierce you are! I declare you quayte fraighten me, Mr. Birkinshaw!"

"Keep your hair on, Birkie," said Cradock. "Percy, you young devil, what have you done with my soap? Birkie..."

"What is it?" said the clerk, busy with his papers once more.

"I've got a couple of seats for the Coliseum. I was going to take Cissie— you know, the girl I told you about— but the dirty dog 'phoned me up just now to say she can't come. You care to come along?"

"Sorry, old man," mumbled Birkinshaw, his head in his desk, "'fraid it's quite impossible!"

"Working late here again, are you?"

There was a slight pause. Cradock repeated his question. "You staying on, old man?"

"Ye-es. There are those papers for the Patent Office to finish. I— I believe I'll stick on a bit and polish 'em off."

"But you can do 'em to-morrow night just as well. And there's a ripping good bill at the Coliseum."

"Thanks awfully, old man, but I don't think I'll go with you this evening. There's the half-yearly statement coming on, y'know, and I want to get clear for it in good time."

He paused and fell to wiping his glasses. Then shyly:

"It's— it's dam' kind of you to ask me, Crad."

"That's all ri', Birkie. Only it's a pity to waste the other ticket. I'll have to try some of the people at my boarding-house, though they're a dull lot, the Lord knows!"

The door in the glass partition opened again, and Mr. Merritone reappeared. The door closed rather forcibly behind him.

"Whatever have you bin an' done to our Alfred?" remarked the stranger affably to Mr. Birkinshaw. "He is in a sweet temper this evening, I *don't* think!"

Mr. Birkinshaw glared indignantly at the intruder, who, quite unperturbed, kissed a white-gloved hand gracefully to Miss Pattinson and vanished into the outer office where Percy was stamping the letters for the post.

"He's got a nerve!" said Miss Pattinson, voicing so effectually the general feeling of the clerks' room that neither Birkinshaw nor Cradock felt impelled to add their own comments. The light in Mr. Salsbrigg's office went out abruptly, and a door slammed.

Mr. Cradock, who, in his grass-green overcoat, was practising golf-shots with his walking-stick, looked up.

"Old man's leaving early," he observed. He glanced out of the window. "Hell! It's going to rain. You'll want the Dreadnought going home to-night, old man!"

He jerked his head in the direction of the hat-stand, where Birkinshaw's umbrella, inexhaustible fount of office witticism, stood in its appointed place. It derived its nickname from its crutch handle of solid ash, a regular club of a handle, as thick as two fingers round. Birkinshaw, who had all the Englishman's love of solid belongings, had bought it at a sale. Three days a week, on the average, it accompanied him to the office.

"Nothing like a good umbrella in this filthy climate!" he remarked stolidly, an observation, like the jest, of the sealed pattern variety.

"Umbrella? I should call it a niblick or a baffy myself!" rejoined Cradock, who contrived to play golf on his infinitesimal income. "Well, I must be toddling. Good ni', old man!"

"Good ni', Crad."

Miss Pattinson had already sailed Tubewards on a cloud of patchouli, and after Cradock, presently Percy, three instalments of "Deadwood Dick" buttoned up beneath his shabby jacket, clattered noisily off to the lift, making the welkin ring with the syncopated protest of the New York fruit-seller. And Birkinshaw

was left alone in the office, the green-shaded lamp pulled down low over his desk the only light in the big room.

He sighed and ran his fingers over his thinning sandy hair. It was close on six o'clock, and the voice of the City droned on a deeper note as thousands of tired workers flocked towards their homes in the suburbs. The clerk got out his papers and settled himself down to work. He liked the quiet of the office after the others had gone home. He could concentrate better without Salsbrigg's strident nagging and Cradock's robust breeziness, and Miss Pattinson's indefatigable parade of her feminine arts. In the reposeful, spacious room, with London's lurid night-sky framed in the uncurtained window, he could indulge in those dreams that come even to a city clerk at three-pound-ten a week, more freely than in his cheerless bed-sitting-room in the Fulham Road.

And he could smoke, content in the knowledge that Mr. Salsbrigg's ban against smoking in office hours expired with the termination of the working day at half-past five. From a battered leather cigarette-case he drew one of his famous Bolivian cigarettes, another office joke— unappetising-looking smokes of coarse black tobacco, with frayed ends protruding from the thin-grained paper stamped with an eagle in blue. Eager for experiment as he always was, he had picked out a packet in a vague tobacconist's near the office, allured by its proud boast: "Pure as the Pampas Air; Grateful to the Palate; Caressing to the Throat." Though secretly he preferred Gold Flake, he had gallantly stuck to his Bolivians. "An acquired taste, old man," he used to tell Cradock; "a bit pungent at first, but pure; at any rate, a fellow knows what he's smoking!"

As he slipped his cigarette-case back into his pocket, his fingers touched something, and he withdrew a letter sealed and stamped ready for the post. He laid down his cigarette unlit upon the desk and smote his brow. Then, with a hasty glance at the clock, he paused for an instant irresolute, gazing at the papers spread out before him, and presently, with a sudden gesture, began to shovel them together.

Outside in the street the shrill note of a fire-gong rang out suddenly above the dull diapason of the traffic, a fierce, noisy clanging accompanied by the thunder of wheels. Again and again the engines swept by with furious gonging and a headlong rush that made the building tremble. Birkinshaw acted very swiftly. He swept all his papers back into his desk, locked it, changed his office-coat for the jacket of his well-worn suit, grabbed his hat and overcoat, and darted for the door of the outer office, that clicked behind him with a spring-lock. He did not wait for the lift, but descended by the staircase to the ground-floor lobby with its huge shields of the tenants' names. As he reached the swing-doors another fire-engine flashed past. The night porter's box was

empty. The sight of passers-by hurrying along the street in the direction taken by the engines told him where the porter had gone.

But Birkinshaw did not bend his steps in the direction of the fire. He hastened to the bloated scarlet pillar-box at the opposite corner of Finsbury Pavement. There he consulted the plate on the front setting out the times of collection, and finally, without posting his letter, turned away and boarded a 'bus going west. He travelled as far as the General Post Office, where he consigned his envelope to one of the huge maws under the pillared portico, and then, after a moment's hesitation, went out into Newgate Street and smartly hopped on a westward-bound bus.

He took a ticket to Piccadilly, and, alighting at the foot of Bond Street, strolled along towards the Park, a look of happy contentment on his face, gazing at the brightly illuminated shop-fronts or, as they halted in the press of traffic, peering in at the windows of the glittering limousines bearing elegant, well-fed folk to the restaurants.

At the corner of Dover Street an idea seemed to strike him. He stopped and looked about him, then addressed a passing District Messenger boy.

"Where's the nearest telegraph-office, sonny?"

"Up Dover Street 'ere on the left," piped the urchin. "But you'll want to be nippy, mate. They closes at seven!"

By the clock above Hatchett's it was five minutes to seven. Birkinshaw hurried up Dover Street and reached the office in time to scribble a telegram under the severe and disapproving gaze of the damsel behind the wire screen, who, dressed for the street, was watching the clock with ill-concealed impatience. As he emerged from the post-office a few drops of rain pattered briskly on his face. He stopped and smote the palm of his hand with his fist. "Well, I'm jiggered!" he said, addressing the night. Then he shrugged his shoulders, and set off slowly towards Piccadilly again.

When, at a quarter of an hour before midnight, he opened with his latch-key the front door of the house where he lodged in the Fulham Road, two dim figures rose up from chairs in the hall to greet him. In the background bobbed the pale and anxious face of his landlady.

"Are you Albert Edward Birkinshaw?" asked one of the two strangers. On the clerk's affirmative reply, the man informed him that he would be arrested for the murder of Alfred Salsbrigg.

ii

WITHOUT leaving the box the Coroner's jury returned a verdict of wilful murder against Albert Edward Birkinshaw. The prisoner reserved his defence,

but the statement which he made voluntarily to the police, read out in court, did little or nothing to rebut the overwhelming volume of evidence against him.

Detective-Inspector Coleburn of the City Police, who had arrested the prisoner, gave the substance of the case against him. Shortly after seven o'clock on the evening of the murder, Bertram Batts, night porter at Casino House, when engaged in his duties on the third floor of the building, heard the telephone ringing in Mr. Salsbrigg's office. There was a light visible through the glass door, but as no one answered the telephone, thinking that Mr. Salsbrigg had gone away and forgotten to turn off the light, Batts opened the door of Mr. Salsbrigg's room with his pass-key and found Mr. Salsbrigg dead in his chair.

The officer submitted a plan of the office— a long narrow room, showing that Mr. Salsbrigg's seat at the desk was placed so that it faced the window and had its back to the door. Mr. Salsbrigg lay prone across the desk with arms hanging down, the top of his head practically smashed in by two, or possibly three, blows from some blunt instrument which the medical evidence would show beyond doubt was the crutch-handled umbrella found lying on the floor beside the desk. This umbrella the prisoner admitted to be his.

A murmur ran round the court as the Inspector held up the Dreadnought. The ribs had torn jagged holes in the cover, for the solid ash stick that ran through it from the handle had snapped with the force of those terrible blows, and the whole frame had collapsed. The handle itself was thickly encrusted with matted blood and hair.

"Robbery was evidently the motive of the crime," the Inspector went on, "robbery, and perhaps revenge as well. The pockets of the deceased had been ransacked for his bunch of keys, which was found hanging in the lock of the safe in the wall beside the dead body. In that safe the sum of eighteen hundred pounds in Bank of England notes was deposited on the afternoon of the crime. When the body was found the safe stood open and the money had disappeared.

"I shall call evidence to show that the prisoner was aware that this money was in the safe, that ill-will existed between him and his employer, and that, only a few hours before the murder, he had uttered threats against the deceased. Witnesses will depose that the accused man was alone in the office, all the other employees having gone home, when, about an hour before the crime, Mr. Salsbrigg returned. Finally, still smouldering in the ash-tray on the desk of the deceased, was found one of the prisoner's cigarettes, a brand of Bolivian cigarettes peculiar to him, which, taken with the circumstances that the body was yet quite warm, shows that the crime was committed— and this is supported by the medical evidence— not more than ten minutes before the discovery of the body."

The first witness was Bertram Batts, night porter at Casino House. On the evening of the murder he came on duty at 6 p.m. By that hour most of the offices would be closed. About five minutes past six, Mr. Salsbrigg came in, and Batts took him up in the lift, as the lift-man went off duty at six. He confirmed in more detail the Inspector's account of the finding of the body. In reply to a question by the Coroner he said he heard no sounds of any struggle, as he must have been on the second floor, the floor below, when the crime was actually committed, collecting the rubbish. From the second floor he mounted by the stairs to the third and, hearing the telephone ringing repeatedly in Mr. Salsbrigg's office, went straight there.

"Did you answer the telephone?" asked the Coroner.

"Yes, Sir. It was Mr. Cradock, one of the clurks, asking for Mr. Birkinshaw."

Cross-examined by Mr. Harley Brewster, representing the accused, the witness gave the hour of his finding the body as ten minutes past seven. He had remembered that this might be an important detail, and had looked at the clock in Mr. Salsbrigg's room as he rang up the police. In reply to a further question he stated that after he had taken Mr. Salsbrigg up in the lift, he returned to his box and remained there till 7 p.m., when, as usual, he went to the upper storeys to clear away the litter.

"Then you were not absent from your post for a second after you returned from the lift?"

"No, sir!"

"Then if Birkinshaw left the building between the hours of six and seven you must have seen him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then we may take it that no one entered or left the building between Mr. Salsbrigg's arrival and seven o'clock?"

"Yes"— defiantly.

"You are prepared to swear to that; you're on your oath, remember!"

The man hesitated, and eventually mumbled something about he "might have popped out to get a mouthful of fresh air."

"You didn't go and see the fire in London Wall by any chance, did you?"

The question took the porter off his guard. Rather abashed he admitted that he did "pop round the corner for a minute or two." With a significant look at the Coroner, Harley Brewster left it at that and sat down.

Followed the medical evidence, very gruesome, with much pawing of the blood-soaked umbrella, and holding up of ghastly exhibits in jars. Then Cradock, pale and reluctant, told how at five minutes past seven he had telephoned the office to try and persuade Birkinshaw to change his mind and accompany him to the theatre; and how, after a long interval, the night-porter

had answered the telephone. Under severe questioning by the Coroner he had to admit that Birkinshaw knew that the money was to be locked in the safe for the night, and that the accused had appeared to resent greatly the "ticking-off" he had received from Mr. Salsbrigg.

"Did the prisoner in your hearing threaten the deceased?" the Coroner asked.

"Not exactly threaten. He said he was fed-up, or words to that effect."

"Nothing more than that?"

Cradock flicked a quick, despairing glance at the table where his friend, blinking, bewildered, insignificant, sat between two uniformed constables.

"He said it was more than he could stand, as Salsbrigg would find out."

"What do you suppose he meant by that?" asked Harley Brewster, rising to cross-examine.

"No, no, Mr. Brewster," the Coroner expostulated; and Miss Ruby Pattinson was called. A less unwilling witness was the typist, in deep and fashionable mourning; "a pretty, girlish figure" one of the newspapers called her, with (inset) "Ruby Pattinson Leaving the Court."

She was not hostile to the accused, but she was more concerned with the impression she was producing upon the crowded court than with the exact effect of her deposition. When, after stating that she could not "quayte" recall the exact words used by the prisoner, but he had said he would "do the old devil in," or something like that, for which she had felt impelled to reprove him, she stood down, it was apparent that her evidence had considerably strengthened the case against the prisoner.

"Call Mr. Claud Merritone," ordered the Coroner, and Salsbrigg's affable caller was sworn. His manner was an admirable blend of deference for the court, sorrow for his dead friend, and sympathy with the accused. Mr. Salsbrigg, he was bound to admit, had spoken harshly to the prisoner. He had gone so far as to describe him to the witness as a something fool— he would leave the adjective to the imagination of the court (laughter). He had known Alf Salsbrigg for the matter of a dozen years; he was one of the very best; a thorough good fellow, without an enemy in the world. He had left him about half-past five busy at his desk, and Salsbrigg had said nothing to him then about leaving or returning later to the office. Yes, he had been a witness of the scene between the deceased and the prisoner, and thought, if he might say so with all respect for the dead, that Salsbrigg's tone had been very provoking. Mr. Brewster had no questions to ask, and Mr. Merritone, nursing his oleaginous topper in his white-gloved hands, stood down.

Detective-Inspector Coleburn was recalled by the Coroner to speak as to the cigarette. The Inspector's theory was that the deceased, and not the

murderer, had been smoking it, for he had detected particles of the coarse black tobacco of which the cigarette was made upon the dead man's lower lip. A leather case filled with these same cigarettes was found in the possession of the accused, and figured with the other exhibits.

The Coroner then read the prisoner's statement voluntarily made at Cloak Lane Police Station, after he had received the customary warning. According to this he had left the office shortly after six and passed unnoticed out of the building, the night-porter being absent from his box. He had taken a bus to Piccadilly, alighted at the foot of Bond Street, and thereafter walked about the West End. Being a vegetarian, he had dined off some apples and bananas, which he had bought at a stall in the street market off Shaftesbury Avenue. Mr Salsbrigg had not returned to the office when he left it. He had intended, as he told Cradock, to stay on late and work; but he found he was unsettled and so had changed his plans and gone for a walk up West instead. About ten minutes past eleven he took the Hammersmith Tube from Piccadilly to Baron's Court, and reached his rooms in the Fulham Road shortly before midnight, when he was arrested. He protested he knew nothing whatsoever of the murder.

When the reading of the statement was finished, the prisoner asked if he might be allowed to speak. The Coroner told him he would be better advised to reserve his defence.

"I only wanted to say this," said Mr Birkinshaw, "and that is I forgot my umbrella when I left the office that evening. As for the cigarette, I remember leaving one out on my desk. I took it from my case intending to light it, and forgot it. I can only suppose that Mr. Salsbrigg found it when he came back and smoked it."

"Is that all?" asked the Coroner bluntly. "Very good." He turned to the jury, "Now, gentlemen...."

"Well," said young Cradock to Harley Brewster as they left the court together. "What do you think?"

"Think?" replied the solicitor disgustedly. "I think that in the whole of my professional career I never saw a man more completely enmeshed in the toils of circumstantial evidence than your pal Birkinshaw. He don't want a lawyer to save his neck; he needs a wonder-worker, by Gad!"

iii

ON a soft December morning, with a smooth sea gently lapping the shore below and the bells of St. Peter's calling to church from the cliffs above, Harley Brewster and young Cradock sat on the jetty at Broadstairs and discussed the case.

"Nothing but a good strong alibi will save him," the lawyer announced. "One creditable witness who will depose that at the hour of seven p.m. on that evening your little pal was anywhere but at Casino House will do the trick. But Birkinshaw can produce nothing. He's scarcely able to remember where he wandered during all those hours on the night of the murder. He says nothing but 'It's hopeless! I'm trapped!' Even that fruit he got don't give us an alibi, for, on his own showing, he didn't buy it till nine o'clock or thereabouts, two hours or so after the murder."

"I believe you think he's guilty," said Cradock bitterly.

Brewster shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm sure he's keeping something back. And, as between solicitor and client, that don't go, young man!"

"Look here," said Cradock, "just suppose we're outsiders and know nothing about him. How do the facts strike us? Here's old Birkie, according to the police account, determined to kill Salsbrigg and get away with the boodle. In the first place, we must wash out premeditation, for not only did he kill him with his umbrella, which all of us know, but he goes and leaves it on the scene of the crime. We'll call it a sudden impulse, then. Right! Well, having brained old S., Birkie thinks he'll grab the oof. Now listen to me! Every one of us in the office knows that old Salsbrigg kept his bunch of keys on a steel chain running from the back of his braces to his left-hand trousers pocket. Whoever killed old S. didn't know that, for his pockets were ransacked. The two lower pockets of his waistcoat were turned inside out, and his watch was dangling down from its chain when they found him."

"By George!" commented Brewster, taking his pipe out of his mouth and sitting up. "Go on, young fellow! You're beginning to interest me."

"Another point. Birkie and I both know the key of the safe. Salsbrigg has given it to us scores of times when he's been away. Do you realise that the man who killed Salsbrigg *didn't know which was the key of the safe?*"

"On what did you base that?" said Brewster sternly.

"The paint, man, the paint! The green paint round the lock shows one scratch, and on the bronze of the lock itself there are other little scratches showing where he must have tried key after key before he hit on the right one."

"Are you sure of this?"

"I spent half an hour last night on the lock with a reading-glass."

"Go on!" said Brewster grimly.

"You've seen the mess that old Birkie's gamp is in. Isn't it rather strange that there was no blood on Birkie's clothes? I don't know anything about these

things, but I've always heard that blood is rather hard to wash off. And where can a man, wandering about London at night, wash his clothes clean?"

"He might have gone to a friend's house," the lawyer put in.

"I'll grant you that, though I don't believe Birkie has a single friend in London apart from me. But there's this further point. You made that lying porter admit that he did not see Birkie go out, didn't you?"

"By implication, yes."

"Then,"— triumphantly— "if he didn't see Birkie go out, why shouldn't the murderer have come in and out again unobserved? How about that, old man— how about that?"

"I had some idea of this in my mind when I cross-examined Batts at the inquest. But now, my young Sherlock Holmes, we come to the question— if your little friend didn't kill Salsbrigg, who did?"

"I'll tell you. Someone who knew that old S. was staying late at the office, someone who knew that eighteen hundred pounds was in the safe! We all knew the money was there, but none of us had any idea that the old man was coming back after hours. It very seldom happens."

"That's all very well. But who did know, then, that Salsbrigg had come back and that this money was in the safe?"

Cradock looked the other in the eyes.

"Merritone," he said.

"Merritone? The chap that gave evidence at the inquest?"

"That's him. Now, listen! Old Salsbrigg was a pretty warm proposition; he had some dam' funny friends calling round to see him at the office. That is why he was so particular about never seeing people except by appointment. On the afternoon of the murder this fellow rolls up. Well, you've seen him: you know what he looks like. He butted in without an appointment and was in the clerks' room when the old man was telling off Birkie for giving Goldstein, the man that brought the eighteen hundred pounds, an appointment after banking hours. As soon as Salsbrigg was finished with Birkie, this Merritone chap, cool as a cucumber, walks into the old man's private office, and Salsbrigg, who had a pretty rough tongue when he liked, never said a word. They weren't long together, and the door slammed pretty fiercely when Merritone came out. Do you know what I think? I believe Merritone had some sort of a hold over the old man, and had come round to raise the wind. Salsbrigg looked at him pretty old-fashioned when Merritone first came into the office."

