PAST MASTERS 188

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

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1: Green Branches

Fiona Macleod

William Sharp, 1855-1905
In: *The Sin-Eater*, as by Fiona Macleod, 1895

IN THE YEAR that followed the death of Manus MacCodrum, James Achanna saw nothing of his brother Gloom. He might have thought himself alone in the world, of all his people, but for a letter that came to him out of the west. True, he had never accepted the common opinion that his brothers had both been drowned on that night when Anne Gillespie left Eilanmore with Manus.

In the first place, he had nothing of that inner conviction concerning the fate of Gloom which he had concerning that of Marcus; in the next, had he not heard the sound of the *feadan*, which no one that he knew played except Gloom; and, for further token, was not the tune that which he hated above all others— the "Dance of the Dead"— for who but Gloom would be playing that, he hating it so, and the hour being late, and no one else on Eilanmore? It was no sure thing that the dead had not come back; but the more he thought of it the more Achanna believed that his sixth brother was still alive. Of this, however, he said nothing to any one.

It was as a man set free that, at last, after long waiting and patient trouble with the disposal of all that was left of the Achanna heritage, he left the island. It was a gray memory for him. The bleak moorland of it, the blight that had lain so long and so often upon the crops, the rains that had swept the isle for gray days and gray weeks and gray months, the sobbing of the sea by day and its dark moan by night, its dim relinquishing sigh in the calm of dreary ebbs, its hollow, baffling roar when the storm-shadow swept up out of the sea— one and all oppressed him, even in memory. He had never loved the island, even when it lay green and fragrant in the green and white seas under white and blue skies, fresh and sweet as an Eden of the sea.

He had ever been lonely and weary, tired of the mysterious shadow that lay upon his folk, caring little for any of his brothers except the eldest— long since mysteriously gone out of the ken of man— and almost hating Gloom, who had ever borne him a grudge because of his beauty, and because of his likeness to and reverent heed for Alison. Moreover, ever since he had come to love Katreen Macarthur, the daughter of Donald Macarthur who lived in Sleat of Skye, he had been eager to live near her; the more eager as he knew that Gloom loved the girl also, and wished for success not only for his own sake, but so as to put a slight upon his younger brother.

So, when at last he left the island, he sailed southward gladly. He was leaving Eilanmore; he was bound to a new home in Skye, and perhaps he was

going to his long-delayed, long dreamed-of happiness. True, Katreen was not pledged to him; he did not even know for sure if she loved him. He thought, hoped, dreamed, almost believed that she did; but then there was her cousin Ian, who had long wooed her, and to whom old Donald Macarthur had given his blessing. Nevertheless, his heart would have been lighter than it had been for long, but for two things. First, there was the letter. Some weeks earlier he had received it, not recognizing the writing, because of the few letters he had ever seen, and, moreover, as it was in a feigned hand. With difficulty he had deciphered the manuscript, plain printed though it was. It ran thus:

"WELL, Sheumais, my brother, it is wondering if I am dead, you will be. Maybe ay, and maybe no. But I send you this writing to let you see that I know all you do and think of. So you are going to leave Eilanmore without an Achanna upon it? And you will be going to Sleat in Skye? Well, let me be telling you this thing. *Do not go*. I see blood there. And there is this, too: neither you nor any man shall take Katreen away from me. *You* know that; and Ian Macarthur knows it; and Katreen knows it; and that holds whether I am alive or dead. I say to you: do not go. It will be better for you, and for all. Ian Macarthur is away in the north-sea with the whaler-captain who came to us at Eilanmore, and will not be back for three months yet. It will be better for him not to come back. But if he comes back he will have to reckon with the man who says that Katreen Macarthur is his. I would rather not have two men to speak to, and one my brother. It does not matter to you where I am. I want no money just now. But put aside my portion for me. Have it ready for me against the day I call for it. I will not be patient that day; so have it ready for me. In the place that I am I am content. You will be saying: why is my brother away in a remote place (I will say this to you: that it is not further north than St. Kilda nor further south than the Mull of Cantyrel), and for what reason? That is between me and silence. But perhaps you think of Anne sometimes. Do you know that she lies under the green grass? And of Manus MacCodrum? They say that he swam out into the sea and was drowned; and they whisper of the seal-blood, though the minister is wrath with them for that. He calls it a madness. Well, I was there at that madness, and I played to it on my *feadan*. And now, Sheumais, can you be thinking of what the tune was that I played?

"Your brother, who waits his own day,

"GLOOM.

"Do not be forgetting this thing: *I would rather not be playing the 'Damhsa-na-Mairbh.'* It was an ill hour for Manus when he heard the 'Dan-nan-Ron'; it was the song of his soul, that; and yours is the 'Davsa-na-Mairv.' "

This letter was ever in his mind: this, and what happened in the gloaming when he sailed away for Skye in the herring-smack of two men who lived at Armadale in Sleat. For, as the boat moved slowly out of the haven, one of the men asked him if he was sure that no one was left upon the island; for he thought he had seen a figure on the rocks, waving a black scarf. Achanna shook his head; but just then his companion cried that at that moment he had seen

the same thing. So the smack was put about, and when she was moving slowly through the haven again, Achanna sculled ashore in the little coggly punt. In vain he searched here and there, calling loudly again and again. Both men could hardly have been mistaken, he thought. If there were no human creature on the island, and if their eyes had not played them false, who could it be? The wraith of Marcus, mayhap; or might it be the old man himself (his father), risen to bid farewell to his youngest son, or to warn him?

It was no use to wait longer, so, looking often behind him, he made his way to the boat again, and rowed slowly out toward the smack.

Jerk— jerk— jerk across the water came, low but only too loud for him, the opening motif of the "Damhsa-na-Mairbh." A horror came upon him, and he drove the boat through the water so that the sea splashed over the bows. When he came on deck he cried in a hoarse voice to the man next him to put up the helm, and let the smack swing to the wind.

"There is no one there, Callum Campbell," he whispered.

"And who is it that will be making that strange music?"

"What music?"

"Sure it has stopped now, but I heard it clear, and so did Anndra MacEwan. It was like the sound of a reed pipe, and the tune was an eery one at that."

"It was the Dance of the Dead."

"And who will be playing that?" asked the man, with fear in his eyes.

"No living man."

"No living man?"

"No. I'm thinking it will be one of my brothers who was drowned here, and by the same token that it is Gloom, for he played upon the *feadan*. But if not, then— then—"

The two men waited in breathless silence, each trembling with superstitious fear; but at last the elder made a sign to Achanna to finish.

"Then— it will be the Kelpie."

"Is there— is there one of the— cave-women here?"

"It is said; and you know of old that the Kelpie sings or plays a strange tune to wile seamen to their death."

At that moment the fantastic, jerking music came loud and clear across the bay. There was a horrible suggestion in it, as if dead bodies were moving along the ground with long jerks, and crying and laughing wild. It was enough; the men, Campbell and MacEwan, would not now have waited longer if Achanna had offered them all he had in the world. Nor were they, or he, out of their panic haste till the smack stood well out at sea, and not a sound could be heard from Eilanmore.

They stood watching, silent. Out of the dusky mass that lay in the seaward way to the north came a red gleam. It was like an eye staring after them with blood-red glances.

"What is that, Achanna?" asked one of the men at last.

"It looks as though a fire had been lighted in the house up in the island. The door and the window must be open. The fire must be fed with wood, for no peats would give that flame; and there were none lighted when I left. To my knowing, there was no wood for burning except the wood of the shelves and the bed."

"And who would be doing that?"

"I know of that no more than you do, Callum Campbell."

No more was said, and it was a relief to all when the last glimmer of the light was absorbed in the darkness.

At the end of the voyage Campbell and MacEwan were well pleased to be quit of their companion; not so much because he was moody and distraught as because they feared that a spell was upon him— a fate in the working of which they might become involved. It needed no vow of the one to the other for them to come to the conclusion that they would never land on Eilanmore, or, if need be, only in broad daylight, and never alone.

THE DAYS went well for James Achanna, where he made his home at Ranza-beag, on Ranza Water in the Sleat of Skye. The farm was small but good, and he hoped that with help and care he would soon have the place as good a farm as there was in all Skye.

Donald Macarthur did not let him see much of Katreen, but the old man was no longer opposed to him. Sheumais must wait till Ian Macarthur came back again, which might be any day now. For sure, James Achanna of Ranza-beag was a very different person from the youngest of the Achanna-folk, who held by on lonely Eilanmore; moreover, the old man could not but think with pleasure that it would be well to see Katreen able to walk over the whole land of Ranza, from the cairn at the north of his own Ranza-Mòr to the burn at the south of Ranza-beag, and know it for her own.

But Achanna was ready to wait. Even before he had the secret word of Katreen he knew from her beautiful dark eyes that she loved him. As the weeks went by they managed to meet often, and at last Katreen told him that she loved him too, and would have none but him; but that they must wait till Ian came back, because of the pledge given to him by her father. They were days of joy for him. Through many a hot noontide hour, through many a gloaming he went as one in a dream. Whenever he saw a birch swaying in the wind, or a wave leaping upon Loch Liath, that was near his home, or passed a

bush covered with wild roses, or saw the moonbeams lying white on the boles of the pines, he thought of Katreen— his fawn for grace, and so lithe and tall, with sunbrown face and wavy, dark mass of hair, and shadowy eyes and rowan-red lips. It is said that there is a god clothed in shadow who goes to and fro among the human kind, putting silence between lovers with his waving hands, and breathing a chill out of his cold breath, and leaving a gulf of deep water flowing between them because of the passing of his feet. That shadow never came their way. Their love grew as a flower fed by rains and warmed by sunlight.

When midsummer came, and there was no sign of Ian Macarthur, it was already too late. Katreen had been won.

During the summer months it was the custom for Katreen and two of the farm-girls to go up Maol-Ranza, to reside at the shealing of Cnoc-an-Fhraoch: and this because of the hill-pasture for the sheep. Cnoc-an-Fhraoch is a round, boulder-studded hill covered with heather, which has a precipitous corrie on each side, and in front slopes down to Lochan Fraoch, a lochlet surrounded by dark woods. Behind the hill, or great hillock rather, lay the shealing. At each week-end Katreen went down to Ranza-Mòr, and on every Monday morning at sunrise returned to her heather-girt eyry. It was on one of these visits that she endured a cruel shock. Her father told her that she must marry some one else than Sheumais Achanna. He had heard words about him which made a union impossible, and indeed, he hoped that the man would leave Ranza-beag. In the end he admitted that what he had heard was to the effect that Achanna was under a doom of some kind, that he was involved in a blood feud; and, moreover, that he was fey. The old man would not be explicit as to the person from whom his information came, but hinted that he was a stranger of rank, probably a laird of the isles. Besides this, there was word of Ian Macarthur. He was at Thurso, in the far north, and would be in Skye before long, and he— her father— had written to him that he might wed Katreen as soon as was practicable.

"Do you see that lintie yonder, father?" was her response to this.

"Ay, lass, and what about the birdeen?"

"Well, when she mates with a hawk, so will I be mating with Ian Macarthur, but not till then."

With that she turned and left the house, and went back to Cnoc-an-Fhraoch. On the way she met Achanna.

It was that night that for the first time he swam across Lochan Fraoch to meet Katreen.

The quickest way to reach the shealing was to row across the lochlet, and then ascend by a sheep-path that wound through the hazel copses at the base

of the hill. Fully half an hour was thus saved, because of the steepness of the precipitous corries to right and left. A boat was kept for this purpose, but it was fastened to a shore-boulder by a padlocked iron chain, the key of which was kept by Donald Macarthur. Latterly he had refused to let this key out of his possession. For one thing, no doubt, he believed he could thus restrain Achanna from visiting his daughter. The young man could not approach the shealing from either side without being seen.

But that night, soon after the moon was whitening slow in the dark, Katreen stole down to the hazel copse and awaited the coming of her lover. The lochan was visible from almost any point on Cnoc-an-Fhraoch, as well as from the south side. To cross it in a boat unseen, if any watcher were near, would be impossible, nor could even a swimmer hope to escape notice unless in the gloom of night or, mayhap, in the dusk. When, however, she saw, half-way across the water, a spray of green branches slowly moving athwart the surface, she knew that Sheumais was keeping his tryst. If, perchance, any one else saw, he or she would never guess that those derelict rowan branches shrouded Sheumais Achanna.

It was not till the estray had drifted close to the ledge, where, hid among the bracken and the hazel undergrowth, she awaited him, that Katreen descried the face of her lover, as with one hand he parted the green sprays, and stared longingly and lovingly at the figure he could just discern in the dim, fragrant obscurity.

And as it was this night so was it many of the nights that followed. Katreen spent the days as in a dream. Not even the news of her cousin Ian's return disturbed her much.

One day the inevitable meeting came. She was at Ranza-Mòr, and when a shadow came into the dairy where she was standing she looked up, and saw Ian before her. She thought he appeared taller and stronger than ever, though still not so tall as Sheumais, who would appear slim beside the Herculean Skye man. But as she looked at his close curling black hair and thick bull-neck and the sullen eyes in his dark wind-red face, she wondered that she had ever tolerated him at all.

He broke the ice at once.

"Tell me, Katreen, are you glad to see me back again?"

"I am glad that you are home once more safe and sound."

"And will you make it my home for me by coming to live with me, as I've asked you again and again?"

"No: as I've told you again and again."

He gloomed at her angrily for a few moments before he resumed.

"I will be asking you this one thing, Katreen, daughter of my father's brother: do you love that man Achanna who lives at Ranza-beag?"

"You may ask the wind why it is from the east or the west, but it won't tell you. You're not the wind's master."

"If you think I will let this man take you away from me, you are thinking a foolish thing."

"And you saying a foolisher."

"Ay?"

"Ay, sure. What could you do, Ian Mhic Ian? At the worst, you could do no more than kill James Achanna. What then? I too would die. You can not separate us. I would not marry you, now, though you were the last man in the world and I the last woman."

"You're a fool, Katreen Macarthur. Your father has promised you to me, and I tell you this: if you love Achanna you'll save his life only by letting him go away from here. I promise you he will not be here long."

"Ay, you promise *me*; but you will not say that thing to James Achanna's face. You are a coward."

With a muttered oath the man turned on his heel.

"Let him beware o' me, and you, too, Katreen-mo-nighean-donn. I swear it by my mother's grave and by St. Martin's Cross that you will be mine by hook or by crook."

The girl smiled scornfully. Slowly she lifted a milk-pail.

"It would be a pity to waste the good milk, Ian-gorach, but if you don't go it is I that will be emptying the pail on you, and then you will be as white without as your heart is within."

"So you call me witless, do you? *Ian-gorach*! Well, we shall be seeing as to that. And as for the milk, there will be more than milk spilt because of *you*, Katreen-donn."

From that day, though neither Sheumais nor Katreen knew of it, a watch was set upon Achanna.

It could not be long before their secret was discovered, and it was with a savage joy overmastering his sullen rage that Ian Macarthur knew himself the discoverer, and conceived his double vengeance. He dreamed, gloatingly, on both the black thoughts that roamed like ravenous beasts through the solitudes of his heart. But he did not dream that another man was filled with hate because of Katreen's lover, another man who had sworn to make her his own, the man who, disguised, was known in Armadale as Donald McLean, and in the north isles would have been hailed as Gloom Achanna.

There had been steady rain for three days, with a cold, raw wind. On the fourth the sun shone, and set in peace. An evening of quiet beauty followed,

warm, fragrant, dusky from the absence of moon or star, though the thin veils of mist promised to disperse as the night grew.

There were two men that eve in the undergrowth on the south side of the lochlet. Sheumais had come earlier than his wont. Impatient for the dusk, he could scarce await the waning of the afterglow; surely, he thought, he might venture. Suddenly his ears caught the sound of cautious footsteps. Could it be old Donald, perhaps with some inkling of the way in which his daughter saw her lover in despite of all; or, mayhap, might it be Ian Macarthur, tracking him as a hunter stalking a stag by the water-pools? He crouched, and waited. In a few minutes he saw Ian carefully picking his way. The man stooped as he descried the green branches; smiled as, with a low rustling, he raised them from the ground.

Meanwhile yet another man watched and waited, though on the further side of the lochan, where the hazel copses were. Gloom Achanna half hoped, half feared the approach of Katreen. It would be sweet to see her again, sweet to slay her lover before her eyes, brother to him though he was. But, there was the chance that she might descry him, and, whether recognizingly or not, warn the swimmer.

So it was that he had come there before sundown, and now lay crouched among the bracken underneath a projecting mossy ledge close upon the water, where it could scarce be that she or any should see him.

As the gloaming deepened a great stillness reigned. There was no breath of wind. A scarce audible sigh prevailed among the spires of the heather. The churring of a night-jar throbbed through the darkness. Somewhere a corncrake called its monotonous crek-craik; the dull, harsh sound emphasizing the utter stillness. The pinging of the gnats hovering over and among the sedges made an incessant murmur through the warm, sultry air.

There was a splash once as of a fish. Then, silence. Then a lower but more continuous splash, or rather wash of water. A slow susurrus rustled through the dark.

Where he lay among the fern Gloom Achanna slowly raised his head, stared through the shadows and listened intently. If Katreen were waiting there she was not near.

Noiselessly he slid into the water. When he rose it was under a clump of green branches. These he had cut and secured three hours before. With his left hand he swam slowly, or kept his equipoise in the water; with his right he guided the heavy rowan bough. In his mouth were two objects, one long and thin and dark, the other with an occasional glitter as of a dead fish.

His motion was scarcely perceptible. None the less he was near the middle of the loch almost as soon as another clump of green branches. Doubtless the swimmer beneath it was confident that he was now safe from observation.

The two clumps of green branches drew nearer. The smaller seemed a mere estray, a spray blown down by the recent gale. But all at once the larger clump jerked awkwardly and stopped. Simultaneously a strange, low strain of music came from the other.

The strain ceased. The two clumps of green branches remained motionless. Slowly, at last, the larger moved forward. It was too dark for the swimmer to see if any one lay hid behind the smaller. When he reached it he thrust aside the leaves.

It was as though a great salmon leaped. There was a splash, and a narrow, dark body shot through the gloom. At the end of it something gleamed. Then suddenly there was a savage struggle. The inanimate green branches tore this way and that, and surged and swirled. Gasping cries came from the leaves. Again and again the gleaming thing leaped. At the third leap an awful scream shrilled through the silence. The echo of it wailed thrice, with horrible distinctness, in the corrie beyond Cnoc-an-Fhraoch. Then, after a faint splashing, there was silence once more. One clump of green branches drifted slowly up the lochlet. The other moved steadily toward the place whence, a brief while before, it had stirred.

Only one thing lived in the heart of Gloom Achanna— the joy of his exultation. He had killed his brother Sheumais. He had always hated him because of his beauty; of late he had hated him because he had stood between him, Gloom, and Katreen Macarthur— because he had become her lover. They were all dead now except himself, all the Achannas. He was "Achanna." When the day came that he would go back to Galloway, there would be a magpie on the first birk, and a screaming jay on the first rowan, and a croaking raven on the first fir; ay, he would be their suffering, though they knew nothing of him meanwhile! He would be Achanna of Achanna again. Let those who would stand in his way beware. As for Katreen: perhaps he would take her there, perhaps not. He smiled.

These thoughts were the wandering fires in his brain while he slowly swam shoreward under the floating green branches, and as he disengaged himself from them and crawled upward through the bracken. It was at this moment that a third man entered the water from the further shore.

Prepared as he was to come suddenly upon Katreen, Gloom was startled when, in a place of dense shadow, a hand touched his shoulder, and her voice whispered:

"Sheumais, Sheumais!"

The next moment she was in his arms. He could feel her heart beating against his side.

"What was it, Sheumais? What was that awful cry?" she whispered.

For answer he put his lips to hers, and kissed her again and again.

The girl drew back. Some vague instinct warned her.

"What is it, Sheumais? Why don't you speak?"

He drew her close again.

"Pulse of my heart, it is I who love you, I who love you best of all; it is I, Gloom Achanna!"

With a cry she struck him full in the face. He staggered, and in that moment she freed herself.

"You *coward*!"

"Katreen, I—"

"Come no nearer. If you do, it will be the death of you!"

"The death o' me! Ah, bonnie fool that you are, and is it you that will be the death o' me?"

"Ay, Gloom Achanna, for I have but to scream and Sheumais will be here, an' he would kill you like a dog if he knew you did me harm."

"Ah, but if there were no Sheumais, or any man to come between me an' my will!"

"Then there would be a woman! Ay, if you overbore me I would strangle you with my hair, or fix my teeth in your false throat!"

"I was not for knowing you were such a wild-cat; but I'll tame you yet, my lass! Aha, wild-cat!" And as he spoke he laughed low.

"It is a true word, Gloom of the black heart. I am a wild-cat, and, like a wild-cat, I am not to be seized by a fox; and that you will be finding to your cost, by the holy St. Bridget! But now, off with you, brother of my man!"

"Your man— ha! ha!"

"Why do you laugh?"

"Sure, I am laughing at a warm, white lass like yourself having a dead man as your lover!"

"A— dead— man?"

No answer came. The girl shook with a new fear. Slowly she drew closer, till her breath fell warm against the face of the other. He spoke at last:

"Ay, a dead man."

"It is a lie."

"Where would you be that you were not hearing his good-by? I'm thinking it was loud enough!"

"It is a lie— it is a lie!"

"No, it is no lie. Sheumais is cold enough now. He's low among the weeds by now. Ay, by now: down there in the lochan."

"*What*— you, *you devil*! Is it for killing your own brother you would be?"

"I killed no one. He died his own way. Maybe the cramp took him. Maybe— maybe a kelpie gripped him. I watched. I saw him beneath the green branches. He was dead before he died. I saw it in the white face o' him. Then he sank. He's dead. Sheumais is dead. Look here, girl, I've always loved you. I swore the oath upon you. You're mine. Sure, you're mine now, Katreen! It is loving you I am! It will be a south wind for you from this day, muirnean mochree! See here, I'll show you how I—"

"Back— back— *murderer*!"

"Be stopping that foolishness now, Katreen Macarthur! By the Book, I am tired of it. I am loving you, and it's having you for mine I am! And if you won't come to me like the dove to its mate, I'll come to you like the hawk to the dove!"

With a spring he was upon her. In vain she strove to beat him back. His arms held her as a stoat grips a rabbit.

He pulled her head back, and kissed her throat till the strangulating breath sobbed against his ear. With a last despairing effort she screamed the name of the dead man: "*Sheumais! Sheumais! Sheumais!*" The man who struggled with her laughed.

"Ay, call away! The herrin' will be coming through the bracken as soon as Sheumais comes to your call! Ah, it is mine you are now, Katreen! He's dead and cold— an' you'd best have a living man— an'— "

She fell back, her balance lost in the sudden releasing. What did it mean? Gloom still stood there, but as one frozen. Through the darkness she saw, at last, that a hand gripped his shoulder; behind him a black mass vaguely obtruded.

For some moments there was absolute silence. Then a hoarse voice came out of the dark:

"You will be knowing now who it is, Gloom Achanna!"

The voice was that of Sheumais, who lay dead in the lochan. The murderer shook as in a palsy. With a great effort, slowly he turned his head. He saw a white splatch, the face of the corpse; in this white splatch flamed two burning eyes, the eyes of the soul of the brother whom he had slain.

He reeled, staggered as a blind man, and, free now of that awful clasp, swayed to and fro as one drunken.

Slowly Sheumais raised an arm and pointed downward through the wood toward the lochan. Still pointing, he moved swiftly forward.

With a cry like a beast, Gloom Achanna swung to one side, stumbled, rose, and leaped into the darkness.

For some minutes Sheumais and Katreen stood, silent, apart, listening to the crashing sound of his flight— the race of the murderer against the pursuing shadow of the Grave.

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2: The Mystery of the Semi-Detached

Edith Nesbit

1886–1924

In: *Grim Tales*, 1893

He was waiting for her, he had been waiting an hour and a half in a dusty suburban lane, with a row of big elms on one side and some eligible building sites on the other— and far away to the south-west the twinkling yellow lights of the Crystal Palace. It was not quite like a country lane, for it had a pavement and lamp-posts, but it was not a bad place for a meeting all the same: and farther up, towards the cemetery, it was really quite rural, and almost pretty, especially in twilight But twilight had long deepened into the night, and still he waited. He loved her, and he was engaged to be married to her, with the complete disapproval of every reasonable person who had been consulted. And this half-clandestine meeting was tonight to take the place of the grudgingly sanctioned weekly interview— because a certain rich uncle was visiting at her house, and her mother was not the woman to acknowledge to a moneyed uncle, who might "go off" any day, a match so deeply ineligible as hers with him.

So he waited for her, and the chill of an unusually severe May evening entered into his bones.

The policeman passed him with a surly response to his "Good night". The bicyclists went by him like grey ghosts with foghorns; and it was nearly ten o'clock, and she had not come.

He shrugged his shoulders and turned towards his lodgings. His road led him by her house— desirable, commodious, semi-detached— and he walked slowly as he neared it. She might, even now, be coming out. But she was not. There was no sign of movement about the house, no sign of life, no lights even in the windows. And her people were not early people.

He paused by the gate, wondering.

Then he noticed that the front door was open— wide open— and the street lamp shone a little way into the dark hall. There was something about all this that did not please him— that scared him a little, indeed. The house had a gloomy and deserted air. It was obviously impossible that it harboured a rich uncle. The old man must have left early. In which case—

He walked up the path of patent glazed dies, and listened. No sign of life. He passed into the hall. There was no light anywhere. Where was everybody, and why was the front door open? There was no one in the drawing room, the dining room and the study (nine feet by seven) were equally blank. Everyone was out, evidently. But the unpleasant sense that he was, perhaps, not the first

casual visitor to walk through that open door impelled him to look through the house before he went away and closed it after him. So he went upstairs, and at the door of the first bedroom he came to he struck a wax match, as he had done in the sitting rooms. Even as he did so he felt that he was not alone. And he was prepared to see something but for what he saw he was not prepared. For what he saw lay on the bed, in a white loose gown— and it was his sweetheart, and its throat was cut from ear to ear. He doesn't know what happened then, nor how he got downstairs and into the street; but he got out somehow, and the policeman found him in a fit, under the lamp-post at the corner of the street He couldn't speak when they picked him up, and he passed the night in the police cells, because the policeman had seen plenty of drunken men before, but never one in a fit.

The next morning he was better, though still very white and shaky. But the tale he told the magistrate was convincing, and they sent a couple of constables with him to her house.

There was no crowd about it as he had fancied there would be, and the blinds were not down.

He held on to the door-post for support...

"SHE'S ALL RIGHT, you see," said the constable, who had found him under the lamp. "I told you you was drunk, but you would know best— "

When he was alone with her he told her— not all— for that would not bear telling— but how he had come into the commodious semi-detached, and how he had found the door open and the lights out, and that he had been into that long back room facing the stairs, and had seen something— in even trying to hint at which he turned sick and broke down and had to have brandy given him.

"But, my dearest," she said, "I dare say the house was dark, for we were all at the Crystal Palace with my uncle, and no doubt the door was open, for the maids will run out if they're left. But you could not have been in that room, because I locked it when I came away, and the key was in my pocket. I dressed in a hurry and I left all my odds and ends lying about."

"I know," he said; "I saw a green scarf on a chair, and some long brown gloves, and a lot of hairpins and ribbons, and a prayerbook, and a lace handkerchief on the dressing table. Why, I even noticed the almanack on the mantelpiece— 21 October. At least it couldn't be that, because this is May. And yet it was. Your almanack is at 21 October, isn't it?"

"No, of course it isn't," she said, smiling rather anxiously; "but all the other things were just as you say. You must have had a dream, or a vision, or something."

He was a very ordinary, commonplace, City young man, and he didn't believe in visions, but he never rested day or night till he got his sweetheart and her mother away from that commodious semi-detached, and settled them in a quiet distant suburb. In the course of the removal he incidentally married her, and the mother went on living with them.

His nerves must have been a good bit shaken, because he was very queer for a long time, and was always enquiring if anyone had taken the desirable semi-detached; and when an old stockbroker with a family took it, he went the length of calling on the old gentleman and imploring him by all that he held dear, not to live in that fatal house.

"Why?" said the stockbroker, not unnaturally.

And then he got so vague and confused, between trying to tell why and trying not to tell why, that the stockbroker showed him out, and thanked his God he was not such a fool as to allow a lunatic to stand in the way of his taking that really remarkably cheap and desirable semi-detached residence.

Now the curious and quite inexplicable part of this story is that when she came down to breakfast on the morning of the 22 October she found him looking like death, with the morning paper in his hand. He caught hers— he couldn't speak, and pointed to the paper. And there she read that on the night of the 21st a young lady, the stockbroker's daughter, had been found, with her throat cut from ear to ear, on the bed in the long back bedroom facing the stairs of that desirable semi-detached.

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3: Tomorrow

Eugene O'Neill

1888-1953

Seven Arts, June 1917

The only known published short story by the famous American playwright whose major works were The Iceman Cometh*,* A Long Day's Journey into Night*,* Mourning Becomes Electra*,* Desire Under the Elms*, and more.*

IT WAS BACK in my sailor days, in the winter of my great down-and-outness, that all this happened. In those years of wandering, to be broke and "on the beach" in some seaport or other of the world was no new experience; but this had been an unusually long period of inaction even for me. Six months before I had landed in New York after a voyage from Buenos Aires as able seaman on a British tramp. Since that time I had loafed around the water front, eking out an existence on a small allowance from my family, too lazy of body and mind, too indifferent to things in general, to ship to sea again or do anything else. I shared a small rear room with another "gentleman-ranker," Jimmy Anderson, an old friend of mine, over an all-night dive near South street known as Tommy the Priest's.

This is the story of Jimmy, my roommate, and it begins on a cold night in the early part of March. I had waited in Tommy the Priest's, hunched up on a chair near the stove in the back room, all the late afternoon until long after dark. My nerves were on edge as a result of a two days' carouse ensuing on the receipt of my weekly allowance. Now all that money was gone— over the bar— and the next few days gloomed up as a dreary, sober and hungry ordeal which must, barring miracles, be endured patiently or otherwise. Three or four others of the crowd I knew were sitting near me, equally sick and penniless. We stared gloomily before us, in listless attitudes, spitting dejectedly at the glowing paunch of the stove. Every now and then someone would come in bringing with him a chill of the freezing wind outside. We would all look up hopefully. No, only a stranger. Nothing in the way of hospitality to be expected from him. "Close that damned door!" we would growl in chorus and huddle closer to the stove, shivering, muttering disappointed curses. In mocking contrast the crowd at the bar were drinking, singing, arguing in each other's ears with loud, care-free voices. None of them noticed our existence.

Surely a bad night for Good Samaritans, I thought, and reflected with bitterness that I counted several in that jubilant throng who had eagerly accepted my favors of the two nights previous. Now they saw me and nodded— but that was all. Suddenly sick with human ingratitude, I got out of

my chair and, grumbling a surly "good-night, all" to the others, went out the side door and up the rickety stairs to our room— Jimmy's and mine.

The thought of spending a long evening alone in the room seemed intolerable to me. I lit the lamp and glanced around angrily. A fine hole! The two beds took up nearly all the space but Jimmy had managed to cram in, in front of the window, a small table on which stood his dilapidated typewriter. The typewriter, of course, was broken and wouldn't work. Jimmy was always going to have it fixed— tomorrow. But then Jimmy lived in a dream of tomorrows; and nothing he was ever associated with ever worked.

The lamp on the table threw a stream of light through the dirty window, revealing the fire-escape outside. Inside, on a shelf along the windowsill, a dyspeptic geranium plant sulked in a small red pot. This plant was Jimmy's garden and his joy. Even when he was too sick to wash his own face he never forgot to water it the first thing after getting up. It goes without saying, the silly thing never bloomed. Nothing that Jimmy loved ever bloomed; but he always hoped, in fact he was quite sure, it would eventually blossom out— in the dawn of some vague tomorrow.

For me it had value only as a symbol of Jimmy's everlasting futility, of his irritating inefficiency. However, at that period in my life, all flowers were yellow primroses and nothing more, and Jimmy's pet was out of place, I thought, and in the way.

Books were piled on the floor against the walls— and what books! Where Jimmy got them and what for, God only knows. He never read them, except a few pages at haphazard to put him to sleep. Yet there must have been fifty at least cluttering up the room— books about history, about journalism, about economics— books of impossible poetry and incredible prose, written by unknown authors and published by firms one had never heard of. He had a craze for buying them and never failed, on the days he was paid for the odd bits of work he did as occasional stenographer for a theatrical booking firm, to stagger weakly into Tommy's, very drunk, with two or three of these unreadable volumes clutched to his breast— books with titles like: "A Commentary on the Bulls of Pope Leo XIII," or "God and the Darwinian Theory" by John Jones, or "Sunflowers and Other Verses" by Lydia Smith. Think of it!

I used to grow wild with rage as I watched him showing them to Tommy, or Big John, if he was on, or to anyone else who would look and listen, with all the besotted pride in the world. I would think of the drinks and the food— kippered herring and bread and good Italian cheese— he might have purchased for the price of these dull works; and I would swear to myself to thrash him good and hard if he even dared to speak to me.

And then— Jimmy would come and lay his idiotic books on my table and I would look up at him furiously; and there he would stand, wavering a bit, smiling his sweet, good-natured smile, trying to force half his remaining change into my hand, his lonely, wistful eyes watching me with the appealing look of a lost dog hungry for an affectionate pat. What could I do but laugh and love him and show him I did by a slap on the back or in some small way or another? It was worth while forgetting all the injuries in the world just to see the light of gratitude shine up in his eyes.

This night I am speaking of I picked up one of the books in desperation and lay down to read with the lamp at the head of the bed; but I couldn't concentrate. I was too sick in body, brain, and soul to follow even the words.

I threw the book aside and lay on my back staring gloomily at the ceiling. The inmate of the next room, a broken-down telegrapher— "the Lunger" we used to call him— had a violent attack of coughing which seemed to be tearing his chest to pieces. I shuddered. He used to spit blood in the back room below. In fact, when drunk, he was quite proud of this achievement, but grew terrified at all allusions to consumption and wildly insisted that he only had "bloody bronchitis," and that he was getting better every day. He died soon after in that same room next to ours. Perhaps his treatment was at fault. A quart and a half of five-cent whiskey a day and only a plate of free soup at noon to eat is hardly a diet conducive to the cure of any disease— not even "bloody bronchitis."

He coughed and coughed until, in a frenzy of tortured nerves, I yelled to him: "For God's sake, shut up!" Then he subsided into a series of groans and querulous, choking complaints. I thought of consumption, the danger of contagion, and remembered that the window ought to be open. But it was too cold. Besides, what was the difference? "Con" or something else, today or tomorrow, it was all the same— the end. What did I care? I had failed— or rather I had never cared enough about it all to want to succeed.

I must have dozed for I came to with a nervous jump to find the lamp sputtering and smoking and the light growing dimmer every minute. No oil! That fool Jimmy had promised to brink back some. I had given him my last twenty cents and he had taken the can with him. He was sober, had been for almost a week, was suffering from one of his infrequent and brief efforts at reformation. No, there was no excuse. I cursed him viciously for the greatest imbecile on earth. The lamp was going out. I would have to lie in darkness or return to the misery of the back room downstairs.

Just then I recognized his step on the stairs and a moment later he came in, bringing the oil. I glared at him. "Where've you been?" I shouted. "Look at that lamp, you idiot! I'd have been in the dark in another second."

Jimmy came forward shrinkingly, a look of deep hurt in his faded blue eyes. He murmured something about "office" and stooped down to fill the lamp.

"Office!" I taunted scornfully, "what office? What do you take me for? I've heard that bunk of yours a million times."

Jimmy finished filling the lamp and sat down on the side of his bed opposite me. He didn't answer; only stared at me with an irritating sort of compassionate pity. How prim he was sitting there is his black suit, wispy, grey hair combed over his bald spot, his jowly face scraped close and chalky with too much cheap powder, the vile odor of which filled the room. I noticed for the first time his clean collar, his fresh shirt. He must have been to the Chinaman's and retrieved part of his laundry. This was what he usually did when he had a windfall of a dollar or so from some unexpected source. Never took out all his laundry. That would have been too expensive. Just called at the Chink's and changed his shirt and collar. His other articles of clothing he washed himself at the sink in the hallway.

I eyed him up and down resentfully. Here was a man who ought always to remain drunk. Sober, he was a respectable nuisance. And his shoes were shined!

"Why the profound meditation?" I asked. "You'd think, to look at you, you were sitting up with my corpse. Cheer up! I feel bad enough without your adding to the gloom."

"That's just it, Art," he began in slow, doleful tones. "I hate to see you in this condition. You wouldn't ever feel this way if you'd— only— only— " he hesitated as he saw my sneer.

"Only what?" I urged.

"Only stop your hard drinking," he mumbled, avoiding my eyes.

"This is almost too much, Jimmy. The water wagon is fatal to your sense of humor. After a week's ride you've accumulated more cheap moralizing than any anchorite in all his years of fasting."

"I'm your friend," he blundered on, "and you know it, Art— or I wouldn't say it."

"And it hurts you more than it does me, I'll bet!"

Jimmy had the piqued air of the rebuffed but well-intentioned. "If that's the way you want to take it— " he was staring unhappily at the floor. We were silent for a time. Then he continued with the obstinacy of the reformed turned reformer: "I'm your friend, the best friend you've got." His eyes looked up into mine and his glance was timidly questioning. "You know that, don't you, Art?"

All my peevishness vanished in a flash before his woeful sincerity. I reached over and grabbed his hand— his white, pudgy little hand so in keeping with the

rest of him— warm and soft. "Of course I know it, Jimmy. Don't be foolish and take what I've said seriously. I've got a full-sized grouch against everything tonight."

Jimmy brightened up and cleared his throat. He evidently thought my remarks an expression of willingness to serve as audience for his temperance lecture. Still he hesitated politely. "I know you don't want to listen— "

I laughed shortly. "Go ahead. Shoot. I'm all ears."

Then he began. You know the sort of drool— introduced by a sage wag of the head and the inevitable remark: "I've been through it all myself, and I know." I won't bore you with it. Coming from Jimmy it was the last word in absurdity.

I tried not to listen, concentrating my mind on the man himself, my nerves soothed by the monotonous flow of his soft-voiced syllables. Yes, he'd been through it all, there was no doubt of that, from soup to nuts. What he didn't realize was that none of it had ever touched him deeply. Forgetful of the last kick his eyes had always looked up at life again with the same appealing, timid uncertainty, pleading for a caress, fearful of a blow. And life had never failed to deal him the expected kick, never a vicious one, more of a shove to get him out of the way of a spirited boot at someone who really mattered. Spurned, Jimmy had always returned, affectionate, uncomprehending, wagging his tail ingratiatingly, so to speak. The longed-for caress would come, he was sure of it, if not today, then tomorrow. Ah, tomorrow!

I looked searchingly at his face— the squat nose, the wistful eyes, the fleshy cheeks hanging down like dewlaps on either side of his weak mouth with its pale, thick lips. The usual marks of dissipation were there but none of the scars of intense suffering. The whole effect was characterless, unfinished; as if some sculptor at the last moment had suddenly lost interest in his clay model of a face and abandoned his work in disgust. I wondered what Jimmy would do if he ever saw that face in the clear, cruel mirror of Truth. Straggle on in the same lost way, no doubt, and cease to have faith in mirrors.

Although most of his lecture was being lost on me I couldn't prevent a chance word now and then from seeping into my consciousness. "Wasted youth— your education— ability— a shame— lost opportunity— drink— some nice girl"— these words my ears retained against my will, and each word had a sting to it. Gradually my feeling of kindliness toward Jimmy petered out. I began to hate him for a pestiferous little crank. What right had he to meddle with my sins? Some of the things he was saying were true; and truth— that kind of truth— should be seen and not heard.

I was becoming angry enough to shrivel him up with some contemptuous remark about his hypocrisy and the doubtful duration of time he would stay on

the wagon when he suddenly disgressed from my misdeeds and began virtuously holding himself up as a horrible example.

He began at the beginning, and, even though I welcomed the change of subject, I swore inwardly at the prospect of hearing the history of his life all over again. He had told me this tale at least fifty times while in all stages of maudlin drunkenness. Usually he wept— which was sometimes funny and sometimes not, depending on my own condition. At all events it would be a novelty to hear his sober version. I might get at some facts this time.

To my surprise this story seemed to be identical with the others I had been lulled to sleep by on so many nights. Making allowances for the natural exaggeration of one in liquor, there was but little difference. It started with the Anderson estate in Scotland where Jimmy had spent his boyhood. This estate of the family extended over the greater part of a Scotch county, so Jimmy claimed, and he was touchy when anyone seemed skeptical regarding its existence.

He loved to dilate on the beauty of the country, the old manor house, the farms, the game park, and all the rest of it. All this was heavily mortgaged, he admitted; and he was not in good standing with most of his relatives on the other side; but he declared that there was one aunt, far gone in years and hoarded wealth, who still treasured his memory, and he promised all the gang in the back room a rare blowout should the old lady pass away in the proper frame of mind. To all of this the crowd would listen with an amiable pretence of belief. For, after all, he was Jimmy and they all swore by him, and a fairy tale like that is no great matter to hold against a man.

But here he was spinning the same yarn in all its details! I looked at him suspiciously. No, he was certainly stone sober. Could there be any truth in it then? Impossible. I finally concluded that Jimmy, after the fashion of liars, had ended by mistaking his own fabrications for fact.

He continued on through his years in Edinburgh University, his graduation with honors, his going into journalism first in Scotland, then in England, afterwards as a correspondent on the Continent, and finally his work in South Africa during the Boer War as representative of some news service.

I had never been able to verify any of this except that relating to the Boer War. An old friend of his had once told me that Jimmy did hold a responsible position in South Africa during the war and had received a large salary. Then the old friend, old-friendlike, shook his head gravely and muttered: "Too bad! Too bad! Drink!" Whether the rest of Jimmy's life, as related by him, had ever been lived or not hardly mattered, I thought. Undoubtedly he had been well educated and what is called a gentleman over there. Of course the Anderson estate was a work of fiction, or, at best, a glorified country house.

"And mind you, Art, up to that time," Jimmy's story had reached the point where he was at the front in South Africa for the news service company, "I had never touched a drop except a glass of wine with dinner now and again. That was ten years ago and I was thirty-five. Then— something happened. Ten years," he repeated sadly, "and now look where I am!" He stared despondently before him for a moment, then brightened up and squared his bent shoulders. "But that's all past and gone now, and I'm through with this kind of life for good and all."

"There's always tomorrow," I ventured ironically.

"Yes, and I'm going to make the most of it." His eyes were bright with the dream of a new hope; or rather, the old hope eternally redreamed. He glanced at the table. "I'll have to have that typewriter fixed up."

"Tomorrow?"

"Yes, tomorrow, if I can spare the time." He hadn't noticed my sarcasm.

"Why, is your day all taken up?" I asked, marvelling at his imagination.

"Pretty well so." He put on an air of importance. "I saw Edwards today"— Edwards was a friend of his who had risen to be an editor on one of the big morning papers— "and he's found an opening for me— a real opening which will give me an opportunity to show them all I'm still in the race."

"And you start in tomorrow?" I was dumbfounded.

"Yes, in the afternoon." His face was alive with energy. "Oh, I'll show them all, Art, that I'm still one of the best when I want to be. They've sneered at me long enough."

"Then you really are about to become a wage slave?" I simply couldn't believe it.

"Honestly, Art. Tomorrow. Do you think I'm spoofing you about it?"

"I must admit you seem to be confessing the shameless truth. Well, at any rate, you seem to be pleased, so— " here I jumped up and pumped his hand up and down— "a million congratulations, Jimmy, old scout!" Jimmy's joy was good to see. There were tears in his eyes as he thanked me. Good old Jimmy! It took him quite a while to get over his emotion. Then, as if he had suddenly remembered something, he began hurriedly fumbling through all his pockets.

"I must have lost it," he said finally, giving up the search. "I wanted to show it to you."

"What?"

"A letter I received today from Aunt Mary." Aunt Mary was the elderly relative in whose will Jimmy hoped to be remembered. "She complains of having felt very feeble for the past half year. She appears to be entirely ignorant of my present condition, thank God. Writes that I'm to come and pay her a long visit should I decide to take a trip abroad this Spring. Fancy!"

"And you've lost the letter?" I asked, trying to hide my skepticism.

"Yes— was showing it to Edwards— must have dropped on the floor— or else he—" Jimmy stopped abruptly. I think he must have sensed my amused incredulity, for he seemed very put out at something and didn't look at me. "I do hope the poor old lady isn't seriously ill," he murmured after a pause.

"What!" I laughed. "Have you the face to tell me that, when you know you've been looking forward to her timely taking off ever since I've known you?"

Jimmy's face grew red and he stammered confusedly. He knew he'd said things which might have sounded that way when he'd been drinking. It was whiskey talking and he didn't mean it. Really he liked her a lot. He remembered she'd been very kind to him when he was a lad. Had hardly seen her since then— twenty-five years ago. No, money or no money, he wanted her to live to be a hundred.

"But you've told me she's almost ninety now! Isn't she?"

"Yes, eighty-six, I think."

"Then," I said with finality, "she's overlingered her welcome, and you're a simpleton to be wasting your crocodile tears— in advance, at that. Besides, I've never noticed her sending you any of her vast fortune. She might at least have made you a present once in a while if she cared to earn any regrets over her demise."

"I've never written her about my hard luck. I hardly ever wrote to her," Jimmy said slowly. His tones were ridiculously dismal, and he sat holding his face in his hands in the woebegone attitude of a mourner.

"Well, you should have written." A sudden thought made me smile. "What will the bunch in the back room say when they hear this? You may give them that long-promised blowout— tomorrow," I added maliciously.

Jimmy stirred uneasily and turned on me a glance full of dim suspicion. "Why do you keep repeating that word tomorrow? You've said it now a dozen times."

"Because tomorrow is your day, Jimmy," I answered carelessly. "Doesn't your career as a sober, industrious citizen begin then?"

"Oh," he sighed with relief, "I thought—" he walked up and down in the narrow space between the beds, his hands deep in his pockets. Finally he stopped and stood beside me. There was an exultant ring to his voice. "Ah, I tell you, Art, it's great to feel like a man again, to know you're done for good and all with that mess downstairs." After a pause he went on in a coaxing, motherly tone. "Don't you think you ought to go to work and do something? I hate to see you— like this. You know what a pal I am, Art. You can listen to

me. It's a shame for you to let yourself go to seed this way. Really, Art, I mean it."

"Now, Jimmy," I got up and put my hands on his shoulders. "I say it without any hard feeling, but I've had about enough of your reform movement for one night. It'll be more truly charitable of you to offer me the price of a drink— if you have it. Your day of reformation is none so remote you can't realize from experience how rotten I feel. I can hear polar bears baying at the Northern Lights."

Jimmy sighed disconsolately and dug some small change out of his pocket. "I borrowed a dollar from Edwards," he explained. "I'll pay him back out of my first salary." The self-sufficient pride he put into that word salary!

But his financial aid proved to be unnecessary. As I was about to take half of his change, there was a great trampling from the stairs outside. Our door was kicked open with a bang and Lyons, the stoker, and Paddy Mehan, the old deep-water sailor, came crowding into the room. Lyons was in the first jovial frenzy of drink but poor Paddy was already awash and rapidly sinking. They had been paid off that afternoon after a trip across on the American liner *St. Paul*.

"Hello, Lyons! Hello, Paddy!" Jimmy and I hailed them in pleased chorus.

"Hello, yourself!" Lyons crushed Jimmy's hand in one huge paw and patted me affectionately on the back with the other. The jar of it nearly knocked me off my feet but I managed to smile. Lyons and I were old pals. I had once made a trip as sailor on the *Philadelphia* when he was in her stokehold, and we had become great friends through a chance adventure together ashore in Southampton— which is another story. He stood grinning, swaying a bit in the lamplight, a great, hard bulk of a man, dwarfing the proportions of our little room. Paddy lurched over to one of the beds and fell on it. "Thick weather! Thick weather!" he groaned to himself, and started to sing an old chanty in a thin, quavering, nasal whine.

"A-roving, a-roving
Since roving's been my ru-i-in,
No more I'll go a-ro-o-ving with you, fair maid."

"Shut up!" roared Lyons and turned again to me. "Art, how are ye?" I dodged an attempt at another love-tap and replied that I was well but thirsty.

"Thirsty, is ut? D'ye hear that, Paddy, ye slimy Corkonian? Here's a mate complainin' av thirst and we wid a full pay day in our pockets." He pulled out a roll of bills and flaunted them before me with a splendid, spendthrift gesture.

"Oh, whiskey killed my poor old dad! Whiskey! O Johnny!" carolled Paddy dolorously.

"Listen to 'im!" Lyons reached over and shook him vigorously. "That's the throuble wid all thim lazy, deck-scrubbers the loike av 'im. They can't stand up to their dhrink loike men. Wake up, Paddy! We'll be goin' below." He hauled Paddy to his feet and held him there. Come on, Art. There's some av the boys ye know below waitin'. Ye'll have all the dhrink ye can pour down your throat, and welcome; and anything more you're wishful for ye've but to name. Come on, Jimmy, you're wan av us."

"I've got something to do before I go down. I'll join you in a few minutes," Jimmy replied, wisely evading a direct refusal.

"See that ye do, me sonny boy," warned Lyons, pushing Paddy to the door. I turned to Jimmy as I was going out. "Well, good luck till tomorrow, Jimmy, if I don't see you before then."

"Thank you, Art," he murmured huskily and shook my hand. I started down. From the bottom of the flight below I heard Lyons' rough curses and Paddy wailing lugubriously: "Old Joe is dead, and gone to hell, poor old Joe!"

"Ye'll be in hell yourself if ye fall in this black hole," Lyons cautioned, steering him to the top of the second flight as I caught up with them.

The fiesta which began with our arrival in the bar didn't break up until long after daylight the next morning. It was one of the old, lusty debauches of my sailor days— songs of the sea and yarns about ships punctuated by rounds of drinks.

The last I remember was Lyons bawling out for someone to come down to the docks and strip to him and see which was the better man. "Have a bit av fun wid 'im," was the way he put it. I believe I was Dutch-courageous enough to accept his challenge but he pushed me back in my chair with a warning to be "a good bye" or I'd get a spanking. So the party had no fatal ending.

As you can well imagine I slept like a corpse all the next day and didn't witness Jimmy's departure for his long hard climb back to respectability and the man who was. When he came home that night he appeared very elated, full of the dignity of labor, tremendously conscious of his position in life, provokingly solicitous concerning my welfare. It would have been insufferable in anyone else; but Jimmy— well, Jimmy was Jimmy, and the most lovable chap on earth. You couldn't stay mad at him more than a minute, if you had the slightest sense of humor.

Had he toiled and spun much on his first day, I asked him. No, he admitted after a moment's hesitation, he had spent the time mostly in feeling about, getting the hang of his work. Now tomorrow he'd get the typewriter fixed so he could do Sunday special stuff in his spare moments— stories of what he'd

seen in South Africa and things of that kind. Wasn't that a bully idea? I agreed that it was, and retreated to the gang below who were still celebrating, leaving Jimmy with pencil poised over a blank sheet of paper determined to map out one of his stories then and there.

I didn't see him the next day or the day after. I was touring the water front with Lyons and Paddy and never returned to the room. The fourth day of his job I ran into him for a second in the hallway. He said hello in a hurried tone and brushed past me. For my part I was glad he didn't stop. I felt he'd immediately start on a heart-to-heart talk which I was in no mood to hear. Later on I remembered his manner had been strange and that he looked drawn and fagged out.

The fifth day Paddy and Lyons were both broke, but I collected my puny allowance and we sat at a table in the back room squandering it lingeringly on enormous scoops of lager and porter which were filling and lasted a long time. We were still sitting there talking when Jimmy came back from work. He looked in from the hallway, saw us and nodded, but went on upstairs without speaking.

"What's the matther wid Jimmy?" grumbled Lyons. "Can't he speak to a man?"

"He looks like he was sick," said Paddy. "Go up, Art, that's a good lad, and ask him if he won't take a bit of a drink, maybe."

"I'll go," I said, getting up, "but he won't drink anything. Jimmy's strictly temperance these days. He's more likely to give us all a sermon on our sins."

"Divil take him, then," growled Lyons, "but run and get him all the same. He looks loike he'd been drawn through a crack in the wall."

I ran quickly up the stairs and opened the door of our room. Jimmy was sitting on the side of his bed, his head in his hands. I glanced at the typewriter. The keys were still grey with a layer of long-accumulated dust. Then he hadn't had it fixed. The same old tomorrow, I thought to myself.

"Jimmy," I called to him. He jumped to his feet with a frightened start. When he saw who it was a flush of anger came over his face.

"Why don't you scare the life out of a man!" he said irritably. I was astonished. I'd never known him to flare up like this over a trifle.

"Come down and join us for a while. You don't have to drink, you know. You look done-up. What's the trouble— been working too hard?"

He winced at this last remark as if I'd shaken my fist in his face. Then he made a frantic gesture with his arms as though he were pushing me out of the room. "Go! Go back!" His voice was unnaturally shrill. "Leave me alone. I want to be alone."

"Jimmy!" I went to him in genuine alarm. "What's the matter? Anything wrong?"

He pressed my hand and tried a feeble attempt at a smile. There were dark rings under his eyes, and, somehow, in some indefinable manner, he seemed years older, a broken old man.

"No, Art, I'm all right. Don't mind me. I've a splitting headache—"

"Don't be a fool and let them work you to death." He raised his hands as if he were going to clap them over his ears to shut out my words.

"Leave me alone, Art, will you? I'm going to bed," he stammered.

"Right-o, that's the stuff. Get a good sleep and you'll be O. K." I went downstairs slowly, vaguely worried about him, wondering what the trouble could be. In the end I laid his peculiar actions to a struggle he was having with his craving for drink. Paddy and Lyons agreed with this opinion and called him a "game little swine" for sticking to his guns. And as such we toasted him in our lager and porter.

When I went up to the room to turn in he was asleep, or pretending to be, and I was careful not to disturb him. The next morning I heard him moving about, but as soon as he saw I was awake, he appeared in a nervous flurry to get away, and we didn't speak more than a few words to each other. That night he never came home at all. I went to bed early— everyone was broke and there was nothing else to do— and when I was roused out of my slumber by the sun shining on my face through the dirty window, I saw that his bed hadn't been touched. A somber presentiment of evil seemed to hover around that bed. The white spread, threadbare and full of holes, which he had tucked in with such precise neatness, had the suggestion of a shroud about it— a shroud symbolically woven for one whose life had been threadbare and full of holes.

I tried to laugh at such grim imaginings. Jimmy had stayed with Edwards or someone else from his paper. What was strange in that? This wasn't the first time he'd remained away all night, was it? If I was to give way to such worries I might just as well put on skirts and be done with it.

But my phantoms, however foolish, refused to be laid. I got dressed in a hurry, anxious to escape from this room, bright with sunlight, dark with uncanny threat. Before I went down, struck by a sentimental mood, I got some water from the sink in the hallway and poured it on his ridiculous geranium plant.

After a breakfast of free soup, I walked with Paddy and Lyons down to the Battery. We spent the afternoon there, lounging on one of the benches. It was as warm as a day in Spring and we sat blinking in the sunshine drowsily

listening to each other's yarns about the sea and lazily watching the passing ships.

When the sun went down we returned to Tommy the Priest's. On the way back I remembered this was Jimmy's pay day and wondered if he would show up. He owed me some money which I hoped would be forthcoming. Otherwise the night was liable to prove an uneventful one. And a farewell bust-up was imperative because Paddy and Lyons would have to go on board ship the following day if they wanted to make the next trip.

The evening didn't pass off as dully as we had feared. Old McDonald, the printer, was in a festive mood and invited us to join him. Two of the telegraph operators, out of a job at that time, had borrowed some money somewhere and were anxious to return the many treats they had received from us in the past. So the time whiled away very pleasantly.

It was shortly after midnight when Jimmy came in. As soon as I saw his face I knew that something had happened to him, something very serious. He was incredibly haggard and pale, and there were deep lines of suffering about his mouth and eyes. His eyes— I can't describe them. There was nothing behind them. He nodded and took his place at the bar beside us. Then he spoke, asked us what we'd have, in a strained, forced voice as though it cost him a tremendous effort to talk. He took whiskey himself, poured out a glass brim full, and downed it straight. Big John changed a bill for him, and without looking at me, he held out the couple of dollars he owed me. I put them in my pocket. Jimmy motioned to Big John and called for another round. A spell of silence was on the whole barroom. Everyone there knew him well. They had all joked with him during the week about his being on the wagon, but they had secretly admired his firmness of will. Now they stared at him with genuine regret that he should have fallen. Their faces grew sad. They had done the same thing themselves so many times. They understood.

"Jimmy!" He caught the reproach in my voice and turned to me with a twisted smile. "It doesn't matter," he said. "Nothing matters." His voice became harsh. "Don't forget what you said about my lectures and start in yourself." He immediately felt sorry for having said this. "No, Art, I don't mean that. Never mind what I say. I'm upset— about something."

"Tell me what it is, Jimmy. Maybe I can help."

"Help?" He laughed hysterically. "No, no help please. After all, why shouldn't I tell you now? You're bound to find out sooner or later. They'll all know it." He indicated the others who, feeling that Jimmy wanted to be alone with me, had taken their drinks to a table in the rear and were sitting around talking in low, constrained voices. Jimmy blurted out: "My job, Art, is gone to hell!"

"What!" I pretended more astonishment than I felt. I had guessed what the trouble was.

"Yes, they asked me to quit— politely requested. Edwards was very nice about it— very kind— very charitable." He put all the bitterness of his heart into these last words.

"The rotten swine!"

"Oh no, Art, it wasn't his fault. If they hadn't— fired me— I'd have had to resign anyway. I— I couldn't do the work."

"That's all nonsense, Jimmy. Well, cheer up. All said and done, it's only a job the less. You can always get another for the asking."

He looked at me with a sort of wild scorn in his eyes. "Can't you understand any better than that? What do I care for the job itself? It isn't that. I tell you I couldn't do the work! I tried and tried. What I wrote was rot. I couldn't get any news. No initiative— no imagination— no character— no courage! All gone. Nothing left— not even cleverness. No memory even!" He stopped, breathing hard, the perspiration glistening on his forehead. "It came to me gradually— the realization. I couldn't believe it. I had been so sure of myself all these years. All I needed was a chance. It had been so easy for me in the past— long ago. These last few days I've guessed the truth. I've been going crazy. Last night I walked— walked and walked— thinking— and finally— I knew!"

He paused, choking back a sob, his face twitching convulsively with the effort he made to control himself. Then he uttered a cracked sound intended for a laugh. "I'm done— burnt out— wasted! It's time to dump the garbage. Nothing here." He tapped his head with a silly gesture and laughed again. I began to be afraid he really was going mad. "No, Art, it isn't the job that's lost. I'm lost!"

"Now you're talking like a fool!" I spoke roughly, trying to shake him out of this mood.

"I won't talk any more," he said quite calmly. "Don't worry. I'm all shot to pieces— no sleep." He broke down suddenly and turned away from me. "But it's hell, Art, to realize all at once— you're dead!"

I put my arm around his shoulders. "Have a drink, Jimmy. Hey you, John, a little service!" What else was there to do? Life had jammed the clear, cruel mirror in front of his eyes and he had recognized himself— in that pitiful thing he saw. "Have a drink, Jimmy, and forget it. Take a real drink!" I urged. What else was there to do?

After we had had a couple at the bar, Jimmy filling his glass to the brim each time, I led him in back and we sat down at the table with the crowd. More drinks were immediately forthcoming, and it wasn't long before Jimmy

became very drunk. He didn't say anything but his eyes glazed, his lips drooped loosely, his head wagged uncertainly from side to side. I saw he'd had enough and I hoped his tired brain had been numbed to a forgetful oblivion.

"Come on to bed, Jimmy," I shook him by the arm.

He stared at me vacantly. "Bed— yes— sleep! sleep!" he mumbled, and came with me willingly enough. I helped him up the stairs to the room and lit the lamp. He sat on the side of the bed, swaying, unlacing his shoes with difficulty. Presently he began to weep softly to himself. "It's you, Alice— cause of all this— damn you— no— didn't mean that— beg pardon," he muttered. He lifted his head and saw me sitting on the other bed. "One word advice, Art— never get married— all rotten, all of 'em—"

This was something new. "What do you know about marriage?" I asked curiously. "Nothing from experience, surely."

He winked at me with drunken cunning. "Don't I, though! Not half! Never told you that, what? Never told you what happened— Cape Town?"

"No, you never did. What was it?"

"Might s'well tell Art— best friend— tell you everything tonight— all over. Yes— married in England— English girl, pretty's picture— big blue eyes— just before war— took her South Africa with me, 'n left her in Cape Town when I went to front. I was called back to Cape Town s'denly— found her with staff officer— dirty swine! No chance for doubt— didn't expect me to turn up— saw them with my own eyes— *flagrante delictu*, you know— dirty swine of a staff officer! Good bye, Jimmy Anderson! All over! Drink! Drink! Forget!" He blubbered to himself, his face a grotesque masque of tragedy.

In a flash it came back to me how he'd always stopped in the stories of his life at the point where he'd commenced drinking. Even at his drunkest he'd always ended the history there by saying abruptly: "and then— something happened." I'd never attached much importance to it— thought he merely wanted to suggest a mysterious reason as an excuse for his tobogganing. Now, I knew. Who could doubt the truth of his statements, knowing all he had been through that day? He was in a mood for truth. So this was the something which happened! Here was real tragedy.

Real tragedy! And there he was sobbing, hiccuping, rolling his eyes stupidly, scratching with limp fingers at the tears which ran down and tickled the sides of his nose. I felt a mad desire to laugh.

"I suppose you and she were divorced?" I asked after a pause.

"No— I couldn't— no proof— no money. Besides, what'd I care about divorce? Never want to marry again— never love anyone else." He wept more violently than ever.

"But didn't she get a divorce?"

"No, she's too cute for that— thinks Aunt Mary'll leave me money— and I'll drink myself to death. No," he interrupted himself hastily, "can't be that— not s'bad s' that— not Alice— no, no, mustn't say that— not right for me to say that— don't know her reason— never can tell— about women. Damn shoes!" He gave up the attempt to get his shoes off and flung himself on the bed, fully dressed. In a minute he was dead to the world and snoring. I left him and went downstairs.

Most of the people in the back room were asleep, but Paddy and Lyons and the operators were still drinking at one table, and I sat down with them. I talked at random on every subject that came up, seeking to forget Jimmy and his woes, for a time at least. His two confessions that night had got on my nerves.

Later on I must have dozed, for I was jolted out of a half dream by a sharp cracking smash in the back yard. Everyone was awake and cursing in an instant. Big John appeared from behind the curtain, grumbling: "Dot's right! Leave bottle on the fire escape, you fellers! Dot's right! Und I have to sweep up."

We heard someone racing down the stairs and Jimmy burst into the room. His face was livid, his eyes popping out of his head. He rushed to the chair beside me and sat down, shaking, his teeth chattering as if he had a chill. I told Big John to bring him a drink.

"What's the trouble now, Jimmy?" I asked him when he'd calmed down a little. He appeared to be quite sober after his sleep.

"The geranium— " he began, his lips trembling, his eyes filling up.

"So that's what fell down just now, is it?"

"Yes, I woke up, and I remembered I'd forgotten to water it. I got up and went to get the water. The window was open. I must have stumbled over something. I put out my hand to steady myself. It was so dark I couldn't see. I knocked it out on the fire escape. Then I heard it crash in the yard." He put his hands over his face and cried heart-brokenly like a sick child whose only remaining toy has been smashed. Not drunken tears this time, but real tears which made all of us at the table blink our eyes and swear fiercely at nothing.

After a while he grew quiet again, attempted a smile, asked our pardons for having created a foolish scene. He stared at his drink standing untouched on the table in front of him; but never made any motion to take it, didn't seem to realize what it was. For fully fifteen minutes he sat and stared, as still as stone, never moving his eyes, never even seeming to breathe. Then he got up from his chair and walked slowly to the door like a man in a trance. As he was going out he turned to me and said: "I'm tired, Art. I think I'll go to sleep," and something like a wan smile trembled on his pale lips. He left the door open

behind him and I heard him climbing the stairs, and the slam of our door as he closed it behind him.

A buzz of conversation broke out as if his going had lifted a weight of silence off the roomful of men. Then it happened— a swish, a sickish thud as of a heavy rock dropping into thick mud. We looked wildly at one another. We knew. We rushed into the hall and out to the yard. There it was— a motionless, dark huddle of clothes, a splintered, protruding bone or two, a widening pool of blood black against the grey flags— Jimmy!

The sky was pale with the light of dawn. Tomorrow had come.

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4: The Last of Squire Ennismore

Charlotte Riddell

1832-1906

The Penny Illustrated Paper, Christmas 1886

Author of a number of supernatural stories, such as this "Christmas Ghost".

"DID I SEE IT MYSELF? No, sir; I did not see it; and my father before me did not see it; nor his father before him, and he was Phil Regan, just the same as myself. But it is true, for all that; just as true as that you are looking at the very place where the whole thing happened. My great-grandfather (and he did not die till he was ninety-eight) used to tell, many and many's the time, how he met the stranger, night after night, walking lonesome-like about the sands where most of the wreckage came ashore."

"And the old house, then, stood behind that belt of Scotch firs?"