Brewster puffed meditatively at his pipe.

"Blackmail, eh?"

"Something like that."

"But what do you know to prove that Merritone knew that Salsbrigg was coming back?"

"Nothing positive. But as Merritone was leaving the office, the light in the old man's room went out, and we heard his private door leading into the corridor slam. That means they must have quitted the building practically at the same time. I can guess where the old man went— to the Bodega. He generally went out and had a couple if anything upset him. Merritone might have shadowed him. If he had only meant to rob the safe, he would have wanted to see old Salsbrigg out of the way first."

Brewster nodded grimly. Then he stood up and tapped the ashes out of his pipe.

"If you will apply your gifts of deduction for the next ten minutes to divining what the wild waves are saying," he remarked, "I will step up to the telegraph-office and send a wire. We will then go up to the North Foreland and see if the air on the links will blow some of the cobwebs out of our minds."

iv

THREE days later, Detective-Inspector Coleburn sat opposite Mr. Harley Brewster in the latter's office in Southampton Street.

"I hold no brief for Merritone, Mr. Brewster," the detective was saying; "but because a man's a crook, it doesn't follow he's a murderer. And to be perfectly frank with you, it'll take a great deal more than Merritone's record— he's done an aggregate of fifteen years' penal servitude and shorter sentences, they tell me at the Yard— to shake the evidence against Birkinshaw. I grant you Merritone probably came to squeeze Salsbrigg for a bit; they were old friends, you know— in fact, Merritone was jugged for the first time over one of Salsbrigg's swindles; but, dearie me, there's not a particle of evidence to connect him with the murder."

"Not yet," said Brewster bluntly, "but I believe there will be, Inspector, if we get word quickly of any of the notes being cashed. As you got the numbers from Goldstein we should hear at once. We know that Merritone is broke to the wide, that he skipped from his boarding-house in Kilburn without paying the bill. I do sincerely hope that you're hot after him."

"As hot as we should be after any other old lag who falls back upon his old tricks, Mr. Brewster. But I fear very much you're drawing a red herring across the trail, sir."

"Then," said the solicitor, opening a drawer in the desk, "take a look at this!"

And he flung on the blotter a stained and crumpled doeskin glove. Once it had been white, but now it was grimy and sodden as though it had been left out in the rain for days. Palm and fingers were tinged a dull terracotta.

"Blood," said Brewster, and pointed at the stain. "They brought me that this morning, Inspector. It was picked up in the air shaft between Casino House and the building backing on to it, overlooked by the window on the landing outside Salsbrigg's office. Perhaps you remarked the gloves that Mr. Claud Merritone was wearing at the inquest. A gentleman of settled habits, it would seem."

"I'll take charge of this," said the Inspector hoarsely.

"By all means," Brewster acquiesced smilingly. "That's why I asked you to call upon me this morning. Come in!"

His clerk entered with a card, which he laid silently before the lawyer. Brewster's hand went up and eased his collar. He turned and exchanged a silent glance with his clerk.

"I'll leave you, Mr. Brewster," said the detective, rising and buttoning up his overcoat. "Good-day to you, sir."

The moment he had gone the solicitor turned to his clerk.

"Show the lady in, Simmons," he said.

It was a woman very simply dressed in black, pale of face, and prematurely grey.

"Mrs. Salsbrigg?" said Brewster, looking at the card. "Won't you sit down? You wished to speak to me about my client, Mr. Birkinshaw?"

His voice was rather stern. She noticed it, for she said hastily:

"To help him, Mr. Brewster. He will need money for his defence. I was in Sicily, at Palermo, when I heard the news. My husband and I have lived apart for many years, and I don't see the English newspapers regularly. It was only four days ago that I heard of the terrible disaster that has overtaken my old friend. I was at my wits' end to know what to do, for I had no address to which to write, so I came myself to say that any money that is required for his defence is at your disposal."

"That question has no urgency," said the solicitor rather severely.

"That was not the sole object of my visit," the woman rejoined. "Before you hear my story, Mr. Brewster, let me say that, in spite of all appearances, I am convinced that Mr. Birkinshaw is incapable of this terrible crime. Five years ago I had to leave my husband. I invested my savings in a small hat-shop in Manchester. It did not prosper; I borrowed money; my forewoman robbed me; and finally I was left absolutely penniless with two children to support. To avoid my creditors I fled in a moment of panic to France. Thence I wrote to Albert Birkinshaw, whom I had known in happier days, for I would not appeal to my husband, God rest his soul!

"Albert Birkinshaw was a true friend. Not only did he send me money to tide over the crisis, but he undertook the whole settlement of my affairs and began himself to pay off the money due under the arrangement he had made. Only this year, since the boarding-house I started at Palermo began to do well, has he consented to let me start repayment of the three hundred pounds or more I owe him. The tragedy of it is that he paid the last instalment of the debt on the very day of the murder through which I inherit the money due to me under my marriage settlement."

Brewster looked up quickly.

"You say that Mr. Birkinshaw made this last payment on the day of the murder?" he said. "You realise, I suppose, that this makes things look blacker than ever for him. You see, a sum of eighteen hundred pounds is missing. It will be said that part of this sum went to make this payment."

She nodded with tense face.

"That is not all," she said, and lowered her voice. "May I speak freely, Mr. Brewster?"

"Nothing you say will pass these four walls, Mrs. Salsbrigg, without your consent," he assured her.

She opened her bag and drew out a folded paper.

"Have they found out about this telegram that Mr. Birkinshaw sent me on the evening of the murder?" she asked.

Brewster's eyebrows went up. "May I see it?" he asked, trying to appear calm.

She hesitated. "We must keep it from the police at all costs," she faltered. "It would be fatal if it came out."

Brewster unfolded the telegram and read—

FINAL PAYMENT MADE TO-NIGHT. YOU ARE FREE.— BIRKINSHAW.

The solicitor whistled and cast his eyes up. Then, with a harassed air, he clawed the back of his head.

"This is the de-vil!" he remarked. "Sent off on the evening of the murder, you said? Let's see now— '*de Londres* 8'— that's the date, Dec. 8— '18.58.S.'— that's the time. Eighteen hours by Continental reckoning is 6 p.m.— that's 6.58 p.m...."

He broke off, with eyes goggling.

"Simmons!" he shouted. "Simmons!"

The amazed clerk appeared.

"A taxi quick! I'm going to Brixton Prison!"

The clerk vanished.

"But what does it all mean?" cried Mrs. Salsbrigg.

"Mean?" roared Brewster, grabbing his hat. "Good God, Madam, don't you understand? Look at the time of despatch on this telegram— 6.58! Your husband was murdered at seven o'clock, or perhaps a few-minutes sooner or later. If Birkinshaw can prove that he handed this message in personally at any telegraph-office that is more than, say, five minutes' distance from Casino House, he has established an unshakable alibi. Why the devil they don't put the office of despatch on foreign telegrams beats me!"

"Taxi, Sir!" panted Simmons at the door.

BY three o'clock that afternoon the good creditable witness for which Mr. Harley Brewster's soul had hungered had been found. On Birkinshaw's indications, the solicitor tracked down the damsel whose severe regard had so flustered the clerk as he had scribbled out his telegram within two minutes of the closing hour of the Dover Street post-office. To Brewster's enraptured gaze she appeared like a being from another sphere as, when the original yellow form was laid before her, with becoming hauteur she immediately described the "little fellow with pince-nez and a sandy moustache" who had handed it in. And so, on the very day on which Detective-Inspector Coleburn left for Ostend to take charge of a smartly dressed Englishman, tall and dark and sallow, detained by the Belgian police for attempting to change one of the hundred-pound notes stolen from Salsbrigg's safe, Albert Birkinshaw found himself a free man.

Harley Brewster entertained his client, Mrs. Salsbrigg, and Cradock at lunch to celebrate the occasion.

"What beats me, Birkinshaw," the solicitor remarked, "is why you should have withheld from your solicitor the one vital piece of information that would have secured your immediate release."

"Eh, what?" said the little man, who had been gazing intently at the lady. Brewster repeated his question. Birkinshaw coloured up.

"I was afraid they'd bring Em'ly— I mean, Mrs. Salsbrigg— into it," he replied dreamily. "The wording of that wire was a bit compromising, y'know. They'd have said Em'ly— Mrs. Salsbrigg— and I had arranged to get rid of Mr. Salsbrigg."

"But, dash it all, the time, man— the time! It was a perfect alibi!"

One of Mr. Birkinshaw's hands disappeared beneath the table-cloth. An expression of seraphic contentment dawned on his face.

"I'm afraid I never thought of that."

"A bit dull, your friend," whispered Brewster behind the menu to Cradock. "Half-asleep he seems to me sometimes." Cradock grinned.

"That's what old Salsbrigg told him," he rejoined. "But we mustn't say things like that about him now. He's to be the new boss, y'know, old man!"

He nodded significantly and drew Mr. Brewster's attention to his two guests facing him across the table. They were holding hands beneath the cloth.

"Em'ly!" sighed Mr. Birkinshaw.

"Dear Albert!" crooned Mrs. Salsbrigg.

19: The Wonderful Tune

Jessie Douglas Kerruish

1884-1949

In anthology: *At Dead of Night*, 1931

IT seemed such an innocent little thing when Larssen rehearsed the details. Besides, it was Magic; ergo, Bosh.

"What is the Huldra King's Tune?" asked Iris.

"It is the crowning piece of Huldra music; and there is a spell attached to it," said Larssen.

"As long as it is played in its entirety all present must dance to it," he further informed her. "Also the player cannot stop playing it— however he wishes to..."

Heaven knows he himself wished to stop playing it that night! I'd like to forget it myself— get that tune out of my head, and the sound of the beastly thuds, the disgusting pad, padding! If I set it out in words perhaps they may not come into my reluctant memory so often.

THIS happened a good while ago, when it meant rough travelling if you wanted to get from Davos to Italy in winter. But I can only tell the tale now, by arrangement with Einar Larssen, because years have steeled Madame Larssen's nerves, and it will not upset her for life if she comes across this account and recognizes, behind the substitute names, what she missed in the Fasplana Inn.

A telegram summoned Mrs. Walsh and Iris to the bedside of a relative who was in extremis, for the tenth time in three years, in a North Italian health resort. Iris and I had only been engaged a week, so even strong-minded Mrs. Walsh had to stretch a point and let me escort them. We set off from Davos comfortably enough, and it was a matter of carriages until late afternoon.

Twilight shut down on us negotiating an uncommonly trying pass of the Rhaetic Alps. Snowflakes big as one's joined thumbs coming down thick, the landscape blotted into unstarred greyness, only the ashy reflection of the nearer snow showing that we were on earth and not jolting over derelict worlds in an infinitude of blank space. At the Hospiz at the top of the pass we changed to a sledge and the driver removed all the horse bells before starting. The chime of them might start off some delicately poised mass of snow from the heights on top of us.

So, hushedly, we drove over a snow floor, coming at times on the top of a telegraph pole just over the surface, the wires making a slow Aeolian harping level with our feet. The snow was falling its thickest when the accident occurred.

A bad spill over a buried obstruction. The women fell into the snow, I landed against a telegraph post and sustained all the casualties— a right wrist that began to swell and pain abominably and a left shoulder that appeared to be shrivelling and losing all feeling. The rest of the drive was nightmare, the wires playing the deuce's own melody, and myself almost light-headed before the flicker of lanterns came suddenly into view.

WHEN my senses were really at my beck and call again we were in a big timber-built hall, a fire crackling in the chimney and an enormous number of Swiss of all ages and sizes acting sympathetic chorus while Iris and her mother attended to my injuries, aided by a slim young man with a mop of tow-coloured hair.

"Allow me to introduce myself, Monsieur, and then you will perhaps fulfil the formality, so beloved in your country, by introducing me to the ladies with whom I have had the pleasure of working for some time." Thus the yellow-haired man, when I was propped in a chair. His French was good, but not of France. "I am your fellow guest, forced to stay for the night through the blocking of the farther road. My wife is here also, but at present she is resting in her own apartment. And my name— I have no card on my person— is Einar Larssen."

We three started in unison— "The violinist?" exclaimed Iris, and he bowed and pushed back a straggling lock self-consciously.

I made the necessary introductions. The landlord interposed nervously, "It is perhaps advisable to inform the ladies— " he began. Larssen interrupted. I distinctly saw him bestow a warning frown on the man, and the Switzer's face expressed the comprehension of one who receives secret orders. "Our host would impress on you that the 'Four Chamois' has but little accommodation to offer at the best of times, Madame Walsh," the violinist said smoothly. "I hear Madame coming, she will arrange with you for a fair division."

Madame Larssen appeared now, a frail, pretty little woman in the early twenties, and bustled Mrs. Walsh and Iris off. I saw all the Swiss, the landlord and his wife, the several servants, and our driver exchange looks as the trio departed.

"It is most awkward, Monsieur Lambton," said Larssen, suddenly become businesslike. "Madame Larssen is of a nervous temperament, and for her sake we have been forced to a certain concealment and we might as well extend the concealment to Madame Walsh and Mademoiselle; they will rest the easier for not knowing about it."

I could not imagine what the fellow was driving at. Infectious disease? Robbers? "It is behind that door they rest. Monsieur," the landlord volunteered, indicating one at the side of the hall. "Three corpses."

"Most ladies are averse to such house-fellows," Larssen proceeded gently. "We will all be on our way in the morning; there is no need for them to know, eh?"

I agreed. "They will rest the easier for knowing nothing. Three corpses? Three at once?"

The landlord waxed voluble. They were the aftermath of an avalanche. There are several kinds of avalanche, and the nastiest is the dirt avalanche. It's like the tipping out of a titanic dust-cart; a filthy tide of mud and shingle, slabbed together with half-melted snow, packed with the trees, turves, rubbish heaps, and corpses it has gathered in its course. The snow avalanche enfolds you dead in its chaste whiteness; the dirt variety pinches, chokes, and suffocates you slowly, then acts threshing-machine and steam-roller combined to the mortal part of you, until its force is spent and it settles with you interred somewhere in it.

Such an abomination had trickled its way down the valley hard by the Inn of the Four Chamois early that winter, three men were lost in it, and that day diggers had found their remains. "Caspar Ragotli is entire," said mine host, with a nod at the door; "Melchoir Fischer— " He told us, detailedly, how this Melchoir was in pieces, most of them there, while of the third, Hans Buol, only one hand had been discovered, "But we know it for Buol's, by the open knife grasped in it," our entertainer proceeded, gloatingly. "A fine new knife from your Sheffield, Monsieur Lambton; and the hand being the right it sufficed for the whole, as the gentlemen will know-"

I felt thankful for Larssen's concealment when the ladies reappeared, prepared to make the best of things. We were merry enough over our mishap, now that food, fire, and four walls were our portion, with sounds of storm brushing up louder and louder without to add zest to enjoyment. The most awkward thing was that, with my injuries, I was limited to the stiff use of one hand alone and could scarcely lift that. I would stay up, if only to convince Iris there was nothing much the matter. If it had not been for my crocking I knew she would have been enjoying everything in this small adventure enormously, from the unexpected company to the robustious dog and severe cat who slipped in when a servant was sent to bring wood from the outhouse where they had been banished.

"But what makes them fidget round that door?" she asked innocently.

Larssen was behind her. Under fear of his eye the landlord answered composedly: "There is in that room a— a stock of meat, Madame."

Now came the son of the house with the bag of an afternoon's hunt: a pair of marmots to be stuffed against the next tourist season. He placed them on a chest by the lethal door while his father took him aside for a word of caution. We made the three, host, hostess and son, sup with us; and all was so comfortable that I forgot the other guests until Larssen whispered apologetically:

"It is not really disrespectful, Monsieur Lambton."

WE kept shocking hours for a Swiss inn, the eight of us, after the tired servants had been packed off to their quarters.

"This is like home," said Larssen dreamily, when we were all basking round the fire. "I come from a farm— up in the wilds beyond Romsdal— and it was even so in the old hall. The big fire in the big fireplace— the cats and dogs going crackle, crackle, over the supper bones— the wind whistling— the clatter of voices— "

"The one thing missing is the scraping of thy violin, my Einar," his wife put in. "Come, thy fingers twitch; I know it; and our friends here would not, perhaps, object— eh?"

"A recital by Herr Larssen, free, and without the trouble of sitting still in a stuffy concert hall!" said Mrs. Walsh, and the ensuing chorus of rapturous assent sent Madame Larssen running for her lord's instrument.

"You have heard of my Da Salò?" Larssen inquired, as he lifted the violin from its travelling case. "My *Cavalancti* Da Salò? It is said Cavalancti sold his eternal welfare for the power to make a certain number of instruments that should approach as near the God-given perfection of Stradivarius's work as devilry could accomplish."

He tilted the violin to show the play of light sinking in the amber lustre of it. "We will have no set pieces," he added, "but such old tunes as I played in our farm kitchen so far away and long ago!"

Tucking it under his chin, he swept us with the first notes right into the faery realm of sound. A realm of tingling frost that whipped the blood along the veins racingly, of icy wind that sang of the Elder Ice at the Back of Beyond: a very vocalization of the eternally young, eternally pure spirit of the Northland.

Ending with a queer suggestion of a lit farmhouse at night, the loneliness of stars and ice and snow crowding to it outside and inside fire and company, and the family spirit concentring round the holy hearth and stretching out invisible strands of love to absent ones far out in the frozen whaling fields, or at mean work in foreign cities, or dead and cherishing in the other world memory of home.

Then he plunged into another tune, and another; snatches all, all singing of the North, and the Northern chasteness that is fierce and passionate as the foulest vice of all other quarters of earth.

"You will not hear these at a paid-for concert— God forbid!" he observed, his dreamy voice filling a pause between two melodies. "You are hearing, my friends, what few but children of Norway ever hear, scraps of the Huldrasleet. The melodies of the Elf-Kind— the Huldra Folk we name them— no less. Snatches that bygone musicians overheard on chancey nights out in the loneliness of fiords and fells, and passed on down the ages. The Huldra Folk are the musicians of all time."

"You would like to hear them?" asked Mrs. Walsh quizzically.

"I have heard them, 'dear Madame. Five times have I heard the Elf-Kind, invisible but audible, holding revels out in the empty winter nights and summer early mornings on the heights of the Dovrefeld— I, Einar Larssen."

Mrs. Walsh started a little; but the rest of us were not much surprised, if I can speak from analysis of my own feelings and a glance in the eyes of the others.

"There was one tune," Larssen went on meditatively. "It was a dark and windy night— like this one. I was searching for a strayed sheep. I found it in a field. Then, over a hedge, the melody began to flow. It was a tune! It got into my fingers and toes; I began to dance to it. There in the snow I danced, and my senses flowed out of my body in sheer ecstasy, while my emptied heart and head were filled with the tune."

His face queerly lit by firelight, his yellow mane tossing as he gesticulated illustratively, he carried us all on by the conviction of his voice over the monstrosity of his relation.

"Then the stark pines on the slope beyond the hedge bent and waved their branches— in time to the tune. The snow was swished about in powder, as the frozen grass-blades beneath waked and waved— to the tune. The stars began to glide about in the sky, and to bow themselves to and from the earth; growing bigger as they approached it and shrinking as they swirled back in the mazes of the dance— to the tune. Then, if you please, I woke. Woke, with the moon much farther across the heavens than she had been when the first note of the tune came to me, and the sheep I had come to find lying exhausted in a patch trampled flat and muddy by its hoofs. And I, also, lay in the middle of a bare trampled patch in surrounding snow. That is the truth."

He drew breath and proceeded:

"I did not remember the tune entirely, though I had heard it repeated many times. A short tune; very short. When the Huldra fiddler reached its end he began again, round and round in a circle of music. The middle part I remember,

but of the end and beginning only certain detached notes. I tried often by playing what I recollect to make the forgotten parts slip into their places, but unavailingly— "

He went to the main door and opened it. The wind swept in steadily, but the snowfall had stopped and a big moon looked down on piled white mountains and glaring snowfields. "It was so; clear, windy, and white, when I heard the tune," he said thoughtfully.

"Similarity of outward circumstances will revive a train of emotion or thought experienced long ago," Mrs. Walsh nodded.

He closed the door, and came back to the fire. Then his eyes lit and he drew the bow across the strings with a large gesture. Followed a few bars of melody. "The middle part," he explained.

Madame Larssen gave an abrupt little cry. "Einar, can it be you heard the Huldra King's Tune? Then thank Heaven you cannot play it!"

"Why, my beloved?" he lifted his eyebrows gently.

"In my district there was a tradition that one man once played it through and something happened."

"What happened?"

"Nobody quite remembered. But it was dreadful."

"What is the Huldra King's Tune?" asked Iris.

"It is the crowning piece of Huldra music, and there is a spell attached to it. An enchantment, Mademoiselle," Larssen elucidated.

"...As long as it is played in its entirety, all who are present must dance to it," he further informed her, after reflection.

"That does not sound very dreadful," she laughed.

"There's something further." He became thoughtful. "Ah; it is that the player cannot stop playing, whether he would or not. He can only stop if— let me consider— yes, if he plays it backward or, failing that, if the strings of his violin are cut for him."

"You could safely play it now, Monsieur," said the landlord. "So far as I am concerned. My rheumatics would stop my dancing, however magically you played."

"And we"— Mrs. Walsh's gesture indicated the other ladies— "are resting to summon energy enough to crawl to bed. So, Herr Larssen, we are a safe audience if you can remember your wonderful tune."

"There was one more detail," he went on. "Ah, it is that if the tune is played often enough, inanimate things must dance, too."

"*That's* danger for us, as we are all nearly inanimate!" Mrs. Walsh yawned frankly now.

He leant against the carved mantel and for a little while he played absently, his subconscious mind busy with reconstruction, fumbling amidst its orderly lumber, connecting, paring, arranging. Then he straightened himself and swept the bow purposefully across the strings.

Slowly at first, then with added lilt and swing, there rippled forth the complete, horrible tune.

I KNEW it, for between a chiming start and a clattering last bar the broken chords he had first remembered fitted in followingly. It was not very long, that tune; he reached the end, leapt, as it were, to the beginning, played it through again, and so to a third repetition.

Then the wonder began. During the second repetition a movement like the passing of a breeze had run round our little assembly. Sleepy eyes opened, heels beat time, figures stiffened. At the third we were on our feet.

It seemed perfectly natural. Though I was almost too tired and shaken to stand, the tune ran into my feet; I made a step towards Iris and almost fell, fetched up against the wall, and so fell to dancing. Dancing calmly and solemnly all by myself.

Iris made a step towards me, too; paused and shook her head. "Poor boy, you must sit and rest," she murmured, and paired off with the Swiss lad.

Somehow one knew the steps on first hearing the music. It was, perhaps, the Dance Primitive, holding in itself the potentialities of all saltatory art. Mainly it consisted of a mazy circling with a little crossing and up-and-down work, going on, over and over; monotonous yet tirelessly fascinating, like some Eastern music.

I repeat, it seemed perfectly natural. The landlord led off with his wife; they danced with decorous determination. Mrs. Walsh and Madame Larssen were footing it with all the abandon two women paired together could be expected to indulge in. Larssen himself had begun to dance, playing conscientiously the while. I circled about, a little uncertain on my feet, my slinged arm for partner, and Iris and the lad sailed amongst us, light as thistledown.

Those clumsy-looking Swiss boys are amongst the best dancers in the world. Whenever she passed me, Iris smiled, her eyes full of far-away ecstasy.

The music quickened and took a richer tone; it rang back from the walls, it melted and echoed in the timber ceiling; the floor-boards hummed with it; every nerve in us was tingling, laughing, almost crying with too much rapture of sound and motion.

Time, weariness, place, all were not. The dead beyond the door were forgotten, there was no Earth, no more Time, nothing but a ringing emptiness

of melody, a singing storm of tunefulness on which one could lean and be carried like an eagle down the wind.

Yet, through all the intoxication of it, I was dimly aware that we were in a homely Swiss inn-parlour, at the same time that we were in the Fourth Dimension of music. I was rapt out of my shaken body, yet saw my surroundings clearly; saw, presently, the cat and dog rise and, on their hind legs, join in, keeping time and threading the maze unerringly.

That appeared neither wonderful nor laughable, only natural; but my dazed senses half-awoke when the two dead marmots slithered off the chest, rose on their hind feet, and, with pluffed-out tails swaying in time to the tune, and a queer little pit-a-pat of tiny feet, that I seemed to hear through the other noises, set to one another and circled with the best of us. They swung past me, their heads level with my knees, and vanished amidst the other dancers. I noted their furry little faces, dropped jaws, frothy teeth, and glazed eyes. Dead, most undoubtedly dead, and dancing!

The cat and dog passed me again, and the marmots chanced to be near at the same time. The dog wrinkled his upper lip, disgusted at the deadness of them; the cat snapped at them in passing. The queerest thing was the others, with one exception, did not seem to notice the four small additions to the company. Only Larssen, figuring solemnly with his fiddle for partner, saw. His eyes protruded as they squinted along the Da Salò at the quartette. "Dead," he gulped.

"Stop now, man!" I called. "This fooling— "

"I cannot," he cried back hoarsely, and began the melody over again for the fifteenth time at least. "The tradition is true— "

Then, as the opening movement rippled forth again, in the inner room three crashes sounded.

Two almost simultaneously, yet singularly distinct from one another, the third a few seconds later. Loud, resonant, wooden crashes. Then silence in that room, and in ours the swell and swing of the infernal melody and the pat of dancing feet.

THE sound had been too pronounced for even enthralled senses to disregard. All looked at the door for a moment. The others forgot the interruption at once and danced on, eyes blank with ecstasy; only Larssen's face went white and the landlord's mottled grey. "Stop, Monsieur!" the landlord cried.

"I cannot!" wailed Larssen, his voice shrill with horror. "I cannot! For Heaven's sake, Monsieur Lambton, come and cut the strings!"

"My hands are useless—" I began, and stopped at a new sound.

You must understand that I had danced nearer to the door by that time. The new sound behind it was one of scuffling and scrambling, half a dozen sounds merged in one, then— pat, pat, patter, patter, pat— was a noise of steps keeping time to the tune.

Soft steps, you'll understand, not the click of shod feet, like ours. I went round, came in range again, and listened.

A fairly heavy thumping— like a man on stockinged feet— was approaching the door. "What's the matter, Cyril?" asked Iris, swaying by, still rapt, as the boy and the three other women were. She did not wait for an answer. The latch of the door rattled. The latch inside the other room, you understand.

"I'll play it backwards when I can!" gasped Larssen, as we crossed each other's track. The noises in the fatal room circled away from the door, then approached, and the latch was unhasped this time before the horrible soft-falling thumps retreated. You see how it was: as we were compelled to circle round our room so, whatever it was in the other room had to circle likewise, making an attempt whenever the door was in reach to open it and join us and the tune.

Larssen was fiddling desperately. "Backwards now!" I implored.

"I cannot— yet. But if I repeat it a few more times, I shall be able to reverse it," he called back.

A few more rounds would be too late. The inner room noises reached the door and it opened a crack. If— what was striving to come— joined us, would even ecstasy blind the women? And when the waking came— ? I flung myself against the door in passing; it snapped to again. "A few more repetitions!" panted Larssen.

Inspiration came to me. The others, dancing in a hypnotized state, circled widely, but I could do the steps within a small compass: in front of the door.

I could do it. I did it. Larssen made an attempt to reverse the melody. He failed.

Two more repetitions. Iris and her partner, passing me, smiled at the quaint figure I must have cut, dancing by myself in narrow circles before the door. Larssen's ashen face was running with sweat that dripped from his chin and trickled, like the slack of a tide, over the amber glory of the Da Salò. The padding steps approached the door; it was jerked a little ajar. I drove it back with my sound shoulder; but a new danger arose. They— the dancers within— were imitating my tactics. They danced in a circumscribed space that grew smaller as the minutes passed If only we could have got the women out of the way! I gyrated, as well as I could, before the door all the time, driving it back with my shoulder as it was thrust ajar, again and again.

Picture it. See me, one arm in a sling and the other nearly powerless, prancing and twirling before the door, trying the while to keep a temperate expression on my sweat-drenched features for the benefit of the women. The landlord only kept from dropping with fear by the magic of the tune. Larssen stepping it absurdly, trickling features set like a Greek tragic mask, his long yellow tresses bobbing about, matted into rats'-tails, his eyes glaring down at the flooded, humming Da Salò. The women and the lad, unconscious of everything save the melody, dancing with the introspective gaze of the drugged.

The door was thrust ajar once more. I dashed it back, but not before a soft padding had pattered from the bottom of the opened crack into our room.

I almost collapsed. Cat and dog and dead marmots— oh, they were respectable beside the latest addition to our company!

The people circled on; the dog, the cat, the dead marmots, they all circled; and circling with them— but keeping ever a course that drew it nearer and nearer to Larssen all the while— was a little dark shadow with a long, thin, tarnished white gleam sticking from it. I beat back the door and what more was pressing against it, and fought with nausea.

Round and round Larssen's feet, nearer and nearer, the little shadow hopped, leapt, and pattered. Leaping and springing. It jumped higher and higher, always in time to the music— higher and higher— high as Larssen's elbow. In another minute I knew even the enraptured dancers could not fail to see it. The door was now beaten on, beaten with soft-falling, fierce thuds. I could not keep it shut much longer...

Up sprang the little shadow and the tarnished gleam, clear over Larssen's shoulder. A series of twangling, discordant snaps, that seemed to prick one's brain physically, and the tune stopped dead.

Thud! It sounded behind the door— very heavy. Then a succession of smaller thuds. I leant against the wall, panting. The dancers stopped, every face dazed and stupefied, and in an automatic way each dropped into the nearest seat.

LARSSEN dashed his handkerchief over his face. I contrived to throw my own on the floor behind him before he staggered to the fireplace. With my most usable hand I also managed to pick up my property again and place it on the seat, behind me, as I sat down on the chest by the door. The marmots were on the floor near my feet; I was enabled to hide my face for a few seconds, and to compose it, as I picked them up.

The eyes of the others cleared and became intelligent. "I really think I've been asleep," said Mrs. Walsh.

"I believe I have," Iris rubbed her eyes.

"I think I have too," laughed Madame Larssen.

The landlord had made himself scarce at once, probably doubting his histrionic powers at such short notice. His wife followed him. The boy sat dazed.

"I had a dream, a ridiculous dream, too ridiculous to repeat," Mrs. Walsh proceeded.

"I had a dream, likewise too absurd to relate," said Madame Larssen.

"I had—" Iris checked herself, and looked sudden apology at Larssen, who had arranged himself with the light at his back.

"Do not fear to hurt my feelings," he said blandly, his voice still a little unnatural. "You were all tired before I began. In brief, Mademoiselle, I am not broken at the heart because my music had a soporific effect on you all."

"It wasn't as if you had been playing one of your own compositions," she apologized. "I am sleepy, mother; I vote we make a move."

"Yes, we will tuck up our drowsiness in bed before it has a chance to insult anyone further," Madame Larssen chimed in gaily.

They trooped off; Larssen kept his face in shadow, I stood carefully before the chest, while bidding them good night. When they had gone, the landlord came back. For a little while we four men stared at one another. "Surely I have had a dream, gentlemen," said the landlord imploringly.

We said nothing. He hesitated, then, with the haste of dislike, snatched a candle and flung open the inner door. "Oh, Holy Virgin!" he cried.

Three coffins lay as they had tumbled from their trestles. About the room was spilt and tangled the coarse linen that charity had contributed—

The landlord reeled against one doorpost. Larssen clung, limp, to the other. "I'll burn the Da Salò before I'll play that tune again!" he whispered hoarsely.

I stepped back into the large room, brought my handkerchief, and from its folds replaced in one of the coffins a shrivelled hand grasping the tarnished knife that had cut the violin strings. The boy, most composed of us all, said stolidly:

"Ah, Messieurs, it appears that the dead do not enjoy being disturbed!"

20: The Middle Toe of the Right Foot

Ambrose Bierce

1842-1914?

San Francisco Examiner August 17 1890

Smith's Weekly (Sydney) 15 April 1950

IT is well known that the old Manton house is haunted. In all the rural district near about, and even in the town of Marshall, a mile away, not one person of unbiased mind entertains a doubt of it; incredulity is confined to those opinionated people who Will be called "cranks" as soon as the useful word shall have penetrated the intellectual demesne of the Marshall *Advance*.

The evidence that the house is haunted is of two kinds: the testimony of disinterested witnesses who have had ocular proof, and that of the house itself. The former may be disregarded and ruled but on any of the various grounds of objection which may be urged against it by the ingenious; but facts within the observation of all are fundamental and controlling.

In the first place, the Manton house has been unoccupied for more than ten years, and with its outbuildings is slowly falling into decay— a circumstance which in itself the judicious will hardly venture to ignore. It stands a little way off the loneliest reach of the Marshall and Harriston road, in an opening which was once a farm and is still disfigured with strips of rotting fence and half covered with brambles overrunning a stony and sterile soil long unacquainted with the plough. The house itself is in tolerably good condition, though badly weather-stained and in dire need of attention from the glazier, the smaller male population of the region having attested in the manner of its kind its disapproval of dwellings without dwellers. The house is two stories in height, nearly square, its front pierced by a single doorway flanked on each side by a window boarded up to the very top. Corresponding windows above, not protected, serve to admit light and rain to the rooms of the upper floor. Grass and weeds grow pretty rankly all about, and a few shade trees, somewhat the worse for wind and leaning ah in one direction, seem to be making a concerted effort to run awav. In short, as the Marshall town humorist explained in the columns of the *Advance*, "the proposition that the Manton house is badly haunted is the only logical conclusion from the premises."

The fact that in this dwelling Mr. Manton thought it expedient one night some ten years ago to rise and cut the throats of his wife and two small children, removing at once to another part of the country, has no doubt done its share in directing public attention to the fitness of the place for supernatural phenomena.

To this house, one summer evening, came four men in a wagon. Three of them promptly alighted, and the one who had been driving hitched the team

to the only remaining post of what had been a fence. The fourth remained seated in the wagon.

"Come," said, one of his companions, approaching him, while the others moved away in the direction of the dwelling— "this is the place."

The man addressed was deathly pale and trembled visibly.

"By God!'' he said harshly, "this is a trick, and it looks to me as if you were in it."

"PERHAPS I am," the other said, looking him straight in the face and speaking in a tone which had something of contempt in it. "You will remember, however, that the choice of place was, with your own assent, left to the other side. Of course if you are afraid of spooks—"

"I am afraid of nothing," the man interrupted with another oath, and sprang to the ground.

The two then joined the others at the door, which one of them had already opened with some difficulty, caused by rust of lock and hinge. All entered. Inside it was dark, but the man who nad unlocked the door produced a candle and matches and made a light. He then unlocked a door on their right as they stood in the passage.

This gave them entrance to a large, square room, which the candle but dimly lighted. The floor had a thick carpeting of dust, which partly muffled their footfalls. Cobwebs were in the angles of the walls and depended from the ceiling like strips of rotting lace, making undulatory movements in the disturbed air. The room had two windows in adjoining sides, but from neither could anything be seen except the rough inner surfaces of boards a few inches from the glass. There was no fireplace, no furniture; there was nothing. Besides the cobwebs and the dust, the four men were the only objects there which were not a part of the architecture.

Strange enough they looked in the yellow light of the candle. The one who had so reluctantly alighted was especially "spectacular"— he might have been called sensational. He was of middle age, heavily built, deep chested and broad-shouldered. Looking at his figure, one would have said that he had a giant's strength; at his face, that he would use it like a giant. He was clean shaven, his hair rather closely cropped and grey. His low forehead was seamed with wrinkles above the eyes and over the nose these became vertical. The heavy black brows followed the same law, saved from meeting only by a upward turn at what would otherwise have been the point of contact. Deeply sunken beneath these, glowed in the obscure light a pair or eyes or uncertain color, but, obviously enough, too small. There was something forbidding in their expression, which was not bettered by the cruel mouth and wide jaw. The

nose was well enough, as noses go; one does not expect much of noses. All that was sinister in the man's face seemed accentuated by an unnatural pallor— he appeared altogether bloodless.

THE appearance of the other men was sufficiently commonplace; they were such persons as one meets and forgets that he met. All were younger than the man described, between whom and the eldest of the others, who stood apart, there was apparently no kindly feeling. They avoided looking at one another.

"Gentlemen," said the man holding the candle and keys, "I believe everything is right. Are you ready, Mr. Rosser?"

The man standing apart from the group bowed and smiled.

"And you, Mr. Grossmith?"

The heavy man bowed and scowled.

"You will please remove your outer clothing." Their hats, coats, waistcoats, and neckwear were soon removed and thrown outside the door in the passage. The man with the candle now nodded, and the fourth man— he who had urged Mr. Grossmith to leave the wagon— produced from the pocket of his overcoat two long, murderous-looking bowie knives, which he drew from the scabbards.

"THEY are exactly alike," he said; presenting one to each of the two principals — for by this time the dullest observer would have understood the nature of this meeting. It was to be a duel to the death. Each combatant took a knife, examined it critically near the candle and tested the strength of blade and handle across his lifted knee. Their persons were then searched in turn, each by the second of the other.

"If it is agreeable to you, Mr. Grossmith," said the man holding the light, "you will place yourself in that corner."

He indicated the angle of the room farthest from the door, to which Grossmith retired, his second parting from him with a grasp of the hand which had nothing of cordiality in it. In the angle nearest the door Mr. Rosser stationed himself, and, after a whispered consultation, his second left him, joining the other near the door.

At that moment the candle was suddenly extinguished, leaving all in profound darkness. This may have been done by a draught from the open door; whatever the cause, the effect was appalling!

"Gentlemen," said a voice which sounded strangely unfamiliar in the altered condition affecting the relations of the senses, "gentlemen. you will not move until you hear the closing of the outer door."

A sound of trampling ensued, the closing of the inner door; and finally the outer one closed with a concussion which shook the entire building.

A FEW minutes later, a belated farmer's boy met a wagon which was being driven furiously toward the town of Marshall. He declared that behind the two figures on the front, seat stood a third with its hands upon the bowed shoulders of the others, who appeared to struggle vainly to free themselves from its grasp. This figure, unlike the others, was clad in white, and had undoubtedly boarded the wagon as it passed the haunted house. As the lad could boast a considerable former experience with the supernatural thereabout, his word had the weight justly due to the testimony of an expert.

The story eventually appeared in the *Advance*, with some slight literary embellishments and a concluding intimation that the gentlemen' referred to would be allowed the use of the paper's columns for their version of the night's adventure. But the privilege remained without a claimant.

ii

THE events which led up to this "duel in the, dark" were simple enough. One evening three young men of the town of Marshall were sitting in a quiet corner of the porch of the village hotel, smoking and discussing such matters as three educated young men of a Southern village would naturally find interesting. Their names were King, Sancher, and Rosser. At a little distance,. within easy hearing but taking no part in the conversation, sat a fourth. He was a stranger to the. others. They merely knew that on his arrival by the stage coach that afternoon he had written in the hotel register the name Robert Grossmith. He had not been observed to speak to anyone except the hotel clerk. He seemed, indeed, singularly fond of his own company— or, as the personnel of the *Advance* expressed it, "grossly addicted to evil associations." But then it should be said in justice to the stranger that the personnel was himself of a too convivial disposition fairly to judge one differently gifted, and had, moreover, experienced a slight rebuff in an effort at an "interview."

"I HATE any kind of deformity in a woman," said King, "whether natural or— or acquired. I have a theory that any physical defect has its correlative mental and moral defect."

"I infer, then," said Rosser, gravely, "that a lady lacking the advantage of a nose would find the struggle to become Mrs. King an arduous enterprise."

"Of course you may put it that way," was the reply: "but, seriously. I once threw over a most charming girl on learning, quite accidentally, that she had

suffered amputation of a toe. My conduct was brutal, if you like, but if I had married that girl I should have been miserable and should have made her so."

"Whereas," said Sancher, with a light laugh, by marrying a gentleman of more liberal views she escaped with a cut throat."