"Yes; and a fine house it was, too. Hearing so much talk about it when a boy, my father said, made him often feel as if he knew every room in the building, though it had all fallen to ruin before he was born. None of the family ever lived in it after the squire went away. Nobody else could be got to stop in the place. There used to be awful noises, as if something was being pitched from the top of the great staircase down in to the hall; and then there would be a sound as if a hundred people were clinking glasses and talking all together at once. And then it seemed as if barrels were rolling in the cellars; and there would be screeches, and howls, and laughing, fit to make your blood run cold. They say there is gold hid away in the cellars; but not one has ever ventured to find it. The very children won't come here to play; and when the men are plowing the field behind, nothing will make them stay in it, once the day begins to change. When the night is coming on, and the tide creeps in on the sand, more than one thinks he has seen mighty queer things on the shore."

"But what is it really they think they see? When I asked my landlord to tell me the story from beginning to end, he said he could not remember it; and, at any rate, the whole rigmarole was nonsense, put together to please strangers.

"And what is he but a stranger himself? And how should he know the doings of real quality like the Ennismores? For they were gentry, every one of them— good old stock; and as for wickedness, you might have searched Ireland through and not found their match. It is a sure thing, though, that if Riley can't tell you the story, I can; for, as I said, my own people were in it, of a manner of speaking. So, if your honour will rest yourself off your feet, on that

bit of a bank, I'll set down my creel and give you the whole pedigree of how Squire Ennismore went away from Ardwinsagh.

It was a lovely day, in the early part of June; and, as the Englishman cast himself on a low ridge of sand, he looked over Ardwinsagh Bay with a feeling of ineffable content. To his left lay the Purple Headland; to his right, a long range of breakers, that went straight out into the Atlantic till they were lost from sight; in front lay the Bay of Ardwinsagh, with its bluish-green water sparkling in the summer sunlight, and here and there breaking over some sunken rock, against which the waves spent themselves in foam.

"You see how the current's set, Sir? That is what makes it dangerous for them as doesn't know the coast, to bathe here at any time, or walk when the tide is flowing. Look how the sea is creeping in now, like a race-horse at the finish. It leaves that tongue of sand bars to the last, and then, before you could look round, it has you up to the middle. That is why I made bold to speak to you; for it is not alone on the account of Squire Ennismore the bay has a bad name. But it is about him and the old house you want to hear. The last mortal being that tried to live in it, my great-grandfather said, was a creature, by name Molly Leary; and she had neither kith nor kin, and begged for her bite and sup, sheltering herself at night in a turf cabin she had built at the back of a ditch. You may be sure she thought herself a made woman when the agent said, 'Yes: she might try if she could stop in the house; there was peat and bog-wood,' he told her, 'and half-a-crown a week for the winter, and a golden guinea once Easter came,' when the house was to be put in order for the family; and his wife gave Molly some warm clothes and a blanket or two; and she was well set up.

"You may be sure she didn't choose the worst room to sleep in; and for a while all went quiet, till one night she was wakened by feeling the bedstead lifted by the four corners and shaken like a carpet. It was a heavy four-post bedstead, with a solid top: and her life seemed to go out of her with the fear. If it had been a ship in a storm off the Headland, it couldn't have pitched worse and then, all of a sudden, it was dropped with such a bang as nearly drove the heart into her mouth.

"But that, she said, was nothing to the screaming and laughing, and hustling and rushing that filled the house. If a hundred people had been running hard along the passages and tumbling downstairs, they could not have made greater noise.

"Molly never was able to tell how she got clear of the place; but a man coming late home from Ballycloyne Fair found the creature crouched under the old thorn there, with very little on her— saving your honour's presence. She

had a bad fever, and talked about strange things, and never was the same woman after."

"But what was the beginning of all this? When did the house first get the name of being haunted?"

"After the old Squire went away: that was what I purposed telling you. He did not come here to live regularly till he had got well on in years. He was near seventy at the time I am talking about; but he held himself as upright as ever, and rode as hard as the youngest; and could have drunk a whole roomful under the table, and walked up to bed as unconcerned as you please at the dead of the night.

"He was a terrible man. You couldn't lay your tongue to a wickedness he had not been in the forefront of— drinking, duelling, gambling,— all manner of sins had been meat and drink to him since he was a boy almost. But at last he did something in London so bad, so beyond the beyonds, that he thought he had best come home and live among people who did not know so much about his goings on as the English. It was said that he wanted to try and stay in this world for ever; and that he had got some secret drops that kept him well and hearty. There was something wonderful queer about him, anyhow.

"He could hold foot with the youngest; and he was strong, and had a fine fresh colour in his face; and his eyes were like a hawk's; and there was not a break in his voice— and him near upon three-score and ten!

"At last and at long last it came to be the March before he was seventy— the worst March ever known in all these parts— such blowing, sheeting, snowing, had not been experienced in the memory of man; when one blusterous night some foreign vessel went to bits on the Purple Headland. They say it was an awful sound to hear the deathery that went up high above the noise of the wind; and it was as bad a sight to see the shore there strewed with corpses of all sorts and sizes, from the little cabin-boy to the grizzled seaman.

"They never knew who they were or where they came from, but some of the men had crosses, and beads, and such like, so the priest said they belonged to him, and they were all buried deeply and decently in the chapel graveyard.

"There was not much wreckage of value drifted on shore. Most of what is lost about the Head stays there; but one thing did come into the bay— a puncheon of brandy.

"The Squire claimed it; it was his right to have all that came on his land, and he owned this sea-shore from the Head to the breakers— every foot— so, in course, he had the brandy; and there was sore illwill because he gave his men nothing, not even a glass of whiskey.

"Well, to make a long story short, that was the most wonderful liquor anybody ever tasted. The gentry came from far and near to take share, and it was cards and dice, and drinking and story-telling night after night— week in, week out. Even on Sundays, God forgive them! The officers would drive over from Ballyclone, and sit emptying tumbler after tumbler till Monday morning came, for it made beautiful punch.

"But all at once people quit coming— a word went round that the liquor was not all it ought to be. Nobody could say what ailed it, but it got about that in some way men found it did not suit them.

"For one thing, they were losing money very fast.

"They could not make head against the Squire's luck, and a hint was dropped the puncheon ought to have been towed out to sea, and sunk in fifty fathoms of water.

"It was getting to the end of April, and fine, warm weather for the time of year, when first one and then another, and then another still, began to take notice of a stranger who walked the shore alone at night. He was a dark man, the same colour as the drowned crew lying in the chapel graveyard, and had rings in his ears, and wore a strange kind of hat, and cut wonderful antics as he walked, and had an ambling sort of gait, curious to look at. Many tried to talk to him, but he only shook his head; so, as nobody could make out where he came from or what he wanted, they made sure he was the spirit of some poor wretch who was tossing about the Head, longing for a snug corner in holy ground.

"The priest went and tried to get some sense out of him.

" 'Is it Christian burial you're wanting?' asked his reverence; but the creature only shook his head.

" 'Is it word sent to the wives and daughters you've left orphans and widows, you'd like?' But no; it wasn't that.

" 'Is it for sin committed you're doomed to walk this way? Would masses comfort ye? There's a heathen,' said his reverence; 'Did you ever hear tell of a Christian that shook his head when masses were mentioned?'

" 'Perhaps he doesn't understand English, Father,' says one of the officers who was there; 'Try him with Latin.'

"No sooner said than done. The priest started off with such a string of ayes and paters that the stranger fairly took to his heels and ran.

" 'He is an evil spirit,' explained the priest, when he stopped, tired out, 'and I have exorcised him.'

"But next night my gentleman was back again, as unconcerned as ever. 'And he'll just have to stay,' said his reverence, 'For I've got lumbago in the small of my back, and pains in all my joints— never to speak of a hoarseness

with standing there shouting; and I don't believe he understood a sentence I said.'

"Well, this went on for a while, and people got that frightened of the man, or appearance of a man, they would not go near the sand; till in the end, Squire Ennismore, who had always scoffed at the talk, took it into his head he would go down one night, and see into the rights of the matter. He, maybe, was feeling lonesome, because, as I told your honour before, people had left off coming to the house, and there was nobody for him to drink with.

"Out he goes, then, bold as brass; and there were a few followed him. The man came forward at sight of the Squire and took off his hat with a foreign flourish. Not to be behind in civility, the Squire lifted his.

" 'I have come, sir,' he said, speaking very loud, to try to make him understand, 'to know if you are looking for anything, and whether I can assist you to find it.'

"The man looked at the Squire as if he had taken the greatest liking to him, and took oft his hat again.

" 'Is it the vessel that was wrecked you are distressed about?'

"There came no answer, only a mournful shake of the head.

" 'Well, I haven't your ship, you know; it went all to bits months ago; and, as for the sailors, they are snug and sound enough in consecrated ground.'

"The man stood and looked at the Squire with a queer sort of smile on his face.

" 'What do you want?' asked Mr. Ennismore in a bit of a passion. 'If anything belonging to you went down with the vessel, it's about the Head you ought to be looking for it, not here— unless, indeed, its after the brandy you're fretting!'

"Now, the Squire had tried him in English and French, and was now speaking a language you'd have thought nobody could understand; but, faith, it seemed natural as kissing to the stranger.

" 'Oh! That's where you are from, is it?' said the Squire. 'Why couldn't you have told me so at once? I can't give you the brandy, because it mostly is drunk; but come along, and you shall have as stiff a glass of punch as ever crossed your lips.' And without more to-do off they went, as sociable as you please, jabbering together in some outlandish tongue that made moderate folks' jaws ache to hear it.

"That was the first night they conversed together, but it wasn't the last. The stranger must have been the height of good company, for the Squire never tired of him. Every evening, regularly, he came up to the house, always dressed the same, always smiling and polite, and then the Squire called for brandy and

hot water, and they drank and played cards till cock-crow, talking and laughing into the small hours.

"This went on for weeks and weeks, nobody knowing where the man came from, or where he went; only two things the old housekeeper did know— that the puncheon was nearly empty, and that the Squire's flesh was wasting off him; and she felt so uneasy she went to the priest, but he could give her no manner of comfort."

"She got so concerned at last that she felt bound to listen at the dining-room door; but they always talked in that foreign gibberish, and whether it was blessing or cursing they were at she couldn't tell."

"Well, the upshot of it came one night in July— on the eve of the Squire's birthday— there wasn't a drop of spirit left in the puncheon— -no, not as much as would drown a fly. They had drunk the whole lot clean up— and the old woman stood trembling, expecting every minute to hear the bell ring for more brandy, for where was she to get more if they wanted any?

"All at once the Squire and the stranger came out into the hall. It was a full moon, and light as day.

" 'I'll go home with you to-night by way of a change,' says the Squire.

" 'Will you so?' asked the other."

" 'That I will,' answered the Squire.

" 'It is your own choice, you know.'

" 'Yes; it is my own choice; let us go.'"

"So they went. And the housekeeper ran up to the window on the great staircase and watched the way they took. Her niece lived there as housemaid, and she came and watched, too; and, after a while, the butler as well. They all turned their faces this way, and looked after their master walking beside the strange man along these very sands. Well, they saw them walk on, and on, and on, and on, till the water took them to their knees, and then to their waists, and then to their arm-pits, and then to their throats and their heads; but long before that the women and the butler were running out on the shore as fast as they could, shouting for help.

"Well?" said the Englishman.

"Living or dead, Squire Ennismore never came back again. Next morning, when the tides ebbed again, one walking over the sand saw the print of a cloven foot— that he tracked to the water's edge. Then everybody knew where the Squire had gone, and with whom."

"And no more search was made?"

"Where would have been the use searching?"

"Not much, I suppose. It's a strange story, anyhow."

"But true, your honour— every word of it."

"Oh! I have no doubt of that," was the satisfactory reply.

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5: A Sunday at Deadwood

Edward Dyson

1865–1931

The Lone Hand. 1 June 1908

Bored sheerers on an outback sheep station miles from anywhere; and a travelling showman with a boxing bear. What could possibly go wrong?

THE company's stay at Deadwood was not lengthy, but it was varied. The time was well chosen. It was three o'clock on the Sunday afternoon when that astute entrepreneur, Eric Appleton, Esq., led his celebrated vaudeville company through Ackerman's slip-rails, and advanced upon the assembled hands, scattered in the shade of the long, barn-like shed.

Shearing was in full blast at Deadwood, but the shearers were observing the Sabbath, and keeping it holy, in a manner of speaking. They sat, crouched, and sprawled in various attitudes of languid discomfort along the belt of shade; some smoked, some chewed, a few drowsed, several slept. Two or three were diligently patching fractured trousers and repairing torn flannels. One divided his attention between the moral education and sanitation of a cattle pup and a kerosene tin, in which a month's washing had been stewing for hours over a small fire in the open. A patient, apathetic, four-handed euchre game was in progress at one end; two rouseabouts looked on listlessly. A curly-headed shearers' cook, squatting on the ground with a candle-box between his legs, wrote a laborious love-letter.

This quaint assemblage was the congregation of the Rev. Whitemore Brown, a peripatetic missionary of no known creed, who had devoted his time and talents to the ungrateful task of bringing shearers to repentance. The reverend, a short, weather-beaten, close-grained, ginger man, with ragged whiskers and a mad eye, was standing out in the sun, bare-headed, the fierce light shining vindictively on his bald occiput, an open book in his hand, preaching with intemperate zeal. Rivulets of sweat ran down the crannies of his weazened neck, flecks of foam hung in his beard, his voice was raspy and indistinct, no three consecutive words of his sermon were explicit to the smoking, dreaming, card-playing rapscallions curled in the shade.

The parson's horse— a limp, bony grey, strangely encrusted with enormous warts— hung on his tether at the end of the shed. A few huts were scattered on the barren land down to the left; beyond, a big dam glittered through the visible air, that lapped the middle distance like the ghost of a great sea. Over all, about everybody, into everything, but detectable only to the untrained

nose, crept the tang of sheep, oozing from the new harvest of wool and from the flocks drifting in the paddocks behind the shed.

Naturally, the advent of Appleton, Lees, and their great bear, created a diversion in the congregation of the Rev. Whitemore Brown. Dave Gale uttered a cry of astonishment, and pointed out the newcomers with the tail-end of his soaped pup.

"By cripes!" he ejaculated; "what is it?" Along the line eyes turned upon Appleton's Al Fresco Entertainers.

" 'Ell! it's a wombat!" said Gale. Gale's natural history was limited and local.

The apathy fell from Ackerman's hands and the lordly shearers; they sat up, some arose to their knees, a few actually stood erect. The rasping preacher was disregarded, all attention was upon the quaint trio marching down the track in a nimbus of silver dust; Eric on the right, fat Ephraim on the left, the cheerful bear ambling between, loaded with bundles and the starry sphere on which he performed some of his most popular evolutions. A pack of dogs barked excitedly in the van. The Rev. Whitemore Brown jerked his head, and foreseeing competition of a pernicious and worldly character, developed a shriller scream and new exuberance of gesture, clamoring for some regard.

"Blank me, if it ain't a blinded bear," said Simmons. "A show!" he howled,

with sudden inspiration. " A show ! A show ! Give 'em a hoy, lads." The congregation sprang to its feet, joining Simmons in a barbaric yell of welcome. The dogs yapped with fatuous exuberance.

Eric halted his company in line. He bowed grateful acknowledgments.

Ephraim bowed, so did Giordano Bruno, the celebrated performing bear. Meanwhile the preacher's voice had soared to the top of his pitch. The Rev. Brown swung into a diatribe on ungodly exhibitions. He warned his hearers to beware of unrighteous worldlings and desecrators of the Sabbath, vain tricksters, and blasphemous and vulgar showmen —particularly to avoid the bear that goeth about like a raging lion seeking whom he may devour. But the congregation was weary of exhortation, and hungry for entertainment. It yelled against the shepherd.

"Time! Time!" cried Simmons.

"Time! Time! Time!" chanted the chorus.

"Oh, ring off, parson, 'n' give the other bloke a charnce," said Gidley.

"Ain't we give you a fair hearin'?" asked Clay, piteously. "Yiv bin at it an hour."

The Rev. Brown relapsed into angry colloquy. He was shocked that an assemblage of presumably Christian men should prefer the ribaldry of buffoons and the caperings of an abominable bear to the preaching of the Word. The congregation chanted, "Time! Time! Time!" The dogs barked

insanely, and the good missionary was forced to either depart or be one of the audience at the unholy show. He departed. There was no collection that Sunday.

There followed an energetic descent upon the dogs ; several were captured, the rest were driven beyond stone's-throw, and again the gifted management bowed its thanks.

"Gents and mates," said the Proselyte, "I take great pleasure in interdoocin't' yer notice 'n' hattention Eric Appleton's celybrated Al Fresco Entertainers, unequalled by few, excelled by none. We aim to amoose yeh this afternoon with er variety performance iv ther 'ighest quality, er performance which, I may tell yeh, has won rapturous happlause 'n' thunders iv happroval frim 'igh-class 'n' interlectual audiences throughout Australia, abroad, 'n' elsewhere." He then formally introduced himself, Ephraim, and the bear, with a short, eloquent, and immodest account of the natural gifts and acquired specialties of each.

"In conclusion, gents," said Eric, "with yer kind permission Perfesser Ephraim Lees will sing that noble Welsh song, 'Men of Garlic.' "

The fat pilgrim sang "The Men of Harlech" in a pure young voice, which at first provoked astonishment and derision. A piping, almost effeminate, strain from Ephraim's huge bulk seemed unnatural and absurd. Lees was promptly christened Euphemia. There were cat-calls and affectionate appeals in ridiculous falsetto, but Ephraim sang on serenely. Though gentle in manner and seemingly diffident, the Professor was densely indifferent in the face of ribaldry and any criticism that did not descend to missiles. His "Men of Harlech" was not a martial song, but a weird and eerie appeal. A few susceptible souls were stirred, and Ephraim did not go without applause.

Bruno was more to the taste of the hardened reprobates of Deadwood. His tricks provoked shouts of approval and storms of laughter. They wanted a lot of Bruno. Eric Appleton, "character actor and raconteur," in his uproarious absurdity, "The Remittance Man" hit the shearers' taste, but Ephraim's art was above them.

"We want nothin' more from 'Phemie," said Simmons. "No more of the boy soprano, if yeh please."

"Why don't yeh grow hair on it, 'n' exhibit it ez the whiskered woman?" asked Kemp.

So, in response to almost general request, the Professor's second song was cut out, and he wrestled with the bear while the actor-manager made a hurried and eloquent perambulation with the hat. The appeal for funds was very successful; Eric secured all the Rev. Whitemore Brown's threepenny bits, and many larger coins to boot, while his corpulent partner labored with the

bear. Ephraim hated this wrestling turn, more particularly in the open under a pitiless sun. After three falls he was utterly exhausted, and retired to the shade, a humid and panting mass, where he lay steaming like a bag of hot grain, leaving the management of the boxing bouts entirely in Eric's hands. Bruno had only recently added boxing to his other accomplishments, and it was easily his most profitable endowment with shed audiences, railway gangs, dam sinkers, and the like.

The bear's fore-paws were clothed in gloves, large and cushiony enough to inspire confidence in the desired competitor, he was placed on the line of a circle about 3ft. in diameter, and Eric explained:

"Now, will any kind gent box ther bear? Ther celybrated boxin' bear, George Brown, stands before you, 'n' ther management iv Appleton's Al Fresco Hentertainers is prepared t' lay two t' one no sport can stay three minutes agin him. Ther rules is these: Yeh fight all in, no spot barred, 'n' ther bloke leavin' ther ring inside ther limit is counted out. Ther bear has no footwork, he trusts to his marvellous right cross. Will any willin' lad back hisself agin Brown fer arf er dollar? "

There were a dozen there with reputations to sustain, reputations founded on performances and on talk. The others would accept neither excuses nor apologies; the champions were rushed into battle, and within a quarter of an hour Bruno had demolished all pretensions, and cleaned up the shed. In that quarter of an hour he earned the firm 30 shillings. Bruno's boxing was not purely scientific, but it was effective. He made a lovely soft punching-block, and his opponent enjoyed it immensely till the bear's right paw came across like a soft meteor, and batted the rash amateur end-over into adjacent space. There was no evading that punch, and no withstanding it; it would have shifted a cow, and yet it was merely playful on Bruno's part. Had it been otherwise it would have killed the cow. Knotty Corboy had the misfortune to take the bat on the mark, and the programme was suspended while the shearer was being restored to sensibility, Bruno standing aside dangling his gloved paws and wearing his customary expression of blended benevolence and joy.

It was at this stage that five Deadwood shearers, who had been absent on a quest, rode back to the shed. They returned at a gallop, with a babel of hoof-beats, barking and shouting. Their quest had been the capture and recovery of "Ringer" Beecham, who, after a week's indulgence at the Trap Shanty, had been seen running wild in scant garments in Ackerman's back paddock. The quest was successful, and Beecham and his illusions were imprisoned together in the log hut. His captors had rewarded themselves with a great superfluity of beer, hence their clamorous home-coming. The new arrivals were vastly interested in Bruno. The boxing game was quite to their liking, but they

despised rules and defied authority, and their good humor was of the drunken order that edges on viciousness. They took the bear's big punch in bad part, and the sport degenerated into open, unchristian bear-baiting. The sober hands were not averse to a new diversion, and presently poor Bruno, standing on end, flapping his gloves aimlessly, his mouth open in a wide grin of childish goodwill, was the centre of a boisterous ring of tormentors, on the outskirts of which Professor Ephraim Lees, reduced almost to tears, revolved, pleading in appealing accents.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, be kind to him. Do not hurt the poor bear. He is so good, my Bruno— so gentle, so affectionate!"

The young men punched at Bruno from all sides; they prodded him with sticks.

A string of cow-bells was dropped about his neck. He wheeled awkwardly, and as the aggravation increased he wept, and his cries of dejection provoked yells of laughter. Eric Appleton, for interfering, was rushed against the shed, and left, sitting with his back to the wall, dusty and dismantled. His philosophy of non-resistance coming into play, he remained there composedly smoking Clay's meerschaum. The excitement about the bear flagged a little.

"Bring Beecham," cried a shearer, "bring the ringer!"

The proposition provoked a roar of delight. Beecham was in the illusory stages of D.T's. Wherever he turned he saw himself beset by kaleidoscopic devils, and distorted, malignant creatures. The crowd was curious to experiment on him with the bear. Beecham, still scantily clad, was brought from the hut; the laughing shearers pressed about him, forcing him to face Bruno. The man's eyes wandered; he did not see; he maundered insanely, and drifted almost into the arms of the bear before his diseased vision took in the strange shape, and then, Heaven knows, with what distortions and what monstrous bedizenment his eyes beheld it. For a moment he glared through spread fingers, thrown up to ward off this new horror; his dead, yellow face was convulsed; his mouth wide, his eyes red with blood and ablaze with madness. Then he shrieked.

Scream after scream burst from his breast— screams so terrible, so fraught with the utmost possibility of human agony and fear that the crowd was thrilled and subdued. It broke apart, and Beecham rushed away, breaking into the hut and grovelling in the darkness under a bunk.

The shearers soon recovered their exuberance, and the attack on Bruno was resumed. This time the dogs were introduced. The bear was beset by half-a dozen snapping collies. But Shellman's big cattle dog Peter was not content to snap, he went straight at Bruno's throat. Bruno received him with open

arms: he embraced him with a long, deliberate hug, and dropped Peter to the ground, a pulped tyke that stirred feebly in its dying agonies.

"By 'll 'n' fury, he's throttled my dorg!" yelled Shellman. Shellman was drunk, Shellman was very injudicious. He tore a long-bladed clasp-knife from his belt, and went at the bear.

Bruno received Shellman as he had received Shellman's dog. The shearer inflicted a slight wound, but he was enfolded in the brute's soft, dreadful hug, before he could lift a hand again. Bruno's head lolled over the man's shoulder, his expression was still benevolent and kindly, but some old devil was stirring in him. He drew Shellman closer, and Shellman's face went purple, his tongue shot out foolishly; his eyes protruded, red and hideous.

The crowd fell back now, horrified.

"He's killin' Shellman!" said Simmons. He thought he was noising the fact, but his voice did not rise above a ridiculous whisper.

Ephraim rushed in. He yelled authoritative words in Bruno's ear, and the bear dropped Shellman, and forgot him, turning to fondle the Professor, uttering infantile complaints, and Shellman stirred feebly on the ground as his dog had done. The shearer, however, had the luck to get off with a broken rib, and when his breath returned, and he was able to vociferate, he clamored furiously for vengeance on the bear.

"He's a murderin' brute! " cried Shellman. "No one's got any right t' keep a man-eatin' beast like that. Kill the cow! "

"No, no," pleaded Ephraim. "No, no, gentlemen; you must not harm the bear. He is not vicious— indeed he is not. He is distressed, agitated."

"It's up to us lads," said Shellman, catching up a split rail. "Do fer the bear."

Several men seized sticks; the crowd moved round Ephraim and Bruno again; but before a blow was struck those on the outskirts raised a cry of warning, and the shearers fell back hastily before one man— a gibbering, tortured wretch, whose red eyes glittered with drunken mania. It was Ringer Beecham. A few tatters of clothes clung to his limbs; in his hand he carried a keen axe. A revulsion of feeling had come over Beecham; he was prepared to slay his enemy now. Crouching low, and muttering as he came, he crept upon the bear.

"Keep him back!" cried Ephraim. "He is mad. Oh, my poor bear. Bruno! Bruno!" Manfully the fat singer ran, encouraging the bear to follow, and Bruno waddled after him.

Beecham rushed, and Bruno increased his pace. Ephraim was outclassed in twenty yards. The bear seemed to have awakened to a sense of his danger; he galloped heavily. His pace looked slow and his action ungainly, but he kept a good lead, jangling the bells about his neck. Bruno headed for the big dam.

Beecham followed, screaming in a fury, and brandishing his axe. Bruno lamented as he ran, twisting his head from side to side, looking back at his enemy, whining patient protestations. The whole of the hands of Deadwood followed Beecham, and Ephraim puffed heavily at the tail of the procession.

Reaching the dam, Bruno took refuge upon the trunk of a fallen tree, which, though still rooted in the soil, lay along the face of the water. Running nimbly, the madman followed him. At the end of the log Bruno arose on his haunches, and faced his enemy. His long tongue hung to his breast; his china-white eye was set in a comical stare; he seemed to be smiling. Beecham's trot ceased; he began to creep. Cunningly, cautiously, he stole to within striking distance; then, raising his axe, he poised himself for the blow, but Bruno's right paw swept across, punching the shearer under the ribs, and Beecham shot head first into deep water. Sprawling on the log, the bear watched for his enemy, and when Ringer's head appeared above water, a great gloved paw fell on it, and drove him under again.

Thrice Beecham was pushed down, while the stupefied crowd gazed mutely at the grim spectacle. Then it occurred to Long Aleck to attempt a rescue, and he waded in, and towed the unconscious Ringer ashore by one leg.

While several devoted themselves to applying the rules for the restoration of the apparently drowned to Ringer Beecham, the outcry against poor Bruno was resumed by Shellman. The bear's treatment of Beecham had created a further prejudice.

"I tell yeh, lads, if he's left t' go he'll do in one of us," said Shellman. "Half-a-dozen of yeh keep him on the log, while me and Bill and Spotty gets guns. We'll show the cow."

Shellman and two or three others ran towards the huts, and again Ephraim's touching appeal was heard. On hands and knees the fat man made his way along the log. He set up his big bulk between Bruno and his enemies.

"I cannot permit it, gentlemen," wailed Ephraim when Shellman and his friends returned with their guns; and tears rolled from the singer's tender blue eye down his plump, pink cheeks. "I positively cannot permit it."

" If yeh don't come out o' that, mister," said Shellman, threateningly, "I'll have a pot at you."

" No, no," pleaded Lees. "My poor bear. Ah, he is so loving, so kind. He would not harm a baby. It was only his play. And if you would only let him go, gentlemen, he would depart with me quietly."

Four men stood on the bank with guns, they were backed by a dozen with clubs. " A couple of youse blokes crawl along, and pitch Fatty in the dam," ordered Shellman.

At this point Eric Appleton arose from his recumbent attitude against Ackerman's shed, put Clay's meerschaum in his pocket, and taking a fire-brand from under Clay's simmering stew of washing, trailed it through the thin dry grass, and threw it where the grass was thicker and longer, tufted under the edges of the ant-eaten wall. Then he passed round the shed, and sauntered down towards the dam from the other side.

Two men crawled out along the log to depose Ephraim Lees, but Ephraim clung to the bear, appealingly dolorously, and the bear clung to him, and when Costigan drew near Bruno leaned over and batted him into the dam; hereupon

Clay retreated precipitately.

Shellman was valiant. "Leave it to me," he said, " I'll go out 'n' blow his blinded head off."

Eric Appleton interposed. "I give yeh doo legal notice," he said. "That bear's registered under th' Act, 'n' hactions fer 'eavy damages will foller any harm done t' him. Valued et eight 'underd 'n fifty pounds, he is."

"But what about self-defence?" snorted Shellman. "Killin' bears is self-defence!"

"Eight 'undred 'n' fifty quid," said Eric impartially. "Please yerself."

"He's my meat," declared Shellman.

"Fire!" yelled a voice at the back of the crowd. "The shed's afire!"

"Cripes!" quavered Clay, "my washin'!"

Diversions are the key principle of strategy. Instantly the bear, Ephraim and Eric were deserted. There was a unanimous rush for the shed. Even Beecham was forgotten, creeping on his hands and knees, picking purple tarantulas off the clay bank. A hard fight was made, and the shed was saved, but by that time the Al Fresco Entertainers were camped in a cool, green nook, some miles from Deadwood.

"That fire was an act of Providence, Eric," Ephraim insisted.

"Yes," admitted the Proselyte, " 'n' although I ain't what yeh'd call er pious man, Ephie, I agree there is times when acts iv Providence is very advisable."

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6: The Missing Spoon

Alice Perrin

Alice Robinson Perrin, 1867-1934)

The Sovereign Magazine, Oct 1922

"TALKING OF SERVANTS, dear Mrs. Dale—" began Miss North.

"Which we weren't," I interrupted ruthlessly. "We were talking of the occult."

Miss North looked snubbed, and I felt faintly remorseful; but she was one of those deprecating, ultra-polite spinsters who provoke snubs. She never contradicted, and yet, while apparently agreeing with every opinion one expressed, she contrived to convey the exasperating impression that she was not convinced. We had been talking of the spirit world (not servants), at least I had, for, suspecting that in her heart she was a sceptic, I felt impelled to convert her. During the last half-hour she had listened meekly to various experiences of my own connected with the supernatural, as well as those of my friends whose veracity was beyond question, interjecting at intervals: "Really?" "How curious." "Quite so!"— gazing at me with watery grey eyes that held no clue to her own ideas, till I had arrived at the point when I could have shaken her.

"Some people," I remarked severely, "cannot disassociate their minds from the mundane, and the material matters of life. What made you mention servants? If you're worried with them, why not follow my example— give up your house and live at a club. Be free!" I waved my hand to indicate the spacious, well-appointed room in which we sat, the waitresses in neat uniforms attending to the teas. Then I recollected with compassion that my guest, with whom I had been acquainted on and off for some years past, was homeless, lived in cheap boarding-houses, lodgings, or with reluctant relations. Coming away from a meeting of the Psychical Research Society that afternoon, I had run up against her in the street, and I had brought her back to my haven for a cup of tea. The invitation was hardly prompted by any instinct of friendship or hospitality; to be candid, I disliked Miss North. But I was not sorry to have encountered someone who would be likely to listen while I expounded my views on the vital subject that just then engrossed my mind, especially after hearing sworn accounts of strange manifestations reported by Mrs. W., Miss X., Mr. Y., and so forth.

Miss North coughed and looked into her cup. "As it happens," she said diffidently, "it's not quite the case of my wishing to give up a home—"

I hastened to make amends for my thoughtless remarks. "No, no, of course; for the moment I had forgotten your sad circumstances. Forgive me!

But, after all, you are fortunate in a way not to be hampered with domestic worries."

"It was our conversation— hauntings, apparitions, restless spirits that suggested to me—" She paused.

"Suggested to you?" I repeated, encouraging her.

"I have hardly had an opportunity of telling you,"— her eyelids flickered, I fancied, a trifle maliciously— "but since our last meeting my circumstances have changed for the better. I have been left a little house in the country. Quite unexpected, a delightful surprise! My sole difficulty is that I cannot get a servant to stay with me, because my poor little house is supposed to be haunted!"

"Oh!" I exclaimed, forgetting to congratulate her on her legacy. "How interesting! Do tell me!" Now, instead of itching to assault Miss North, I felt more like embracing her.

"I am afraid there is little to tell." Her voice was apologetic. "I can't say I have seen or heard anything unexplainable myself, but two maids have left me because of odd noises. I have to put up with a woman for the mornings; nothing will induce any of the village people to stay late or to sleep in the house. Once that kind of idea gets about— I suppose it's suggestion more than anything else."