"Ah, you know to whom I refer! Yes, she married Manton, but I don't know about his liberality; I'm not sure that he cut her throat because he discovered that she lacked that excellent thing in Woman, the middle toe of the right foot."

"Look at that chap!" said Rosser in a low voice, his eyes fixed upon the stranger. That person was obviously listening intently to the conversation.

"Damn his impudence!" whispered King, "what ought we to do?"

"That's an easy one," Rosser replied, rising. "Sir," he continued, addressing the stranger, "I think it would be better If you would remove your chair to the other end of the verandah. The presence of gentlemen is evidently an unfamiliar situation to you."

The man sprang to his feet and strode forward with clenche'd hands, his face white with rage. All were now standing. Sancher stepped between the belligerents.

"You are hasty and unjust," he said to Rosser; "this gentleman has done nothing to deserve such language."

But Rosser would hot withdraw a word. By the custom of the country and the time, there could be but one outcome to the quarrel.

"I demand the satisfaction due to a gentleman," said the stranger, who had become more calm. "I have not an acquaintance in this region. Perhaps you, sir," bowing to Sancher, "will be kind enough to represent me in this matter."

Sancher accepted the trust— somewhat reluctantly, it must be confessed, for the man's appearance and manner were not at all to his liking. King, who during the colloquy had hardly removed his eyes from the stranger's face, and had not spoken a word, con sented with a nod to act for Rosser, and the upshot of it was that, the principals having retired, a meeting was arranged for the next evening.

The nature of the arrangements has been already disclosed. The duel with knives in a dark room was once a commoner feature of South-western life than it is likely to be again. How thin a veneering of "chivalry" covered the essential brutality of the code under which such encounters were possible, we shall see.

iii

IN the blaze of a mid summer noonday, the old Manton house was hardly true to its traditions. It was of the earth, earthy. The sunshine caressed it

warmly and affectionately, with evident un consciousness of its bad reputation. The grass greening all the expanse in its front seemed to grow, not rankly, but with a natural and joyous exuberance, and the weeds blossomed quite like plants. Full of charming lights and shadows, and populous with pleasant-voiced birds, the neglected shade trees no longer struggled to run away, but bent reverently beneath their burdens of sun and song. Even in the glassless upper windows was an expression of peace and contentment, due to the light within. Over the stony fields the visible heat danced with a lively tremor incompatible with the gravity which is an attribute of the super natural.

Such was the aspect under which the place presented itself to Sheriff Adams and two other men who had come out from Marshall to look at it. One of these men was Mr. King, the sheriff's deputy; the other, whose name was Brewer, was a brother of the late Mrs. Manton. Under a beneficent law of the State relating to property which has been for a certain period abandoned by its owner, whose residence cannot be ascertained, the sheriff was the legal custodian of the Manton farm and the appurtenances thereunto belonging. His present visit was in mere perfunctory compliance with some order of a court, in which Mr. Brewer had an action to get possession of the property as heir to his deceased sister. By a mere coincidence the visit was made on the day after the night that Deputy King had unlocked the house for another and very different purpose. His presence now was not of his own choosing: he had been ordered to accompany his superior, and at the moment could think of noth ing more prudent than simulated alacrity in obedience. He had in tended going anyhow, but in other company.

CARELESSLY opening the front door, which to his surprise was not locked, the sheriff was amazed to see, lying on the floor of the passage into which it opened, a confused heap of men's apparel. Examination showed it to consist of two hats, and the same number of coats, waistcoats, and scarves, all in a remarkably good state of preservation, albeit somewhat defiled by the dust in which they lay. Mr. Brewer was equally astonished, but Mr. King's emotion is not of record. With a new and lively interest in his own actions, the sheriff now unlatched and pushed open a door on the right, and the three entered. The room was apparently vacant— no; as their eyes became accustomed to the dimmer light, something was visible in the farth est angle of the wall. It was a human figure— that of a man crouching close in the corner. Something in the attitude made the intruders halt when they had barely passed the threshold. The figure more and more clearly defined it self. The man was upon one knee, his back in the angle of the wall, his shoulders elevated to the level of his ears, his hands before his face, palms outward, the fingers spread and crooked like

claws; the white face turned upward on the retracted neck had an expression of unutterable fright, the mouth half open, the eyes incredibly expanded. He was stone dead— dead of terror! Yet, with the exception of a knife, which had evidently fallen from his own hand, not an other object was in the room.

IN the thick dust which covered the floor were some confused footprints near the door and along the wall through which it opened. Along one of the adjoining walls, too, past the boarded-up windows, was the trail made by the man himself in reaching his corner. Instinctively, in approaching the body the three men now followed that trail. The sheriff grasped one of the outthrown arms; it was as rigid as iron, and the application of a gentle force rocked the entire body without altering the relation of its parts. Brewer, pale with terror, gazed intently into the distorted face.

"God of mercy!" he suddenly cried, "it is Manton!"

"You are right," said King, with an evident attempt at calmness: "I knew Manton. He then wore a full beard and his hair long, but this is he."

He might have added: "I recognised him when he challenged Rosser. I told Rosser and Sancher who he was before we played him this horrible trick. When Rosser left this dark room at our heels, forgetting his clothes in the excitement, and driving away with us in his shirt— all through the discreditable proceedings we knew whom we were dealing with, murderer and coward that he was!"

But nothing of this did Mr. King say. With his better light he was trying to penetrate the mystery of the man's death. That he had not once moved from the corner where he had been stationed, that his posture was that of neither attack nor defence, that he had dropped his weapon, that he had obviously perished of sheer terror of some thing that he saw— these were circumstances which Mr. King's disturbed intelligence could not rightly comprehend.

GROPING in intellectual darkness for a clue to his maze of doubt, his gaze, directed mechanically downward, as is the way of one who ponders momentous matters, fell upon something which, there, in the light of day, and in the presence of living companions, struck him with an invincible terror. In the dust of years that lay thick upon the floor— leading from the door by which they had entered, straight across the room, to within a yard of Manton's crouching corpse— were three parallel lines of footprints— light but definite impressions of bare feet, the outer ones those of small children, the inner a woman's. From the point at which they ended they did not return; they pointed all one way. Brewer, who had observed them at the same moment, was leaning forward in an attitude of rapt attention, horribly pale.

"Look at that!" he cried, pointing with both hands at the nearest print of the woman's right foot, where she had apparently stopped and stood.

"The middle toe is missing— it was Gertrude!"

Gertrude was the late Mrs. Manton, sister to Mr. Brewer.

21: Retiring Inspector

W Pett Ridge

1859-1930

In: *Table d'Hôte*, 1911

INSPECTOR RICHARDS mentioned to several of the staff that, whilst he had often taken part in the presentation of testimonials, he specially wished that no tribute of a valuable nature should be paid to him on his retirement, and the men, after private consideration, took him at his word. The night of his departure was the occasion, nevertheless, for many touching incidents. Inspector Richards made a point of shaking hands with all those inferior to him in position; a compliment they accepted shyly, after rubbing the palm down the side of trousers.

"Always been my desire," he said benevolently, "to treat every one alike, and I trust I've succeeded."

"You've done it, sir. No mistake about that."

"I hope I have never shown anything in the shape of favouritism."

"There again, sir, you're right."

"I am anxious to express the desire that nothing but what I may call kindly thoughts will be entertained concerning me when I leave the duties I have so long carried out," said Inspector Richards elaborately, "and there's no objection to you mentioning it, as freely as you like, that I shall be glad to see old friends at any hour, and any time, from half-past eight in the morning till eleven o'clock o' night at three-two-seven, Hampstead Road."

A few of the junior members were under the impression that the words suggested liberal and cheerful hospitality; those who knew Mr. Richards better warned them not to expect too much from old T. R. T. R., they said, had never yet given away a ha'porth of anything, and acquaintance with human nature induced them to believe that he, at his age, was not likely to begin. The one person who had known T. R. the longest found herself swiftly disillusioned. Harriet was to live with her father over the shop in Hampstead Road, and to keep house for him; her wedding was to take place when Mr. Richards found it possible to make other arrangements, and not until then.

"I shall look after the shop," he said commandingly. "That's my part of the work. All you've got to do is to see to the cooking, and the cleaning up, the washing on Mondays, the ironing later on, the boots, the garden at the back, and so on and so forth. You sweep out the shop first thing in the morning, but apart from that, you're not to show your face there. Understand?"

"Yes, father."

"Don't give me the trouble of speaking twice," he went on in his official manner. "I've been used to managing much bigger affairs, without any trouble,

and this will be mere child's play. I look on it more as a hobby than anything else. Worst thing that can happen to a man of my industrious nature is to have nothing to occupy his mind. Go in now, and don't you ever dare come out 'less I call you."

The shop opened promptly on the first morning, Mr. Richards wearing a silk hat as he took down the shutters, to indicate that shirt-sleeves did not mean inferiority. He nodded distantly to his neighbours, and when they asked him a question concerning the weather of the day shook his head reservedly to convey the idea that he had not yet decided the point. Inside, he arranged the cash-drawer neatly and prepared change, blew a speck of dust from the counter, and, replacing the silk hat with a grey tweed cap, lighted a pipe and waited for the rush of custom. A drawback of official life had consisted in the fact that one could not be seen smoking within a certain distance of the terminus; it had been his duty on many occasions to reprove the staff for indulging in a pipe at the wrong moment, or at the inappropriate place; the match which he struck on the sole of his slippers made a bright flaming signal of the inauguration of liberty. During the morning Mr. Richards struck many matches and smoked several pipes, so that at one o'clock when his daughter called out respectfully, "Dinner's ready, father!" his appetite was not so good as, at this hour, it should have been.

"What sort of a morning has it been, father?" asked Harriet, with deference.

"Mind your own business," he retorted. "And pull the muslin curtain aside so that I can see when any one comes in. I've told you before the shop's nothing to do with you."

"There's a lad rapping at the counter," she remarked, disregarding his orders.

Mr. Richards upset his chair in the anxiety to attend to his first customer, and hurried in, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

"How do?" said the lad familiarly. "How you getting on at your new job? Settling down all right?"

"What can I do for you, Jenkinson?" Richards rested the tips of his fingers on the counter and beamed across. "Tobacco or cigarettes?"

"Last time me and you held conversation together," remarked the lad— "I'm speaking now of a matter of six weeks ago, or it might be a couple of months— you distinctly told me, as far as I remember, that smoking at my time of life was playing the deuce with my health."

"Everything's good if taken in moderation."

"And, furthermore, you said that if you caught me with a fag again, you'd report me to headquarters."

"My humour is what they call dry," urged Richards. "You have to go below the surface to see what I'm really driving at. How are they managing at the old place? What's the new inspector like? Some of you will find a difference, if I'm not greatly mistaken."

"We have!"

"Ah!"

"General opinion," said the lad, with marked emphasis, "seems to be that this one is a gentleman."

Mr. Richards eyed him across the counter; the other, almost quailing, asked whether the establishment included matches amongst its stores. A box being produced, he inquired how many it contained. Mr. Richards said he did not know. The lad, opening the box, remarked that it appeared to have been tampered with, and expressed a desire not to be swindled. The proprietor imperatively ordered him to go out of the shop, and went back to his meal. This had become cold; the circumstance that he himself was considerably heated did not compensate.

"There's another!" mentioned Harriet.

A lamp-boy, bearing on his features evidence of occupation, wished to make an inquiry, and, accepting the reply, stayed to argue that tin-tacks were a necessity to many people at many times and should therefore be kept by those who desired to serve the public; he went on to give a brief lecture on the laws of supply and demand, and, this finished, seemed unwilling to leave without confessing something in the way of patronage, and Mr. Richards found himself called upon to give two halfpennies in exchange for a penny and to say "Thank you" to an individual whom he had not, in official days, condescended to notice.

"You must put some brains into it," counselled the boy, before going out of the doorway. "That's your only chance. Competition's very keen at the present time. And don't forget civility. Civility goes a long way with a lot of people."

"Take your hand away from that new paint! I don't want to identify customers by finger-marks."

"You won't have any if you don't treat 'em properly."

"Go back to the station," roared Mr. Richards, "and give them features of yours a good wash!"

"Used soap and water just before I came away."

"Then get them to turn the hose on you."

The boy tried to think of a retort, but none came. He made a face and went.

That evening, at half-past six, saw the real start of business. In less than five minutes the shop filled with customers, all talking loudly, all demanding to be

served at once, but, in spite of this, making no attempt to leave quickly. More than once in the flurry and bustle of taking money— it was the night of pay-day, and much change therefore required— he called upstairs to inquire whether Harriet's young man had arrived; the last answer received was to the effect that the youth in question had been told not to come round that evening.

"Who told you to say that?"

"I thought it best, father."

He made an appeal to the customers for sympathy on the grounds that he had a fool for a daughter. They asked what else he had a right to expect.

It was satisfactory to see the shop crowded, but he wished the deportment had been of a more careful nature. Some called him Richards, quite shortly; a porter, for whom it had been his painful duty to obtain three days' suspension, referred to him more familiarly; and the retired inspector found, as many have discovered, that few of us in London, however important, escape a nickname. A few in sportive mood endeavoured to confuse him over the coins tendered, and when he had to beg one to go out and obtain some small silver for a sovereign, the messenger prolonged absence to such an extent that Mr. Richards became seriously alarmed, refusing to consider the bets offered concerning the possibility of the man never being heard of again. Temper was exhibited when the messenger returned with eighty threepenny-pieces, obtained from a friend connected with a chapel; and when it was pointed out that folk had a prejudice against accepting these, prompt answer came to the effect that in future Richards had better run errands for himself. A mouth-organ started a tune in a corner, and a porter solicited the favour of a labeller's hand for a dance.

"I'm not going to have that noise." They explained that it was not noise, but music. "Whatever it is, I'm not going to have it. Put a stop to it at once!"

"Look here, old man, you're out of uniform now. None of your gold-braid behaviour, if you please. That's gone and done with. All change is the motto."

"But," he pleaded, "I don't want to be a nuisance to my neighbours."

"You always have been."

They gave up, with reluctance, the idea of frivolous entertainment, and went on to the discussion of political matters. Richards had prided himself on the definite nature of his opinions concerning affairs of the nation, and even intimate colleagues rarely ventured to disagree; he reminded himself now that a shopkeeper had to be extremely careful to show impartiality, and to be cautious not to give offence. Consequently he found that many cherished views had to go; appealed to when the debate became warm, he said there was a good deal to be said on both sides; you found good and bad in

everybody; seemed to him you might say in general of politicians that they were six of one and half-dozen of the other. In preparing to go, the customers declared they would not give a brass button for a man who was unable to make up his mind.

"Look in again soon," he said, with a determined effort at cordiality. "Come to-morrow evening, if you're doing nothing else. Always glad to see you. No friends like the old ones."

He relaxed the usual attitude towards his daughter, and said that if she felt certain hers was a case of genuine affection, and not a mere idle fancy, he had no objection to the young man looking in any evening, every evening in fact, at about half-past six. Harriet promised to convey the permission, although she could not be sure that Arthur would take advantage of it.

"Tell him he can stay on to supper," recommended her father.

"That might influence him," admitted Harriet. "Would you like me to give a hand with the shop when you're so busy as you were to-night?"

"How many more times am I to tell you that I can manage the business myself? Besides, I don't want a set of young men coming in just for the sake of chatting and talking with you. What do you think your poor mother would have said to such an idea?"

The young man on arriving the next night found a hearty hand-shake awaiting him, and an American cigarette. He was ordered to sit inside the counter and to have a good look around. Mr. Richards gave something like a lesson in geography, pointing out that Log Cabin was bordered on the east by Navy Cut, on the west by Honey Dew; that twopenny cigars were situated on a peninsula, and wax matches formed a range of mountains. Proceeding to the cash drawers, Arthur was instructed to observe that four separate lakes existed, each with its own duty, and one was not on any account to be confused with the rest. When he exhibited a desire to go in and see Harriet, Mr. Richards upbraided him for want of attention, and mentioned that all knowledge was worth acquiring, in that you never knew when it might prove useful; to retain him until the rush of business came many reminiscent anecdotes were told of railway life, incidents of difficulty faced by Inspector Richards at various periods, and always triumphantly overcome. Coming to more recent occurrences, a complaint was made that Harriet that morning going out to shop in High Street had been absent for no less than three-quarters of an hour.

"Don't go in there!" said a voice at the doorway. "That's old T. R.'s show. Let's go on higher up. He'll only try to boss it over us."

When Harriet sang out an announcement concerning the meal, the proprietor of the tobacconist's shop remarked brusquely that there was

probably enough for two, but not sufficient for three, and in these circumstances he would not trouble Arthur to stay.

Mr. Richards was still watching the roadway, and wondering how it was possible for so many folk to pass by an attractive shop-window without stopping to give it the compliment of a glance, when he caught sight of one of his fellow-inspectors on the opposite side. Anxious for congenial company, he gave an invitation with a wave of the hand, and the other, after a moment of thought, crossed over. Harriet made another deferential announcement.

"Just in time!" he cried genially. "Come along inside, Wilkinson, and share pot-luck."

"What do you call pot-luck?" inquired Wilkinson, with caution. Mr. Richards recited the brief menu, and the inspector decided to enter.

"Brought a friend," said Richards to his daughter in the back parlour.

"Then we shall want a fourth chair, father."

"No, we shan't. Wilkinson, sit you down and make yourself thoroughly at home. How are you muddling on without me?"

"Do you want the truth?"

"Let's hear the worst."

"We're getting on first class," announced Wilkinson, his eyes on Harriet, but his words addressed to her father. "Some of them were saying only this evening that it just proved how much could be done by kindness. There hasn't been a cross word since you left, and not a single member of the staff has had to be reported."

"You'll all have a nice job later on," he prophesied. "Let them get slack and out of control, and it'll take you months to get 'em well in hand again."

"How do you like the change, Miss?" asked Wilkinson, accepting the offer of lettuce. "How does business life suit you, may I ask?"

"Nothing to do with her!" interrupted her father sharply. "All she's responsible for is household duties. I believe in women keeping to their proper sphere. Once they come out of it—"

"The change hasn't improved your temper, old man."

He stopped in the act of helping himself to mustard, and stared at his late colleague. "Me?" he said, in a dazed way. "Me, got a temper? Well, upon my word, we live and learn. This is news!"

"Pretty stale to other people."

"I venture to challenge that statement," said Richards hotly. "I should like to have a decision on the point by some independent authority."

"Ask her!"

Harriet, appealed to and ordered to speak without fear or favour, said she wanted to know why Arthur was sent away. The answer was to the effect if she

had finished gorging herself with food, she could go upstairs and leave her father and his friend to discuss matters which her youth and sex prevented her from understanding. Harriet had not completed her share of the meal, but she obeyed at once.

"That's the way to bring up a child," said Richards, with a jerk of the head. "I've only got to give her a hint. Wonderful control I exercise. I give my orders; she carries 'em out."

"You don't seem overwhelmed with customers," remarked the visitor, looking through the glass portion of the door.

"They either come with a run," he explained, "or not at all."

"I only go," went on Wilkinson, "by what I've heard at the station. They came here once for the lark of the thing, but the notion seems to be that once is plenty."

"And that," ejaculated the ex-inspector bitterly, "that, I suppose, is what they call *esprit de corps*."

"That's what they call getting their own back. And I don't want to discourage you, and I should like you to believe that I'm saying it only for your own good, but it's pretty clear to my mind that, in regard to this tobacconist's business, you're going to lose your little all. The savings of a lifetime are going to vanish like smoke, or rather not like smoke, but into thin air. Unless," added Wilkinson impressively— "unless you act wisely."

"Don't I always act wisely?"

Wilkinson shook his head. "The best of us are liable to make mistakes," he said diplomatically, "and consequently you're more liable than most."

Mr. Richards failed in the attempt to make a knife balance on a fork, and sighed deeply.

"I've been here now for— how long?— and there hasn't been a single, solitary ring of the bell," went on Wilkinson. "You've got to look the facts squarely in the face."

"If the worst comes to the worst," announced the other grimly, "I shall sell the business and the goodwill and stock and everything, and embark on something entirely fresh— something where I shan't be dependent on the kindness of old friends."

"You'll get a big price for the goodwill," mentioned the visitor, with sarcasm. "And I suppose you've taken the premises on a lease?"

"Let me fetch you a cigar," suggested Mr. Richards desperately, "and then you give me the best advice that lays in your power."

"Pick out one that I can smoke."

Wilkinson's counsel, given after he had submitted the cigar to a sufficient test, was this. Competition, brisk and determined, existed in the trade on the

part of large firms who opened shops all over the place. Small establishments could only exist by the possession of something in the shape of what Wilkinson called a magnet— a magnet to draw the people in.

"You mean a gramophone?"

Wilkinson meant nothing of the kind. What you had to bear in mind was, first, that all your possible customers belonged to what was known as the male persuasion; second, that by an old-established arrangement, which you might argue against but you had to accept, the male was always attracted by the female. Wilkinson added that in his opinion the daughter upstairs was a dashed good-looking girl, and, the cigar being near to its end, suggested that another might be presented to bear him company on the way home. And went.

"Harriet, my girl," said Mr. Richards, "I've thought of an idea that I may as well mention at once before I forget it. No doubt you've heard the remark about Satan and idle hands. And as there's no good reason why I should work my fingers to the bone, I shall want you to come into the shop of an afternoon and evening, and serve customers, and smile at 'em, and make yourself generally useful."

"Afraid you're too late, father," she said. "If you had let Arthur stay to supper, we were not going to tell you anything about it. As it is, you've got to be told that we were married this morning at the registrar's, and that I'm going to leave you now."

THE SHOP is doing very well, and when you happen to pass that way, you might step in and buy something. You will find Harriet at the counter serving goods of excellent quality at current prices; in the evening her husband is also there. Glancing through the windowed door of the shop parlour, you may catch sight of ex-Inspector Richards, looking after the baby.

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22: The Elf-Trap

Francis Stevens

G. M. Barrows, 1883-1948

Argosy, 5 July 1919

IN THIS our well-advertised, modern world, crammed with engines, death-dealing shells, life-dealing serums, and science, he who listens to "old wives' tales" is counted idle. He who believes them, a superstitious fool. Yet there are some legends which have a strange, deathless habit of recrudescence in many languages and lands.

Of one such I have a story to tell. It was related to me by a well-known specialist in nervous diseases, not as an instance of the possible truth behind fable, but as a curious case in which— I quote his words— "the delusions of a diseased brain were reflected by a second and otherwise sound mentality."

No doubt his view was the right one. And yet, at the finish, I had the strangest flash of feeling. As if, somewhere, some time, I, like young Wharton, had stood and seen against blue sky— Elva, of the sky-hued scarf and the yellow honeysuckles.

But my part is neither to feel nor surmise. I will tell the story as I heard it, save for substitution of fictitious names for the real ones. My quotations from the red notebook are verbatim.

Theron Tademus, A.A.S., F.E.S., D.S., et cetera, occupied the chair of biology in a not-unfamed university. He was the author of a treatise on cytology, since widely used as a textbook, and of several important brochures on the more obscure infusoria. As a boy he had been— in appearance— a romantically charming person. The age of thirty-seven found him still handsome in a cold, fine-drawn manner, but almost inhumanly detached from any save scientific interests.

Then, at the height of his career, he died. Having entered his classroom with intent to deliver the first lecture of the fall term, he walked to his desk, laid down a small, red notebook, turned, opened his mouth, went ghastly white and subsided. His assistant, young Wharton, was first to reach him and first to discover the shocking truth.

Tademus was unmarried, and his will bequeathed all he possessed to the university.

The little red book was not at first regarded as important. Supposed to contain notes for his lecture, it was laid aside. On being at last read, however, by his assistant in course of arranging his papers, the book was found to contain not notes, but a diary covering the summer just passed.

Barring the circumstances of one peculiar incident, Wharton already knew the main facts of that summer.

Tademus, at the insistence of his physician— the specialist aforesaid— had spent July and August in the Carolina Mountains not far north from the famous resort, Asheville. Dr. Locke was friend as well as medical adviser, and he lent his patient the use of a bungalow he owned there.

It was situated in a beautiful, but lonely spot, to which the nearest settlement was Carcassonne. In the valley below stood a tiny railroad station, but Carcassonne was not built up around this, nor was it a town at all in the ordinary sense.

A certain landscape painter had once raised him a house on that mountainside, at a place chosen for its magnificent view. Later, he was wont to invite thither, for summer sketching, one or two of his more favored pupils. Later still, he increased this number. For their accommodation other structures were raised near his mountain studio, and the Blue Ridge summer class became an established fact, with a name of its own and a rather large membership.

Two roads led thither from the valley. One, that most in use by the artist colonists, was as good and broad as any Carolina mountain road could hope to be. The other, a winding, narrow, yellow track, passed the lonely bungalow of Dr. Locke, and at last split into two paths, one of which led on to further heights, the second to Carcassonne.

The distance between colony and bungalow was considerable, and neither was visible to the other. Tademus was not interested in art, and, as disclosed by the red book, he was not even aware of Carcassonne's existence until some days after his arrival at the bungalow.

Solitude, long walks, deep breathing, and abstinence from work or sustained thought had been Dr. Locke's prescription, accepted with seeming meekness by Tademus.

Nevertheless, but a short time passed till Wharton received a telegram from the professor ordering him to pack and send by express certain apparatus, including a microscope and dissecting stand. The assistant obeyed.

Another fortnight and Dr. Locke in turn received an urgent wire. It was from Jake Higgins, the Negro caretaker whom he had "lent" to Tademus along with the bungalow.

Leaving his practice to another man's care, Dr. Locke fled for the Carolina Blue Ridge.

He found his caretaker and his bungalow, but no Tademus.

By Jake's story, the professor had gone to walk one afternoon and had not returned. Having wired Locke, the caretaker had otherwise done his best. He notified the county sheriff, and search parties scoured the mountains. At his appeal, too, the entire Carcassonnian colony, male and female, turned out with

enthusiasm to hunt for Tademus. Many of them carried easel and sketch-box along, and for such it is to be feared that their humane search ended with the discovery of any tempting "tit" in the scenic line.

However, the colony's efforts were at least as successful as the sheriff's or indeed those of anyone else.

Shortly before Tademus' vanishment, a band of gypsies had settled themselves in a group of old, empty, half-ruined shacks, about a mile from Locke's bungalow.

Suspicion fell upon them. A posse visited the encampment, searched it and questioned every member of the migrant band. They were a peculiarly ill-favored set, dirty and villainous of feature. Nothing, however, could be found of either the missing professor or anything belonging to him.

The posse left, after a quarrel that came near to actual fighting. A dog— a wretched, starved yellow cur— had attacked one of the deputies and set its teeth in his boot. He promptly shot it. In their resentment, the dog's owners drew knives.

The posse were more efficiently armed, and under threat of the latter's rifles and shotguns, the gypsies reconsidered. They were warned to pack up and leave, and following a few days' delay, they obeyed the mandate.

On the very morning of their departure, which was also the eighth day after Tademus' disappearance, Dr. Locke sat down gloomily to breakfast. The search, he thought, must be further extended. Let it cover the whole Blue Ridge, if need be. Somewhere in those mountains was a friend and patient whom he did not propose to lose.

At one side of the breakfast room was a door. It led into the cleared-out bedroom which Locke had, with indignation, discovered to have been converted into a laboratory by the patient he had sent here to "rest."

Suddenly this door opened. Out walked Theron Tademus.

He seemed greatly amazed to find Locke there, and said that he had come in shortly after midnight and been in his laboratory ever since.

Questioned as to his whereabouts before that, he replied surprisingly that throughout the week he had been visiting with friends in Carcassonne.

Dr. Locke doubted his statement. And reasonably.

Artists are not necessarily liars, and every artist and near-artist in the Carcassonne colony had not only denied knowledge of the professor, but spent a good part of the week helping hunt for him.

Later, after insisting that Locke accompany him to Carcassonne and meet his friends there, Tademus suddenly admitted that he had not previously been near the place. He declined, however, either to explain his untruthful first statement, or give any other account of his mysterious absence.

One week ago Tademus had left the bungalow, carrying nothing but a light cane, and wearing a white flannel suit, canvas shoes, and a Panama. That was his idea of a tramping costume. He had returned, dressed in the same suit, hat and shoes. Moreover, though white, they looked neat as when he started, save for a few grass stains and the road's inevitable yellow clay about his shoe-soles.

If he had spent the week vagrant-wise, he had been remarkably successful in keeping his clothes clean.

"Asheville," thought the doctor. "He went by train, stopped at a hotel, and has returned without the faintest memory of his real doings. Lame, overtaxed nerves can play that sort of trick with a man's brain."

But he kept the opinion to himself. Like a good doctor, he soon dropped the whole subject, particularly because he saw that Tademus was deeply distressed and trying to conceal the fact.

On plea of taking a long-delayed vacation of his own, Locke remained some time at the bungalow, guarded his friend from the curiosity of those who had combed the hills for him, and did all in his power to restore him to health and a clear brain.

He was so far successful that Tademus returned to his classes in the fall, with Locke's consent.

To his classes— and death.

Wharton had known all this. He knew that Tademus' whereabouts during that mysterious week had never been learned. But the diary in the red book purported to cover the summer, including that week.

To Wharton, the record seemed so supremely curious that he took a liberty with what was now the university's property. He carried the book to Dr. Locke.

It was evening, and the latter was about to retire after a day's work that began before dawn.

"Personal, you say?" Locke handled the book, frowning slightly.

"Personal. But I feel— when you've finished reading that. I have a rather queer thing to tell you in addition. You can't understand till you've read it. I am almost sure that what is described here has a secret bearing on Professor Tademus' death."

"His heart failed. Overwork. There was no mystery in that."

"Maybe not, doctor. And yet— won't you please read?"

"Run through it aloud for me," said the doctor. "I couldn't read one of my own prescriptions tonight, and you are more familiar with that microscopic writing of his."

Wharton complied.

Monday, July 3.

Arrived yesterday. Not worse than expected, but bad enough. If Locke were here, he should be satisfied. I have absolutely no occupation. Walked and climbed for two hours, as prescribed. Spent the rest of day pacing up and down indoors. Enough walking, at least. I can't sit idle. I can't stop thinking. Locke is a fool!

Thursday, July 6.

Telegraphed Wharton today. He will express me the Swift binocular, some slides, cover-glasses, and a very little other apparatus. Locke is a fool! I shall follow his advice, but within reason. There is a room here lighted by five windows. Old Jake has cleared the bedroom furniture out. It has qualities as a laboratory. Not, of course, that I intend doing any real work. An hour or so a day of micrological observation will only make "resting" tolerable.

Tuesday, July 11.

Jake hitched up his "ol' gray mule" and has brought my three cases from the station' I unpacked the old Stephenson-Swift and set it up. The mere touch of it brought tears to my eyes. Locke's "rest-cure" has done that to my nerves!

After unpacking, though, I resolutely let the microscope and other things be. Walked ten miles up-hill and down. Tried to admire the landscape, as Locke advised, but can't see much in it. Rocks, trees, lumpy hills, yellow roads, sky, clouds, buzzards. Beauty! What beauty is there in this vast, clumsy world that is the outer husk for nature's real and delicate triumphs?

I saw a man painting today. He was swabbing at a canvas with huge, clumsy brushes. He had his easel set up by the road, and I stopped to see what any human being could find hereabout worth picturing.

And what had this painter, this artist, this lover of beauty chosen for a subject? Why, about a mile from here there is a clump of ugly, dark trees. A stream runs between them and the road. It is yellow with clay, and too swift. The more interesting microorganisms could not exist in it. A ram-shackle, plank bridge crosses it, leading to the grove, and there, between the trees, stand and lean some dreary, half-ruined huts.

That scene was the one which my "artist" had chosen for his subject.

For sheer curiosity I got into conversation with the fellow.

Unusual gibberish of chiaroscuro, flat tones, masses, et cetera. Not a definite thought in his head as to why he wished to paint those shacks. I learned one thing, though. He wasn't the isolated specimen of his kind I had thought him. Locke failed to tell me about Carcassonne. Think of it! Nearly a hundred of these insane pursuers of "beauty" are spending the summer within walking distance of the house I have promised to live in!

And the one who was painting the grove actually invited me to call on him! I smiled noncommittally, and came home. On the way I passed the branch road that leads to the place. I had always avoided that road, but I didn't know why until today. Imagine it! Nearly a hundred. Some of them women, I suppose. No, I shall keep discreetly away from Carcassonne.

Saturday, July 15.

Jake informs me that a band of gypsies have settled themselves in the grove which my Carcassonnian acquaintance chose to paint. They are living in the ruined huts. Now I shall avoid that road, too. Talk of solitude! Why, the hills are fairly swarming with artists, gypsies, and Lord knows who else. One might as well try to rest in a beehive!

Found some interesting variations of the ciliara living in a near-by pond. Wonderful! Have recorded over a dozen specimens in which the macronucleus is unquestionably double. Not lobed, not pulverate, as in Oxytricha, but double! My summer has not, after all, been wasted.

Felt singularly slack and tired this morning, and realized that I have hardly been out of the house in three days. Shall certainly take a long tramp tomorrow.

Monday, July 17.

Absent-mindedness betrayed me today. I had a very unpleasant experience. Resolutely keeping my promise to Locke, I sallied forth this afternoon and walked briskly for some distance. I had, however, forgotten the gypsies and took my old route.

Soon I met a woman, or rather a girl. She was arrayed in the tattered, brilliantly colored garments which women of these wandering tribes affect. There was a scarf about her head. I noticed because its blue was exactly the same brilliant hue of the sky over the mountains behind her. There was a stripe of yellow in it, too, and thrust in her sash she carried a great bunch of yellow flowers— wild honeysuckle, I think.

Her face was not dark, like the swart faces of most gypsies. On the contrary, the skin of it had a smooth, firm whiteness. Her features were fine and delicate.

Passing, we looked at one another, and I saw her eyes brighten in the strangest, most beautiful manner. I am sure that there was nothing bold or immodest in her glance. It was rather like the look of a person who recognizes an old acquaintance, and is glad of it. Yet we never met before. Had we met, I could not have forgotten her.

We passed without speaking, of course, and I walked on.

Meeting the girl, I had hardly thought of her as a gypsy, or indeed tried to classify her in any way. The impression she left was new in my experience. It was only on reaching the grove that I came to myself, as it were, and remembered Jake's story of the gypsies who are camping there.

Then I very quickly emerged from the vague, absurd happiness which sight of the girl had brought.

While talking with my Carcassonnian, I had observed that grove rather carefully. I had thought it perfect— that nothing added could increase the somber ugliness of its trees, nor the desolation of its gray, ruined, tumbledown old huts.

Today I learned better. To be perfect, ugliness must include sordid humanity.

The shacks, dreary in themselves, were hideous now. In their doorways lounged fat, unclean women nursing their filthy offspring. Older children, clothed in rags, caked with dirt, sprawled and fought among themselves. Their voices were the snarls of animals.

I realized that the girl with the sky-like scarf had come from here— out of this filth unspeakable!

A yellow cur, the mere, starved skeleton of a dog, came tearing down to the bridge. A rusty, jangling bell was tied about its neck with a string. The beast stopped on the far side and crouched there, yapping. Its anger seemed to surpass mere canine savagery. The lean jaws fairly writhed in maniacal but loathsomely feeble ferocity.

A few men, whiskered, dirty-faced, were gathered about a sort of forge erected in the grove. They were making something, beating it with hammers in the midst of showers of sparks. As the dog yapped, one of the men turned and saw me. He spoke to his mates, and to my dismay they stopped work and transferred their attention to me.

I was afraid that they would cross the bridge, and the idea of having to talk to them was for some reason inexpressibly revolting.

They stayed where they were, but one of them suddenly laughed out loudly, and held up to my view the thing upon which they had been hammering.

It was a great, clumsy, rough, iron trap. Even at that distance I could see the huge, jagged teeth, fit to maim a bear— or a man. It was the ugliest instrument I have ever seen.

I turned away and began walking toward home, and when I looked back they were at work again.

The sun shone brightly, but about the grove there seemed to be a queer darkness. It was like a place alone and aloof from the world. The trees, even,

were different from the other mountain trees. Their heavy branches did not stir at all in the wind. They had a strange, dark, flat look against the sky, as though they had been cut from dark paper, or rather like the flat trees woven in a tapestry. That was it. The whole scene was like a flat, dark, unreal picture in tapestry.

I came straight home. My nerves are undoubtedly in bad shape, and I think I shall write Locke and ask him to prescribe medicine that will straighten me up. So far, his "rest-cure" has not been notably successful.

Wednesday, July 19.

I have met her again.

Last night I could not sleep at all. Round midnight I ceased trying, rose, dressed, and spent the rest of the night with the good old Stephenson-Swift. My light for night-work— a common oil lamp— is not very brilliant. This morning I suffered considerable pain behind the eyes, and determined to give Locke's "walking and open air" treatment another trial, though discouraged by previous results.

This time I remembered to turn my back on the road which leads to that hideous grove. The sunlight seemed to increase the pain I was already suffering. The air was hot, full of dust, and I had to walk slowly. At the slightest increase of pace my heart would set up a kind of fluttering, very unpleasant and giving me a sense of suffocation.

Then I came to the girl.

She was seated on a rock, her lap heaped with wild honeysuckle, and she was weaving the flower stems together.

Seeing me, she smiled.

"I have your garland finished," she said, "and mine soon will be."

One would have thought the rock a trysting place at which we had for a long time been accustomed to meet! In her hand she was extending to me a wreath, made of the honeysuckle flowers.

I can't imagine what made me act as I did. Weariness and the pain behind my eyes may have robbed me of my usual good sense.

Anyway, rather to my own surprise, I took her absurd wreath and sat down where she made room for me on the boulder.

After that we talked.

At this moment, only a few hours later, I couldn't say whether or not the girl's English was correct, nor exactly what she said. But I can remember the very sound of her voice.

I recall, too, that she told me her name Elva, and that when I asked for the rest of it, she informed me that one good name was enough for one good person.

That struck me as a charmingly humorous sally. I laughed like a boy— or a fool, God knows which!

Soon she had finished her second garland, and laughingly insisted that we each crown the other with flowers.

Imagine it. Had one of my students come by then, I am sure he would have been greatly startled. Professor Theron Tademus, seated on a rock with a gypsy girl, crowned with wild honeysuckle and adjusting a similar wreath to the girl's blue-scarfed head!

Luckily, neither the student nor anyone else passed, and in a few minutes she said something that brought me to my senses. Due to that inexplicable dimness of memory, I quote the sense, not her words.

"My father is a ruler among our people. You must visit us. For my sake, the people and my father will make you welcome."

She spoke with the gracious air of a princess, but I rose hastily from beside her. A vision of the grove had returned— dark, oppressive— like an old, dark tapestry, woven with the ugly forms and foliage. I remembered the horrible, filthy tribe from which this girl had sprung.

Without a word of farewell, I left her there on the rock. I did not look back, nor did she call after me. Not until reaching home, when I met old Jake at the door and saw him stare, did I remember the honeysuckle wreath. I was still wearing it, and carrying my hat.

Snatching at the flowers, I flung them in the ditch and retreated with what dignity I might into the bungalow's seclusion.

It is night now, and, a little while since, I went out again. The wreath is here in the room with me. The flowers were unsoiled by the ditch, and seem fresh as when she gave them to me. They are more fragrant than I had thought even wild honeysuckle could be.

Elva. Elva of the sky-blue scarf and the yellow honeysuckle

My eyes are heavy, but the pain behind them is gone. I think I shall sleep tonight.

Friday, July 21.

Is there any man so gullible as he who prides himself on his accuracy of observation?

I ask this in humility, for I am that man.

Yesterday I rose, feeling fresher than for weeks past. After all, Locke's treatment seemed worthy of respect. With that in mind, I put in only a few hours staining some of my binucleate cilia and finishing the slides.

All the last part of the afternoon I faithfully tramped the roads. There is undoubtedly a sort of broad, coarse charm in mere landscape, with its reaches of green, its distant purples, and the sky like a blue scarf flung over it all. Had the pain of my eyes not returned, I could almost have enjoyed those vistas.

Having walked farther than usual, it was deep dusk when I reached home. As if from ambush, a little figure dashed out from behind some rhododendrons. It seemed to be a child, a boy, though I couldn't see him clearly, nor how he was dressed.