"Why should it be?" I argued hotly. "I can't understand such crass incredulity. Over and over again it has been proved beyond any shadow of doubt that disembodied spirits do return for some definite reason. What is the story? Who is it that is supposed to haunt your house?"

Miss North shrugged her thin shoulders and evaded my questions. "I haven't inquired," she confessed; by which I gathered she had been told without making inquiry, but for some reason of her own she did not intend to reveal the information.

This was maddening. I resolved to get into that house. If I could hear or see the "presence," what a case to report to the P.R.S.— a chance not to be lost!

"Now, my dear old friend," I said, in my most ingratiating manner, "you know my firm faith in such matters. Would you feel inclined to be very unselfish and invite me to spend a couple of nights with you? I should know if your house is really haunted or not, and, if it is, how best to procure peace for the poor earthbound spirit, so that your difficulty about a servant" (what bathos!) "might be overcome."

"Oh, would you?" breathed Miss North. "It's just what I was wishing so much to ask you, only I hardly liked to venture, it seemed so presumptuous— you, who are so busy, so important!"

"Certainly I would," I assured her, with fervour.

"And you would not mind the discomfort? A servant only in the mornings, no electric light, no bathroom!"

"Not a scrap. I should enjoy the little change, not to speak," I laughed indulgently, "of my keen interest in your haunted abode."

"Thank you, thank you very much," she quavered, drawing on her gloves. "Then shall we say the sixteenth? I am returning this evening; I came up to get some mats for my spare room, and I should be quite ready for you by then. A great pleasure."

I consulted my engagement tablets. "Let me see, the sixteenth— Mrs. Gill's séance, and a lecture on spiritualism by Mr. O'Donovan. Never mind, I'll get out of both. Yes, the sixteenth, dear Miss North, will suit me admirably."

Before we parted it was arranged that I should travel down by an afternoon train, and that Miss North should order the village fly to meet me at the station, four miles distant from her home. When she had tiptoed from the room, like some nervous little animal, I sat and thought. Now why had she wriggled out of telling me that story? Obviously there was one, and obviously she was acquainted with it. Her reticence had only increased my interest; I felt I could hardly exist until I was in a position to investigate the mystery for myself. What a piece of luck— no doubt I had been "led" to do so by occult forces, that marvellous chain of communication in the spirit world always at work about us, ever seeking to make use of those still in the flesh who are sympathetic, who cultivate understanding, grope after enlightenment. I folded my hands, made my mind a blank, waited, so that, if perchance there was some message, it might reach me unhindered. And the conviction became overwhelming that I was the instrument chosen to set at rest the hapless spirit that disturbed the peace of Miss North's unexpected inheritance.

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL evening when I arrived at the door of White Cottage, a genuinely ancient, oak-beamed dwelling, that stood back from the village in a delicious garden, a soothing contrast to a couple of modern villas that had sprung up on either side. The wonder was that the little house had hitherto escaped destruction, for it must have been centuries old.

Miss North stood in the porch to receive me. She looked surprisingly different; no longer a hesitating downtrodden victim of fate, but a calm, self-contained hostess, sure of her position as mistress of this enchanting refuge from the world. Her dress harmonized with her surroundings; until now I had never seen her clothed in anything but drab, ill-fitting garments that proclaimed genteel poverty without hope or effort. And here she was, in a soft lilac gown with exquisite lace at her throat and wrists, and a lappet to match

concealing her scanty grey hair. Her cheeks were pink, and her eyes tranquil. I could hardly believe it was the same Miss North.

We sat down to a high tea, waiting on ourselves, for which she made no apology; and she smiled serenely as I admired the antique furniture, the priceless old china, the taste with which everything was arranged.

"It is all just as I found it," she told me, disclaiming any credit. "My great-aunt was close on a hundred when she died; she had lived here all her life, and her parents and grandparents before her. They never sold a thing. There is a chest full of plate; but I will show you that to-morrow. Come, now, and see your room. I hope you will like it."

I should think I did! A low-ceilinged chamber, running the length of the house, with a latticed window at each end. The bed, a stout four-poster, hung and spread with delicate old needlework; real willow-patterned china on the three-cornered washstand, a folding dressing-table with a well, and a little Jacobean writing bureau that made my mouth water. Nothing modern in the room except the mats on the worm-eaten boards of the floor; and Miss North had made quite an inoffensive selection.

I looked about me with pleasure. "Delightful!" I murmured. "And is this— do tell me, you know I'm not nervous— is this the haunted room?"

Miss North sidled to the dressing-table, rearranged a couple of old glass candlesticks and a picture-topped pomatum jar, before she answered: "I really can't tell which part of the house is said to be haunted. That is what I hope you may be able to discover. As I said before, I have never heard or seen anything I could not account for."

"I understand," I said civilly, though I felt cross with her.

"To-morrow," she went on, "I will take you all over the house. Meantime it is a pity to waste this sweet evening. I will clear away the tea-things while you unpack, and then we might take a stroll if you are not too fatigued?"

I should have preferred to explore the house then and there, but good manners as well as a certain obstinate note in Miss North's pernickety speech, forbade my saying so. Consequently we "strolled," wandered through the village that was incredibly Arcadian, almost stage-like, with its low thatched roofs clustered about a squat little Norman church; and there was actually a pound, and stocks, and a pond wherein, so said Miss North, a reputed witch had been ducked not so many years ago. But charmed as I was with the old-world atmosphere, I felt impatient for nightfall, yearned to find myself alone in my bedroom, free to lie and listen, my mind receptive, my whole being bent on extending help should some earthbound spirit be clinging to the premises.

It was still light, when, after a simple supper, we went to bed, carrying up our hot-water cans that Miss North filled in the kitchen. Possibly I was more

exhausted than I realized, what with the heat and the tedium of the journey. Anyway, amid the profound peace and quiet I quickly and inadvertently fell asleep.

I awoke to hear a clock somewhere in the house strike two; and then I became conscious that something— someone unhappy, beseeching, insistent, had entered my room.

I held my breath, concentrating my whole attention on the uncertain sound that was like a faint footfall scarcely touching the boards. With all my mental strength I put forth sympathy, encouragement; and in the course of the next few minutes there came three distinct taps close to the head of my bed.

"Try to answer me," I whispered; "if anyone is there, tap again."

A long silence— broken at last by a succession of hasty taps on the farther side of the room, followed by a fluttering movement, so light, so furtive, that it might have been caused by a large moth. I lit my candle, rose and searched everywhere, found no moth, nor anything that could account for the sound; but as I shook curtains, groped and peered, leaving nothing to chance, the taps resounded all about me, and a chill breath passed over my hands and my face. I knew what it was, I had experienced it on other occasions; without doubt a disembodied spirit was attempting communication. But in spite of my efforts I could get no intelligible response to my patient inquiries, and in time the tappings ceased altogether. Until dawn began to creep in at the windows I waited, but heard nothing further; and I feared that unless some clue to the manifestations were obtainable I should be powerless to give help.

Again I slept, and was awakened by a stout woman who lugged in a hip-bath and a can of hot water. I determined to pump her; she might be induced to impart the story of the "ghost," if she knew it. But when I remarked brightly that it was a beautiful morning she made no reply, she was stone deaf.

Miss North evinced lively interest when I related what I had heard in the night-time; nevertheless she suggested rats, decaying woodwork, night breezes? I ruled out such solutions, reminded her that I knew what I was talking about.

"Something supernatural is certainly attached to this house," I concluded, with emphasis, "and I can only hope that more definite manifestations may take place to-night."

She echoed the hope, argued no more; and we spent a pleasant morning examining the treasures in every room. I found she knew almost as much as I did about old furniture. We ended up in the dining-room, where she unlocked a cupboard that contained a plate chest, and from it produced some rare bits of silver, among them, to my envy, five undeniable Cromwellian spoons— all in

perfect condition, the marks on them as clear as if they had but lately left the silversmith's hands.

"Nice, aren't they?" she said. "But there ought to be six; one of the set is missing."

"What a pity!" I exclaimed. "I suppose you have no idea what became of it?"

"I believe it was stolen, stolen by a maid-servant. Oh, not within my recollection! It happened ages ago, when people were hanged for theft."

"And was the thief hanged?"

"I don't think so. I have always understood that she was convicted and sentenced to death, but died in prison."

"Poor thing! Perhaps she wasn't really guilty, perhaps she died of a broken heart. Ah!" I cried, with growing excitement, "that might account— Now, why on earth didn't you tell me this before? You declared you knew of no story! Of course, the whole thing is perfectly clear— a guiltless human being, falsely accused, and the poor creature's spirit will never rest until her innocence has been proved."

"Well, perhaps," said Miss North dubiously; "it never occurred to me."

She replaced the silver in the chest. Tiresome old thing! If she had only had the sense yesterday to tell me all about the spoon! And now there was so little time. I had to be back in London the following afternoon for a meeting at which I had to take the chair. I could only do my utmost to-night to get into useful communication with the being from the other side, and if I failed I must induce Miss North to invite me again for a longer visit.

The rest of the day we spent chiefly in the garden, knitting and conversing on commonplace matters; the air was invigorating, the peace welcome, and I gained strength for what might be required of me that night.

Never shall I forget that night! As before, we went to bed early, and I took up a book with me to keep myself awake, though, indeed, I felt anything but sleepy. For a space I sat beside one of the windows, enjoying the calm of the summer night, the scent of the honeysuckle that covered the porch, and allowed my mind to dwell with all the sympathy at my command on the melancholy story of the missing spoon. That unfortunate girl! I imagined her helplessness, her despair; visioned her white and trembling as she was taken away covered with disgrace, unable to prove her innocence; then the prison, the prospect of the gallows, death, and a poor soul crying out for justice.

Darkness fell, there was no moon, and I sat on, reluctant to light my candle; it might disturb the conditions, render communication more difficult. The silence became oppressive, charged with effort on my part, with effort on the part of another, for gradually I became aware that I was not alone. The strain

was awful. Then I heard the faint tapping, first at the head of the bed, again at the farther end of the room, finally close beside me.

I spoke quietly, firmly: "I know of your trouble. If I can help you, give me some sign."

No sound. I had almost abandoned hope when suddenly the door swung open, and I received the impression that I was being urged to go out on the landing. Without hesitation I rose, I felt my way to the door. I had not been mistaken, the door was wide open, and I passed out, stood to listen. Someone was crying at the foot of the staircase. Oh, the hopeless distress, the utter misery of that weeping! I crept down the stairs. The sobs ceased, but I was drawn as by a magnet along the narrow passage that led to the kitchen, and came up against the closed door. Passing my hand over the panels, I found the old-fashioned latch, raised it, stepped forward, saw the glow of live ashes in the range. Next moment there was a loud knock, just beneath my feet, a knock so decisive, so commanding that I knew I had been guided to the very spot that held the key to the "haunting." Then the tension weakened. No longer was I in touch with the spirit world, and I stood powerless, devitalized, yet in a sense triumphant. If I could prevail on Miss North to have the boards raised at this spot, just over the kitchen threshold, I had not a doubt but that something bearing upon the message I had received would there be discovered.

I went straight to the point when we met next morning, told her of my experiences, and urged her to have those boards raised without delay. At first she avoided my gaze and said nothing.

"I would willingly defray the cost," I went on, feeling desperate. "The inconvenience for you would be trifling, and I'm ready to guarantee you would have no further trouble over servants. The proof of that wretched girl's innocence lies there!"

"But think of the mess, the upset," she protested. "I have a horror of workmen about the place. And if it was all for nothing? Rats do cause queer noises, and there's a sick baby next door that wails; I have never heard or seen anything."

I cut short this parrot cry. "Can't you understand? Have you no pity?"

To my relief she looked slightly ashamed.

"Please don't distress yourself," she said, hastily. "I will think it over."

"Do," I besought her, "and, believe me, you won't regret it if you have those boards taken up."

"I will let you know, I will write and tell you. Yes," with an air of capitulation, "I will follow your advice."

"Bless you!" I said. And we exchanged friendly smiles.

I was to catch an early train; the village fly was already at the door, my suitcase on the box; I had tipped the deaf woman handsomely before leaving my room. Nothing now remained but to take leave of my hostess, and to await the fulfilment of her promise.

THREE WEEKS LATER I opened an envelope addressed to me in Miss North's handwriting, and read:—

"My dear,

"I am so sorry to have to put you off, but drains are to blame. The inheritance of a very old house is not all pure joy. To begin with, as I told you, I was hampered with a foolish tale of a ghost which prevented my keeping a servant, but just as I thought I had captured a treasure with no nerves or fancies, I was laid low with a bad throat, and apparently drains were to blame. So now my kitchen is in chaos, and for the time being I am lodged in the village inn. But I shall soon be tidy again, and am much looking forward to seeing you. My last guest was our mutual acquaintance, Mrs. Dale. She is, as you know, a real crank, and a conceited, overbearing one at that!— besides being obsessed with spiritualistic rubbish. In a weak moment I told her my house was supposed to be haunted, and nothing would do but she must come here for a couple of nights in order that she might 'investigate' for herself. She came, and, of course, heard significant noises. Then I confess I played a trick on her— may I be forgiven! But she brought it on herself with her absurd beliefs and domineering ways. I invented a story about that missing Cromwellian spoon, said it had been stolen long ago by a maid-servant who was sentenced to be hanged for the theft, but died in prison. She swallowed it all, made up her mind that it was a case of false accusation, and that the ghost of the victim walked the house. Then she declared she had heard sounds at the foot of the staircase, and had been 'led' to a certain spot in the kitchen. She wanted me to have the boards taken up, and offered to pay expenses. Naturally I had no intention of doing anything of the kind; but now, owing to drains, I have been forced to have the whole floor of the kitchen raised. And what do you think?— wedged into a hole near the door the skeleton of a rat was discovered with the missing spoon in its mouth! I am writing to our psychic friend by this post to tell her of the find, though, needless to say, I have made no confession of my little bit of fiction, neither have I mentioned drains! It would seem cruel to deprive her of the satisfaction of believing that she had spotted a real ghost. Of course, it was nothing on her part but the result of what I understand is termed 'expectant attention,' otherwise imagination..."

Boiling with rage, I flung down the letter, which clearly was not intended for me, but had been placed in the wrong envelope. I now understood why I had always disliked Miss North. My instinct had not deceived me; she was a mean, despicable character. So I was a crank, conceited, overbearing, with absurd beliefs! And to think of her having invented—

Then, all at once, in the midst of my anger and bewilderment, I began to see daylight. I collected my thoughts, re-read the letter, and bit by bit I realized that Miss North had not invented that story of the spoon, but that with

diabolical cunning she had devised this underhand method of leading me to believe that I had wasted my time and my money and my energies, and had been fooled into the bargain! It was no case of wrong envelopes. "My dear" did not exist. She had written no other letter to me by the same post; the whole thing was a spiteful, contemptible ruse. Well, it had not succeeded. I did not doubt that drains had forced her to have her kitchen floor raised, nor that the spoon had been found in the jaws of the skeleton rat; but as for believing that she had invented the story of the maid-servant and the theft— no, a thousand times no! I only rejoiced that the truth had at last come to light, however accidentally, and that in consequence a tortured spirit must now be at rest.

But never shall I forgive Miss North, and the next time we meet I shall cut her dead.

7: The Leopard Man's Story

Jack London

1876-1916

Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly, Aug 1903

HE HAD a dreamy, far-away look in his eyes, and his sad, insistent voice, gentle-spoken as a maid's, seemed the placid embodiment of some deep-seated melancholy. He was the Leopard Man, but he did not look it. His business in life, whereby he lived, was to appear in a cage of performing leopards before vast audiences, and to thrill those audiences by certain exhibitions of nerve for which his employers rewarded him on a scale commensurate with the thrills he produced.

As I say, he did not look it. He was narrow-hipped, narrow-shouldered, and anemic, while he seemed not so much oppressed by gloom as by a sweet and gentle sadness, the weight of which was as sweetly and gently borne. For an hour I had been trying to get a story out of him, but he appeared to lack imagination. To him there was no romance in his gorgeous career, no deeds of daring, no thrills— nothing but a gray sameness and infinite boredom.

Lions? Oh, yes! he had fought with them. It was nothing. All you had to do was to stay sober. Anybody could whip a lion to a standstill with an ordinary stick. He had fought one for half an hour once. Just hit him on the nose every time he rushed, and when he got artful and rushed with his head down, why, the thing to do was to stick out your leg. When he grabbed at the leg you drew it back and hit hint on the nose again. That was all.

With the far-away look in his eyes and his soft flow of words he showed me his scars. There were many of them, and one recent one where a tigress had reached for his shoulder and gone down to the bone. I could see the neatly mended rents in the coat he had on. His right arm, from the elbow down, looked as though it had gone through a threshing machine, what of the ravage wrought by claws and fangs. But it was nothing, he said, only the old wounds bothered him somewhat when rainy weather came on.

Suddenly his face brightened with a recollection, for he was really as anxious to give me a story as I was to get it.

"I suppose you've heard of the lion-tamer who was hated by another man?" he asked.

He paused and looked pensively at a sick lion in the cage opposite.

"Got the toothache," he explained. "Well, the lion-tamer's big play to the audience was putting his head in a lion's mouth. The man who hated him attended every performance in the hope sometime of seeing that lion crunch down. He followed the show about all over the country. The years went by and he grew old, and the lion-tamer grew old, and the lion grew old. And at last

one day, sitting in a front seat, he saw what he had waited for. The lion crunched down, and there wasn't any need to call a doctor."

The Leopard Man glanced casually over his finger nails in a manner which would have been critical had it not been so sad.

"Now, that's what I call patience," he continued, "and it's my style. But it was not the style of a fellow I knew. He was a little, thin, sawed-off, sword-swallowing and juggling Frenchman. De Ville, he called himself, and he had a nice wife. She did trapeze work and used to dive from under the roof into a net, turning over once on the way as nice as you please.

"De Ville had a quick temper, as quick as his hand, and his hand was as quick as the paw of a tiger. One day, because the ringmaster called him a frog-eater, or something like that and maybe a little worse, he shoved him against the soft pine background he used in his knife-throwing act, so quick the ringmaster didn't have time to think, and there, before the audience, De Ville kept the air on fire with his knives, sinking them into the wood all around the ringmaster so close that they passed through his clothes and most of them bit into his skin.

"The clowns had to pull the knives out to get him loose, for he was pinned fast. So the word went around to watch out for De Ville, and no one dared be more than barely civil to his wife. And she was a sly bit of baggage, too, only all hands were afraid of De Ville.

"But there was one man, Wallace, who was afraid of nothing. He was the lion-tamer, and he had the selfsame trick of putting his head into the lion's mouth. He'd put it into the mouths of any of them, though he preferred Augustus, a big, good-natured beast who could always be depended upon.

"As I was saying, Wallace— 'King' Wallace we called him— was afraid of nothing alive or dead. He was a king and no mistake. I've seen him drunk, and on a wager go into the cage of a lion that'd turned nasty, and without a stick beat him to a finish. Just did it with his fist on the nose.

"Madame de Ville—"

At an uproar behind us the Leopard Man turned quietly around. It was a divided cage, and a monkey, poking through the bars and around the partition, had had its paw seized by a big gray wolf who was trying to pull it off by main strength. The arm seemed stretching out longer end longer like a thick elastic, and the unfortunate monkey's mates were raising a terrible din. No keeper was at hand, so the Leopard Man stepped over a couple of paces, dealt the wolf a sharp blow on the nose with the light cane he carried, and returned with a sadly apologetic smile to take up his unfinished sentence as though there had been no interruption.

"—looked at King Wallace and King Wallace looked at her, while De Ville looked black. We warned Wallace, but it was no use. He laughed at us, as he laughed at De Ville one day when he shoved De Ville's head into a bucket of paste because he wanted to fight.

"De Ville was in a pretty mess— I helped to scrape him off; but he was cool as a cucumber and made no threats at all. But I saw a glitter in his eyes which I had seen often in the eyes of wild beasts, and I went out of my way to give Wallace a final warning. He laughed, but he did not look so much in Madame de Ville's direction after that.

"Several months passed by. Nothing had happened and I was beginning to think it all a scare over nothing. We were West by that time, showing in 'Frisco. It was during the afternoon performance, and the big tent was filled with women and children, when I went looking for Red Denny, the head canvas-man, who had walked off with my pocketknife.

"Passing by one of the dressing tents I glanced in through a hole in the canvas to see if I could locate him. He wasn't there, but directly in front of me was King Wallace, in tights, waiting for his turn to go on with his cage of performing lions. He was watching with much amusement a quarrel between a couple of trapeze artists. All the rest of the people in the dressing tent were watching the same thing, with the exception of De Ville whom I noticed staring at Wallace with undisguised hatred. Wallace and the rest were all too busy following the quarrel to notice this or what followed.

"But I saw it through the hole in the canvas. De Ville drew his handkerchief from his pocket, made as though to mop the sweat from his face with it (it was a hot day), and at the same time walked past Wallace's back. The look troubled me at the time, for not only did I see hatred in it, but I saw triumph as well.

"'De Ville will bear watching,' I said to myself, and I really breathed easier when I saw him go out the entrance to the circus grounds and board an electric car for down town. A few minutes later I was in the big tent, where I had overhauled Red Denny. King Wallace was doing his turn and holding the audience spellbound. He was in a particularly vicious mood, and he kept the lions stirred up till they were all snarling, that is, all of them except old Augustus, and he was just too fat and lazy and old to get stirred up over anything.

"Finally Wallace cracked the old lion's knees with his whip and got him into position. Old Augustus, blinking good-naturedly, opened his mouth and in popped Wallace's head. Then the jaws came together, *crunch*, just like that."

The Leopard Man smiled in a sweetly wistful fashion, and the far-away look came into his eyes.

"And that was the end of King Wallace," he went on in his sad, low voice. "After the excitement cooled down I watched my chance and bent over and smelled Wallace's head. Then I sneezed."

"It… it was…?" I queried with halting eagerness.

"Snuff— that De Ville dropped on his hair in the dressing tent. Old Augustus never meant to do it. He only sneezed."

———————

8: The Sixth Bench

Robert Barr

1850-1912

The Idler, Aug 1892

SHE was in earnest; he was not. When that state of things exists anything may happen. The occurrence may be commonplace, comic, or tragic, depending on the temperament and experience of the woman. In this instance the result was merely an appointment— which both of them kept.

Hector McLane came to Paris with noble resolutions, a theory of color, and a small allowance. Paris played havoc with all of these. He was engaged to a nice girl at home, who believed him destined to become a great painter; a delusion which McLane shared.

He entered with great zest into the life of a Parisian art student, but somehow the experience did not equal his anticipations. What he had read in books— poetry and prose— had thrown a halo around the Latin Quarter, and he was therefore disappointed in finding the halo missing. The romance was sordid and mercenary, and after a few months of it he yearned for something better.

In Paris you may have nearly everything— except the something better. It exists, of course, but it rarely falls in the way of the usually impecunious art student. Yet it happened that, as luck was not against the young man, he found it when he had abandoned the search for it.

McLane's theory was that art had become too sombre. The world was running overmuch after the subdued in color. He wanted to be able to paint things as they are, and was not to be deterred if his pictures were called gaudy. He obtained permission to set up his easel in the Church of Notre Dame, and in the dim light there, he endeavored to place on canvas some semblance of the splendor of color that came through the huge rose window high above him. He was discouraged to see how opaque the colors in the canvas were as compared with the translucent hues of the great window. As he leaned back with a sigh of defeat, his wandering eyes met, for one brief instant, something more beautiful than the stained glass, as the handiwork of God must always be more beautiful than the handiwork of man. The fleeting glimpse was of a melting pair of dark limpid eyes, which, meeting his, were instantly veiled, and then he had a longer view of the sweet face they belonged to. It was evident that the young girl had been admiring his work, which was more than he could hope to have the professor at Julien's do.

Lack of assurance was never considered, even by his dearest friend, to be among McLane's failings. He rose from his painting stool, bowed and asked her if she would not sit down for a moment; she could see the— the— painting so

much better. The girl did not answer, but turned a frightened look upon him, and fled under the wing of her kneeling duenna, who had not yet finished her devotions. It was evident that the prayers of the girl had been briefer than those of the old woman in whose charge she was. Where the need is greatest the prayer is often the shortest. McLane had one more transitory glimpse of those dark eyes as he held open the swinging door. The unconscious woman and the conscious girl passed out of the church.

This was how it began.

The painting of the colored window of Notre Dame now occupied almost all the time at the disposal of Hector McLane. No great work is ever accomplished without unwearied perseverance. It was remarkable that the realization of this truth came upon him just after he had definitely made up his mind to abandon the task. Before he allowed the swinging door to close he had resolved to pursue his study in color. It thus happened, incidentally, that he saw the young girl again, always at the same hour, and always with the same companion. Once he succeeded, unnoticed by the elder, in slipping a note into her hand, which he was pleased and flattered to see she retained and concealed. Another day he had the joy of having a few whispered words with her in the dim shadow of one of the gigantic pillars. After that, progress was comparatively easy.

Her name was Yvette, he learned, and he was amused to find with what expert dexterity a perfectly guileless and innocent little creature such as she was, managed to elude the vigilance of the aged and experienced woman who had her in charge. The stolen interviews usually took place in the little park behind Notre Dame. There they sat on the bench facing the fountain, or walked up and down on the crunching gravel under the trees. In the afternoons they walked in the secluded part of the park, in the shadow of the great church. It was her custom to send him dainty little notes telling him when she expected to be in the park, giving the number of the bench, for sometimes the duenna could not be eluded, and was seated there with Yvette. On these occasions McLane had to content himself with gazing from afar.

She was so much in earnest that the particular emotion which occupied the place of conscience in McLane's being, was troubled. He thought of the nice girl at home, and fervently hoped nothing of this would ever reach her ears. No matter how careful a man is, chance sometimes plays him a scurvy trick. McLane remembered instances, and regretted the world was so small. Sometimes a cry of recognition from one on the pavement to a comrade in the park, shouted through the iron railings, sent a shiver through McLane. Art students had an uncomfortable habit of roaming everywhere, and they were boisterous in hailing an acquaintance. Besides, they talked, and McLane

dreaded having his little intrigue the joke of the school. At any moment an objectionable art student might drop into the park to sketch the fountain, or the nurses and children, or the back of the cathedral at one end of the park, or even the low, gloomy, unimposing front of the Morgue at the other.

He was an easy-going young fellow, who hated trouble, and perhaps, knowing that the inevitable day of reckoning was approaching, this accounted for the somewhat tardy awakening of his conscience.

He sometimes thought it would be best simply to leave Paris without any explanation, but he remembered that she knew his address, having written to him often, and that by going to the school she could easily find out where his home was. So if there was to be a scene it was much better that it should take place in Paris, rather than where the nice girl lived.

He nerved himself up many times to make the explanation and bring down the avalanche, but when the time came he postponed it. But the inevitable ultimately arrives. He had some difficulty at first in getting her to understand the situation clearly, but when he at last succeeded there was no demonstration. She merely kept her eyes fixed on the gravel and gently withdrew her hand from his. To his surprise she did not cry, nor even answer him, but walked silently to and fro with downcast eyes in the shadow of the church. No one, he said, would ever occupy the place in his heart that she held. He was engaged to the other girl, but he had not known what love was until he met Yvette. He was bound to the other girl by ties he could not break, which was quite true, because the nice girl had a rich father. He drew such a pathetic picture of the loveless life he must in the future lead, that a great wave of self-pity surged up within him and his voice quavered. He felt almost resentful that she should take the separation in such an unemotional manner. When a man gets what he most desires he is still unsatisfied. This was exactly the way he had hoped she would take it.

All things come to an end, even explanations.

"Well, good-bye, Yvette," he said, reaching out his hand. She hesitated an instant, then without looking up, placed her small palm in his.

They stood thus for a moment under the trees, while the fountain beside them plashed and trickled musically. The shadow of the church was slowly creeping towards them over the gravel. The park was deserted, except by themselves. She tried gently to withdraw her hand, which he retained.

"Have you nothing to say to me, Yvette?" he asked, with a touch of reproach in his voice.

She did not answer. He held her fingers, which were slipping from his grasp, and the shadow touched her feet.

"Yvette, you will at least kiss me goodbye?"

She quickly withdrew her hand from his, shook her head and turned away. He watched her until she was out of sight, and then walked slowly towards his rooms on the Boulevard St. Germain. His thoughts were not comfortable. He was disappointed in Yvette. She was so clever, so witty, that he had at least expected she would have said something cutting, which he felt he thoroughly deserved. He had no idea she could be so heartless. Then his thoughts turned to the nice girl at home. She, too, had elements in her character that were somewhat bewildering to an honest young man. Her letters for a long time had been infrequent and unsatisfactory. It couldn't be possible that she had heard anything. Still, there is nothing so easy as point-blank denial, and he would see to that when he reached home.

An explanation awaited him at his rooms on the Boulevard. There was a foreign stamp on the envelope, and it was from the nice girl. There had been a mistake, she wrote, but happily she had discovered it before it was too late. She bitterly reproached herself, taking three pages to do it in, and on the fourth page he gathered that she would be married by the time he had the letter. There appeared to be no doubt that the nice girl fully realized how basely she had treated a talented, hard- working, aspiring, sterling young man, but the realization had not seemingly postponed the ringing of the wedding-bells to any appreciable extent.

Young McLane crushed the letter in his hand and used strong language, as, indeed, he was perfectly justified in doing. He laughed a hard dry laugh at the perfidy of woman. Then his thoughts turned towards Yvette. What a pity it was she was not rich! Like so many other noble, talented men, he realized he could not marry a poor woman. Suddenly it occurred to him that Yvette might not be poor. The more he pondered over the matter the more astonished he was that he had ever taken her poverty for granted. She dressed richly, and that cost money in Paris. He remembered that she wore a watch which flashed with jewels on the one occasion when he had seen it for a moment. He wished he had postponed his explanation for one more day; still, that was something easily remedied. He would tell her he had thrown over the other girl for her sake. Like a pang there came to him the remembrance that he did not know her address, nor even her family name. Still, she would be sure to visit the little park, and he would haunt it until she came. The haunting would give additional point to his story of consuming love. Anyhow, nothing could be done that night.

In the morning he was overjoyed to receive a letter from Yvette, and he was more than pleased when he read its contents. It asked for one more meeting behind the church.

"I could not tell you to-day," she wrote, *"all I felt. To-morrow you shall know, if you meet me. Do not fear that I will reproach you. You will receive this letter in the morning. At twelve o'clock I shall be waiting for you on the sixth bench on the row south of the fountain— the sixth bench— the farthest from the church.*

Yvette."

McLane was overjoyed at his good luck. He felt that he hardly merited it. He was early at the spot, and sat down on the last bench of the row facing the fountain. Yvette had not yet arrived, but it was still half an hour before the time. McLane read the morning paper and waited. At last the bells all around him chimed the hour of twelve. She had not come. This was unusual, but always possible. She might not have succeeded in getting away. The quarter and then the half hour passed before McLane began to suspect that he had been made the victim of a practical joke. He dismissed the thought; such a thing was so unlike her. He walked around the little park, hoping he had mistaken the row of benches. She was not there. He read the letter again. It was plain enough— the sixth bench. He counted the benches beginning at the church. One— two— three— four— five. There were only five benches in the row.

As he gazed stupidly at the fifth bench a man beside him said— "That is the bench, sir."

"What do you mean?" cried McLane, turning toward him, astonished at the remark.

"It was there that the young girl was found dead this morning— poisoned, they say."

McLane stared at him— and then he said huskily— "Who— was she?"

"Nobody knows that— yet. We will soon know, for everybody, as you see, is going into the Morgue. She's the only one on the bench to-day. Better go before the crowd gets greater. I have been twice."

McLane sank on the seat and drew his hand across his forehead.

He knew she was waiting for him on the sixth bench— the furthest from the church!

———————

9: Submarine

Stella Benson

1892–1933

Harper's Magazine, Sep 1929

THERE WAS a loud squealing in her ears and it was like the translation into sound of the hurried green twilight about her. Her head felt as if it was padded with vacuum like a thermos, but— also like a thermos filled with iced lemonade— cool, acid, and lucid inside. She watched Amos in front of her, cannonball-headed, waddling grotesquely, sticking out a large creased behind, like an offended rhinoceros, planting his immense feet on gardens and moving creatures and swaying flowers, flapping a portentous hand like a drunkard. "That's the man I love," she thought, gaping at him through streaked unflattering space, and as she thought this, his foot moved carelessly and he sprang, sprawling askew, to a point outside her range of vision. She could only see a blinkered view through the window in her helmet.