He thrust something into my hand. To my astonishment, the thing was a spray of wild honeysuckle.

"Elva— Elva— Elva!"

The strange youngster was fairly dancing up and down before me, repeating the girl's name and nothing else.

Recovering myself, I surmised that Elva must have sent this boy, and sure enough, at my insistence he managed to stop prancing long enough to deliver her message.

Elva's grandmother, he said, was very ill. She had been ailing for days, but tonight the sickness was worse— much worse. Elva feared that her grandmother would die, and, "of course," the boy said, "no doctor will come for our sending!" She had remembered me, as the only friend she knew among the "outside people." Wouldn't I come and look at her poor, sick grandmother? And if I had any of the outside people's medicine in my house, would I please bring that with me?

Well, yes, I did hesitate. Aside from practical and obvious suspicions, I was possessed with a senseless horror for not only the gypsy tribe, but the grove itself.

But there was the spray of honeysuckle. In her need, she had sent that for a token— and sent it to me! Elva, of the sky-like scarf and laughing mouth.

"Wait here," I said to the boy, rather brusquely, and entered the house. I had remembered a pocket-case of simple remedies, none of which I had ever used, but there was a direction pamphlet with them. If I must play amateur physician, that might help. I looked for Jake, meaning to inform him of my proposed expedition. Though he had left a chicken broiling on the kitchen range, he was not about. He might have gone to the spring for water.

Passing out again, I called the boy, but received no answer. It was very dark. Toward sunset, the sky had clouded over, so that now I had not even the benefit of starlight.

I was angry with the boy for not waiting, but the road was familiar enough, even in the dark. At least, I thought it was, till, colliding with a clump of holly. I realized that I must have strayed off and across a bare stretch of yellow clay which defaces the Mountainside above Locke's bungalow.

I looked back for the guiding lights of its windows, but the trees hid them. However, the road couldn't be far off. After some stumbling about, I was sure that my feet were in the right track again. Somewhat later I perceived a faint, ruddy point of light, to the left and ahead of me.

As I walked toward it, the rapid rush and gurgle of water soon apprized me that I had reached the stream with the plank bridge across it.

There I stood for several minutes, staring toward the ruddy light. That was all I could see. It seemed, somehow, to cast no illumination about it.

There came a scamper of paws, the tinkle of a bell, and then a wild yapping broke out on the stream's far side. That vile, yellow cur, I thought. Elva, having imposed on my kindness to the extent of sending for me, might at least have arranged a better welcome than this.

When I pictured her, crouched in her bright, summer-colored garments, tending the dreadful old hag that her grandmother must be. The rest of the tribe were probably indifferent. She could not desert her sick— and there stood I, hesitant as any other coward!

For the dog's sake I took a firm grip on my cane. Feeling about with it, I found the bridge and crossed over.

Instantly something flung itself against my legs and was gone before I could hit out. I heard the dog leaping and barking all around me. It suddenly struck me that the beast's voice was not like that of the yellow cur. There was nothing savage in it. This was the cheerful, excited bark of a well-bred dog that welcomes its master, or its master's friend. And the bell that tinkled to every leap had a sweet, silvery note, different from the cracked jangle of the cur's bell.

I had hated and loathed that yellow brute, and to think that I need not combat the creature was a relief. The huts, as I recalled them, weren't fifty yards beyond the stream. There was no sign of a campfire. Just that one ruddy point of light.

I advanced—

WHARTON PAUSED suddenly in his reading. "Here," he interpolated, "begins that part of the diary which passed from commonplace to amazing. And the queer part is that in writing it, Professor Tademus seems to have been unaware that he was describing anything but an unusually pleasant experience."

Dr, Locke's heavy brows knit in a frown. "Pleasant!" he snapped. "The date of that entry?"

"July twenty-one."

"The day he disappeared. I see. Pleasant! And that gypsy girl— faugh! What an adventure for such a man! No wonder he tried to lie out of it. I don't think I care to hear the rest, Wharton. Whatever it is, my friend is dead. Let him rest."

"Oh, but wait," cried the young man, with startled earnestness. "Good Lord, doctor, do you believe I would bring this book even to you if it contained that kind of story— about Professor Tademus? No. Its amazing quality is along different lines than you can possibly suspect."

"Get on, then," grumbled Locke, and Wharton continued.

SUDDENLY, as though at a signal, not one, but a myriad of lights blazed into existence.

It was like walking out of a dark closet into broad day. The first dazzlement passing, I perceived that instead of the somber grove and ruined huts, I was facing a group of very beautiful houses.

It is curious how a previous and false assumption— will rule a man. Having believed myself at the gypsy encampment, several minutes passed before I could overcome my bewilderment and realize that after losing my road I had not actually regained it.

That I had somehow wandered into the other branch road, and reached, not the grove, but Carcassonne!

I had no idea, either, that this artists' colony could be such a really beautiful place. It is cut by no streets. The houses are set here and there over the surface of such green lawns as I have never seen in these mountains of rock and yellow clay.

(Dr. Locke started slightly in his chair. Carcassonne, as he had himself seen it, flashed before his memory. He did not interrupt, but from that moment his attention was alertly set, like a man who listens for the key word of a riddle.)

Everywhere were lights, hung in the flowering branches of trees, glowing upward from the grass, blazing from every door and window. Why they should have been turned on so abruptly, after that first darkness, I do not yet know.

Out of the nearest house a girl came walking. She was dressed charmingly, in thin, bright-colored silks. A bunch of wild honeysuckle was thrust in the girdle, and over her hair was flung a scarf of sky-like blue. I knew her instantly, and began to see a glimmering of the joke that had been played on me.

The dog bounded toward the girl. He was a magnificent collie. A tiny silver bell was attached to his neck by a broad ribbon.

I take credit for considerable aplomb in my immediate behavior. The girl had stopped a little way off. She was laughing, but I had certainly allowed myself to be victimized.

On my accusation, she at once admitted to having deceived me. She explained that, perceiving me to be misled by her appearance into thinking her one of the gypsies, she could not resist carrying out the joke. She had sent her small brother with the token and message.

I replied that the boy deserted me, and that I had nearly invaded the camp of real gypsies while looking for her and the fictitious dying grandmother.

At this she appeared even more greatly amused. Elva's mirth has a peculiarly contagious quality. Instead of being angry, I found myself laughing with her.

By this time quite a throng of people had emerged on the lawns, and leading me to a dignified, fine-looking old man who she said was her father, she presented me. In the moment, I hardly noticed that she used my first name only, Theron, which I had told her when we sat on the roadside boulder. I have observed since that all these people use the single name only, in presentation and intercourse. Though lacking personal experience with artists, I have heard that they are inclined to peculiar "fads" of unconventionality. I had never, however, imagined that they could be attractive to a man like myself, or pleasant to know.

I am enlightened. These Carcassonnian "colonists" are the only charming, altogether delightful people whom I have ever met.

One and all, they seemed acquainted with Elva's amusing jest at my expense. They laughed with us, but in recompense have made me one of themselves in the pleasantest manner.

I dined in the house of Elva's father. The dining-room, or rather hall, is a wonderful place. Due to much microscopic work, I am inclined to see only clumsiness— largeness— in what other people characterize as beauty. Carcassonne is different. There is a minute perfection about the architecture of these artists' houses, the texture of their clothes, and even the delicate contour of their faces, which I find amazingly agreeable.

There is no conventionality of costume among them. Both men and women dress as they please. Their individual taste is exquisite, and the result is an array of soft fabrics, and bright colors, flowerlike, rather than garish.

Till last night I never learned the charm of what is called "fancy dress," nor the genial effect it may exert on even a rather somber nature, such as I admit mine to be.

Elva, full of good-natured mischief, insisted that I must "dress for dinner." Her demand was instantly backed by the whole laughing throng. Carried off my

feet in a way to which I am not at all used, I let them drape me in white robes, laced with silver embroideries like the delicate crystallization of hoar-frost. Dragged hilariously before a mirror, I was amazed at the change in my appearance.

Unlike the black, scarlet-hooded gown of my university, these glittering robes lent me not dignity, but a kind of— I can only call it a noble youthfulness. I looked younger, and at the same time keener— more alive. And either the contagious spirit of my companions, or some resurgence of boyishness filled me with a sudden desire to please; to be merry with the merry-makers, and— I must be frank— particularly to keep Elva's attention where it seemed temporarily fixed— on myself.

My success was unexpectedly brilliant. There is something in the very atmosphere of Carcassonne which, once yielded to, exhilarates like wine. I have never danced, nor desired to learn. Last night, after a banquet so perfect that I hardly recall its details, I danced. I danced with Elva— and with Elva— and always with Elva. She laughed aside all other partners. We danced on no polished floors, but out on the green lawns, under white, laughing stars. Our music was not orchestral. Wherever the light-footed couples chose to circle, there followed a young flutist, piping on his flute of white ivory.

Fluttering wings, driving clouds, wind tossed leaves— all the light, swift things of the air were in that music. It lifted and carried one with it. One did not need to learn. One danced! It seems, as I write, that the flute's piping is still in my ears, and that its echoes will never cease. Elva's voice is like the ivory flutels. Last night I was mad with the music and her voice. We danced— I know not how long, nor when we ceased.

This morning I awakened in a gold-and-ivory room, with round windows that were full of blue sky and crossed by blossoming branches. Dimly I recalled that Elva's father had urged me to accept his hospitality for the night.

Too much of such new happiness may have gone to my head, I'm afraid. At least, it was nothing stronger. At dinner I drank only one glass of wine- sparkling, golden stuff, but mild and with a taste like the fragrance of Elva's wild honeysuckle blooms.

It is midmorning now, and I am writing this seated on a marble bench beside a pool in the central court of my host's house. I am waiting for Elva, who excused herself to attend to some duty or other. I found this book in my pocket, and thought best to make an immediate record of not only a good joke on myself, but the only really pleasant social experience I have ever enjoyed.

I must lay aside these fanciful white robes, bid Elva good-by, and return to my lonely bungalow and Jake. The poor old man is probably tearing his hair

over my unexplained absence. But I hope for another invitation to Carcassonne!

Saturday, July 22.

I seem to be "staying on" indefinitely. This won't do. I spoke to Elva of my extended visit, and she laughingly informed me that people who have drunk the wine and worn the woven robes of Carcassonne seldom wish to leave. She suggested that I give up trying to "escape" and spend my life here. Jest, of course; but I half wished her words were earnest. She and her people are spoiling me for the common, workaday world.

Not that they are idle, but their occupations as well as pleasures are of a delicate, fascinating beauty.

Whole families are stopping here, including the children. I don't care for children, as a rule, but these are harmless as butterflies. I met Elva's messenger, her brother. He is a funny, dear little elf. How even in the dark I fancied him one of those gypsy brats is hard to conceive. But then I took Elva herself for a gypsy!

My new friends engage in many pursuits besides painting. "Crafts," I believe they are called. This morning Elva took me around the shops— shops like architectural blossoms, carved out of the finest marble.

They make jewelry, weave fabrics, tool leather, and follow many other interesting occupations. Set in the midst of the lawns is a forge. Every part of it, even to the iron anvil, is embellished with a fernlike inlay of other metals. Several amateur silversmiths were at work there, but Elva hurried me away before I could see what they were about.

I have inquired for the young painter who first told me of Carcassonne and invited me to visit him there. I can't recall his name, but on describing him to Elva she replied vaguely that not every "outsider" was permanently welcome among her people.

I didn't press the question. Remembering the ugliness which that same painter had been committing to canvas, I could understand that his welcome among these exquisite workers might be short-lived. He was probably banished, or banished himself, soon after our interview on the road.

I must be careful, lest I wear out my own welcome. Yet the very thought of that old, rough, husk of a world that I must return to, brings back the sickness, and the pain behind my eyes that I had almost forgotten.

Sunday, July 23.

Elva! Her presence alone is delight. The sky is not bluer than her scarf and eyes. Sunlight is a duller gold than the wild honeysuckle she weaves in garlands for our heads.

Today, like child sweethearts, we carved our names on the smooth trunk of a tree. "Elva— Theron." And a wreath to shut them in. I am happy. Why— why, indeed should I leave Carcassonne?

Monday, July 24.

Still here, but this is the last night that I shall impose upon these regally hospitable people. An incident occurred today, pathetic from one viewpoint, outrageous from another. I was asleep when it happened, and only woke up at the sound of the gunshot.

Some rough young mountaineers rode into Carcassonne and wantonly killed Elva's collie dog. They claimed, I believe, that the unlucky animal attacked one of their number. A lie! The dog was gentle as a kitten. He probably leaped and barked around their horses and annoyed the young brutes. They had ridden off before I reached the scene.

Elva was crying, and no wonder. They had blown her pet's head clean off with a shotgun. Don't know what will be done about it. I wanted to go straight to the county sheriff, but Elva wouldn't have that. I pretended to give in but if her father doesn't see to the punishment of those men, I will. Murderous devils! Elva is too forgiving.

Wednesday, July 26.

I watched the silversmiths today. Elva was not with me. I had no idea that silver was worked like iron. They must use some peculiar amalgam, or it would melt in the furnace, Instead of emerging white-hot, to be beaten with tiny, delicate hammers.

They were making a strange looking contraption. It was all silver, beaten into floral patterns, but the general shape was a riddle to me. Finally I asked one of the smiths what they were about. He is a tall fellow, with a merry, dark face.

"Guess!" he demanded.

"Can't. To my ignorance, it resembles a Chinese puzzle.'

"Something more curious than that."

"What?"

"An— elf-trap!" He laughed mischievously.

"Please!"

"Well, it's a trap anyway. See this?" The others had stepped back good-naturedly. With his hammer he pressed on a lever. Instantly two slender, jaw-

like parts of the queer machine opened wide. They were set with needlelike points, or teeth. It was all red-hot, and when he removed his hammer the jaws clashed in a shower of sparks.

"It's a trap, of course." I was still puzzled.

"Yes, and a very remarkable one. This trap will not only catch, but it will recatch."

"I don't understand."

"If any creature, man, say— " he was laughing again-"walks into this trap, he may escape it. But sooner or later— soon, I should think— it will catch him again. That is why we call it an elf-trap!"

I perceived suddenly that he was making pure game of me. His mates were all laughing at the nonsense. I moved off, not offended, but perturbed in another way.

He and his absurd silver trap-toy had reminded me of the gypsies. What a horrible, rough iron thing that was which they had held up to me from their forge. Men capable of creating such an uncouthly cruel instrument as that jag toothed trap would be terrible to meet in the night. And I had come near blundering in among them— at night!

This won't do. I have been happy. Don't let me drop back into the morbidly nervous condition which invested those gypsies with more than human horror. Elva is calling me. I have been too long alone.

Friday, July 28.

Home again. I am writing this in my bungalow-laboratory. Gray dawn is breaking, and I have been at work here since midnight. Feel strangely depressed. Need breakfast, probably.

Last night Elva and I were together in the court of her father's house. The pool in the center of it is lighted from below to a golden glow. We were watching the goldfish, with their wide, filmy tails of living lace.

Suddenly I gave a sharp cry. I had seen a thing in the water more important than goldfish. Snatching out the small collecting bottle, without which I never go abroad, I made a quick pass at the pool's glowing surface.

Elva had started back, rather frightened.

"What is it?"

I held the bottle up and peered closely. There was no mistake.

"Dysteria," I said triumphantly. "Dysteria ciliata. Dysterlus giganticus, to give a unique specimen the separate name he deserves. Why, Elva, this enormous creature will give me a new insight on his entire species!"

"What enormous creature?"

For the first time I saw Elva nearly petulant. But I was filled with enthusiasm. I let her look in the bottle.

"There!" I ejaculated. "See him?"

"Where? I can't see anything but water— and a tiny speck in it."

"That," I explained proudly, "is dysterius giganticus. Large enough to be seen by the naked eye. Why, child, he's a monster of his kind. A fresh-water variety, too!"

I thrust the bottle in my pocket.

"Where are you going?"

"Home, of course. I can't get this fellow under the microscope any too quickly."

I had forgotten how wide apart are the scientific and artistic temperaments. No explanation I could make would persuade Elva that my remarkable capture was worth walking a mile to examine properly.

"You are all alike!" she cried. "All! You talk of love, but your love is for gold, or freedom, or some pitiful foolish nothingness like that speck of life you call by a long name— and leave me for!"

"But," I protested, "only for a little while. I shall come back."

She shook her head. This was Elva in a new mood, dark brows drawn, laughing mouth drooped to a sullen curve. I felt sorry to leave her angry, but my visit had already been preposterously long. Besides, a rush of desire had swept me to get back to my natural surroundings. I wanted the feel of the micrometer adjuster in my fingers, and to see the round, speckled white field under the lens pass from blurred chaos to perfect definition.

She let me go at last. I promised solemnly to come to her whenever she should send or call. Foolish child! Why, I can walk over to Carcassonne every day, if she likes.

I hear Jake rattling about in the breakfast-room. Conscience informs me that I have treated him rather badly. Wonder where he thought I was? Couldn't have been much worried, or he would have hunted me up in Carcassonne.

August 30.

I shall not make any further entries in this book. My day for the making of records is over, I think. Any sort of records. I go back to my classes next month. God knows what I shall say to them! Elva.

I may as well finish the story here.

Every day I find it harder to recall the details. If I hadn't this book, with what I wrote in it when I was— when I was there, I should believe that my brain had failed in earnest.

Locke said I couldn't have been in Carcassonne. He stood in the breakfast-room, with the sunlight striking across him. I saw him clearly. I saw the huge, coarse, ugly creature that he was. And in that minute, I knew.

But I wouldn't admit it, even to myself. I made him go with me to Carcassonne. There was no stream. There was no bridge.

The houses were wretched bungalows, set about on the bare, flat, yellow clay of the Mountainside. The people— artists, save the mark!— were a common, carelessly dressed, painting-aproned crowd who fulfilled my original idea of an artists colony.

Their coarse features and thick skins sickened me. Locke walked home beside me, very silent. I could hardly bear his company.

He was gross— coarse— human!

Toward evening, managing to escape his company, I stole up the road to the gypsy's grove. The huts were empty. That queer look, as of a flat, dark tapestry, was gone from the grove.

I crossed the plank bridge. Among the trees I found ashes, and a depression where the forge had stood. Something else, too. A dog, or rather its unburied remains. The yellow cur. Its head had been blown off by a shotgun. An ugly little bell lay in the mess, tied to a piece of string.

One of the trees— it had a smooth trunk— and carved in the bark— I can't write it. I went away and left those two names carved there.

The wild honeysuckle has almost ceased to bloom. I can leave now. Locke says I am well, and that I can return to my classes.

I have not entered my laboratory since that morning. Locke admires my "willpower" for dropping all that till physical health should have returned. Willpower! I shall never, as long as I live, look into a microscope again.

Perhaps she will know that somehow, and send or call for me quickly.

I have drunk the wine and worn the woven robes of her people. They made me one of them. Is it right that they should cast me out, because I did not understand what I have since guessed the meaning of so well?

I can't bear the human folk about me. They are clumsy, revolting. And I can't work.

God only knows what I shall say to my classes.

Here is the end of my last record— till she calls!

THERE WAS silence in Locke's private study. At last the doctor expelled his breath in a long sigh. He might have been holding it all the time.

"Great-Heavens!" he ejaculated. "Poor old Tademus! And I thought his trouble in the summer there was a temporary lapse. But he talked like a sane man. Acted like one, too, by Jove! With his mind in that condition! And in spite

of the posse, he must have been with the gypsies all that week. You can see it. Even through his delusions, you catch occasional notes of reality.

"I heard of that dog-shooting, and he speaks of being asleep when it happened. Where was he concealed that the posse didn't find him? Drugged and hidden under some filthy heap of rags in one of the huts, do you think? And why hide him at all, and then let him go? He returned the very day they left."

At the volley of questions, Wharton shook his head.

"I can't even guess about that. He was certainly among the gypsies. But as for his delusions, to call them so, there is a kind of beauty and coherence about them which I— well, which I don't like!"

The doctor eyed him sharply.

"You can't mean that you-"

"Doctor," said Wharton softly, "do you recall what he wrote of the silversmiths and their work? They were making an elf-trap. Well, I think the elf-trap— caught him!"

"What?"

Locke's tired eyes opened wide. A look of alarm flashed into them. The alarm was for Wharton, not himself.

"Wait!" said the latter. "I haven't finished. You know that I was in the classroom at the moment when Professor Tademus died?"

"Yes?"

"Yes! I was the first to reach him. But before that, I stood near the desk. There are three windows at the foot of that room. Every other man there faced the desk. I faced the windows. The professor entered, laid down his book and turned to the class. As he did so, a head appeared in one of those windows. They are close to the ground, and a person standing outside could easily look in.

"The head was a woman's. No, I am not inventing this. I saw her head, draped in a blue scarf. I noticed, because the scarf's blueness gave me the strangest thrill of delight. It was the exact blue of the sky behind it. Then she had raised her hand. I saw it. In her fingers was a spray of yellow flowers— yellow as sunshine. She waved them in a beckoning motion. Like this.

"Then Tademus dropped.

"And there are legends, you know, of strange people, either more or less than human, who appear as gypsies, but are not the real gypsies, that possess queer powers. Their outer appearance is rough and vile, but behind that, as a veil, they live a wonderful hidden life of their own.

"And a man who has been with them once is caught— caught in the real elf-trap, which the smiths' work only symbolized. He may escape, but he can't

forget nor be joined again with his own race, while to return among them, he must walk the dark road that Tademus had taken when she called.

"Oh. I've scoffed at 'old wives' tales' with the rest of our overeducated, modern kind. I can't ever scoff again, you see, because—

"What's that? A prescription? For me? Why, doctor, you don't yet understand. I saw her, I tell you. Elva! Elva! Elva, of the wild honeysuckle and the sky-like scarf!"

———————————

23: The Undying Thing

Barry Pain

1864-1928

Black & White, Christmas 1893

UP AND DOWN the oak-panelled dining-hall of Mansteth the master of the house walked restlessly. At formal intervals down the long severe table were placed four silver candlesticks, but the light from these did not serve to illuminate the whole of the surroundings. It just touched the portrait of a fair-haired boy with a sad and wistful expression that hung at one end of the room; it sparkled on the lid of a silver tankard. As Sir Edric passed to and fro it lit up his face and figure. It was a bold and resolute face with a firm chin and passionate, dominant eyes. A bad past was written in the lines of it. And yet every now and then there came over it a strange look of very anxious gentleness that gave it some resemblance to the portrait of the fair-haired boy. Sir Edric paused a moment before the portrait and surveyed it carefully, his strong brown hands locked behind him, his gigantic shoulders thrust a little forward.

'Ah, what I was!' he murmured to himself— 'what I was!'

Once more he commenced pacing up and down. The candles, mirrored in the polished wood of the table, had burnt low. For hours Sir Edric had been waiting, listening intently for some sound from the room above or from the broad staircase outside. There had been sounds— the wailing of a woman, a quick abrupt voice, the moving of rapid feet. But for the last hour he had heard nothing. Quite suddenly he stopped and dropped on his knees against the table:

'God, I have never thought of Thee. Thou knowest that— Thou knowest that by my devihsh behaviour and cruelty I did veritably murder Alice, my first wife, albeit the physicians did maintain that she died of a decline— a wasting sickness. Thou knowest that all here in Mansteth do hate me, and that rightly. They say, too, that I am mad; but that they say not rightly, seeing that I know how wicked I am. I always knew it, but I never cared until I loved— oh, God, I never cared!'

His fierce eyes opened for a minute, glared round the room, and closed again tightly. He went on:

'God, for myself I ask nothing; I make no bargaining with Thee. Whatsoever punishment Thou givest me to bear I will bear it; whatsoever Thou givest me to do I will do it. Whether Thou killest Eve or whether Thou keepest her in life— and never have I loved but her— I will from this night be good. In due penitence will I receive the holy Sacrament of Thy Body and Blood. And my son, the one child that I had by Alice, I will fetch back again from Challonsea,

where I kept him in order that I might not look upon him, and I will be to him a father in deed and very truth. And in all things, so far as in me lieth, I will make restitution and atonement. Whether Thou hearest me or whether Thou hearest me not, these things shall be. And for my prayer, it is but this: of Thy loving kindness, most merciful God, be Thou with Eve and make her happy; and after these great pains and perils of childbirth send her Thy peace. Of Thy loving-kindness. Thy merciful loving-kindness, O God!'

Perhaps the prayer that is offered when the time for praying is over is more terribly pathetic than any other. Yet one might hesitate to say that this prayer was unanswered.

Sir Edric rose to his feet. Once more he paced the room. There was a strange simplicity about him, the simplicity that scorns an incongruity. He felt that his lips and throat were parched and dry. He lifted the heavy silver tankard from the table and raised the lid; there was still a good draught of mulled wine in it with the burnt toast, cut heart-shape, floating on the top.

'To the health of Eve and her child,' he said aloud, and drained it to the last drop.

Click, click! As he put the tankard down he heard distinctly two doors opened and shut quickly, one after the other. And then slowly down the stairs came a hesitating step. Sir Edric could bear the suspense no longer. He opened the dining-room door, and the dim light strayed out into the dark hall beyond.

'Dennison,' he said, in a low, sharp whisper, 'is that you?'

'Yes, yes. I am coming, Sir Edric.'

A moment afterwards Dr. Dennison entered the room. He was very pale; perspiration streamed from his forehead; his cravat was disarranged. He was an old man, thin, with the air of proud humility. Sir Edric watched him narrowly.

'Then she is dead,' he said, with a quiet that Dr. Dennison had not expected.

'Twenty physicians— a hundred physicians could not have saved her. Sir Edric. She was—' He gave some details of medical interest.

'Dennison,' said Sir Edric, still speaking with calm and restraint, 'why do you seem thus indisposed and panic-stricken? You are a physician; have you never looked upon the face of death before? The soul of my wife is with God—'

'Yes,' murmured Dennison, 'a good woman, a perfect, saintly woman.'

'And,' Sir Edric went on, raising his eyes to the ceiling as though he could see through it, 'her body lies in great dignity and beauty upon the bed, and there is no horror in it. Why are you afraid?'

'I do not fear death, Sir Edric.'

'But your hands— they are not steady. You are evidently overcome. Does the child live?'

'Yes, it lives.'

'Another boy— a brother for young Edric, the child that Alice bore me?'

'There— there is something wrong. I do not know what to do. I want you to come upstairs. And, Sir Edric, I must tell you, you will need your self-command.'

'Dennison, the hand of God is heavy upon me; but from this time forth until the day of my death I am submissive to it, and God send that that day may come quickly! I will follow you and I will endure.'

He took one of the high silver candlesticks from the table and stepped towards the door. He strode quickly up the staircase. Dr. Dennison following a little way behind him.

As Sir Edric waited at the top of the staircase he heard suddenly from the room before him a low cry. He put down the candlestick on the floor and leaned back against the wall listening. The cry came again, a vibrating monotone ending in a growl.

'Dennison, Dennison!'

His voice choked; he could not go on.

'Yes,' said the doctor, 'it is in there. I had the two women out of the room, and got it here. No one but myself has seen it. But you must see it, too.'

He raised the candle and the two men entered the room— one of the spare bedrooms. On the bed there was something moving under cover of a blanket. Dr. Dennison paused for a moment and then flung the blanket partially back.

They did not remain in the room for more than a few seconds. The moment they got outside, Dr. Dennison began to speak.

'Sir Edric, I would fain suggest somewhat to you. There is no evil, as Sophocles hath it in his "Antigone," for which man hath not found a remedy, except it be death, and here—'

Sir Edric interrupted him in a husky voice.

'Downstairs, Dennison. This is too near.'

It was, indeed, passing strange. When once the novelty of this— this occurrence had worn off. Dr. Dennison seemed no longer frightened. He was calm, academic, interested in an unusual phenomenon. But Sir Edric, who was said in the village to fear nothing in earth, or heaven, or hell, was obviously much moved.

When they had got back to the dining-room. Sir Edric motioned the doctor to a seat.

'Now, then,' he said, 'I will hear you. Something must be done— and to-night.'

'Exceptional cases,' said Dr. Dennison, 'demand exceptional remedies. Well, it lies there up-stairs and is at our mercy. We can let it live, or, placing one hand over the mouth and nostrils, we can—'

'Stop,' said Sir Edric. 'This thing has so crushed and humiliated me that I can scarcely think. But I recall that while I waited for you I fell upon my knees and prayed that God would save Eve. And, as I confessed unto Him more than I will ever confess unto man, it seemed to me that it were ignoble to offer a price for His favour. And I said that whatsoever punishment I had to bear, I would bear it; and whatsoever He called upon me to do, I would do it; and I made no conditions.'

'Well?'

'Now my punishment is of two kinds. Firstly, my wife. Eve, is dead. And this I bear more easily because I know that now she is numbered with the company of God's saints, and with them her pure spirit finds happier communion than with me; I was not worthy of her. And yet she would call my roughness by gentle, pretty names. She gloried, Dennison, in the mere strength of my body, and in the greatness of my stature. And I am thankful that she never saw this— this shame that has come upon the house. For she was a proud woman, with all her gentleness, even as I was proud and bad until it pleased God this night to break me even to the dust. And for my second punishment, that, too, I must bear. This thing that lies upstairs, I will take and rear; it is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; only, if it be possible, I will hide my shame so that no man but you shall know of it.'

'This is not possible. You cannot keep a living being in this house unless it be known. Will not these women say, "'Where is the child?"'

Sir Edric stood upright, his powerful hands linked before him, his face working in agony; but he was still resolute.

'Then if it must be known, it shall be known. The fault is mine. If I had but done sooner what Eve asked, this would not have happened. I will bear it.'

'Sir Edric, do not be angry with me, for if I did not say this, then I should be but an ill counsellor. And, firstly, do not use the word shame. The ways of nature are past all explaining; if a woman be frail and easily impressed, and other circumstances concur, then in some few rare cases a thing of this sort does happen. If there be shame, it is not upon you but upon nature— to whom one would not lightly impute shame. Yet it is true that common and uninformed people might think that this shame was yours. And herein lies the great trouble— the shame would rest also on her memory.'

'Then,' said Sir Edric, in a low, unfaltering voice, 'this night for the sake of Eve I will break my word, and lose my own soul eternally.'

About an hour afterwards Sir Edric and Dr. Dennison left the house together. The doctor carried a stable lantern in his hand. Sir Edric bore in his arms something wrapped in a blanket. They went through the long garden, out into the orchard that skirts the north side of the park, and then across a field to a small dark plantation known as Hal's Planting. In the very heart of Hal's Planting there are some curious caves: access to the innermost chamber of them is exceedingly difficult and dangerous, and only possible to a climber of exceptional skill and courage. As they returned from these caves. Sir Edric no longer carried his burden. The dawn was breaking and the birds began to sing.

'Could not they be quiet just for this morning?' said Sir Edric wearily.

There were but few people who were asked to attend the funeral of Lady Vanquerest and of the baby which, it was said, had only survived her by a few hours. There were but three people who knew that only one body— the body of Lady Vanquerest— was really interred on that occasion. These three were Sir Edric Vanquerest, Dr. Dennison, and a nurse whom it had been found expedient to take into their confidence.

During the next six years Sir Edric lived, almost in solitude, a life of great sanctity, devoting much of his time to the education of the younger Edric, the child that he had by his first wife. In the course of this time some strange stories began to be told and believed in the neighbourhood with reference to Hal's Planting, and the place was generally avoided.

When Sir Edric lay on his death-bed the windows of the chamber were open, and suddenly through them came a low cry. The doctor in attendance hardly regarded it, supposing that it came from one of the owls in the trees outside. But Sir Edric, at the sound of it, rose right up in bed before anyone could stay him, and flinging up his arms cried, 'Wolves! wolves! wolves!' Then he fell forward on his face, dead.

And four generations passed away.

ii

TOWARDS the latter end of the nineteenth century, John Marsh, who was the oldest man in the village of Mansteth, could be prevailed upon to state what he recollected. His two sons supported him in his old age; he never felt the pinch of poverty, and he always had money in his pocket; but it was a settled principle with him that he would not pay for the pint of beer which he drank occasionally in the parlour of The Stag. Sometimes Farmer Wynthwaite paid for the beer; sometimes it was Mr. Spicer from the post-office; sometimes

the landlord of The Stag himself would finance the old man's evening dissipation. In return, John Marsh was prevailed upon to state what he recollected; this he would do with great heartiness and strict impartiality, recalling the intemperance of a former Wynthwaite and the dishonesty of some ancestral Spicer while he drank the beer of their direct descendants. He would tell you, with two tough old fingers crooked round the handle of the pewter that you had provided, how your grandfather was a poor thing, 'fit for nowt but to brak steeans by ta rord-side.' He was so disrespectful that it was believed that he spoke truth. He was particularly disrespectful when he spoke of that most devilish family, the Vanquerests; and he never tired of recounting the stories that from generation to generation had grown up about them. It would be objected, sometimes, that the present Sir Edric, the last surviving member of the race, was a pleasant-spoken young man, with none of the family wildness and hot temper. It was for no sin of his that Hal's Planting was haunted— a thing which everyone in Mansteth, and many beyond it, most devoutly believed. John Marsh would hear no apology for him, nor for any of his ancestors; he recounted the prophecy that an old mad woman had made of the family before her strange death, and hoped, fervently, that he might live to see it fulfilled.

The third baronet, as has already been told, had lived the latter part of his life, after his second wife's death, in peace and quietness. Of him John Marsh remembered nothing, of course, and could only recall the few fragments of information that had been handed down to him. He had been told that this Sir Edric, who had travelled a good deal, at one time kept wolves, intending to train them to serve as dogs; these wolves were not kept under proper restraint, and became a kind of terror to the neighbourhood. Lady Vanquerest, his second wife, had asked him frequently to destroy these beasts; but Sir Edric, although it was said that he loved his second wife even more than he hated the first, was obstinate when any of his whims were crossed, and put her off with promises. Then one day Lady Vanquerest herself was attacked by the wolves; she was not bitten, but she was badly frightened. That filled Sir Edric with remorse, and, when it was too late, he went out into the yard where the wolves were kept and shot them all. A few months afterwards Lady Vanquerest died in childbirth. It was a queer things John Marsh noted, that it was just at this time that Hal's Planting began to get such a bad name. The fourth baronet was, John Marsh considered, the worst of the race; it was to him that the old mad woman had made her prophecy, an incident that Marsh himself had witnessed in his childhood and still vividly remembered.

The baronet, in his old age, had been cast up by his vices on the shores of melancholy; heavy-eyed, gray-haired, bent, he seemed to pass through life as

in a dream. Every day he would go out on horseback, always at a walking pace, as though he were following the funeral of his past self. One night he was riding up the village street as this old woman came down it. Her name was Ann Ruthers; she had a kind of reputation in the village, and although all said that she was mad, many of her utterances were remembered, and she was treated with respect. It was growing dark, and the village street was almost empty; but just at the lower end was the usual group of men by the door of The Stag, dimly illuminated by the light that came through the quaint windows of the old inn. They glanced at Sir Edric as he rode slowly past them, taking no notice of their respectful salutes. At the upper end of the street there were two persons. One was Ann Ruthers, a tall, gaunt old woman, her head wrapped in a shawl; the other was John Marsh. He was then a boy of eight, and he was feeling somewhat frightened. He had been on an expedition to a distant and fœtid pond, and in the black mud and clay about its borders he had discovered live newts; he had three of them in his pocket, and this was to some extent a joy to him, but his joy was damped by his knowledge that he was coming home much too late, and would probably be chastised in consequence. He was unable to walk fast or to run, because Ann Ruthers was immediately in front of him, and he dared not pass her, especially at night. She walked on until she met Sir Edric, and then, standing still, she called him by name. He pulled in his horse and raised his heavy eyes to look at her. Then in loud clear tones she spoke to him, and John Marsh heard and remembered every word that she said; it was her prophecy of the end of the Vanquerests. Sir Edric never answered a word. When she had finished, he rode on, while she remained standing there, her eyes fixed on the stars above her. John Marsh dared not pass the mad woman; he turned round and walked back, keeping close to Sir Edric's horse. Quite suddenly, without a word of warning, as if in a moment of ungovernable irritation, Sir Edric wheeled his horse round and struck the boy across the face with his switch.

On the following morning John Marsh— or rather, his parents— received a handsome solatium in coin of the realm; but sixty-five years afterwards he had not forgiven that blow, and still spoke of the Vanquerests as a most devilish family, still hoped and prayed that he might see the prophecy fulfilled. He would relate, too, the death of Ann Ruthers, which occurred either later on the night of her prophecy or early on the following day. She would often roam about the country all night, and on this particular night she left the main road to wander over the Vanquerest lands, where trespassers, especially at night, were not welcomed. But no one saw her, and it seemed that she had made her way to a part where no one was likely to see her; for none of the keepers would have entered Hal's Planting by night. Her body was found there at noon

on the following day, lying under the tall bracken, dead, but without any mark of violence upon it. It was considered that she had died in a fit. This naturally added to the ill-repute of Hal's Planting. The woman's death caused considerable sensation in the village. Sir Edric sent a messenger to the married sister with whom she had lived, saying that he wished to pay all the funeral expenses. This offer, as John Marsh recalled with satisfaction, was refused.

Of the last two baronets he had but little to tell. The fifth baronet was credited with the family temper, but he conducted himself in a perfectly conventional way, and did not seem in the least to belong to romance. He was a good man of business, and devoted himself to making up, as far as he could, for the very extravagant expenditure of his predecessors. His son, the present Sir Edric, was a fine young fellow and popular in the village. Even John Marsh could find nothing to say against him; other people in the village were interested in him. It was said that he had chosen a wife in London— a Miss Guerdon— and would shortly be back to see that Mansteth Hall was put in proper order for her before his marriage at the close of the season. Modernity kills ghostly romance. It was difficult to associate this modern and handsome Sir Edric, bright and spirited, a good sportsman and a good fellow, with the doom that had been foretold for the Vanquerest family. He himself knew the tradition and laughed at it. He wore clothes made by a London tailor, looked healthy, smiled cheerfully, and, in a vain attempt to shame his own head-keeper, had himself spent a night alone in Hal's Planting. This last was used by Mr. Spicer in argument, who would ask John Marsh what he made of it. John Marsh replied, contemptuously, that it was 'nowt.' It was not so that the Vanquerest family was to end; but when the thing, whatever it was, that lived in Hal's Planting, left it and came up to the house, to Mansteth Hall itself, then one would see the end of the Vanquerests. So Ann Ruthers had prophesied. Sometimes Mr. Spicer would ask the pertinent question, how did John Marsh know that there really was anything in Hal's Planting? This he asked, less because he disbelieved, than because he wished to draw forth an account of John's personal experiences. These were given in great detail, but they did not amount to very much. One night John Marsh had been taken by business— Sir Edric's keepers would have called the business by hard names— into the neighbourhood of Hal's Planting. He had there been suddenly startled by a cry, and had run away as though he were running for his life. That was all he could tell about the cry— it was the kind of cry to make a man lose his head and run. And then it always happened that John Marsh was urged by his companions to enter Hal's Planting himself, and discover what was there. John pursed his thin lips together, and hinted that that also might be done one of these days.

Whereupon Mr. Spicer looked across his pipe to Farmer Wynthwaite, and smiled significantly.

Shortly before Sir Edric's return from London, the attention of Mansteth was once more directed to Hal's Planting, but not by any supernatural occurrence. Quite suddenly, on a calm day, two trees there fell with a crash; there were caves in the centre of the plantation, and it seemed as if the roof of some big chamber in these caves had given way.

They talked it over one night in the parlour of The Stag. There was water in these caves. Farmer Wynthwaite knew it; and he expected a further subsidence. If the whole thing collapsed, what then?

'Ay,' said John Marsh. He rose from his chair, and pointed in the direction of the Hall with his thumb. 'What then?'

He walked across to the fire, looked at it meditatively for a moment, and then spat in it.