She was not wearing the full diving-suit but only a headpiece with a rubber "bertha" and her own bathing dress. She felt like a top-heavy pawn on a drunken chess-board. The airpipe was under her arm. The helmet was like a diving-bell with only a certain allowance of bubbling squealing air trapped inside it. When she bowed forward to look at a little crab, the air receded up to her mouth; in fright she bent backward and the crisp line of the water slipped down at once to her adam's apple. Now she felt braver; she could bend her nervous weightless body a little— not too much— to allow her window to command a view of white coral branches, white craters, anemones like pianists' fingers, green-black patches of matted weed, crabs and smiling open mussels, little glassy splinters offish that moved off round her ankles like sun-touched midges round the pillars of a cathedral. Looking at her ankles, slim and pearl-green under a body that felt so top-heavy and undisciplined, she tried to dance a step or two. Instantly she soared by mistake— sideways— backwards— outspread like a spider— outspread like a little boy lifted by the seat of the trousers… She landed on one heel, unable for a moment to retrieve her aspiring right leg, in a white coral crater.

"Who *was* that man like?" came suddenly into her mind as she waved and slanted in the urgent water, unable to stand, unable to fall. She was thinking of the man in charge of the raft above her. "Who *was* he like?" Her eyes remembered the man, standing in his shirtsleeves in the sun on the raft, scowling at the negroes who worked the pump, turning with an apologetic smile to her and Amos. Her ears remembered him… "It's not often we get a lady on this raft, wanting to dive for the fun of the thing, too. But you couldn't wear the outfit, lady, well look, you couldn't move it— try one of the shoes…

well look, there, you see— why, you couldn't carry the weight over the side— three hundred and twenty-five pounds— of course it feels like a feather once you're under water, but it'd be the getting there. Still… well look, I'd like you to go down and see the *Will o' the Wisp*— she lies so pretty, just twenty-eight feet under that buoy there; we shall get the whisky out of her hold by to-morrow night, I guess, if there really are only a hundred cases. No— she's not worth salving, herself— she was only a dot-and-carry-one old schooner and she crumpled her bows right in, running into that rock there— the sea was pretty high and the old man must have lost his head… It's only the whisky the owners want out of her; well look, right here, within a hundred miles of the Yankee buyers, whisky's worth something, I can tell you. Well look, lady, I'd like you to see her— well, why don't you go down in this gadget here, what the niggers use when they don't want to bother with the whole caboodle— nothing but the helmet and the tube, you see— works just as well for a short trip."

Well look, he said so often— who *was* that like— with that mumbled *well,* like *wll,* and the open throaty *look*— "*wll lok.*" It was like *Nana*— he might be Nana's son— that was why the connection— or disconnection— in her memory had made her so uncomfortable. Everything connected with Nana was wounding. The thought of Nana brought in a rush into her mind a young lifetime of croonings and hummings and comfortings and scoldings and rockings and forgivings… and then— *crash*— a day when Amos discovered that Nana, turned from nurse to housekeeper, had during these twenty years stolen eight hundred and thirty pounds out of the money given her for her charge's upkeep. The widow profiting by the orphan's trust. Nana turned out of the house. Amos shouting, "You're lucky we don't care to prosecute…" Nana's sailor son— who happened to be in Harwich— sent for in a great uproar. "Call yesself a gentleman— this is how you reward my old mother's lifetime of service… Wait till I get you alone— I'll get a chance to get even with you some day…" She had only seen Nana's son on that occasion— she had looked over the banisters and seen him shaking his fist. The man on the raft *was* like him. Amos would not notice it— he was so short-sighted. Besides, it was ten years ago. But "*wll lok*"— it was Nana's exact intonation. Surely the coincidence could be *too* extraordinary. She and Amos were only here by chance, yachting in the West Indies— had come here idly to this lonely lagoon, having heard of the wreck of the little smuggler. "Why, there's diving— oh, what fun, Vi, let's dive…" So here they were, by chance, at the bottom of the sea, at the mercy of a man on a raft— who was like Nana's son. By chance. "I'll get a chance to get even…" *Was* it Nana's son? Now, suddenly, she remembered that he had said to Amos, "Some people like diving, and some do it once and never do it again."

Amos had said, "We shall never get a chance to do it again, whether we like it or not." And Nana's son had replied, "Probably not." (It *was* Nana's son.) Then, to the negroes, "You goggling idiots, can't you— aw hell— well then, get to hell out of here. I'll do it myself." He would work the pump himself.

The young woman, alone in a squealing bubbling silence in the crater, looked about her in a panic, moving jointlessly like a cheap puppet. She thought thirstily of the safe dry air— of the light sky— of birds— of England— Oh to be in England now that April's here; there's the wise elm he grows each twig twice over… She tentatively pulled her air tube— the signal for help from the raft. There was no answering pull. She could probably swim upward unaided— indeed she had some difficulty in remaining down. But Amos in his leaden armour… Where was Amos? Where was the wreck of the *Will o' the Wisp*—?— he would be there. She began to climb prancingly up the side of the crater, a mild slope of perhaps six feet but as difficult as a mountain to her unwieldy feet. At the edge of the crater at last, she could see the wreck quite near, looking very different from her expectation. It looked like a little leaning house with a swinging door; the mast, with flags of blackish seaweed, was like a dying tree over the little house, and the ominous green light added to its menaced look. A waltzing inverted Spanish onion bowing to the crushed bows of the ship was identifiable as Amos. As his wife approached, the unsuspicious Amos, in one flying stride like a slow motion cinema study, aimed himself at the sloping deck of the schooner, reached it, slipped and fell, and lay in the scuppers. He did all this with absurd suspended ponderousness; his helmet, of course, could not change its expression to a smile, and this immobility gave him the earnest look of a puppy trying unsuccessfully for the first time to climb steps. His wife, however, did not smile at his antics inside her own soberly grinning mask. Somehow she reached the lower side of the ship, bruising her shoulder against a stanchion. She could reach her Amos' foot as he cautiously tried to get up. She pulled his foot; he sat down again as abruptly as the supporting water would allow him to, and bounced once. (What a field there is for a submarine low comedian!) Amos made a flapping gesture of irritation, like the "Don't bovver me" of a baby.

"Amos— come quickly— that's Nana's son, we're in danger," yelled his wife. Her ears cracked. The squealing in her headpiece changed its note and crackled; she felt almost suffocated; she reeled. Amos could not hear a sound. He flapped foolishly again. "Amos— Amos— " She pulled his ankle in panic— it was all she could reach of him. He tried to draw it away. There was asperity in his flapping. She pointed upward like a Salvation Army preacher. He turned his mask towards her; she half saw his mouth moving behind the glass. He pointed at her and pointed upward as he lay along the rail at an impossible angle. He

was evidently saying, "Go up yourself then, but leave me alone." This squealing instead of silence was a more frightful answer than silence. There he was, wrapped away in his own squealing sound-proof world. A fish swam between him and her. "Amos— Amos," she screamed, and once more was checked by semi-suffocation. Was the air being cut off from above? Amos withdrew his leaden foot from her reach. He regained a kind of perpendicularity and signed to her once more, peremptorily, that she should soar away from him. He took one step away from her. As a step, it failed. As a flight, it was unexpectedly successful; the steep deck seemed to launch him backwards into space; he flew towards his wife and, for a second, sat lightly on her iron face. She clasped him round the middle; he doubled up like a jointed foot-rule. She was saving him. She bounded about frantically. Amos managed to twist himself out of her grasp but she caught his arm. "It's Nana's son up there— an enemy." She clung with both hands to his rubber wrist, dragging him. Amos, she could see, was now quite alarmed— not suspicious of foul play but dumbfounded by the frenzied behaviour of his wife. He pulled his safety cord. They were instantly caught up to heaven together, floating sideways, intertwined, through the blowing current, like G.F. Watts' *Paolo and Francesca.* Their two round steel heads collided at the surface, at the foot of the raft's ladder. Some one lifted our young woman's false head off; she was herself again— she was herself in her bathing suit, unarmoured, safe, as though coming aboard after a common swim. A face bent over her. Nana's son? What *had* she been thinking of? This man was not in the least like Nana's son; he was short and broad— Nana's son had been tall and knock-kneed; this man on the raft was obviously Australian— he greeted her with an unmistakable accent, and his first words were not *wll lok,* but *lok here, lidy*… What madness of memory had caught her, down there in that new senseless shadowed world?

Amos was being helped up the ladder. Some one opened his little window and his voice leapt out like a bird out of a cage. "Good Lord, Vi, what in the world…?" as the raftman helpfully wrenched his iron head off.

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10: Hereditary

"Waif Wander"

Mary Helena Fortune, 1833-1911
In *Sand on the Gumshoe*, 1989

THERE WANTED but a few days to Christmas, when one morning Archie Hopeton dashed into my office with an open letter in his hand. I say dashed, for scarcely any other word would effectually describe his abrupt and sudden entrance; and, as such a manner was rather unusual with him, I looked up at him in wondering inquiry.

'I've got the invitation for you, Mark. Now, surely you won't refuse to go with me. My aunt, Mrs Thorne, says she will be very much pleased to see you.'

'I'm afraid you've been putting the screw on the old lady, Archie—threatening not to go yourself unless she invited me, or something of that sort?'

' 'Pon my honour, no. I simply said that I was trying hard to induce you to spend your holidays at Puntwater. You will go, won't you, Mark, out of charity, if for no other reason?'

I looked up from my desk into the young fellow's anxious and pleading face; it was the face of a fair, handsome youth of twenty-two or three, with a pair of fine, brown eyes lighting it up, and beautiful glossy, fair hair waving above it; but at the moment it looked really haggard and careworn.

'I might as well go there as anywhere else, Archie,' I returned, 'that is to say if I get away at all. I'm so used to applying for leave, having it granted, and then cancelled again in consequence of a "very particular case," that I quite expect to stop and work hard during holiday time.'

'Why don't you start at once? Your leave's granted now. Will you come on Monday, Mark?' he asked eagerly.

'If I get through with this business today, I shall certainly take time by the forelock, and go on Monday, my son. But I *can't* make out your great anxiety to have me go with you.'

'That shows how little attention you've been paying to all my egotistical stories,' he cried, 'and indeed, Sinclair, it is as simple a piece of selfishness for me to wish you with me, I mean, as ever you accused me of; but I am positively *afraid* to go back to aunt's, *afraid* is the word.'

'Afraid of your aunt, or cousin? Which?'

'Of both. Oh, I know I'm a soft fellow, Sinclair, but until you have seen them, and known them, you cannot understand. Aunt Thorne has set her very heart on us marrying, and now that I've chosen so differently, she will be wild.'

'And the young lady? Your cousin Hester, what will she say, or do? Is she so infatuated with you that she will never forgive you? What a lady-killer you must be, young chap. It's well to be you.'

'For mercy sake don't chaff, Mark. I can't stand it. Wait till you see them, and you will understand better. I was brought up by Aunt Thorne, and until I went to college, I had no idea that they were so peculiar and different from other people. Well, Mark, you *will* come, eh?'

'I suppose I must. I suppose, to prove the entire unselfishness of my friendship for a young scatterbrains, I must place myself as a sort of buffer between him and the ladies who are foolish enough to wish to wed him against his will. But I've got a new idea, Archie. I'll pay my addresses to Miss Thorne myself and see if I can't cut you out. You say she has money?'

'Yes, her father settled a tidy little fortune on Hester, but God forbid that you should think of spending your life with such a girl.'

'I wish she heard you— I think she would be disenchanted.'

Archie shook his head with a shadow on his usually bright face that nothing but my faithful promise for Monday served to lighten.

For a wonder nothing intervened, and on the appointed day I found myself and portmanteau in company with Archie Hopeton, being whirled along the line to Puntwater. The weather was delightful, and we had every prospect of splendid holidays for outdoor amusements.

But I was considerably more occupied by thinking curiously of Archie's relatives than of the fishing and shooting he promised me, and it was no wonder I had known him ever since he had commenced his career as a student of medicine, and considering the difference of our years, we had got on very well together. His fresh ideas of life, and his merry, good-humored freedom of conversation suited me, although what he had taken a fancy to in the hard-worked, cynical Detective Sinclair had often puzzled me.

I suppose it was the professional element ingrained in me that had made me so curious respecting these female relatives he so often spoke about. People with ample means, yet who lived so retired a life as to be almost strangers to their nearest neigbours— must have something peculiar about them; but there were many other things that I had become acquainted with through Archie that seemed at once odd and unaccountable to me.

One of them was the fact that Mrs Thorne had so set her heart on her daughter's marriage with Archie. It was rather an unusual thing for a mother of Mrs Thorne's stamp to insist on her girl marrying a penniless young doctor, entirely depending on her own help as to his present expenditure, and on his profession for his future support, but there were still more peculiar circumstances in the affair. From what Archie had himself told me, I had little

doubt that Mrs Thorne absolutely disliked her nephew. If he had simply neglected to fall in with her views by ignoring his cousin Hester's charms and preference, it would have been bad enough, but the silly fellow had gone and fallen in love with some pretty child in the neighbourhood of his aunt's place, and when she came to find it out there would be the— ahem— to pay.

'I see you are getting quite nervous, Archie,' I said bantering-ly, as the train neared Puntwater.

'I am,' he said 'and you needn't laugh about it. It's all sure to be found out before we go back, for I can't and won't be appropriated any longer, now that I am really engaged to Bessie— poor little girl! If she only knew how wild aunt will be she would be terrified out of her life. You see, Mark, I've been accustomed to take things easy at home, and let them do with me as they liked, for peace sake, but now it *must* be different and there's sure to be scenes.

'What sort of man was your uncle? Do you remember him at all?'

'A little— he was peculiar, too, but kind withall. It is nine or ten years since he died, I think.'

'In this colony?'

'Yes, and rather suddenly. I was at school, but although aunt never speaks of him, Hester has done so occasionally. He was ill, and aunt took him to town for medical advice— he died there, and she came back a widow.'

There was no one in the compartment with us, and we could speak freely.

'See here, mate,' I said. 'I don't quite understand my *role* in this affair; what is it that you expect me to do in it? Am I to try and frighten your good aunt out of her anxiety for your alliance by declaring you to be incorrigibly dissipated, or what?'

'That game won't do,' he answered with a laugh that came from his teeth only. 'I've tried it myself, and it didn't effect any good purpose. I don't know what you're to do for me, Mark, but I've every confidence in you. You're such a clever chap, you see, that you'll corner them up somehow. At all events, I depend on you to back me if there's a regular row about Bessie.'

'And get kicked out? Well I suppose it wouldn't much matter if I did. We'll see, old boy— if I'm not grateful for the dose of flattery you've given me, I ought to be.'

It was yet early in the day when we reached Puntwater, and our first move was to refresh and brighten ourselves up at the hotel before presenting ourselves to Mrs and Miss Thorne. They expected us, though they were not aware of the day we should arrive, so no fear of their being waiting lunch or any other meal prevented us from resting before we set out for Riverdale. For that was the name bestowed by its godfathers and godmothers on Mrs

Thorne's property, and it was a pretty suitable one. It was about half a mile from the township, and situated so near the Loddon that the grounds sloped down to the river. The house itself was of brick and wood, and a prettily picturesque building, the old look of which was partly concealed by quantities of climbing plants and vines and a group of the original old monarchs of the bush in the shape of box and peppermint trees.

'It's the prettiest place I've seen for many a day,' I observed, as Archie paused and turned toward the river. 'You might do worse than please mamma, marry your cousin, and settle down to live a delightfully rural and domestic life.'

He did not answer, and seeing that he was intently gazing at a pretty little cottage that stood almost close to the Loddon on a lovely, sloping, green bank, I guessed at once.

'Oh, I see! That's the home of Bessie, the beloved, eh? And I suppose that is the sweet girl herself, sitting down there by the water, dressed in white?'

'Where?' he asked, eagerly.

'Here, just below us, with her back against a tree, and her eyes, not on the book she holds in her lap, but on the river. But no, it can't be; your *fiancée* is fair, and this girl is black as night. It must be Miss Thorne.'

'It is,' Archie answered shortly and turned to continue his way toward the cottage.

'I say, Archie, I don't think Miss Thorne has observed us. I have a fancy for making the acquaintance of that young lady in some unconventional manner. Just you go on and prepare aunt and get your blowing up, and I'll join you after.'

All right— please yourself, only mind, I didn't tell them you were a detective.'

'Ashamed of the D's acquaintance, eh? Well, perhaps it's all the better. Ta-ta.'

We had moved on a few steps, and when we parted, there were some trees between me and the young lady by the river; but when I made a circuit of them, I saw she still sat like an image of stone in the same spot.

I may well say like an image, for I never did see anything like the apparent immobility of that girl. I had an opportunity of studying her face before she observed me and before the sound of my foot attracted her. It was as calm as the river at her feet, and far more expressionless.

And it was a remarkable face for all that— one that would hold your eye as would a statue with a story in every line; it was pale as the face of a living, healthy subject could possibly be, and its pallor was apparent all the more

from the strong contrast of hair— as black as night— and strongly marked, straight, black brows above black-lashed, deeply-set eyes of the hue of coal.

She was small and slight of figure and prettily dressed in black silk, and she was about twenty-three or four. Her attire was rather odd in some way— I recognised that fact at once, but I suppose in consequence of my lamentable ignorance of drapery and fashions, I could not decide where, or in what the oddity began. Her glossy hair was drawn back smoothly from her face and worn in a large coil high on the back of her head, and with the exception of a massive brooch fastening her collar, she had not a single ornament about.

I stood for a moment and examined the small and delicate, yet sharp features, and saw that the white hands crossed idly on her lap were small and thin, and that the black dress fitted her perfect figure with a precision almost wonderful. There did not seem to be a crease or a wrinkle anywhere, even in the careless attitude she held, leaning against the trunk of the old tree.

Gazing at the river, I have said, and gazing as if she was thoughtless. I mean that her face was so expressionless as to make me wonder if it could be possible for any girl of her age to sit there without thinking of anything, no more than if she were really the image I have compared her to.

'A strange girl this, and one worth studying; though she is not the sort one might get up a pleasant, silly flirtation with, and as for falling in love with her— phew?'

Something like that, I thought to myself as I advanced until she was attracted by the sound of my footstep. She lifted up the heavy eyelashes and turned upon me a pair of blazing, black eyes that almost electrified me as they met mine.

You see, I had been speculating so on the strange immobility of the still-looking face, that when the piercing orbs looked at me with that fiery intensity, the fact struck me as though a corpse had suddenly returned to life and turned a look full of terrible vitality on me, and I assure that I took no small credit to myself and my training for especial emergencies that I managed to retain my self-possession and not to expose my astonishment to the lady.

'Pardon me, I hope I have not startled you. If I have the honour of addressing Miss Thorne, may I introduce myself as Mr Sinclair— Archie's friend?'

I said this with the most agreeable grimace I could summon, and with uncovered head and a bow that would have been quite low enough for any queen; but she took as much notice of me as though I was a stick until I concluded, and then she simply repeated, coldly, 'Archie's friend,' just with her lips, and not the move of another facial muscle; but all at once a faint flush rose to her pale cheeks, and she rose up suddenly.

'Pray do not let me disturb you,' I cried, 'I shall go away at once rather than do so.'

'You do not disturb me. Of course, if Archie— if Mr Hopeton has arrived, I must return. Mamma will require assistance— perhaps you will accompany me?' she added, with a hesitation so evident that it was only too apparent how much rather she would have left me behind. But I have got past the age when we begin to consider our own convenience and pleasure in preference to the indulgence of an irritable vanity, so I bowed and marched on beside her.

I tried vainly to open a conversation as we went toward the house— my original remarks on the weather and the beauty of the view from Riverdale, and got a bow or a monosyllable for my pains. She looked to all appearance as cool as an iceberg, but that there was an internal excitement under the ice was quite visible to a keen observer. The flush deepened on her cheek as we neared the cottage, and I saw that the hand, drooped to her side as she walked, was clenched so tightly that the nails were buried in the palm.

At the door we were met by Archie in person; he had seen our approach, and glad of interruption to what had proved to be a disagreeable interview with his aunt, he hastened to get me into it with the usual selfishness of his sex.

He shook hands with his cousin, hurriedly, and I saw that in spite of the firm pressure of her lips against each other, they trembled spasmodically as he addressed a few commonplaces to the girl, and then he fussily led me into a parlour and as fussily introduced me to Mrs Thorne.

There was a strong resemblance between mother and daughter, although in the face or figure of the former there was an entire absence of the immobility distinguishing the younger woman. Mrs Thorne was small and thin, and had coal-black hair and eyes also, but her figure seemed never at rest; and her eyes darted about sharply as if continually watching and scanning every movement of those around her. She impressed me as being shrewish, in spite of the apparent kindness of her reception; and, after I had been in her company a short time, I had discovered, or fancied I discovered, that she was unchangeably under the influence of one predominate feeling, which was a dread of something in connection with her daughter. Even the distant prospect of a secret for me to ferret out was quite enough to interest me at once, and I set myself on the watch with intense gusto.

We had dinner, and immediately after Archie, who had been exhibiting signs of restlessness for the hour previous, excused himself for a couple of hours, having, as he declared, a particular matter to attend to at Puntwater for a friend. I saw the scowl that came into Mrs Thorne's face as he left the room, and the quick, apprehensive look she darted towards her daughter.

Hester, however, took no notice of her and made no remark; but, when Archie had gone, she got up and walked through the open window to the garden. It was a lovely evening, and there was sufficient excuse in the beauty of the time and weather to make Mrs Thorne's proposal of a walk an apparently sensible one.

'It would be a shame to keep you indoors, Mr Sinclair,' she said, moving towards the door. 'And rather than do so, I will get some slight wrap and accompany you. We shall, in all probability, find my daughter among the flowers.'

But she was not among the flowers. When we got outside the shrubs near the cottage, we could see the slight, black-robed figure sitting in the identical spot, and in the identical attitude I had first seen her. I observed Mrs. Thorne's face grow paler as she looked toward the river and saw the girl seated, steadily gazing at the water, with her hands in her lap and her back supported by the tree.

'That seems to be a favourite spot of Miss Thorne's,' I observed, as the mother's eyes fell upon her. 'I met her there as I came.'

'Yes, she is there a great deal, and I do all I can. She is not to be weaned from it. I should take it as a great favour, Mr Sinclair, if you could influence her not to sit so by the water.'

'I cannot flatter myself that Miss Thorne is likely to be influenced by anything I might say, madam, but I can at least try. What is your objection, may I ask?'

'I don't think the air of the river is healthy for Hester— she is far from strong— and I am sure that the monotonous sound of the running water makes her morbidly sad.'

'Perhaps it may be so. At all events it is very lonely for her. I suppose it will be different while Archie is here. Miss Thorne may perhaps allow her cousin to escort her about a little during his visit.'

At the name of her nephew, Mrs Thorne's brows met in a deep black line over her nose, and her lips grew stern. She was looking at the gravel of the walk over which we were passing, but she lifted her sharp, black eyes just then, and bored a hole right through me, in a keen attempt to see what I was made of ere she said:

'I want to speak to you about Archie, Mr Sinclair. Let us move toward the river— we can talk as we go.'

'With pleasure,' I returned, wondering all the time what kind of pumping I was going to get about Archie.

'You are my nephew's most intimate friend, Mr Sinclair?'

'Well, I scarcely know, Mrs Thorne. We are very intimate certainly, but there is a considerable difference in our ages, and, as a necessary consequence, a great difference in our modes of living.'

'I know— I know,' she said impatiently. 'I can understand all that— still you *are* friends?'

'I hope and believe so, madam.'

'And my nephew confides in you and tells you a good deal of his affairs, doubtless?'

'Ye-es,' I answered, with some hesitation, for, while I wanted to hear what she had to say, I was afraid of committing myself too far.

'Can you tell me, without any breach of confidence, if Archie is entangled in any love affair in town? I have particular— *most* particular reasons for wishing to know.'

'I can with certainty assure you that he has nothing of the kind on hand in town, Mrs Thorne,' I assured her.

Her face brightened wonderfully, and something like a sigh of relief escaped between her thin, sharp lips.

'I'm glad of that,' she declared. 'It is quite a relief to hear you say so. After all it is most unlikely that at his age he should be wound up in any engagement. He is only a boy.'

'Oh, as to that, madam, boys even younger than Archie have managed to find their hearts and pledge them before now, and I could not undertake to say that he has not already done so. Indeed, I believe he has.'

'Has what? Do you mean that my nephew is in love, or engaged, or some nonsense or other? I thought I understood you to assure me that he was quite free from any entanglement in town.'

'So you did. I said that he had no engagement or love affair in town to my certain knowledge, but I could not make the same statement, truthfully, about the country.'

'In the country? Where? Who? In the name of God tell me all about it?'

Wondering at the terrible fear in her tones, I turned slightly to look in her face. I think I have mentioned that Mrs Thorne was an older epitome of her daughter, small, slight, and pale in complexion, with eyes and hair like night. She wore a widow's cap, too, the long, white bands of which streamed over the shoulders of her black dress down to the slender, prim waist with its neat belt. This cap was worn primly and suited the style of the woman's features; but now, as I looked at her, the calm content of her face was gone and every feature was convulsed with a terrible fear.

'Quick! If you don't want to kill me, tell me with whom Archie Hopeton is in love.'

'I am not sufficiently in his confidence to inform you precisely, Mrs Thorne, but I believe it is some young lady in this neighbourhood. What more likely than that his heart is in his cousin's keeping?'

She looked at me sharply, as I insinuatingly completed my reply— perhaps she was shrewd enough to guess my insincerity. At all events she made no reply, and with a strong effort at controlling her feelings made some remark that shut off the subject.

By this time we had reached the river bank, where the gravelled walk turned at an acute angle and wound along by the water. As we turned that corner, I looked up the river toward the point where stood embowered in greenery, the pretty home of Bessie Elliot, the young girl I knew was my friend Archie's beloved *fiancée,* and where I thought he most likely was at that instant. I saw nothing of him, however, and went on toward Miss Thorne, who still sat like an image, staring at the running water. The mother hastened her steps as she saw her, and in a few moments, we were standing beside her.

'Hester, dear, don't sit here so near the river,' Mrs Thorne said pleadingly. 'You know it cannot be good for you.'

'Can you tell me anything that *would* be good for me?' the girl asked sharply as she lifted her eyes to her mother's face with such a fierce glare in them that she cowered under it. 'You are always following me about bothering— I wish to goodness you'd let me alone.'

'My dear, Mr Sinclair is here, hoping for a stroll with you,' the woman said in a half terrified way that strangely puzzled me.

'What do I care for Mr Sinclair?' was the sharp retort, 'and what does he care for me? Please go away, and leave me in peace!'

'Are you not forgetting your cousin, Hester?' Mrs Thorne said faintly. 'He will be back soon and think it so strange to find you absent.'

Such a wild laugh darted from the girl's lips that I absolutely started, and her mother turned a frightened look towards me.

'No, I am not forgetting my cousin Archie, and he will not return as soon as you think. Are you going?'

The question was asked with a sudden lifting of her figure from its leaning position against the tree, and a clenching of the right hand that lay on her lap, and a fierce look from the black eyes that seemed to actually wither the miserable mother.

'Yes, yes, dear, we're going at once. How very fond of solitude my daughter is.'

I could not reply to this remarkable observation, for I was too completely astonished at the extraordinary conduct of Miss Thorne to make small talk for her mother. 'That's a pretty temper if you like!' I thought to myself, 'and how

strange Archie never mentioned it to me. Why, her very mother is afraid of her life to cross the beauty.'

We returned toward the house, and at last Mrs Thorne broke the awkward silence.

'I need not apologise for my poor girl's strange manner, Mr Sinclair. Of course Archie has told you what a sufferer she was?'

'No, he has not mentioned anything particular.'

'No! Well, my poor child had a severe attack of nervous fever some years ago, and ever since she is liable to recurrences of nervousness which are absolutely painful. There are days when the sound of a voice is torture to her.'

'And perhaps she finds the sound of the rippling water soothing, dear madam. If such is the case, pray, permit her to enjoy it in peace. I should be sorry if my visit should in any way interfere with Miss Thorne's comfort, and Archie and I have formed any amount of plans about shooting and fishing while we are here.'

'Thank you, Mr Sinclair, but I trust Hester may be quite recovered tomorrow.'

Some household affair called my hostess inside, and I was left to pace up and down one of the walks, smoking a cigar, while waiting for Archie. I had some curiosity to know when Miss Thorne would think proper to come up from the river, too, and kept a sharp look-out until the sun was down, and the full moon was rising. At last Archie put in an appearance when it was so dark that I could scarcely recognise him.

'You're a fine fellow!' I cried, 'to leave me here all alone in an enemy's camp. And if you don't get a good rowing from the ladies, you deserve one.'

'I couldn't help it,' he said in a whisper. 'I wrote to Bessie, telling her I would be at our old trysting place this evening, and I've been waiting for her ever since. Some visitors had detained her, and I had scarcely time to say half-a-dozen words to her.'

'No, I suppose you were too busy kissing. Did you see your cousin down by the river?'

'Hester? No, what would take me down there at this time of night?'

'At all events she's there. How was it you never told me what a delightful temper she had, my son?'

'Who? Hester? I never saw anything remarkably bad about it. She used to be a bit sulky, that's all.'

Then I related to him the episode of our interview, and he was full of astonishment. 'I never heard of such an exhibition on my cousin's part— surely she is greatly changed. I think I'll go down and look for her to keep the peace. I

hope to goodness she has heard nothing about Bessie. Does aunt guess, do you think, Sinclair?'

'Not the facts, I think,' and then I told him of the pumping I had undergone from the elder lady.

'It'll have to come out somehow, and, heaven knows, I'd rather face anything. Mark, you'll promise to tell them for me when I can make up my mind, won't you?'

'You're an arrant coward, Mr Archibald. Oh, yes, I'll face the breach for you. It would be a sort of satisfaction to make that young lady a little return for her uncalled-for rudeness to Mr Sinclair. But you'd better go, if you want to make the peace for the present.'

He had scarcely gone when Mrs Thorne came out anxiously.

'Are you alone, Mr Sinclair? I had hoped the young people were with you. Where is Archie, do you know?'

'I think he is with Miss Thorne. Yes, there they are, coming up by the shrubbery,' and Mrs Thorne, evidently relieved, begged me to go into the house.

The evening we spent in the little drawing-room at Riverdale was, to my mind, about the most wretchedly dull I ever passed. It was worse than dull, for it was full of restraint and discomfort. There was a piano in the room, and Mrs Thorne tried timidly to induce her daughter to sing and play for us. The reply she got was a look that silenced her and made the miserable woman's hands tremble as though she had the ague.

Hester Thorne sat back from the lamp in the corner of a lounge, her hand on her lap, with the slender white fingers interlocked. She had chosen the seat that she might have Archie in full view as he sat in an arm-chair before her and her mother, and I saw that he knew he was watched and felt miserable under the glare of the fierce black eyes that shone in the dim corner like those of a cat.

I did my best, and so did Mrs Thorne, to try and get up a general conversation, but to no purpose. Even to direct appeals Hester would return a cold, curt monosyllable, and poor Archie was too decidedly uncomfortable to assist me in small talk. At last I took pity on him, and drew his attention to the hour with a remark that we must not keep the ladies up too late, and I saw how gladly Mrs Thorne had in a little supper and then escorted us to our several chamber doors.

When I had shut myself in, I went to the French window and opened it, for the room seemed hot and close, and feeling the inutility of attempting sleep at an hour so unusually early for me, I blew out my lamp and sat down by the open window to enjoy a cigar and a good think at one and the same time.

These new acquaintances of mine were puzzling me. As Hester Thorne sat there in the lounge during the evening and looked at Archie with that stony glare in her awful eyes, an idea that I had seen those eyes somewhere before haunted me; they seemed quite familiar to me. Indeed, the darkly-outlined face was altogether like the memory of a well-impressed dream on me, but in vain. I tried to recall the circumstances under which the impression had been made.

Finding that impossible, my mind reverted to the strange way of exhibiting her preference which I had an opportunity of witnessing since my arrival.

'Archie, indeed, was quite correct in saying I had better wait to see the people before I recommended him to fall in with his aunt's views,' I thought to myself, 'for if his cousin is not the most ill-tempered and worst-bred girl I ever met, I'm no judge. What a jolly row there will be when she finds out about Archie being over head and ears in love with Bessie Elliot! By-the-bye, I must get him to introduce me before I go. I should like to become acquainted with Archie's idea of the beautiful.' But little, indeed, I thought in what an awful way I should become acquainted with Bessie Elliot.

I had got to the end of my cigar and stood up to fling the butt out of the window. As I did so, I heard a rush of feminine garments and the sound of a hurried, but light, foot on the grass outside. It was, as I have before stated, nearly full moon, but a number of white, fleecy clouds were sailing in the lovely, pale sky, which at that moment had met and partially hid the lady moon so that the light under the trees at the side of the house was but indistinct. The idea that the movement I had heard was caused by some fresh freak of Hester Thorne struck me, and deeply curious, I stepped out and moved more into the shadow of the trees.