'A trewly wun'ful owd mon,' said Farmer Wynthwaite as he watched him.

iii

IN THE SMOKING-room at Mansteth Hall sat Sir Edric with his friend and intended brother-in-law, Dr. Andrew Guerdon. Both men were on the verge of middle-age; there was hardly a year's difference between them. Yet Guerdon looked much the older man; that was, perhaps, because he wore a short, black beard, while Sir Edric was clean shaven. Guerdon was thought to be an enviable man. His father had made a fortune in the firm of Guerdon, Guerdon and Bird; the old style was still retained at the bank, although there was no longer a Guerdon in the firm. Andrew Guerdon had a handsome allowance from his father, and had also inherited money through his mother. He had taken the degree of Doctor of Medicine; he did not practise, but he was still interested in science, especially in out-of-the-way science. He was unmarried, gifted with perpetually good health, interested in life, popular. His friendship with Sir Edric dated from their college days. It had for some years been almost certain that Sir Edric would marry his friend's sister, Ray Guerdon, although the actual betrothal had only been announced that season.

On a bureau in one corner of the room were spread a couple of plans and various slips of paper. Sir Edric was wrinkling his brows over them, dropping cigar-ash over them, and finally getting angry over them. He pushed back his chair irritably, and turned towards Guerdon.

'Look here, old man!' he said. I desire to curse the original architect of this house— to curse him in his down-sitting and his uprising.'

'Seeing that the original architect has gone to where beyond these voices there is peace, he won't be offended. Neither shall I. But why worry yourself? You've been rooted to that blessed bureau all day, and now, after dinner, when every self-respecting man chucks business, you return to it again— even as a sow returns to her wallowing in the mire.'

'Now, my good Andrew, do be reasonable. How on earth can I bring Ray to such a place as this? And it's built with such ingrained malice and vexatiousness that one can't live in it as it is, and can't alter it without having the whole shanty tumble down about one's ears. Look at this plan now. That thing's what they're pleased to call a morning room. If the window had been *here* there would have been an uninterrupted view of open country. So what does this forsaken fool of an architect do? He sticks it *there*, where you see it on the plan, looking straight on to a blank wall with a stable yard on the other side of it. But that's a trifle. Look here again—'

'I won't look any more. This place is all right. It was good enough for your father and mother and several generations before them until you arose to improve the world; it was good enough for you until you started to get married. It's a picturesque place, and if you begin to alter it you'll spoil it.' Guerdon looked round the room critically. 'Upon my word,' he said, 'I don't know of any house where I like the smoking-room as well as I like this. It's not too big, and yet it's fairly lofty; it's got those comfortable-looking oak-panelled walls. That's the right kind of fireplace, too, and these corner cupboards are handy.'

'Of course this won't *remain* the smoking-room. It has the morning sun, and Ray likes that, so I shall make it into her boudoir. It *is* a nice room, as you say.'

'That's it, Ted, my boy,' said Guerdon bitterly; 'take a room which is designed by nature and art to be a smoking-room and turn it into a boudoir. Turn it into the very deuce of a boudoir with the morning sun laid on for ever and ever. Waste the twelfth of August by getting married on it. Spend the winter in foreign parts, and write letters that you can breakfast out of doors, just as if you'd created the mildness of the climate yourself. Come back in the spring and spend the London season in the country in order to avoid seeing anybody who wants to see you. That's the way to do it; that's the way to get yourself generally loved and admired!'

'That's chiefly imagination,' said Sir Edric. 'I'm blest if I can see why I should not make this house fit for Ray to live in.'

'It's a queer thing: Ray was a good girl, and you weren't a bad sort yourself. You prepare to go into partnership, and you both straightway turn into despicable lunatics. I'll have a word or two with Ray. But I'm serious about this

house. Don't go tinkering it; it's got a character of its own, and you'd better leave it. Turn half Tottenham Court Road and the culture thereof— Heaven help it!— into your town house if you like, but leave this alone.'

'Haven't got a town house— yet. Anyway I'm not going to be unsuitable; I'm not going to feel myself at the mercy of a big firm. I shall supervise the whole thing myself. I shall drive over to Challonsea to-morrow afternoon and see if I can't find some intelligent and fairly conscientious workmen.'

'That's all right; you supervise them and I'll supervise you. You'll be much too new if I don't look after you. You've got an old legend, I believe, that the family's coming to a bad end; you must be consistent with it. As you are bad, be beautiful. By the way, what do you yourself think of the legend?'

'It's nothing,' said Sir Edric, speaking, however, rather seriously. 'They say that Hal's Planting is haunted by something that will not die. Certainly an old woman, who for some godless reason of her own made her way there by night, was found there dead on the following morning; but her death could be, and was, accounted for by natural causes. Certainly, too, I haven't a man in my employ who'll go there by night now.'

'Why not?'

'How should I know? I fancy that a few of the villagers sit boozing at The Stag in the evening, and like to scare themselves by swopping lies about Hal's Planting. I've done my best to stop it. I once, as you know, took a rug, a revolver and a flask of whisky and spent the night there myself. But even that didn't convince them.'

'Yes, you told me. By the way, did you hear or see anything?'

Sir Edric hesitated before he answered. Finally he said:

'Look here, old man, I wouldn't tell this to anyone but yourself I did think that I heard something. About the middle of the night I was awakened by a cry; I can only say that it was the kind of cry that frightened me. I sat up, and at that moment I heard some great, heavy thing go swishing through the bracken behind me at a great rate. Then all was still; I looked about, but I could find nothing. At last I argued as I would argue now that a man who is just awake is only half awake, and that his powers of observation, by hearing or any other sense, are not to be trusted. I even persuaded myself to go to sleep again, and there was no more disturbance. However, there's a real danger there now. In the heart of the plantation there are some eaves and a subterranean spring; lately there has been some slight subsidence there, and the same sort of thing will happen again in all probability. I wired to-day to an expert to come and look at the place; he has replied that he will come on Monday. The legend says that when the thing that lives in Hal's Planting comes up to the Hall the

Vanquerests will be ended. If I cut down the trees and then break up the place with a charge of dynamite I shouldn't wonder if I spoiled that legend.'

Guerdon smiled.

'I'm inclined to agree with you all through. It's absurd to trust the immediate impressions of a man just awakened; what you heard was probably a stray cow.'

'No cow,' said Sir Edric impartially. 'There's a low wall all round the place— not much of a wall, but too much for a cow.'

'Well, something else— some equally obvious explanation. In dealing with such questions, never forget that you're in the nineteenth century. By the way, your man's coming on Monday. That reminds me to-day's Friday, and as an indisputable consequence to-morrow's Saturday, therefore, if you want to find your intelligent workmen it will be of no use to go in the afternoon.'

'True,' said Sir Edric, 'I'll go in the morning.' He walked to a tray on a side table and poured a little whisky into a tumbler. 'They don't seem to have brought any seltzer water,' he remarked in a grumbling voice.

He rang the bell impatiently.

'Now why don't you use those corner cupboards for that kind of thing? If you kept a supply there, it would be handy in case of accidents.'

'They're full up already.'

He opened one of them and showed that it was filled with old account-books and yellow documents tied up in bundles. The servant entered.

'Oh, I say, there isn't any seltzer. Bring it, please.'

He turned again to Guerdon.

'You might do me a favour when I'm away to-morrow, if there's nothing else that you want to do. I wish you'd look through all these papers for me. They're all old. Possibly some of them ought to go to my solicitor, and I know that a lot of them ought to be destroyed. Some few may be of family interest. It's not the kind of thing that I could ask a stranger or a servant to do for me, and I've so much on hand just now before my marriage—'

'But of course, my dear fellow, I'll do it with pleasure.'

'I'm ashamed to give you all this bother. However, you said that you were coming here to help me, and I take you at your word. By the way, I think you'd better not say anything to Ray about the Hal's Planting story.'

'I may be some of the things that you take me for, but really I am not a common ass. Of course I shouldn't tell her.'

'I'll tell her myself, and I'd sooner do it when I've got the whole thing cleared up. Well, I'm really obliged to you.'

'I needn't remind you that I hope to receive as much again. I believe in compensation. Nature always gives it and always requires it. One finds it everywhere, in philology and onwards.'

'I could mention omissions.'

'They are few, and make a belief in a hereafter to supply them logical.'

'Lunatics, for instance?'

'Their delusions are often their compensation. They argue correctly from false premises. A lunatic believing himself to be a millionaire has as much delight as money can give.'

'How about deformities or monstrosities?'

'The principle is there, although I don't pretend that the compensation is always adequate. A man who is deprived of one sense generally has another developed with unusual acuteness. As for monstrosities of at all a human type one sees none; the things exhibited in fairs are, almost without exception, frauds. They occur rarely, and one does not know enough about them. A really good text-book on the subject would be interesting. Still, such stories as I have heard would bear out my theory— stories of their superhuman strength and cunning, and of the extraordinary prolongation of life that has been noted, or is said to have been noted, in them. But it is hardly fair to test my principle by exceptional cases. Besides, anyone can prove anything except that anything's worth proving.'

'That's a cheerful thing to say. I wouldn't like to swear that I could prove how the Hal's Planting legend started; but I fancy, do you know, that I could make a very good shot at it.'

'Well?'

'My great-grandfather kept wolves— I can't say why. Do you remember the portrait of him?— not the one when he was a boy, the other. It hangs on the staircase. There's now a group of wolves in one corner of the picture. I was looking carefully at the picture one day and thought that I detected some over-painting in that corner; indeed, it was done so roughly that a child would have noticed it if the picture had been hung in a better light. I had the over-painting removed by a good man, and underneath there was that group of wolves depicted. Well, one of these wolves must have escaped, got into Hal's Planting, and scared an old woman or two; that would start a story, and human mendacity would do the rest.'

'Yes,' said Guerdon meditatively, 'that doesn't sound improbable. But why did your great-grandfather have the wolves painted out?'

SATURDAY MORNING was fine, but very hot and sultry. After breakfast, when Sir Edric had driven off to Challonsea, Andrew Guerdon settled himself in a comfortable chair in the smoking-room. The contents of the corner cupboard were piled up on a table by his side. He lit his pipe and began to go through the papers and put them in order. He had been at work about a quarter of an hour when the butler entered rather abruptly, looking pale and disturbed.

'In Sir Edric's absence, sir, it was thought that I had better come to you for advice. There's been an awful thing happened.'

'Well?'

'They've found a corpse in Hal's Planting about half an hour ago. It's the body of an old man, John Marsh, who used to live in the village. He seems to have died in some kind of a fit. They were bringing it here, but I had it taken down to the village where his cottage is. Then I sent to the police and to a doctor.'

There was a moment or two's silence before Guerdon answered.

'This is a terrible thing. I don't know of anything else that you could do. Stop; if the police want to see the spot where the body was found, I think that Sir Edric would like them to have every facility.'

'Quite so, sir.'

'And no one else must be allowed there.'

'No, sir. Thank you.'

The butler withdrew.

Guerdon arose from his chair and began to pace up and down the room

'What an impressive thing a coincidence is!' he thought to himself. 'Last night the whole of the Hal's Planting story seemed to me not worth consideration. But this second death there— it can be only coincidence. What else could it be?'

The question would not leave him. What else could it be? Had that dead man seen something there and died in sheer terror of it? Had Sir Edric really heard something when he spent that night there alone? He returned to his work, but he found that he got on with it but slowly. Every now and then his mind wandered back to the subject of Hal's Planting. His doubts annoyed him. It was unscientific and unmodern of him to feel any perplexity, because a natural and rational explanation was possible; he was annoyed with himself for being perplexed.

After luncheon he strolled round the grounds and smoked a cigar. He noticed that a thick bank of dark, slate-coloured clouds was gathering in the west. The air was very still. In a remote corner of the garden a big heap of weeds was burning; the smoke went up perfectly straight. On the top of the heap light flames danced; they were like the ghosts of flames in the strange

light. A few big drops of rain fell. The small shower did not last for five seconds. Guerdon glanced at his watch. Sir Edric would be back in an hour, and he wanted to finish his work with the papers before Sir Edric's return, so he went back into the house once more.

He picked up the first document that came to hand. As he did so, another, smaller, and written on parchment, which had been folded in with it, dropped out. He began to read the parchment; it was written in faded ink, and the parchment itself was yellow and in many places stained. It was the confession of the third baronet— he could tell that by the date upon it. It told the story of that night when he and Dr. Dennison went together carrying a burden through the long garden out into the orchard that skirts the north side of the park, and then across a field to a small, dark plantation. It told how he made a vow to God and did not keep it. These were the last words of the confession:

'Already upon me has the punishment fallen, and the devil's wolves do seem to hunt me in my sleep nightly. But I know that there is worse to come. The thing that I took to Hal's Planting is dead. Yet will it come back again to the Hall, and then will the Vanquerests be at an end. This writing I have committed to chance, neither showing it nor hiding it, and leaving it to chance if any man shall read it.'

Underneath there was a line written in darker ink, and in quite a different handwriting. It was dated fifteen years later, and the initials R.D. were appended to it:

'It is not dead. I do not think that it will ever die.'

When Andrew Guerdon had finished reading this document, he looked slowly round the room. The subject had got on his nerves, and he was almost expecting to see something. Then he did his best to pull himself together. The first question he put to himself was this: 'Has Ted ever seen this? Obviously he had not. If he had, he could not have taken the tradition of Hal's Planting so lightly, nor have spoken of it so freely. Besides, he would either have mentioned the document to Guerdon, or he would have kept it carefully concealed. He would not have allowed him to come across it casually in that way. 'Ted must never see it,' thought Guerdon to himself. He then remembered the pile of weeds he had seen burning in the garden, He put the parchment in his pocket, and hurried out. There was no one about. He spread the parchment on the top of the pile, and waited until it was entirely consumed. Then he went back to the smoking-room; he felt easier now.

'Yes,' thought Guerdon, 'if Ted had first of all heard of the finding of that body, and then had read that document, I believe that he would have gone mad. Things that come near us affect us deeply.'

Guerdon himself was much moved. He clung steadily to reason; he felt himself able to give a natural explanation all through, and yet he was nervous. The net of coincidence had closed in around him; the mention in Sir Edric's confession of the prophecy which had suubsequently become traditional in the village alarmed him. And what did that last line mean? He supposed that R.D. must be the initials of Dr. Dennison. What did he mean by saying that the thing was not dead? Did he mean that it had not really been killed, that it had been gifted with some preternatural strength and vitality and had survived, though Sir Edric did not know it? He recalled what he had said about the prolongation of the lives of such things. If it still survived, why had it never been seen? Had it joined to the wild hardiness of the beast a cunning that was human— or more than human? How could it have lived? There was water in the caves, he reflected, and food could have been secured— a wild beast's food. Or did Dr. Dennison mean that though the thing itself was dead, its wraith survived and haunted the place? He wondered how the doctor had found Sir Edric's confession, and why he had written that hue at the end of it. As he sat thinking, a low rumble of thunder in the distance startled him. He felt a touch of panic— a sudden impulse to leave Mansteth at once and, if possible, to take Ted with him. Ray could never live there. He went over the whole thing in his mind again and again, at one time calm and argumentative about it, and at another shaken by blind horror.

Sir Edric, on his return from Challonsea a few minutes afterwards, came straight to the smoking-room where Guerdon was. He looked tired and depressed. He began to speak at once:

'You needn't tell me about it— about John Marsh. I heard about it in the village.'

'Did you? It's a painful occurrence, although, of course—'

'Stop. Don't go into it. Anything can be explained— I know that'

'I went through those papers and account-books while you were away. Most of them may just as well be destroyed; but there are a few— I put them aside there— which might be kept. There was nothing of any interest.'

'Thanks; I'm much obliged to you.'

'Oh, and look here, I've got an idea. I've been examining the plans of the house, and I'm coming round to your opinion. There are some alterations which should be made, and yet I'm afraid that they'd make the place look patched and renovated. It wouldn't be a bad thing to know what Ray thought about it.'

'That's impossible. The workmen come on Monday, and we can't consult her before then. Besides, I have a general notion what she would like.'

'We could catch the night express to town at Challonsea, and—'

Sir Edric rose from his seat angrily and hit the table.

'Good God! don't sit there hunting up excuses to cover my cowardice, and making it easy for me to bolt. What do you suppose the villagers would say, and what would my own servants say, if I ran away to-night? I am a coward— I know it. I'm horribly afraid. But I'm not going to act like a coward if I can help it.'

'Now, my dear chap, don't excite yourself. If you are going to care at all— to care as much as the conventional damn— for what people say, you'll have no peace in life. And I don't believe you're afraid. What are you afraid of?'

Sir Edric paced once or twice up and down the room, and then sat down again before replying.

'Look here, Andrew, I'll make a clean breast of it. I've always laughed at the tradition; I forced myself, as it seemed at least, to disprove it by spending a night in Hal's Planting; I took the pains even to make a theory which would account for its origin. All the time I had a sneaking, stifled belief in it. With the help of my reason I crushed that; but now my reason has thrown up the job, and I'm afraid. I'm afraid of the Undying Thing that is in Hal's Planting. I heard it that night. John Marsh saw it last night— they took me to see the body, and the face was awful; and I believe that one day it will come from Hal's Planting—'

'Yes,' interrupted Guerdon, 'I know. And at present I believe as much. Last night we laughed at the whole thing, and we shall live to laugh at it again, and be ashamed of ourselves for a couple of superstitious old women. I fancy that beliefs are affected by weather— there's thunder in the air.'

'No,' said Sir Edric, 'my belief has come to stay.'

'And what are you going to do?'

'I'm going to test it. On Monday I can begin to get to work, and then I'll blow up Hal's Planting with dynamite. After that we shan't need to believe— we shall *know*. And now let's dismiss the subject. Come down into the billiard-room and have a game. Until Monday I won't think of the thing again.'

Long before dinner. Sir Edric's depression seemed to have completely vanished. At dinner he was boisterous and amused. Afterwards he told stories and was interesting.

IT WAS late at night; the terrific storm that was raging outside had awoke Guerdon from sleep. Hopeless of getting to sleep again, he had arisen and dressed, and now sat in the window-seat watching the storm. He had never

seen anything like it before; and every now and then the sky seemed to be torn across as if by hands of white fire. Suddenly he heard a tap at his door, and looked round. Sir Edric had already entered; he also had dressed. He spoke in a curious, subdued voice.

'I thought you wouldn't be able to sleep through this. Do you remember that I shut and fastened the dining-room window?'

'Yes, I remember it.'

'Well, come in here.'

Sir Edric led the way to his room, which was immediately over the dining-room. By leaning out of window they could see that the dining-room window was open wide.

'Burglar,' said Guerdon meditatively.

'No,' Sir Edric answered, still speaking in a hushed voice. 'It is the Undying Thing— it has come for me.'

He snatched up the candle, and made towards the staircase; Guerdon caught up the loaded revolver which always lay on the table beside Sir Edric's bed and followed him. Both men ran down the staircase as though there were not another moment to lose. Sir Edric rushed at the dining-room door, opened it a little, and looked in. Then he turned to Guerdon, who was just behind him.

'Go back to your room,' he said authoritatively.

'I won't,' said Guerdon. 'Why? What is it?'

Suddenly the corners of Sir Edric's mouth shot outward into the hideous grin of terror.

'It's there! It's there!' he gasped.

'Then I come in with you.'

'Go back!'

With a sudden movement, Sir Edric thrust Guerdon away from the door, and then, quick as light, darted in, and locked the door behind him.

Guerdon bent down and listened. He heard Sir Edric say in a firm voice:

'Who are you? What are you?'

Then followed a heavy, snorting breathing, a low, vibrating growl, an awful cry, a scuffle.

Then Guerdon flung himself at the door. He kicked at the lock, but it would not give way. At last he fired his revolver at it. Then he managed to force his way into the room. It was perfectly empty. Overhead he could hear footsteps; the noise had awakened the servants; they were standing, tremulous, on the upper landing.

Through the open window access to the garden was easy. Guerdon did not wait to get help; and in all probability none of the servants could have been persuaded to come with him. He climbed out alone, and, as if by some blind

impulse, started to run as hard as he could in the direction of Hal's Planting. He knew that Sir Edric would be found there.

But when he got within a hundred yards of the plantation, he stopped. There had been a great flash of lightning, and he saw that it had struck one of the trees. Flames darted about the plantation as the dry bracken caught. Suddenly, in the light of another flash, he saw the whole of the trees fling their heads upwards; then came a deafening crash, and the ground slipped under him, and he was flung forward on his face. The plantation had collapsed, fallen through into the caves beneath it. Guerdon slowly regained his feet; he was surprised to find that he was unhurt. He walked on a few steps, and then fell again; this time he had fainted away.

End