Standing there a moment I heard voices at some distance down toward the Loddon, and allowing my curiosity to overcome what small sense of decency I may have possessed, I ran down behind the fringe of shrubs that separated the gravel from the large centre grass plot. As I approached the speakers, I at once recognised the voices of mother and daughter. In a few seconds more there was between them and me only a thinly-leaved bush, and I could distinctly see the two forms— one a picture of almost demoniac anger, the other of an humble and pleading yet most terrified petitioner.

'Do you hear? I *will* not be followed and haunted day and night. You are driving me *mad!* Don't I tell you that it is only by the side of that water that I feel at rest, and yet you will try to keep me away from it! Go home, woman! If you are one of those who can sleep in bed when those they love are dead, go and sleep in yours. And yet you say you loved my father!'

The scorn of the latter words was unendurable, and the poor mother seemed barely able to gasp— 'Oh, Hester!'

'Oh, Hester!' the angry girl mimicked. 'Oh! Hester, why aren't you a stone? Oh! Hester, what makes you feel? When you see the man you love, and who has loved you, drifting away from you for ever, why don't you go to bed and sleep? Don't deny it! He did love me! He has been mine only from boyhood. Hasn't he lived with me under one roof, and sat with me in one school and one church, and prayed to God with me from one book, until the pretty face of a girl baby bewitched him?' And with a dark face, eyes full of fire, and a gesture full of fury, she hurried riverward once more.

'Oh! what am I to do?' Mrs Thorne gasped, as she clasped her hands and wrung them despairingly; and then, as the form of her daughter was rapidly disappearing, she turned and went quickly back to the house.

On witnessing this bewildering scene I was puzzled. This was love with a vengeance. What a fortunate chap my friend, Archie, was to inspire the girls with so desperate a passion! But then, you know, we don't respect girls that throw their hearts at fellows' heads that way, and *I am afraid* that the sneer on my lips would not have gratified Miss Thorne if she could have seen me listening to her confession of love for a young man who cared less for her than he did for his cricket bat.

But when she turned to face her terrified mother with eyes that gleamed like a cat's in the moonlight, and raised her right hand and her voice in furious exclamation, a memory of one other face shot into my mind and almost suspended my breath.

'Good heavens!' I thought to myself. 'Can it be possible that*that* is the likeness I fancied I recognised? If it is I can quite understand that unfortunate woman's terror, and her as unfortunate daughter's violent temper. I must question Archie tomorrow.

In the meantime, however, it should not do to let that girl go away down to that river all alone. In her violent mood it would not be safe, and her mother was afraid to follow her— I could see that, so I hurried down by the side of the grounds, avoiding the moonlight as much as I could and seeking the shelter of the trees and shrubs.

It was by this time almost as bright as day, and when I reached the bank of the Loddon, lower down than the spot at which I had seen her in the afternoon, I paused and looked toward it. She was not seated by the tree, but she was standing by the river, her face gleaming white in the moonlight, and her gaze fixed apparently on some object up the stream.

All at once I remembered her words to her mother— words to which I had, at the time they were spoken, paid little heed. She had alluded to Archie being

bewitched by a baby girl's face. Was it possible that she had, in some cunning way, discovered the secret he had been so anxious to preserve and knew of his affection for Bessie Elliot? If that was the case, truly was 'all the fat in the fire.'

And it seemed probable, as I watched her, dreading to tell you the truth, that she contemplated suicide. I noticed that Bessie's home was visible from where she stood, its white wooden roof gleaming brightly just above the foliage at the bend of the stream higher up.

She stood there so immovably for some time that I got tired of watching her, and just as I was thinking of boldly walking down to her and pretending I had been tempted to a stroll by the beauty of the night, she lifted the hand that had been drooping by her side and took her watch from her side.

I saw it gleam in the brilliant beams of the moon and knew that she was consulting it to see the time, for she lifted her eyes from its face to look up at the moon, as if to see how high it was. Then she turned one more steady look up the river before she moved away and went quickly, as one with a purpose, up the gravel walk toward her home.

I felt relieved, and was about following her when I heard a rustle behind me, and looking in the direction of the noise, I saw Archie hurriedly coming toward the river. He was greatly surprised on meeting me and hastily asked what had brought me there.

'I thought you in bed an hour ago,' he said. 'Have you seen anything of Hester? There's the deuce to pay with the old lady and her it seems, and I'm in for it nicely.'

'Make your mind easy about your cousin; she's at home by this time,' I returned. 'But what is the what-do-you-call-'em to pay about?'

'Aunt came to my room a few minutes ago like a woman half cranky with terror. She told me that Hester had gone down to the river in spite of her, and that Hester was in such a state of mind that she was afraid she'd make away with herself. Then she begged and prayed of me to get up and go after her, declaring that the girl's very existence was in my hands.'

'Hum!' grunted I.

'I tell you what it is, Mark. It is the deuce of a bore—'

'Will you say what-do-you-call-it of a bore?' I interrupted coolly.

'Bosh! It *is* the deuce of a bore to have a girl threatening to drown herself or kill somebody if a fellow doesn't make love to her.'

'Oh! that's it, is it?'

'About it, I believe. Aunt almost told me plainly that Hester was breaking her heart at what she was pleased to call my desertion. Sinclair, you know more about women then I do. Is it customary for mothers to stand in bodily fear of their daughters and to be afraid to cross them in any way?'

'Rather a difficult question, my boy, and one I should prefer not answering, but I may observe that, as a general thing, we could do in the world with a few more obedient and respectful daughters. But I want to ask *you* a question. Are you quite sure that your Uncle Thorne is dead?'

'Am I sure? What a strange question! Of course I'm sure. What should aunt pretend he was dead for if he was not?'

'Another puzzling question, but do you know anyone who saw him dead? Or who saw him even ill?'

'No! Bah! Sinclair, what a fellow you are! You can't help fancying a secret in the most natural event. What makes you suppose the possibility of Uncle Thorne's being alive?'

'Because I believe I saw him in Melbourne not a month ago!'

'Gracious! But how could you know him?'

'You have told me a dozen times of your cousin's extraordinary likeness to her father, and when I saw her tonight under a strong excitement, her face brought before me another face— a man's face— with the same terrible expression on the same mould of feature.'

The young chap saw, or imagined he saw in my face, or heard in the tones of my voice, a hint that there was something very serious connected with the man I alluded to. He looked at me anxiously for a moment, and then he asked -

'Do you *know* of anything wrong, Mark?'

'On honour— no, Archie.'

'Was the man you think was my Uncle Thorne in gaol or a criminal of any sort?'

'On honour— no again.'

'Oh, then it's all right— it's all fancy on your part. Uncle *must*be dead, you know. But, for any sake, tell me what I'm to do about Hester? Can't you give me advice of some kind?'

'I can give you a great many kinds I don't doubt. I can give you good, bad, and indifferent— welcome and unwelcome— possible and impossible— but first it will be necessary for you to tell me what strait you are in.'

'You know well enough! Aunt says that Hester has believed that I loved her ever since we were at school together, and that her very life hung on me. She made me shake in my boots with the responsibility she heaped on my head, and I cried like a big baby when she got down on her knees to me and begged me to save Hester.'

'And did you tell her about Bessie?'

'No! I daren't.'

'You're a coward as well as a big baby,' I said, 'and an ass to boot. Why couldn't you tell the woman at once that you loved another and she was your promised wife? I've no patience with you; go home and go to bed!'

We were moving toward the house, and had almost reached it, when I spoke the words I have last written, and to which poor Archie made no reply for some minutes. At last he asked -

'You do not think that I am in any honourable way bound to Hester, then?'

'Certainly not, if you have told me the truth. You have never made love to her you tell me?'

'Not unless you call acting like a brother to her is making love. I have escorted her to church, and concerts, and parties, and called her 'cousin,' and dear Hester, and so forth, but as to pretending to love her as I love dear Bessie, no!'

'Go in to bed.'

'Wait, Mark, what would I say or think if she *did* put herself in the river, or kill her mother, or do some other awful thing that Aunt fears?'

'You would both say and think something— what-do-you-call-it?— silly I have no doubt, but I'll tell you what I'd say and think. At all events, I'd think that if a girl fancies she can't live without a man that doesn't care one rap for her, she'd be a precious sight better out of the world than in it. Go to bed— I'll talk to you tomorrow.'

'And,' thought I to myself, 'I'll talk to Mrs Thorne tomorrow— like a father.'

I had left my window open, of course, and just before I shut it I turned to have one more look at the river and the splendid moonlit heavens. The queen of night was so bright by that time that she cast but few shadows, save close under tree and shrub, and the Loddon glittered like silver. It must have been nearly midnight, and there was the silence of rest on every object in my view. Just as my hand was on the sash to shut it to, I saw a moving object on the gleaming river just under the garden, and I looked at it until I convinced myself that it was neither more or less than a boat. 'They are fishing,' thinks I, 'and I wish I was with them,' but as I so thought, the little boat disappeared in the shadow of the bend where stood the cottage of Bessie Elliot.

I went to bed and I slept. I was not in love with Bessie Elliot or with Hester Thorne, and was accustomed to making a proper use of my bed when I got a chance to get into it; so it was long after sunrise when I turned out, dressed myself, and opened my window to get into the precious morning air.

Mrs Thorne must have heard me, for as I emerged on the verandah, she came out of the front door and joined me. She looked careworn and haggard to a degree, and nay, she looked absolutely frightened, as I hoped that Miss

Thorne was quite well— I suppose she dreaded my having found out about Hester's wild disobedience the night before.

'My daughter is not very well this morning, I am sorry to say. She spent a very restless night she tells me. Will you come to breakfast, Mr. Sinclair? I presume that Archie will join us before we have finished.'

'Is he so lazy this morning, Mrs Thorne? We had all sorts of plans laid about a fishing excursion this morning.'

'Oh, he has been out these two hours, the servant tells me,' she answered as we sat down to table.

'How strange that he did not call me!' I said, but then I remembered Bessie, and that in all probability he had some appointment with her, so I went on with my breakfast without further remark on that subject.

We had scarcely been seated ten minutes, however, when Archie came in. I was sitting opposite the door and at the first look of his face I saw there was something wrong. He was white to the lips and his hand trembled like leaves. His first look was to me and he opened his mouth, but shut it without speaking when he turned to his aunt and met her look of terrified inquiry.

'Will you come to the verandah with me Mark? I want you.'

'Something is wrong,' the mother cried, rising to her feet and gasping out the words tremulously. 'And it is something about my child? What is it? Tell me! I command you to tell me, nephew Archie!'

'Compose yourself, Aunt. I assure you that my business is not at all connected with my cousin. As far as I know she is all right— I have neither seen nor heard of her this morning.'

I followed him out wonderingly.

'In the name of goodness what has gone wrong?' I asked. 'Something very serious I am afraid— what has happened?'

'Oh! Sinclair, I want to tell you that you must come with me at once to Elliot's, for it's my firm belief that Bessie has been murdered!'

I confess to you that I paid very little attention to the boy's information, for I saw what a state of agitation he was in. Thinks I to myself, 'Thank goodness, *I* never knew what it was to be in love in this bread and butter fashion, if this is the fruits of it.' But what I said was— 'Will you tell me what has put such nonsense into your head this bright and pleasant summer morning, Archie Hopeton?'

'I wish it was nonsense. For any sake don't lose any time— get your hat and come with me at once. Bessie has disappeared and her mother is like a mad woman. Will you come at once?'

Certainly I would, but not the less I thought to myself as we hurried toward the path by the river, that girls had disappeared before now without being

murdered. Still I knew quite well that deeds of blood *had* been done— who better? And I made what inquiries I could as we walked.

What I could gather from Archie's despairing words was that Bessie and he had met on the previous night, not clandestinely, but with the mother's knowledge and permission and that after they had strolled about the garden and grounds for an hour or so, they parted with a promise to see each other early in the morning. Bessie had bidden her mother the usual good night and retired to her own little room and had never been seen since.

'When the servant and the mother were early astir this morning, they thought nothing of Bessie not being out of her room, supposing her with me; but when I, not meeting her by the river where I had promised to take her for a row in our boat, went up to the cottage and inquired for her, Mrs Elliot became quite alarmed and went to my poor darling's room.'

'Well?'

'She was not there— the bed was cold, the window open, and the room marked with blood in several places.'

'And that is all?'

'All! My God, isn't it enough! My poor darling has been murdered and, perhaps, worse! Oh, I shall go mad, Mark Sinclair! I shall go mad!'

'Well, I shouldn't at all wonder,' I replied drily. 'A good many folks have a habit that way if there is anything to be done. Wouldn't it, perhaps, be better to keep your senses about you until you see how you may help or serve the interests of the girl you think has been wronged?'

A groan was my poor Archie's only reply, and as we just then reached the cottage, no more passed between us. The servant showed us into a pretty little parlour, where Mrs Elliot sat weeping bitterly, and such a picture of despairing grief that I began to think there must be something more suspicious and decided about the girl's disappearance than Archie had informed me of.

When my young friend had introduced me to the poor woman, he discreetly withdrew and left me to enter upon the business professionally. One look discovered to me both the appearance and character of Bessie's mother. She was a small, pretty, colourless, little body, with a round, innocent looking face and an appealing look in her faded blue eyes. She took possession, as it were, of me as soon as I entered the room, and hung upon me all the trouble, as she had, doubtless, been in the habit of hanging troubles all of her life, like a weak, pretty parasite, helpless without its life-sustaining tree. She seemed to think that because I was a police-officer, I could do the impossible in the way of discovery, and offered me 'everything she owned in the world' if I would only find her 'poor Bessie' for her.

'Archie says she is murdered, but I won't believe it!' she sobbed. 'Who could have the heart to murder my darling girl? The best and the sweetest girl, Mr. Sinclair, that ever gladdened a mother's heart. For God's sake, don't look so awfully serious! Don't think it possible that Archie is right unless you want to see me die here under your very eyes!'

Women (especially young ones) are very pretty and very useful things sometimes, but they are also occasionally very silly and try a practical man's temper immensely.

'You don't think Bessie is killed? Surely you don't think anyone— *anyone could* be so wicked as to do my darling wrong?'

'My, dear madam, how can I possibly form any opinion on the subject without knowing anything of the facts? Will you first tell me what occurred last night and then let me see Miss Elliot's room?'

In a rambling sort of way she then told me pretty nearly the same story I had heard from Archie, but she was so incoherent that I called in Archie, and resigned her to his care, begging of him to take her in charge and see that she didn't bother me while I made an examination and questioned the servant.

Having secured time to see and think uninterruptedly, I found my way to the little kitchen at the back, where, in a bewildered sort of way, I found the only female servant looking from the door idly yet with something of a fearful anxiety in her eyes. She was not a very young woman— perhaps thirty, and she was neither well-favoured or pleasant-looking. As I passed through the back door of the house toward that of the detached kitchen she looked at me half-wonderingly and half-frightened, as I thought, and opened her eyes and pursed her lips as I addressed her.

'I want you to lead me to Miss Elliot's bedroom, please, and to tell me what you know of her disappearance.'

'What should I know of her disappearance?' she asked sharply, and as she spoke with an impudent intonation, it seemed to me that her face was in some way familiar to me.

'And who may you be that wants to get to see her room?'

'You couldn't guess, I suppose, miss?'

Her face flushed just slightly as she met my steady eye. 'Yes, I think I could guess what you are, a policeman, I daresay. The mistress is making such a tune and cry, as if a young lady (with a sneering emphasis on the term) never left her mother's house without leave before.'

'When *you* were a young lady they doubtless did and didn't go empty-handed. How's *your* mother, Ann Dempsey?'

An ashy shade covered up, or rather replaced, the flush on her face, and it was delightful to me to see the terror in her face.

'You are mistaken, sir. That is not my name,' she managed to stammer.

'I am not in the habit of making mistakes, and I took quite an interest in your handsome countenance the last time I had the pleasure of looking at it.'

'Where was that?'

'In the corridor at the City Police Court.'

'It's a black lie! I never was there in my life!'

'That'll do, Miss Dempsey,' I said with a raised, warning finger. 'I have no wish to interfere with you at present, so you'd better be civil. When I really want you I shall know how to lay my hand on you. No more talk, but show me the young lady's apartment.

She went sulkily into the cottage, and I followed her. There was a little room at the end of the front verandah with a door window opening to the garden, and another door communicating with the little central passage. This had been poor Bessie Elliot's room. Telling the woman to remain in the apartment while I examined it— a thing she seemed to do very unwillingly, by the way— I looked around me.

The room was just such a pretty little chamber as you might expect a pretty and lovable girl of the middle class, and especially a pretty girl in love, to occupy. It was small and plainly furnished with plenty of ornamental bits of muslin and lace and ribbon about it. There were mosquito curtains to the tent bedstead, tied up with blue ribbons, and matting on the floor, and a large mirror decorated with lace on the lace-robed toilet. Many articles of feminine apparel lay about, but not untidily, and to my astonishment, the bed had not been disturbed, nor were there any articles of attire lying round that seemed to have been moved on the previous night.

'Miss Elliot has not been to bed at all, then? Is this room just as she left it?'

'Yes, at least *I* know of no one's disturbing it.'

'Oh, of course not— *you* are not likely to know much. Do you by any chance know who the man was who was hanging about this house late last night?'

Now I didn't at all know that there had been a man about, but I knew the woman, and thought the guess a very safe one. That it was so could easily be seen from her face under my steady eye. She turned, as the saying is, all colours, but denied all knowledge of that or anything else at first.

'Look here, my dear creature, you'd better tell the truth to me at least— you will find it pay you best. If you've been up to any of your old little games among Mrs. Elliot's rings or brooches I'm sure to hear of it in the long run, and if you know anything about *this* affair, it will be in your favour to spit it out.'

'What affair? Do you mean if I know anything about Miss Elliot running away?'

'Running away, eh? Have you any reason to know that she ran away, as you call it?'

'I think you'd better ask Mr Archie Hopeton that question. It's my opinion he knows all about Bessie, where she went— ay, and where she is.'

I confess to being confounded with surprise. A policeman sees many queer things, but I thought I could have pinned my faith on my friend Archie's truth and honesty of purpose concerning Bessie Elliot.

'Do you know who I am? I asked as calmly as I could.

'No, and I don't much care.'

'Oh, yes you do. I am Detective Sinclair and you've heard of me. Now *will* you tell me who the man was that was hanging about this at a late hour last night?'

'Who saw him?' was the return question put very sullenly.

'That's none of your business. Who was it?'

'Well, it was Jack Sprague, and I don't know what it is to anyone if I have a young man I'm keeping company with.'

'I won't ask you if Mrs Elliot allows followers, for I don't care. What I want to know is where Jack Sprague hangs out. I want to see him. I have some idea that he can give me some information about this case. Now for two plain questions. Where can I lay eyes on the young gentleman? And what did you mean by saying that Mr Hopeton knew all about Miss Elliot's running away?'

She paused for a moment, in doubt as to her safest course, and then she brazened it out.

'Jack Sprague is stopping in Puntwater at the Commercial. I don't care who knows it, and he don't either. He came down to see me, and he *was* waiting about last night to see me.'

'One question answered, now for the other, Miss Dempsey. What makes you pretend to suspect Mr Hopeton?'

'Pretend, indeed! I don't pretend anything. Jack was waiting for me last night, and as there was company, I couldn't get out. When I did see him, they had all gone to bed and it was very late.'

'About what time?'

'Eleven or thereabouts.'

'Well?'

'Jack told me that, about an hour before, a woman in a boat had rowed up to the bank, and seeing him before he could get out of the way, had called him. She asked him if he would take a note from Mr Archie Hopeton to Miss Bessie, and she would give him half-a-crown. As he wanted to get an excuse to see me, he consented, and as it happened, Miss Bessie was standing at that door on the verandah when he came up to the house.'

'He gave her the note?'

'Yes, and it was from Mr Hopeton. You can put two and two together as well as J can, Mr Detective.'

'I can, perhaps better. And now, oblige me by leaving,' and I opened the door for her to pass out. She did so, giving me a look as she passed, black enough to poison me if looks could do it.

I had listened to the woman's story, but without believing one particle of it, save that Jack Sprague had been there on the night before. I knew that man of *aliases,* and that a bigger rascal never went unhung, and although I never would have thought of murder in connection with him unless there was money to be made by it, I had no doubt but that Ann Dempsey and he were both at the bottom of Bessie Elliot's disappearance. In the meantime, while thinking this, I was looking around the room to see if by any chance there might be any signs of that note Ann Dempsey was so positive about.

But I saw nothing of it, and left the room as wise as I had entered it, so far as traces of crime were concerned. After I had thoroughly satisfied myself I went out and locked the door behind me.

I managed to slip out without Mrs. Elliot observing me— for I did not want to be overwhelmed with the poor woman's questions when I could give no satisfactory reply to them. Archie, however, saw or heard me and hurried out to join me.

'Well?' was his anxious question, and looking in the young fellow's face, seeing its haggard anxiety and trembling lips, it was utterly impossible to suspect him of foul dealing— his grief and fear were too real. 'Have you discovered anything?'

'No, but I want to ask you a question. Did you send Bessie a note by anyone last night?'

'A note! No, certainly not. What makes you ask such a question!'

'Never mind just now. Answer me another. In what boat did you intend to take Miss Elliot for a row today?'

'In our own, to be sure— that is, in aunt's. Didn't you observe it moored at the bottom of the garden?'

'No. Did you bring it up this morning then?'

'I did not. We did not intend to go until after breakfast. I only came to see what time she would be ready. In the name of mercy, Sinclair, tell me what you think of it— has anything serious happened to my darling?'

'I don't know what to think yet, Archie, and look here, if you want me to find out, don't bother me. Just devote yourself to that poor mother, and believe me, I will do all I can; but don't ask me anything about it until I have something to tell.'

He turned away with a grieved look, and after making some inquiries about the neighbourhood, I went away quickly, turning my face toward the township.

Archie's explanation about the boat had given my ideas a strange and new turn. After all, I might have come to too hasty a conclusion in thinking that Jack Sprague and the woman, who was neither more nor less than his accomplice, had some knowledge of the girl's abduction. The way I had to go was but short, yet it seemed interminable to me, so anxious was I to reach my object.

My first entry was to the telegraph office, by means of which I despatched a telegram to our department. As I came out I saw at the hotel side door, next to the office, a face and figure I knew, though the man was dressed in a *rûle* I had never before seen him acting— viz., that of a labouring man. I diverged from the footway and confronted him.

'Do you know your old friends when you meet them, mate?' I asked.

'I know *you,* at all events,' he answered with an independent air that was sufficient, or at least, almost sufficient in itself to assure me that he was not engaged in any unlawful 'lay' at the time. 'As to friendship, the less said about that between you and me the better.'

'I believe you are right so far,' I returned dryly. 'What may be your business at Puntwater?'

'None of yours at any rate.'

'It's not the first time you've been mistaken, Mr Sprague, *alias*etc, etc., etc. I want some information about your movements about ten o'clock last night.'

'You won't get it, D Sinclair.'

'Oh, yes, I will. I have seen Miss Dempsey at Mrs Elliot's this morning, and she referred me to you and told me you were putting up at the Commercial.'

He looked at me dubiously.

'What did she refer you to me for?'

'For the information I want.'

'What information do you want?'

'About someone giving you something to deliver at Elliot's last night.'

'Oh, is that all! You're quite welcome to that.'

'Tell me all about it then.'

'Well, there ain't much to tell. I went hanging about under the trees at the bottom of Elliot's garden on the river bank when a boat shot up, and before I could get out of the way someone called me.'

'A man or a woman?'

'A woman.'

'What sort of woman and what sort of boat?'

'A youngish woman, I should say, from her voice, but you know the time it was, and although it was moonlight it was very dim under the trees. As for the

boat, it was a pretty light affair, and it was wonderful to see how well the woman managed the sculls.'

'Well, go on.'

'She called me and asked me if I would give Miss Bessie Elliot a note from Mr Archie Hopeton, with the offer of half-a-crown for the job, and I said yes; so she gave me the note and the money without leaving the boat. After telling me not to fail as it was urgent, she pulled down past the bend.

'And you delivered it?'

'I went up the garden boldly, as I had now some business to be on the premises, and just as I got near the house, Miss Elliot came out on the verandah and stood leaning over the rails looking up at the moon. I went up and handed her the note.'

'Did she say anything?'

'Only 'thank you,' and went inside, shutting the window after her, and I went round the back to pitch some gravel at the kitchen-window to get Ann out. Now, might a chap ask what all this is about?' he added, seeing I was disposed to be silent.

'Miss Elliot has disappeared from her home, and if it is true about that note being delivered to her, it was, in all probability, the cause of her leaving home. She must have left last night, as her bed was never disturbed.'

'Wasn't Mr Archie Hopeton her sweetheart?'

'They were engaged.'

He laughed coarsely. 'Then I think it is no mystery where she has gone.'

'See here, Mr— ah— Sprague. Mr Hopeton sent no communication to Miss Elliot last night, so there must be some deception. At first I thought you and Dempsey had something to do with it, but I don't now. If you can throw any light on this, do it— it will be something in your favour. Would you know that woman in the boat again?'

'I don't think it— I never saw her face— but something has just come into my head. I didn't leave Elliot's garden until near twelve o'clock, and as I was getting through the hedge lower down the river I saw a boat again, passing up under the shadow of the trees. I was in a hurry to get away, thinking the hotel would be shut, but something struck me that the same woman was in the boat as it passed me, only I thought it must be nonsense at that hour of the night. The boat passed so close to the bushes, that the cloak, or whatever was round the person sculling, caught, so that it tore and left a piece stuck right under my nose as I stooped to crawl through, and I dragged it off and put it in my pocket, for I saw it was cloth that might do for a patch. Here it is.'

He handed me a piece of blue waterproof cloth about seven inches by four, and when I had examined it and put it in my pocket, I said 'So long' to my

friend Sprague, and returned to get my telegraphic reply from town, which I knew would have reached the office by that time. It had, and its results you will read presently.

An hour after my short interview I was at Riverdale, awaiting in the parlour the arrival of Mrs Thorne, to whom I had sent a message by the servant. She came, shortly, looking, ah!, so white and frightened, and well I guess the awful cause.

'You wished to see me, Mr Sinclair. I am sorry I had to keep you waiting, but my poor child is very ill this morning— indeed, I am very uneasy regarding her.'

'I cannot wonder at that, dear madam,' I returned very seriously.

'What? I hardly understood you, sir,' she stammered. 'Why should you not wonder? Ah, perhaps you are aware of her imprudence in exposing herself to the night air last evening? My poor Hester is very headstrong.'

'Mrs Thorne, my wish to see you concerned Miss Thorne. A terrible duty has fallen to my lot, but I am Archie's friend, and if I am to befriend you for his sake, there must be neither concealment or deception between you and I.'

She stared at me with such dreadful, growing, and wild terror in her eyes, that I was nearly unmanned for the duty before me. At last she managed to articulate feebly and with trembling white lips -

'What dreadful thing has happened? For mercy's sake, tell me at once! It cannot be of *her,* she is safe at home! Oh, tell me!'

'It is of Miss Thorne. Prepare yourself, dear Mrs Thorne, for sad tidings. If I tell you who and what I am, will it help you to understand? I am a member of the Melbourne Detective Police Force.'

'And you know? You have found out?' Oh, the horror, the despair, the *fear* pictured in that poor, pale face!

'I know all. I know that you are not a widow, that Hester's father is not dead— that he is mad. Not very long ago, duty called me into one of the violent cells at the Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum, and in one of his worst paroxysms I saw John Thorne, without once suspecting his relationship to my friend Archie. As soon, however, as I saw your daughter, I recognised the strong likeness and suspected.'

'Suspected what?' The wretched mother could hardly speak. I pitied her from my very heart, knowing what I did know.

'My dear Mrs Thorne, I can say nothing to comfort you. I can only try to soften my bitter intelligence.'

'Don't soften it!' she interrupted hurriedly. 'If you don't want to see me die here under your eyes, tell me at once! Quick!'

'Knowing how your unhappy husband's lunacy first evinced itself, I suspected as soon as I saw Miss Thorne's stranged and determined gaze at the running water. I trembled for her even then.'

'But now! Don't wait! Tell me the worst. I have trembled for bitter years, and dared not cross her slightest humour, lest one of those fearful outbreaks should culminate in the worst. Tell me all! Tell me all!'

Wringing her hands and writhing as one in terrible bodily agony, she thus went on as I paused— wishing, hard as I was, that the task had not fallen to my lot.

'You know how your poor husband's madness culminated? I need not remind you of that?'

She gasped but could not speak.

'He grew insanely jealous of you, his wife, and one night stole upon you in your sleep and tried to murder you. You remember all this?'

'It is not— my God, it is not that!' she cried, starting up and stretching her hands above her wildly. 'If you hope for mercy, do not say it is *that!'*

'I fear it is. Ah! dear madam, what can I say! Bessie Elliot is missing. Miss Thorne is known to have inveigled her from her home by a pretended note from Archie. What has become of that poor girl we must ask your unfortunate daughter.'

'Are you alluding to me?' asked a sharp voice at the open, long window, and as the mother's shriek rang in my ears, I saw Hester Thorne standing on the verandah. To say it as gently as possible, there was something actually develish in the girl's face as her fierce, black eyes blazed at me, and for a moment I was really and truly afraid; but remembering my strength, and my always ready handcuffs, I recovered my self-possession, and seeing that poor Mrs Thorne had mercifully fainted in her chair, I rose and went out the window, steadily meeting the maniac's eyes as I did so.

'I ask again if you were alluding to me? Am I the person you designated as your unfortunate daughter?'

'You are,' I replied, firmly.

'And in doing so you are only exposing your own ignorance; but I have previously had occasion to remark the contemptible ignorance and folly of men— especially *young* men. So far from being unfortunate, I am one of the most fortunate girls in the whole world! Where is Archie?'

'There,' I said, pointing down towards the Loddon. 'I see him coming along the bank. Shall we join him?'

'Certainly. I *should* like to go and meet him, and I cannot very well go alone.'

'Will you tell me why you consider yourself so fortunate?' I asked as we walked down the garden path— she with her eyes fixed on the man she had loved to distraction, and a strange jubilant expression in her pale face.

'If you found in your way an insuperable obstacle to your happiness, and if that obstacle were suddenly (ay, and effectually) should not you consider yourself fortunate and happy?' she cried, turning her wild, gleaming eyes full upon me.

'You are happy, then?'

'Beyond all words! Harry, I want to meet Archie.'

We were now close on the river, and would have met my poor friend before, only that he had paused to look back at Bessie's home, as it appeared to me, thinking, doubtless, of the lost girl he so dearly loved. As our footsteps sounded near him he turned round suddenly, and as he saw his cousin, so great a change came over him that I gazed at him in fear as well as wonder.

He advanced to Hester Thorne with a face as white as her own, and set teeth gleaming between pallid, dry lips. I saw he was suffering greatly, and wondered how far I could depend on his assistance in case of an outburst, which I dreaded.

'Hester!' he cried. 'What have you done with my darling? You need not deny it I know it was you! Jealous of my love for my sweet, innocent Bessie, you have decoyed her from her home, and if evil has happened her, so help me heaven, but you shall suffer for it!'

'Hush!' I whispered, for I saw the awful change in the listening woman's countenance— the flush that mounted, blood-red to her forehead— the fierce clutching of her long, thin fingers, and the quick gasps of the hot, hard breath between her white, clenched teeth.

'I will *not* hush! Why should I? If I were to hold my tongue the stones would cry out! Hester Thorne, what have you done with my darling? Where is my Bessie— my own darling love— my life? For she is all that; give me my love, I say, or you shall suffer for it!'

The poor fellow seemed nearly mad himself, while she grew strangely and unaccountably calm with every added word of his violent accusation.

'You love her very much, then?' she asked, in a tone of ice.

'More than my life— more than my soul. If anything should happen to my Bessie I should die! Do you hear? I should *die!'*

'Yes— I hear. To listen to your ravings, a fool might fancy that love was the strongest passion of the human heart, but there's a stronger.'

'There is not! Nothing could be stronger than my love for Bessie!'

'You are mistaken. My hate was stronger. Come, and I will prove it to you.'

Archie staggered back— an inkling of the fearful truth was beginning to creep dimly on him; there was something awful in the hard, cold gaze she now turned on him— a something indescribably suggestive of evil in the very tones so her voice.

'Follow her!' I whispered. 'Humour her! Good heavens, Archie, don't you see she is mad— quite mad, like her unfortunate father?'

He looked at me, and guessed it all! Like a blind man, he silently followed Hester Thorne, as she moved quietly, and with a firm step toward her favourite seat at the foot of the tree. She passed it and went toward the river bank where the sweeping branches dipped low in the water, and the ripples ran murmuring through green, glossy leaves. With one swift hand she drew back a heavy branch, and then stepping aside, turned her face toward us, with a bitter smile on the pale lips, as her outstretched right hand pointed toward the river at her feet.

Archie would have bounded forward, but almost by main force I held him back until I passed before him and looked first through the leaves down toward the sweet murmuring water. Never shall I forget the sight! Under the young branches which the young girl had drawn back lay the boat which I guessed at once was the one belonging to Riverview, and in the bottom of the boat lay a white form, stark dead. Ah! that was my introduction to hapless Bessie Elliot!

In spite of my exertions, Archie had managed to get a look at the pitiful object, and his shout of wild horror was a sound to be remembered. It was, however, outvoiced by the triumphant laughter of Hester Thorne.

'Which is strongest— love or hate?' she cried with a fierce laugh of derision.

'Hate!' he shouted. 'I hate you more than I could ever love even my murdered darling! Murderess! Fiend! All evil in the shape of disgraced womanhood— are there words vile enough to couple with your name! But, thank God, you will, at least, share a cell with your mad father!'

'Mad?' she repeated in awful tones of horror. 'What is he saying about being mad? My God, is it true? Am *I* mad?' And as she screamed out the words she lifted her hands to her head and fell back on the grass in a strong fit.

Poor Bessie Elliot! Enticed to the boat by the madwoman's forgery, declaring her lover seized with a sudden illness, she had been stabbed in the back by a sharp carving-knife that the lunatic had abstracted from her own home. Her pretty muslin dress was covered with gore, and her bright hair torn in handfuls from her head by the vindictive maniac. The scene, when Archie lifted the body from the boat, and wept and raved over the senseless remains,

was dreadful; but he outlived it, and time has so softened the memory of his loss that he is now a prosperous and contented parent of a young family.

Hester Thorne is dead. She was one of the most violent patients ever incarcerated in the Yarra Bend Asylum for one terrible year, and then death released her. And, strange to say, Mrs Thorne was reconciled to life by the perfect restoration of her husband, whose disorder took an unexpected return to perfect sanity.

Mrs Elliot, as might be expected of so weak a character, raved like a lunatic at the first recognition of her sorrow and loss, but that she returned to resignation you may guess when I tell you that she is no longer Mrs Elliot, but rejoices in a newer and prettier name.

If you are at all interested in Mr Sprague and Miss Dempsey, I may mention that they are at the present moment both serving well-deserved sentences in the Melbourne Gaol, where I do hope they will yet vegetate for a considerable time.

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11: The Devil of the Marsh

Henry Brereton Marriott Watson

1863-1921

In: *Diogenes of London*, 1893

IT WAS NIGH UPON dusk when I drew close to the Great Marsh, and already the white vapours were about, riding across the sunken levels like ghosts in a churchyard. Though I had set forth in a mood of wild delight, I had sobered in the lonely ride across the moor and was now uneasily alert. As my horse jerked down the grassy slopes that fell away to the jaws of the swamp I could see thin streams of mist rise slowly, hover like wraiths above the long rushes, and then, turning gradually more material, go blowing heavily away across the flat. The appearance of the place at this desolate hour, so remote from human society and so darkly significant of evil presences, struck me with a certain wonder that she should have chosen this spot for our meeting. She was a familiar of the moors, where I had invariably encountered her; but it was like her arrogant caprice to test my devotion by some such dreary assignation. The wide and horrid prospect depressed me beyond reason, but the fact of her neighbourhood drew me on, and my spirits mounted at the thought that at last she was to put me in possession of herself. Tethering my horse upon the verge of the swamp, I soon discovered the path that crossed it, and entering struck out boldly for the heart. The track could have been little used, for the reeds, which stood high above the level of my eyes upon either side, straggled everywhere across in low arches, through which I dodged, and broke my way with some inconvenience and much impatience. A full half hour I was solitary in that wilderness, and when at last a sound other than my own footsteps broke the silence the dusk had fallen.

I was moving very slowly at the time, with a mind half disposed to turn from the melancholy expedition, which it seemed to me now must surely be a cruel jest she had played upon me. While some such reluctance held me, I was suddenly arrested by a hoarse croaking which broke out upon my left, sounding somewhere from the reeds in the black mire. A little further it came again from close at hand, and when I had passed on a few more steps in wonder and perplexity, I heard it for the third time. I stopped and listened, but the marsh was as a grave, and so taking the noise for the signal of some raucous frog, I resumed my way. But in a little the croaking was repeated, and coming quickly to a stand I pushed the reeds aside and peered into the darkness. I could see nothing, but at the immediate moment of my pause I thought I detected the sound of some body trailing through the rushes. My distaste for the adventure grew with this suspicion, and had it not been for my delirious infatuation I had assuredly turned back and ridden home. The ghastly

sound pursued me at intervals along the track, until at last, irritated beyond endurance by the sense of this persistent and invisible company, I broke into a sort of run. This, it seemed, the creature (whatever it was) could not achieve, for I heard no more of it, and continued my way in peace. My path at length ran out from among the reeds upon the smooth flat of which she had spoken, and here my heart quickened, and the gloom of the dreadful place lifted. The flat lay in the very centre of the marsh, and here and there in it a gaunt bush or withered tree rose like a spectre against the white mists. At the further end I fancied some kind of building loomed up; but the fog which had been gathering ever since my entrance upon the passage sailed down upon me at that moment and the prospect went out with suddenness. As I stood waiting for the clouds to pass, a voice cried to me out of its centre, and I saw her next second with bands of mist swirling about her body, come rushing to me from the darkness. She put her long arms about me, and, drawing her close, I looked into her deep eyes. Far down in them, it seemed to me, I could discern a mystic laughter dancing in the wells of light, and I had that ecstatic sense of nearness to some spirit of fire which was wont to possess me at her contact.

"At last," she said, "at last, my beloved!" I caressed her.

"Why," said I, tingling at the nerves, "why have you put this dolorous journey between us? And what mad freak is your presence in this swamp?" She uttered her silver laugh, and nestled to me again.

"I am the creature of this place," she answered. "This is my home. I have sworn you should behold me in my native sin ere you ravished me away."

"Come, then," said I; "I have seen; let there be an end of this. I know you, what you are. This marsh chokes up my heart. God forbid you should spend more of your days here. Come."

"You are in haste," she cried. "There is yet much to learn. Look, my friend," she said, "you who know me, what I am. This is my prison, and I have inherited its properties. Have you no fear?"

For answer I pulled her to me, and her warm lips drove out the horrid humours of the night; but the swift passage of a flickering mockery over her eyes struck me as a flash of lightning, and I grew chill again.

"I have the marsh in my blood," she whispered: "the marsh and the fog of it. Think ere you vow to me, for I am the cloud in a starry night."

A lithe and lovely creature, palpable of warm flesh, she lifted her magic face to mine and besought me plaintively with these words. The dews of the nightfall hung on her lashes, and seemed to plead with me for her forlorn and solitary plight.

"Behold!" I cried, "witch or devil of the marsh, you shall come with me! I have known you on the moors, a roving apparition of beauty; nothing more I

know, nothing more I ask. I care not what this dismal haunt means; not what these strange and mystic eyes. You have powers and senses above me; your sphere and habits are as mysterious and incomprehensible as your beauty. But that," I said, "is mine, and the world that is mine shall be yours also."

She moved her head nearer to me with an antic gesture, and her gleaming eyes glanced up at me with a sudden flash, the similitude (great heavens!) of a hooded snake. Starting, I fell away, but at that moment she turned her face and set it fast towards the fog that came rolling in thick volumes over the flat. Noiselessly the great cloud crept down upon us, and all dazed and troubled I watched her watching it in silence. It was as if she awaited some omen of horror, and I too trembled in the fear of its coming.

Then suddenly out of the night issued the hoarse and hideous croaking I had heard upon my passage. I reached out my arm to take her hand, but in an instant the mists broke over us, and I was groping in the vacancy. Something like panic took hold of me, and, beating through the blind obscurity, I rushed over the flat, calling upon her. In a little the swirl went by, and I perceived her upon the margin of the swamp, her arm raised as in imperious command. I ran to her, but stopped, amazed and shaken by a fearful sight. Low by the dripping reeds crouched a small squat thing, in the likeness of a monstrous frog, coughing and choking in its throat. As I stared, the creature rose upon its legs and disclosed a horrid human resemblance. Its face was white and thin, with long black hair; its body gnarled and twisted as with the ague of a thousand years. Shaking, it whined in a breathless voice, pointing a skeleton finger at the woman by my side.

"Your eyes were my guide," it quavered. "Do you think that after all these years I have no knowledge of your eyes? Lo, is there aught of evil in you I am not instructed in? This is the Hell you designed for me, and now you would leave me to a greater."

The wretch paused, and panting leaned upon a bush, while she stood silent, mocking him with her eyes, and soothing my terror with her soft touch.

"Hear!" he cried, turning to me, "hear the tale of this woman that you may know her as she is. She is the Presence of the marshes. Woman or Devil I know not, but only that the accursed marsh has crept into her soul and she herself is become its Evil Spirit; she herself, that lives and grows young and beautiful by it, has its full power to blight and chill and slay. I, who was once as you are, have this knowledge. What bones lie deep in this black swamp who can say but she? She has drained of health, she has drained of mind and of soul; what is between her and her desire that she should not drain also of life? She has made me a devil in her Hell, and now she would leave me to my solitary pain,

and go search for another victim. But she shall not!" he screamed through his chattering teeth; "she shall not! My Hell is also hers! She shall not!"

Her smiling untroubled eyes left his face and turned to me: she put out her arms, swaying towards me, and so fervid and so great a light glowed in her face that, as one distraught of superhuman means, I took her into my embrace. And then the madness seized me.

"Woman or devil," I said, "I will go with you! Of what account this pitiful past? Blight me even as that wretch, so be only you are with me."

She laughed, and, disengaging herself, leaned, half-clinging to me, towards the coughing creature by the mire.

"Come," I cried, catching her by the waist. "Come!" She laughed again a silver-ringing laugh. She moved with me slowly across the flat to where the track started for the portals of the marsh. She laughed and clung to me.

But at the edge of the track I was startled by a shrill, hoarse screaming; and behold, from my very feet, that loathsome creature rose up and wound his long black arms about her shrieking and crying in his pain. Stooping I pushed him from her skirts, and with one sweep of my arm drew her across the pathway; as her face passed mine her eyes were wide and smiling. Then of a sudden the still mist enveloped us once more; but ere it descended I had a glimpse of that contorted figure trembling on the margin, the white face drawn and full of desolate pain. At the sight an icy shiver ran through me. And then through the yellow gloom the shadow of her darted past me to the further side. I heard the hoarse cough, the dim noise of a struggle, a swishing sound, a thin cry, and then the sucking of the slime over something in the rushes. I leapt forward: and once again the fog thinned, and I beheld her, woman or devil, standing upon the verge, and peering with smiling eyes into the foul and sickly bog. With a sharp cry wrung from my nerveless soul, I turned and fled down the narrow way from that accursed spot; and as I ran the thickening fog closed round me, and I heard far off and lessening still the silver sound of her mocking laughter.

12: Harcourt's Literature

Carolyn Wells

1862-1942

Sunday Magazine, 11 March 1906

HARRY HARCOURT had long been a success in his own line of light literature. And his line was a trunk line with spurs in any number of directions. His acquaintances called him a free-lance when they spoke to him and a hack-writer when they spoke of him.

But, to be accurate, he was neither. He was simply a manufacturer and vendor of marketable light-literary merchandise, and he thoroughly understood his business. After a studious and hard-working apprenticeship, he had now reached the place where he could turn off a sonnet, a short story or a special article with that peculiar touch about it which makes it acceptable to any editor. He was as versatile as Kipling, as prolific as Cyrus T. Brady, and as sure of having his work accepted as C.D. Gibson or T. Roosevelt.

Of course, the financial result of this state of things was a comfortable competency, though perhaps not affluence. But Harry Harcourt was not ambitious. The best rates of the best periodicals were good enough for him, and he lived happily with his wife and children in a small suburban town, and occasionally ran over to the city for a breath of "hot air," as he expressed it in his light-literary way.

Harcourt was a methodical man. Indeed, it was to this trait that he attributed his success. In the preface of his career he had systematized his work. He had reduced all jokes to common denominators, and discovered that the skeletons of all short stories looked alike. He had classified tables of jests, ready for instant use. They were alphabetically arranged, as: Appendicitis, Bernard Shaw, Chauffeurs, Divorce, and so on. Moreover, he was always on time. In January he wrote his summer-girl verses, his Fourth of July jokes, and his articles on "The Advantages of the City as a Summer Resort." In June he wrote his Christmas ballads and his jests on New Year resolutions.

He worked at his desk every day from nine till one, his copy was always neat and clean, and his return envelopes carefully stamped and addressed. They were rarely used, for he kept his trained finger on the editorial pulse, and most of his stuff was accepted on its first offer.

So all was well, and as we may deduce, there was not a fly in Harry Harcourt's light-literary ointment.

But suddenly and with no apparent reason things began to change. One day a manuscript was returned to him in his own neat return-envelope. Though unusual, this was not absolutely unprecedented, and it caused Harcourt only a momentary surprise, after which he sent it off again to the

next most desirable editor. But next day two more manuscripts came back to him, and the day after another. After this, he began to have nearly as many rejections as acceptances, then just as many, and then more.

The sensation in Harcourt's mind regarding this phenomenon was not disappointment, discouragement, dismay or despair. It was a healthy intelligent curiosity as to what the dickens it all meant. He knew his market and his work too well to think for a moment that one was overcrowded or the other inferior. There must be a reason, he knew— a good reason— and he determined to find it. He was in that peculiar stage where an author is both too successful and not successful enough to march boldly to his editors and ask explanation. So he puzzled over it himself, but he couldn't solve the mystery. And matters grew worse. His stuff was selling so poorly that his bank account was seriously threatened.

Something must be done; but what? He thought of Dr. Osler's theory, and wondered if he ought to be chloroformed. He didn't feel that he ought to be, but he wrote a humorous poem on the thought, as was his wont on all such thoughts. The poem was returned to him with printed thanks, and again he was mildly surprised and deeply mystified.

He was thinking it all over one day, when his friend Jack Norton came into the library. Norton was a well-to-do man, and consequently was in automobile togs.

"I say, Harcourt," he said, "lend me your horse and gig, will you, to tow my machine around to the garage?"

"Sure!" said Harcourt. "What's the matter this time?"

"Needle-valve worked loose, and I've a choked carburetor," explained Norton. "I thought I'd tinker it up myself— been supining under the old thing for half an hour, but it's no go for either of us. Thanks awfully for your gig. By the way, old man, what's up with you? You look as seedy as seed."

"I am!" suddenly exclaimed Harcourt, and then in a burst of confidence he told his friend of his troubles. "There must be some reason." He concluded. "Of course you don't understand, Norton; but I know the stuff I write is just as good, and better, than what I've always done."

"It is queer," said Norton, his jolly face grave at the tale of his friend's woe. "I'll tell you, Harry, the trouble must be purely mechanical. Get down under your desk on your back and gaze up into your apparatus. Test everything, and you're bound to come across the trouble, whether you can fix it or not, ta-ta, old man."

Harcourt looked after his friend's vanishing raincoat, and from sheer force of habit ruminated on his words to see if they could be used as material. As he ruminated, the solution of his own problem flashed upon him.

All at once he understood why his jokes had been rejected, his stories returned, his verses sent back. And as he realized the truth, he turned ghastly pale and bowed his head in his hands. Thus his wife found him, as she tripped blithely in to ask for a little shopping money.

"Harry!" she cried, "what in the world is the matter?"

"Matter enough! I am ruined!" he replied, in a melodramatic atmosphere.

"Ruined? Why? How?" and bravely renouncing her shopping expedition, Mrs. Harcourt sat down beside her husband.

"I don't often bother you with business details, Ethel," Harcourt began; "but I can tell you in a few words why I don't and can't sell any more manuscripts."

Ethel didn't say "Why?" she just looked at him, knowing he'd go on.

"Because," he continued, "the only thing the editors buy nowadays is automobile stuff. Whether it's a joke, jingle, short story or book, it must be about automobiles, and written in their crazy jargon. The hero must wear automobile togs, and the heroine a motor cap held on with a shirred chiffon veil. Then the intricacies of the machinery must be detailed *ad nauseam*, and incidentally a little fool love story shows its nose every thirty-eight pages. Oh, I know the trouble with my stuff now! It's back numbers, Osler, appendicitis, cruelty to animals, dialect stories, nature books— all the legitimate subjects are knocked out by an automobilization of forces."

"Well, deary, can't you write automobile jokes and stories too?"

"No! I can't write about the confounded things, when I don't know a carburetor valve from a spark plug. And I can't afford to buy one, and I couldn't afford to take the time to learn it and to run it if I did. And we'd probably both get killed anyway, and then what would become of the children?"

"If we could only afford to get one, perhaps I could learn to run it and then I could tell you the technical terms," said Ethel sympathetically.

"No, you'd get them all wrong, and besides you couldn't crawl under the thing and spend the day— you'd spoil your clothes. And then, I tell you, I can't afford to buy one. To buy one means to buy a more expensive one every succeeding year. And the way my work has been going lately I'm just about broke as it is."

"Are you sure you can't write about them without owning one?"

"Of course I can't. You have to know just how the cones of the countershaft affect the leverage and foolishness like that. And I don't know!"

"Do the editors know?" asked Mrs. Harcourt softly.

Her husband looked at her. "By Jove, Ethel!" he cried, "you're a wonder! You saved my life. Of course they don't.

"And so," the pretty voice went on. You could at least write jokes and jingles about automobiles."

"I can do more than that!" cried Harcourt. "I can see it all now. I must have been wool-gathering not to have seen it long ago. I'll write short stories— yes, even serials and books. And I'll lift the jargon from the best-selling stuff in the market. Clear out, Ethel dear! I'll see you at dinner. But now I must systematize this thing."

With happy alacrity Harcourt took an indexed blank book from a pile of new ones in his supply closet. Then getting together a number of recent automobile novels, he quickly recorded such terms as "lowered the sprag," "advance sparking lever," "taking out the inlet," "cotton-waste in the tool-box," "back-kick,' and "speedometer." Then growing bolder, he appropriated whole phrases, such as, "If the aspiration-pipe works loose, the vapor can't get from the carburetor to the explosion chamber," and "If the connecting-rod that works the magnet gets out of adjustment, the timing of the explosions will be wrong."

He was not always able to understand why there should be worms in the steering-gear, and why a jockey-pulley should be provided for the purpose of breaking belts, but all these things went into his indexed notebook in alphabetical order.

Then to work! He took his original "skeletons" of jests and fitted them out with his new gear. The "Mother-in-Law" joke was done up in a dozen ways, all relating to the easy destruction of one's mother-in-law by an automobile. The "Irate Father" joke, the "Tramp Sawing Wood' joke, the "Little Brother," the "Young Wife, the "Minister's Call," all were worked over the automobile allusions. Writing with feverish haste, Harcourt soon had a large bundle of these ready.

Verse came next. Ballads were easy, "Where is the auto of yesteryear?" made a fine refrain. Sonnets, limericks, all styles of meter, flowed swiftly from his trained and facile pen.

Then short stories. All the stories recently returned to him were remodeled with no trouble at all. The plot and characters were kept intact, the local color shifted to some place outside for automobiling, and the whole thickly sprinkled with phrases from the notebook.

The scheme worked well, as he knew it would. Everything he sent out was accepted and his output was limited only by the time necessary to write the manuscripts properly. Soon Harcourt was rich enough to buy an automobile.

"But we don't want one, do we?" he said to his wife.

"No, indeed," she replied, shuddering at the thought. "It would be like a merchant riding in his delivery wagon. "We'll take a sailing trip on the

Mediterranean, and while we're doing that you can write a novel about a motor trip through Normandy, and publish it over both our names."

"Just the thing," cried Harcourt, and we can get post-cards down at the post-card shop, for illustrations photographed en route."

13: The Queer Story of Brownlow's Newspaper

H. G. Wells

1866-1946

Ladies' Home Journal Feb 1932

I CALL THIS a Queer Story because it is a story without an explanation. When I first heard it, in scraps, from Brownlow I found it queer and incredible. But— it refuses to remain incredible. After resisting and then questioning and scrutinizing and falling back before the evidence, after rejecting all his evidence as an elaborate mystification and refusing to hear any more about it, and then being drawn to reconsider it by an irresistible curiosity and so going through it all again, I have been forced to the conclusion that Brownlow, so far as he can tell the truth, has been telling the truth. But it remains queer truth, queer and exciting to the imagination. The more credible his story becomes the queerer it is. It troubles my mind. I am fevered by it, infected not with germs but with notes of interrogation and unsatisfied curiosity.

Brownlow is, I admit, a cheerful spirit. I have known him tell lies. But I have never known him do anything so elaborate and sustained as this affair, if it is a mystification, would have to be. He is incapable of anything so elaborate and sustained. He is too lazy and easy-going for anything of the sort. And he would have laughed. At some stage he would have laughed and given the whole thing away. He has nothing to gain by keeping it up. His honour is not in the case either way. And after all there is his bit of newspaper in evidence— and the scrap of an addressed wrapper. ...

I realize it will damage this story for many readers that it opens with Brownlow in a state very definitely on the gayer side of sobriety. He was not in a mood for cool and calculated observation, much less for accurate record. He was seeing things in an exhilarated manner. He was disposed to see them and greet them cheerfully and let them slip by out of attention. The limitations of time and space lay lightly upon him. It was after midnight. He had been dining with friends.

I have inquired what friends— and satisfied myself upon one or two obvious possibilities of that dinner party. They were, he said to me, "just friends. They hadn't anything to do with it." I don't usually push past an assurance of this sort, but I made an exception in this case. I watched my man and took a chance of repeating the question. There was nothing out of the ordinary about that dinner party, unless it was the fact that it was an unusually good dinner party. The host was Redpath Baynes, the solicitor, and the dinner was in his house in St. John's Wood. Gifford, of the *Evening Telegraph*, whom I know slightly, was, I found, present, and from him I got all I wanted to know. There was much bright and discursive talk and Brownlow had been inspired to

give an imitation of his aunt, Lady Clitherholme, reproving an inconsiderate plumber during some re-building operations at Clitherholme. This early memory had been received with considerable merriment— he was always very good about his aunt, Lady Clitherholme— and Brownlow had departed obviously elated by this little social success and the general geniality of the occasion. Had they talked, I asked, about the Future, or Einstein, or J.W. Dunne, or any such high and serious topic at that party? They had not. Had they discussed the modern newspaper? No. There had been nobody whom one could call a practical joker at this party, and Brownlow had gone off alone in a taxi. That is what I was most desirous of knowing. He had been duly delivered by his taxi at the main entrance to Sussex Court.

Nothing untoward is to be recorded of his journey in the lift to the fifth floor of Sussex Court. The liftman on duty noted nothing exceptional. I asked if Brownlow said, "Good night." The liftman does not remember. "Usually he says Night O," reflected the liftman— manifestly doing his best and with nothing particular to recall. And there the fruits of my inquiries about the condition of Brownlow on this particular evening conclude. The rest of the story comes directly from him. My investigations arrive only at this: he was certainly not drunk. But he was lifted a little out of our normal harsh and grinding contact with the immediate realities of existence. Life was glowing softly and warmly in him, and the unexpected could happen brightly, easily, and acceptably.

He went down the long passage with its red carpet, its clear light, and its occasional oaken doors, each with its artistic brass number. I have been down that passage with him on several occasions. It was his custom to enliven that corridor by raising his hat gravely as he passed each entrance, saluting his unknown and invisible neighbours, addressing them softly but distinctly by playful if sometimes slightly indecorous names of his own devising, expressing good wishes or paying them little compliments.

He came at last to his own door, number 49, and let himself in without serious difficulty. He switched on his hall light. Scattered on the polished oak floor and invading his Chinese carpet were a number of letters and circulars, the evening's mail. His parlourmaid-housekeeper who slept in a room in another part of the building, had been taking her evening out, or these letters would have been gathered up and put on the desk in his bureau. As it was, they lay on the floor. He closed his door behind him or it closed of its own accord; he took off his coat and wrap, placed his hat on the head of the Greek charioteer whose bust adorns his hall, and set himself to pick up his letters.

This also he succeeded in doing without misadventure. He was a little annoyed to miss the *Evening Standard*. It is his custom, he says, to subscribe for the afternoon edition of the Star to read at tea-time and also for the final

edition of the *Evening Standard* to turn over the last thing at night, if only on account of Low's cartoon. He gathered up all these envelopes and packets and took them with him into his little sitting-room. There he turned on the electric heater, mixed himself a weak whisky-and-soda, went to his bedroom to put on soft slippers and replace his smoking jacket by a frogged jacket of llama wool, returned to his sitting-room, lit a cigarette, and sat down in his arm-chair by the reading lamp to examine his correspondence. He recalls all these details very exactly. They were routines he had repeated scores of times.

Brownlow's is not a preoccupied mind; it goes out to things. He is one of those buoyant extroverts who open and read all their letters and circulars whenever they can get hold of them. In the daytime his secretary intercepts and deals with most of them, but at night he escapes from her control and does what he pleases, that is to say, he opens everything.

He ripped up various envelopes. There was a formal acknowledgment of a business letter he had dictated the day before, there was a letter from his solicitor asking for some details about a settlement he was making, there was an offer from some unknown gentleman with an aristocratic name to lend him money on his note of hand alone, and there was a notice about a proposed new wing to his club. "Same old stuff," he sighed. "Same old stuff. What bores they all are!" He was always hoping, like every man who is proceeding across the plains of middle-age, that his correspondence would contain agreeable surprises— and it never did. Then, as he put it to me, *inter alia*, he picked up the remarkable newspaper.

ii

IT WAS different in appearance from an ordinary newspaper, but not so different as not to be recognizable as a newspaper, and he was surprised, he says, not to have observed it before. It was enclosed in a wrapper of pale green, but it was unstamped; apparently it had been delivered not by the postman, but by some other hand. (This wrapper still exists; I have seen it.) He had already torn it off before he noted that he was not the addressee.

For a moment or so he remained looking at this address, which struck him as just a little odd. It was printed in rather unusual type: "Evan O'Hara Mr., Sussex Court 49."

"Wrong name," said Mr. Brownlow; "Right address. Rummy. Sussex Court 49. ... 'Spose he's got my *Evening Standard*. ... 'Change no robbery."

He put the torn wrapper with his unanswered letters and opened out the newspaper.

The title of the paper was printed in large slightly ornamental black-green letters that might have come from a kindred fount to that responsible for the address. But, as he read it, it was the *Evening Standard!* Or, at least, it was the "Even Standrd." "Silly," said Brownlow. "It's some damn Irish paper. Can't spell— anything— these Irish...."

He had, I think, a passing idea, suggested perhaps by the green wrapper and the green ink, that it was a lottery stunt from Dublin.

Still, if there was anything to read he meant to read it. He surveyed the front page. Across this ran a streamer headline:

WILTON BORING REACHES SEVEN MILES
SUCCES ASSURED

"No," said Brownlow. "It must be oil.... Illiterate lot these oil chaps— leave out the 's' in 'success.'"

He held the paper down on his knee for a moment, reinforced himself by a drink, took and lit a second cigarette, and then leant back in his chair to take a dispassionate view of any oil-share pushing that might be afoot.

But it wasn't an affair of oil. It was, it began to dawn upon him, something stranger than oil. He found himself surveying a real evening newspaper, which was dealing, so far as he could see at the first onset, with the affairs of another world.

He had for a moment a feeling as though he and his arm-chair and his little sitting-room were afloat in a vast space and then it all seemed to become firm and solid again.

This thing in his hands was plainly and indisputably a printed newspaper. It was a little odd in its letterpress, and it didn't feel or rustle like ordinary paper, but newspaper it was. It was printed in either three or four columns— for the life of him he cannot remember which— and there were column headlines under the page streamer. It had a sort of art-nouveau affair at the bottom of one column that might be an advertisement (it showed a woman in an impossibly big hat), and in the upper left-hand corner was an unmistakable weather chart of Western Europe, with *coloured* isobars, or isotherms, or whatever they are, and the inscription: "To-morrow's Weather."

And then he remarked the date. The date was November 10th, 1971!

"Steady on," said Brownlow. "Damitall! Steady on."

He held the paper sideways, and then straight again. The date remained November 10th, 1971.

He got up in a state of immense perplexity and put the paper down. For a moment he felt a little afraid of it. He rubbed his forehead. "Haven't been doing a Rip Van Winkle, by any chance, Brownlow, my boy?" he said. He picked

up the paper again, walked out into his hall and looked at himself in the hall mirror. He was reassured to see no signs of advancing age, but the expression of mingled consternation and amazement upon his flushed face struck him suddenly as being undignified and unwarrantable. He laughed at himself, but not uncontrollably. Then he stared blankly at that familiar countenance. "I must be half-way *tordu*" he said, that being his habitual facetious translation of "screwed." On the console table was a little respectable-looking adjustable calendar bearing witness that the date was November 10th, 1931.

"D'you see?" he said, shaking the queer newspaper at it reproachfully. "I ought to have spotted you for a hoax ten minutes ago. 'Moosing trick, to say the least of it. I suppose they've made Low editor for a night, and he's had this idea. Eh?"

He felt he had been taken in, but that the joke was a good one. And, with quite unusual anticipations of entertainment, he returned to his arm-chair. A good idea it was, a paper forty years ahead. Good fun if it was well done. For a time nothing but the sounds of a newspaper being turned over and Brownlow's breathing can have broken the silence of the flat.

iii

REGARDED as an imaginative creation, he found the thing almost too well done. Every time he turned a page he expected the sheet to break out into laughter and give the whole thing away. But it did nothing of the kind. From being a mere quip, it became an immense and amusing, if perhaps a little over-elaborate, lark. And then, as a lark, it passed from stage to stage of incredibility until, as any thing but the thing it professed to be, it was incredible altogether. It must have cost far more than an ordinary number. All sorts of colours were used, and suddenly he came upon illustrations that went beyond amazement; they were in the colours of reality. Never in all his life had he seen such colour printing— and the buildings and scenery and costumes in the pictures were strange. Strange and yet credible. They were colour photographs of actuality forty years from now. He could not believe anything else of them. Doubt could not exist in their presence.

His mind had swung back, away from the stunt-number idea altogether. This paper in his hand would not simply be costly beyond dreaming to produce. At any price it could not be produced. All this present world could not produce such an object as this paper he held in his hand. He was quite capable of realizing that.

He sat turning the sheet over and— quite mechanically— drinking whisky. His sceptical faculties were largely in suspense; the barriers of criticism were

down. His mind could now accept the idea that he was reading a newspaper of forty years ahead without any further protest.

It had been addressed to Mr. Evan O'Hara, and it had come to him. Well and good. This Evan O'Hara evidently knew how to get ahead of things....

I doubt if at that time Brownlow found anything very wonderful in the situation.

Yet it was, it continues to be, a very wonderful situation. The wonder of it mounts to my head as I write. Only gradually have I been able to build up this picture of Brownlow turning over that miraculous sheet, so that I can believe it myself. And you will understand how, as the thing flickered between credibility and incredibility in my mind, I asked him, partly to justify or confute what he told me, and partly to satisfy a vast expanding and, at last, devouring curiosity: "What was there in it? What did it have to say?" At the same time, I found myself trying to catch him out in his story, and also asking him for every particular he could give me.

What was there in it? In other words, What will the world be doing forty years from now? That was the stupendous scale of the vision, of which Brownlow was afforded a glimpse. The world forty years from now! I lie awake at nights thinking of all that paper might have revealed to us. Much it did reveal, but there is hardly a thing it reveals that does not change at once into a constellation of riddles. When first he told me about the thing I was— it is, I admit, an enormous pity— intensely sceptical. I asked him questions in what people call a "nasty" manner. I was ready— as my manner made plain to him— to jump down his throat with "But that's preposterous!" at the very first slip. And I had an engagement that carried me off at the end of half an hour. But the thing had already got hold of my imagination, and I rang up Brownlow before tea-time, and was biting at this "queer story" of his again. That afternoon he was sulking because of my morning's disbelief, and he told me very little. "I was drunk and dreaming, I suppose," he said. "I'm beginning to doubt it all myself." In the night it occurred to me for the first time that, if he was not allowed to tell and put on record what he had seen, he might become both confused and sceptical about it himself. Fancies might mix up with it. He might hedge and alter to get it more credible. Next day, therefore, I lunched and spent the afternoon with him, and arranged to go down into Surrey for the week-end. I managed to dispel his huffiness with me. My growing keenness restored his. There we set ourselves in earnest, first of all to recover everything he could remember about his newspaper and then to form some coherent idea of the world about which it was telling.

It is perhaps a little banal to say we were not trained men for the job. For who could be considered trained for such a job as we were attempting? What

facts was he to pick out as important and how were they to be arranged? We wanted to know everything we could about 1971; and the little facts and the big facts crowded on one another and offended against each other.

The streamer headline across the page about that seven-mile Wilton boring, is, to my mind, one of the most significant items in the story. About that we are fairly clear. It referred, says Brownlow, to a series of attempts to tap the supply of heat beneath the surface of the earth. I asked various questions. "It was *explained*, y'know," said Brownlow, and smiled and held out a hand with twiddling fingers. "It was explained all right. Old system, they said, was to go down from a few hundred feet to a mile or so and bring up coal and burn it. Go down a bit deeper, and there's no need to bring up and burn anything. Just get heat itself straightaway. Comes up of its own accord— under its own steam. See? Simple.

"They were making a big fuss about it," he added. "It wasn't only the streamer headline; there was a leading article in big type. What was it headed? Ah! The Age of Combustion has Ended!"

Now that is plainly a very big event for mankind, caught in mid-happening, November 10th, 1971. And the way in which Brownlow describes it as being handled, shows clearly a world much more preoccupied by economic essentials than the world of to-day, and dealing with them on a larger scale and in a bolder spirit.

That excitement about tapping the central reservoirs of heat, Brownlow was very definite, was not the only symptom of an increase in practical economic interest and intelligence. There was much more space given to scientific work and to inventions than is given in any contemporary paper. There were diagrams and mathematical symbols, he says, but he did not look into them very closely because he could not get the hang of them. "*Frightfully* highbrow, some of it," he said.

A more intelligent world for our grandchildren evidently, and also, as the pictures testified, a healthier and happier world.

"The fashions kept you looking," said Brownlow, going off at a tangent, "all coloured up as they were."

"Were they elaborate?" I asked.

"Anything *but*," he said.

His description of these costumes is vague. The people depicted in the social illustrations and in the advertisements seemed to have reduced body clothing— I mean things like vests, pants, socks and so forth— to a minimum. Breast and chest went bare. There seem to have been tremendously exaggerated wristlets, mostly on the left arm and going as far up as the elbow, provided with gadgets which served the purpose of pockets. Most of these

armlets seem to have been very decorative, almost like little shields. And then, usually, there was an immense hat, often rolled up and carried in the hand, and long cloaks of the loveliest colours and evidently also of the most beautiful soft material, which either trailed from a sort of gorget or were gathered up and wrapped about the naked body, or were belted up or thrown over the shoulders.

There were a number of pictures of crowds from various parts of the world. "The people looked fine," said Brownlow. "Prosperous, you know, and upstanding. Some of the women— just lovely."

My mind went off to India. What was happening in India?

Brownlow could not remember anything very much about India. "Ankor," said Brownlow. "That's not India, is it?" There had been some sort of Carnival going on amidst "perfectly lovely" buildings in the sunshine of Ankor.

The people there were brownish people but they were dressed very much like the people in other parts of the world.

I found the politician stirring in me. Was there really nothing about India? Was he sure of that? There was certainly nothing that had left any impression in Brownlow's mind. And Soviet Russia? "Not as Soviet Russia," said Brownlow. All that trouble had ceased to be a matter of daily interest. "And how was France getting on with Germany?" Brownlow could not recall a mention of either of these two great powers. Nor of the British Empire as such, nor of the U.S.A. There was no mention of any interchanges, communications, ambassadors, conferences, competitions, comparisons, stresses, in which these governments figured, so far as he could remember. He racked his brains. I thought perhaps all that had been going on so entirely like it goes on to-day— and has been going on for the last hundred years— that he had run his eyes over the passages in question and that they had left no distinctive impression on his mind. But he is positive that it was not like that. "All that stuff was washed out," he said. He is unshaken in his assertion that there were no elections in progress, no notice of Parliament or politicians, no mention of Geneva or anything about armaments or war. All those main interests of a contemporary journal seem to have been among the "washed out" stuff. It isn't that Brownlow didn't notice them very much; he is positive they were not there.

Now to me this is a very wonderful thing indeed. It means, I take it, that in only forty years from now the great game of sovereign states will be over. It looks also as if the parliamentary game will be over, and as if some quite new method of handling human affairs will have been adopted. Not a word of patriotism or nationalism; not a word of party, not an allusion. But in only forty years! While half the human beings already alive in the world will still be living!

You cannot believe it for a moment. Nor could I, if it wasn't for two little torn scraps of paper. These, as I will make clear, leave me in a state of— how can I put it?— incredulous belief.

iv

AFTER ALL, in 1831 very few people thought of railway or steamship travel, and in 1871 you could already go round the world in eighty days by steam, and send a telegram in a few minutes to nearly every part of the earth. Who would have thought of that in 1831? Revolutions in human life, when they begin to come, can come very fast. Our ideas and methods change faster than we know.

But just forty years!

It was not only that there was this absence of national politics from that evening paper, but there was something else still more fundamental. Business, we both think, finance that is, was not in evidence, at least upon anything like contemporary lines. We are not quite sure of that, but that is our impression. There was no list of Stock Exchange prices. for example, no City page, and nothing in its place. I have suggested already that Brownlow just turned that page over, and that it was sufficiently like what it is to-day that he passed and forgot it. I have put that suggestion to him. But he is quite sure that that was not the case. Like most of us nowadays, he is watching a number of his investments rather nervously, and he is convinced he looked for the City article.

November 10th, 1971, may have been Monday— there seems to have been some readjustment of the months and the days of the week; that is a detail into which I will not enter now— but that will not account for the absence of any City news at all. That also, it seems, will be washed out forty years from now.

Is there some tremendous revolutionary smash-up ahead, then? Which will put an end to investment and speculation? Is the world going Bolshevik? In the paper, anyhow, there was no sign of, or reference to, anything of that kind. Yet against this idea of some stupendous economic revolution we have the fact that here forty years ahead is a familiar London evening paper still tumbling into a private individual's letter-box in the most uninterrupted manner. Not much suggestion of a social smash-up there. Much stronger is the effect of immense changes which have come about bit by bit, day by day, and hour by hour, without any sort of revolutionary jolt, as morning or springtime comes to the world.

These futile speculations are irresistible. The reader must forgive me them. Let me return to our story.

There had been a picture of a landslide near Ventimiglia and one of some new chemical works at Salzburg, and there had been a picture of fighting going on near Irkutsk. (Of that picture, as I will tell presently, a fading scrap survives.) "Now that was called—" Brownlow made an effort, and snapped his fingers triumphantly. "— 'Round-up of Brigands by Federal Police.'"

"*What Federal Police?*" I asked.

"There you have me," said Brownlow. "The fellows on both sides looked mostly Chinese, but there were one or two taller fellows, who might have been Americans or British or Scandinavians.

"What filled a lot of the paper," said Brownlow, suddenly, "was gorillas. There was no end of a fuss about gorillas. Not so much as about that boring, but still a lot of fuss. Photographs. A map. A special article and some paragraphs."

The paper, had, in fact, announced the death of the last gorilla. Considerable resentment was displayed at the tragedy that had happened in the African gorilla reserve. The gorilla population of the world had been dwindling for many years. In 1931 it had been estimated at nine hundred. When the Federal Board took over it had shrunken to three hundred.

"*What* Federal Board?" I asked.

Brownlow knew no more than I did. When he read the phrase, it had seemed all right somehow. Apparently this Board had had too much to do all at once, and insufficient resources. I had the impression at first that it must be some sort of conservation board, improvised under panic conditions, to save the rare creatures of the world threatened with extinction. The gorillas had not been sufficiently observed and guarded, and they had been swept out of existence suddenly by a new and malignant form of influenza. The thing had happened practically before it was remarked. The paper was clamouring for inquiry and drastic changes of reorganization.

This Federal Board, whatever it might be, seemed to be something of very considerable importance in the year 1971. Its name turned up again in an article of afforestation. This interested Brownlow considerably because he has large holdings in lumber companies. This Federal Board was apparently not only responsible for the maladies of wild gorillas but also for the plantation of trees in— just note these names!— Canada, New York State, Siberia, Algiers, and the East Coast of England, and it was arraigned for various negligences in combating insect pests and various fungoid plant diseases. It jumped all our contemporary boundaries in the most astounding way. Its range was world-wide. "In spite of the recent additional restrictions put upon the use of big

timber in building and furnishing, there is a plain possibility of a shortage of shelter timber and of rainfall in nearly all the threatened regions for 1985 onwards. Admittedly the Federal Board has come late to its task, from the beginning its work has been urgency work; but in view of the lucid report prepared by the James Commission, there is little or no excuse for the inaggressiveness and over-confidence it has displayed."

I am able to quote this particular article because as a matter of fact it lies before me as I write. It is indeed, as I will explain, all that remains of this remarkable newspaper. The rest has been destroyed and all we can ever know of it now is through Brownlow's sound but not absolutely trustworthy memory.

v

MY MIND, as the days pass, hangs on to that Federal Board. Does that phrase mean, as just possibly it may mean, a world federation, a scientific control of all human life only forty years from now? I find that idea— staggering. I have always believed that the world was destined to unify— "Parliament of Mankind and Confederation of the World," as Tennyson put it— but I have always supposed that the process would take centuries. But then my time sense is poor. My disposition has always been to under-estimate the pace of change. I wrote in 1900 that there would be aeroplanes "in fifty years' time." And the confounded things were buzzing about everywhere and carrying passengers before 1920.

Let me tell very briefly of the rest of that evening paper. There seemed to be a lot of sport and fashion; much about something called "Spectacle"— with pictures— a lot of illustrated criticism of decorative art and particularly of architecture. The architecture in the pictures he saw was "towering— kind of magnificent. Great blocks of building. New York, but more so and all run together" ... Unfortunately he cannot sketch. There were sections devoted to something he couldn't understand, but which he thinks was some sort of "radio programme stuff."

All that suggests a sort of advanced human life very much like the life we lead to-day, possibly rather brighter and better. But here is something— different.

"The birth-rate," said Brownlow, searching his mind, "was seven in the thousand."

I exclaimed. The lowest birth-rates in Europe now are sixteen or more per thousand. The Russian birth-rate is forty per thousand, and falling slowly.

"It was seven," said Brownlow. "Exactly seven. I noticed it. In a paragraph."

But what birth-rate, I asked. The British? The European?

"It said the birth-rate," said Brownlow. "Just that." That I think is the most tantalizing item in all this strange glimpse of the world of our grandchildren. A birth-rate of seven in the thousand does not mean a fixed world population; it means a population that is being reduced at a very rapid rate— unless the death-rate has gone still lower. Quite possibly people will not be dying so much then, but living very much longer. On that Brownlow could throw no light. The people in the pictures did not look to him an "old lot." There were plenty of children and young or young-looking people about.

"But Brownlow," I said, "wasn't there any crime?"

"Rather," said Brownlow. "They had a big poisoning case on, but it was jolly hard to follow. You know how it is with these crimes. Unless you've read about it from the beginning, it's hard to get the hang of the situation. No newspaper has found out that for every crime it ought to give a summary up-to-date every day— and forty years ahead, they hadn't. Or they aren't going to. Whichever way you like to put it.

"There were several crimes and what newspaper men call stories," he resumed; "personal stories. What struck me about it was that they seemed to be more sympathetic than our reporters, more concerned with the motives and less with just finding someone out. What you might call psychological— so to speak."

"Was there anything much about books?" I asked him.

"I don't remember anything about books," he said. ...

And that is all. Except for a few trifling details such as a possible thirteenth month inserted in the year, that is all. It is intolerably tantalizing. That is the substance of Brownlow's account of his newspaper. He read it— as one might read any newspaper. He was just in that state of alcoholic comfort when nothing is incredible and so nothing is really wonderful. He knew he was reading an evening newspaper of forty years ahead and he sat in front of his fire, and smoked and sipped his drink and was no more perturbed than he would have been if he had been reading an imaginative book about the future.

Suddenly his little brass clock pinged Two.

He got up and yawned. He put that astounding, that miraculous newspaper down as he was wont to put any old newspaper down; he carried off his correspondence to the desk in his bureau, and with the swift laziness of a very tired man he dropped his clothes about his room anyhow and went to bed.

But somewhen in the night he woke up feeling thirsty and grey-minded. He lay awake and it came to him that something very strange had occurred to him. His mind went back to the idea that he had been taken in by a very ingenious fabrication. He got up for a drink of Vichy water and a liver tabloid,

he put his head in cold water and found himself sitting on his bed towelling his hair and doubting whether he had really seen those photographs in the very colours of reality itself, or whether he had imagined them. Also running through his mind was the thought that the approach of a world timber famine for 1985 was something likely to affect his investments and particularly a trust he was setting up on behalf of an infant in whom he was interested. It might be wise, he thought, to put more into timber.

He went back down the corridor to his sitting-room. He sat there in his dressing-gown, turning over the marvellous sheets. There it was in his hands complete in every page, not a corner torn. Some sort of auto-hypnosis, he thought, might be at work, but certainly the pictures seemed as real as looking out of a window. After he had stared at them some time he went back to the timber paragraph. He felt he must keep that. I don't know if you will understand how his mind worked— for my own part I can see at once how perfectly irrational and entirely natural it was— but he took this marvellous paper, creased the page in question, tore off this particular article and left the rest. He returned very drowsily to his bedroom, put the scrap of paper on his dressing-table, got into bed and dropped off to sleep at once.

vi

WHEN HE AWOKE again it was nine o'clock; his morning tea was untasted by his bedside and the room was full of sunshine. His parlourmaid-housekeeper had just re-entered the room.

"You were sleeping so peacefully," she said; "I couldn't bear to wake you. Shall I get you a fresh cup of tea?"

Brownlow did not answer. He was trying to think of something strange that had happened.

She repeated her question.

"No. I'll come and have breakfast in my dressing-gown before my bath," he said, and she went out of the room.

Then he saw the scrap of paper.

In a moment he was running down the corridor to the sitting-room. "I left a newspaper," he said. "I left a newspaper."

She came in response to the commotion he made.

"A newspaper?" she said. "It's been gone this two hours, down the chute, with the dust and things."

Brownlow had a moment of extreme consternation.

He invoked his God. "I wanted it *kept*!" he shouted. "I wanted it *kept*."

"But how was *I* to know you wanted it kept?"

"But didn't you notice it was a very extraordinary-looking newspaper?"

"I've got none too much time to dust out this flat to be looking at newspapers," she said. "I thought I saw some coloured photographs of bathing ladies and chorus girls in it, but that's no concern of mine. It didn't seem a proper newspaper to me. How was I to know you'd be wanting to look at them again this morning?"

"I must get that newspaper back," said Brownlow. "It's— it's vitally important. ... If all Sussex Court has to be held up I want that newspaper back."

"I've never known a thing come up that chute again," said his housekeeper, "that's once gone down it. But I'll telephone down, sir, and see what can be done. Most of that stuff goes right into the hot-water furnace, they say. ..."

It does. The newspaper had gone.

Brownlow came near raving. By a vast effort of self-control he sat down and consumed his cooling breakfast. He kept on saying "Oh, my God!" as he did so. In the midst of it he got up to recover the scrap of paper from his bedroom, and then found the wrapper addressed to Evan O'Hara among the overnight letters on his bureau. That seemed an almost maddening confirmation. The thing had happened.

Presently after he had breakfasted, he rang me up to aid his baffled mind.

I found him at his bureau with the two bits of paper before him. He did not speak. He made a solemn gesture.

"What is it?" I asked, standing before him.

"Tell me," he said. "Tell me. What are these objects? It's serious. Either—" He left the sentence unfinished.

I picked up the torn wrapper first and felt its texture. "Evan O'Hara, Mr.," I read.

"Yes. Sussex Court, 49. Eh?"

"Right," I agreed and stared at him.

"*That's* not hallucination, eh?"

I shook my head.

"And now this?" His hand trembled as he held out the cutting. I took it.

"Odd," I said. I stared at the black-green ink, the unfamiliar type, the little novelties in spelling. Then I turned the thing over. On the back was a piece of one of the illustrations; it was, I suppose, about a quarter of the photograph of that "Round-up of Brigands by Federal Police" I have already mentioned.

When I saw it that morning it had not even begun to fade. It represented a mass of broken masonry in a sandy waste with bare-looking mountains in the distance. The cold, clear atmosphere, the glare of a cloudless afternoon were rendered perfectly. In the foreground were four masked men in a brown service uniform intent on working some little machine on wheels with a tube

and a nozzle projecting a jet that went out to the left, where the fragment was torn off. I cannot imagine what the jet was doing. Brownlow says he thinks they were gassing some men in a hut. Never have I seen such realistic colour printing.

"What on earth is this?" I asked.

"It's *that!*" said Brownlow. "I'm not mad, am I? It's really *that*."

"But what the devil is it?"

"It's a piece of a newspaper for November 10th, 1971."

"You had better explain," I said, and sat down, with the scrap of paper in my hand, to hear his story. And, with as much elimination of questions and digressions and repetitions as possible, that is the story I have written here.

I said at the beginning that it was a queer story and queer to my mind it remains, fantastically queer. I return to it at intervals, and it refuses to settle down in my mind as anything but an incongruity with all my experience and beliefs. If it were not for the two little bits of paper, one might dispose of it quite easily. One might say that Brownlow had had a vision, a dream of unparalleled vividness and consistency. Or that he had been hoaxed and his head turned by some elaborate mystification. Or, again, one might suppose he had really seen into the future with a sort of exaggeration of those previsions cited by Mr. J.W. Dunne in his remarkable "Experiment with Time." But nothing Mr. Dunne has to advance can account for an actual evening paper being slapped through a letter-slit forty years in advance of its date.

The wrapper has not altered in the least since I first saw it. But the scrap of paper with the article about afforestation is dissolving into a fine powder and the fragment of picture at the back of it is fading out; most of the colour has gone and the outlines have lost their sharpness. Some of the powder I have taken to my friend Ryder at the Royal College, whose work in micro-chemistry is so well known. He says the stuff is not paper at all, properly speaking. It is mostly aluminium fortified by admixture with some artificial resinous substance.

vii

THOUGH I offer no explanation whatever of this affair I think I will venture on one little prophesy. I have an obstinate persuasion that on November 10th, 1971, the name of the tenant of 49, Sussex Court, will be Mr. Evan O'Hara. (There is no tenant of that name now in Sussex Court and I find no evidence in the *Telephone Directory*, or the *London Directory*, that such a person exists anywhere in London.) And on that particular evening forty years ahead, he will

not get his usual copy of the *Even Standrd*: instead he will get a copy of the *Evening Standard* of 1931. I have an incurable fancy that this will be so.

There I may be right or wrong, but that Brownlow really got and for two remarkable hours, read, a real newspaper forty years ahead of time I am as convinced as I am convinced that my own name is Hubert G. Wells. Can I say anything stronger than that?

_____

14: Piebald Jim

Thomas E Spencer

1845-1911

In: *The Haunted Shanty* and other stories, 1910

'DID YOU EVER hear of Piebald Jim?' asked the coachman.

'No; what was Piebald Jim— a horse or a man?'

'Oh, it was a man,' he answered, as he flicked a fly off the ear of the near leader; 'You see, Piebald Jim was a nickname given to him by the boys at the Muckerawa. He was about as ugly a chap as you would meet in a hundred mile drive. One half of his face was not so bad, and if you caught a glimpse of his profile on that side it was passable. The other side, taking his nose as a dividing line, was like the ground about the Muckerawa— patchy. It varied in colour from rose pink to lead colour. He had neither eyebrows nor lashes on the variegated side of his face, and his mouth was twisted up at the corners like that of a bull pup when he's aggravated. When he tried to laugh, which wasn't often, he used to laugh with one side of his face only, while the other side remained fixed, with a snarling expression, as if it was rebuking the side that laughed, for its levity.

He lived in a tent along the Macquarie, near the Muckerawa, and worked as a hatter. He never spoke unless he was spoken to, and then it was never more than a quiet 'good day' as he passed the camp. His name was Jim, and owing to his peculiar physiogonomy the boys nicknamed him 'Piebald Jim.'

He had been living on the river about a year, when an event happened which caused quite an excitement among the boys in the district. This was the arrival of the new governess at Harper's Flat.

Old Harper had struck it pretty rich on the Muckerawa, and had been known to clean up as much as two pannikins full of gold in a day. He then invested in sheep and did pretty well; and so as he had been made a J.P., he engaged a governess from Sydney to teach his children.

Before the new governess had been a month at Harper's all the young fellows for miles around were going mad about her. There were not many women about there in those days, in proportion to the men, and what there were, were a mixed lot; but this new governess was a beauty, and no mistake. I've knocked about a bit and seen a few. I've been in Bathurst three times, and I once spent a fortnight in Sydney; but Miss Kingsmill was about as fine a specimen as I ever struck.

She was tall and straight, with a colour that always reminded me of a bunch of red and white roses. She had brown eyes, as tender in expression as those of a kangaroo, while the clustering curls of her wavy brown hair seemed to be always inviting you to caress them. Her mouth and lips, with the rows of

pearly teeth within, were simply perfect. I'm not good at describing females; I could tell you the points of a horse better, but you can take my tip she was a gem.

Well, the boys wanted to do the polite thing, you know, and they talked it over at night around the camp fire. Jack Carson wanted to serenade her, but we howled him down. He only suggested that because he thought he could sing. He knew the first five or six verses of 'The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington,' but I never knew him to get beyond the third verse. When he got to the place where it says:

'When all the maids of Islington,
Went forth to sport and play'

somebody was bound to hit him on the head with a wet soogee bag, and that stopped him.

After several meetings it was carried unanimously that we should invite the new governess-to a ball. We got the use of Harper's woolshed, and each of the boys tried to outdo the other in making the preparations. When the night arrived, it was a treat to see them roll up. They each had on a new suit of clothes, and as there was only one store at 'The Barks' in those days, there was a certain amount of uniformity about the dress, but there wasn't a pair of moleskins among them.

They had rounded up all the eligible females in the district, and two or three came from 'The Barks.' We were all there before sundown, and while the ladies were having a cup of tea in the house we were all sitting round, smoking, on the grass, when who should come cantering across the flat and through the slip-rails but Piebald Jim.

Now; he had never been to any of the meetings, and nobody had thought of asking him, because the idea of Piebald Jim coming to a ball was too funny for anything. I should as soon have thought of entering my near wheeler for the Melbourne Cup. What girl would be seen dancing with Piebald Jim? The boys all started laughing when they saw him coming, and I thought some of them would take a fit.

'Coming to the ball, Jimmy?' said Jack Carson.

'Yes,' drawled Jimmy in his quiet way, 'I thought I'd come in honour of Miss Kingsmill.'

Then there was another laugh, but he took no notice; and turned his horse into the yard.

Soon after that the ladies came down from the house, and the boys all got excited. There was an agreement among them that there was to be a fair start.

Nobody was to engage Miss Kingsmill for a dance until the M.C. gave the signal. Sullivan from 'The Barks' was M.C., and when he sang out 'Take your partners for the first quadrille,' you may bet there was a rush for her. Amongst the rest, who should walk forward, but Piebald Jim. The moment she saw him she left off laughing and turned pale, and several of us were going to remonstrate with him, for we thought that she was frightened at his ugly physiognomy, when he said quietly, 'Miss Bessie,' and his voice seemed to quiver and shake a bit, as if it had got over the traces, and he had a job to manage it.

She started forward, and we might as well have been a lot of sheep waiting in that shed to be shorn, as I'd often seen them, for all the notice she took of us.

She seized his two hands in hers, and looked him straight in the face. There was a tear glistening like a dewdrop in each of her eyes, as she said in a soft tone, 'Is that you, Mr. Haydon?'

And then came the most curious part of the whole performance, for she threw her two pretty arms round his neck and— kissed him! actually kissed him! kissed Piebald Jim! in front of all the company! kissed him twice! once on the good cheek and once on the patchy one. And then the colour spread like a sunset all over her face, neck and shoulders, right up among the curls that clustered on her forehead. All the roses were turned to red ones. Then she covered her face with her hands and sobbed as if her heart would break.

Mrs. Harper took her outside, and we stopped the music. Of course we couldn't open the ball without her, and about half-a-dozen young fellows got into a group at the lower end of the shed and talked the matter over.

Dan Fitzgibbons, a young giant from the Yahoo, wanted to take Jim outside and 'stouch' him.

'Ain't he got a blinded cheek,' said he, 'to let the handsomest girl in the country put her arms round his neck and kiss him?'

But just then Harper came in and got up on a table at the other end of the room. Now, Harper, although he was a J.P., wasn't a bad sort, an and the boys all respected him, and so they listened to hear what he had to say.

'Boys,' he commenced, 'we are going to start the first quadrille, and Miss Kingsmill and our esteemed friend, Mr. Hayden (here he pointed to Piebald Jim), are going to take tops. Before we start the music, however, and so that there will be no misunderstanding among us, I am going to tell you a little story.'

And then he told us the following yarn:—

'EIGHT YEARS AGO,' said he, 'there was a small rush at Cawley's Creek. Miss Kingsmill's father kept a store there. Down the creek there was a young fellow working named James Haydon, who was known among his friends as 'Handsonne Jim.' You needn't laugh, Carson, it's a fact, and any man who don't believe what I say, or who don't want to listen, can leave my woolshed.'

They were all quiet after this, and he went on:—

'Well, Jim Haydon used to call at the store as he passed, and never called without some little present in his pocket for Kingsmill's daughter, Bessie, then a golden-haired little lassie of ten. One night, while Kingsnnill was away, the store caught fire. Mrs. Kingsmill had barely time to drag the two Younger children out in their night dresses, when the whole of the frail structure was a mass of flame. A crowd soon collected, but the people felt that they could do nothing except watch the flames as they leapt upwards, licking with tongues of fire, weatherboards, and studs, tie beams and rafters, right up to the ridge-pole.

Suddenly Jim Haydon came running up, and his first words were, 'Where's Bessie?'

'My God!' exclaimed Mrs. Kingsmill, 'my child, where is my child? She is not here, she must still be sleeping, or suffocated. For Heaven's sake, save my child.'

Jim Haydon at once ran forward, but for a man to attempt to enter that burning building seemed insanity itself. The roof was likely to fall at any moment.

'Come back!' shouted a dozen voices, but Jim took no notice and went steadily forward. 'Come back Jim you can't do any good,' said several of his mates. Still Jim, with his arm before his face to protect it from the heat, continued his advance.

Then a voice, louder than the rest, and in a tone which sent a thrill of horror through every heart in the crowd said:—

'For God's sake, Jim, come back. There's powder in the store.'

But even this did not make Jim come back. On the contrary, he redoubled his efforts and his speed. He made a wild dash forward, and disappeared into the burning building. For a few moments everybody held their breath. Not a sound was heard but the roaring and crackling of the flames as they cast a lurid light upon the horrific faces of the spectators. Even Mrs. Kingsmill's sobs were stifled.

Suddenly Jim was seen at a side window, groping his way, with a bundle in his arms. He had taken off his coat and thrown it round the sleeping child, and now, with his shirt ablaze, he handed his precious burden through the window

to a sturdy miner who, bolder than the rest, had sprung forward to receive her, and who quickly ran with her to a place of safety.

Jim attempted to follow, but at that moment two burning rafters from the roof fell across the window and barred his pasage. A cry of horror burst from every throat as Jim was seen to tug for a moment at the blazing timber, and then, before the cry had ceased there was heard a dull report. Burning pieces of timber, sheets of hot iron, and myriads of glowing embers were scattered in all directions. Like a fiery fountain a mass of sparks flew upwards towards the sky, eclipsing fora moment the light of the stars, and then, scarcely ten minutes from the first alarm, what had before been a mass of fire, was nothing but a smouldering heap of ruins.

And where was Jim?

Among the debris they found him, blackened, bleeding, scorched, and perfectly unconscious, but still alive. Tenderly they bore him to the nearest hospital, and for weeks the spark of life flickered in his poor, wounded body, threatening every moment to expire.

He mended, slowly at first, and then more rapidly, for Jim had wonderful endurance and vitality, as well as splendid courage, and in six months he was discharged, He was cured as well as surgical skill could cure him, but all the surgical skill could not restore his good looks, and he was terribly and permanently disfigured.

Immediately after the fire Kingsmill sent his family to Sydney, and when Jim was out of danger, followed himself. Since the night of the fire Bessie and Jim had never met until this evening, 'but now,' concluded Harper, with a determined glance at the company, 'now, at my special request, they are going to take tops.'

Every man in the room pressed forward to shake hands with Piebald Jim.

When Dan Fitzgibbons had shaken hands with him, he said solemnly to those around him: 'Look here, boys, ten minutes ago I was talking like a blinded fool, about stouching Mr. Haydon, and I beg his pardon. I never begged a man's pardon in my life, but I beg his pardon, and if any man in the room objects to me begging his pardon, if that man will step outside, by ghost, I'll stouch him.' There was no objection, however, and we went on with the music.

That was five years ago.

Do you see that little cottage under the hill yonder— the one with the baby roses and wistaria growing up the verandah? That's where Mr. and Mrs. Haydon live. As she remarked to Mrs. Harper: 'She gave into his keeping the life he had risked his own to save.'

The two little dots you can see moving about among the peach trees are the sun-bonnets of their two little girls. They both take after their mother; they are neither of them like 'Piebald Jim'."

15: The Packet

Stacy Aumonier

1877-1928

Collier's May 26 1917

MR. BULTISHAW stood leaning heavily against the bar in "The Duchess of Teck," talking to his friend, Mr. Ticknett. Their friendship had endured for nearly twenty-seven years, and they still called each other "*Mr.*" Bultishaw and "*Mr.*" Ticknett. They were on the surface a curiously ill-matched couple, and the other salesmen and buyers from Cotterway's could never see what they had in common. Bultishaw was a big puffy man, shabbily florid. He had a fat babyish face, with large bright eyes which always seemed to be on the verge of tears, but whether this condition of liquefaction was due to his excessive emotionalism, or to the generally liquid state of his whole body, it would be difficult to decide. He was of an excitable nature, and though his voice seemed to come wheezing through various local derangements of his system, and was always pitched in a low key, it suggested a degree of excitement— usually of a querulous kind— quite remarkable in a person of his appearance. He was a man of moods, too...He was not always querulous, in fact his querulousness might generally be traced to an occasional revolt of his organic system against the treatment to which it was normally subjected. There were times when he was genial, playful, kind, sentimental, and maudlin. His clothes had a certain pretentiousness of style and wealth, not sustained by the dilapidated condition of their linings and edges, and the many stains of alcohol and the burns from matches and tobacco carelessly dropped. He was the manager of the linoleum department at Cotterway's.

Ticknett had a similar position with regard to "soft goods" in the same firm. But in appearance and character he was entirely dissimilar to Bultishaw. One of the junior salesmen one day called him "The Chinese God," and there was indeed something a little Eastern in his reserved manner, his suavity, and his great capacity for apparently minding his own business and yet at the same time— well, nobody liked Ticknett, but they all admired his ability, and most of them feared him. He was admired because he had risen from the position of being a "packer" in the yard to that of great influence, and he even shared the confidence of Mr. Joseph Cotterway himself. Hie skin was rather yellow, and he had very heavy black eyebrows and mustache and deep-set eyes with a slight cast. His clothes were so well cut that in the bar of "The Duchess of Teck" they seemed almost assertively unobtrusive.

Bultishaw was a prolific talker, and Ticknett was a patient listener. This was perhaps one of their principal bonds of mutual understanding. They had, of course, one common interest of an absorbing nature. It bubbled and sparkled

in the innumerable glasses which, at all hours of the day, Mrs. Clarke and Daphne and Gladys handed to them across the bar of "The Duchess of Teck," which in those days was always crowded with the salesmen and the staff of Cotterway's.

On this particular morning, Bultishaw was holding a glass in his fat fingers, and breathing heavily between each sentence. He was saying:

"'Sperience is the thing that counts in the furnishing trade, like anywhere else— ugh! Take any line you like— ugh!— buying cork carpets, eating oysters, or extending the Empire— ugh!— it's the man with'sperience who counts. These young fellers!...ugh!..."

Bultishaw shrugged his shoulders expressively, and glanced round the bar. Immediately a change came over his expression. His eyes sparkled angrily, and he shook the dregs of whisky in his glass, and drank them off with a spluttering gulp. Ticknett followed the glance of his friend and was quickly observant of the reason of Bultishaw's sudden trepidation. "Percy" had entered the bar. Percy was Bultishaw's assistant and also his *bête noir*.

He was a slim young man dressed in a most extravagant manner. He had a pale face, and a slightly receding chin. He wore a small bowler hat with a very narrow brim, pointed patent leather boots, a very shapely overcoat which almost suggested that he wore corsets, a pale lemon tie held together by a gold pin, and a spotted green waistcoat.

Percy was a very high-spirited young person— an irrepressible— with, a genius for taking stage center. He was invariably accompanied by several friends of his own age, and he had a habit of greeting a whole barful of men, whether he knew them or not, with a cheering cry of:

"Hullo! hullo! HULLO! So here we all are!"

He would deliver this greeting with such a gay abandon that every one would look up and laugh. Men would nod, and call out:

"Hullo! here's Percy! How do, Percy?"

And even those who did not know him would be conscious of some contagious fever of geniality. The conversation would grow louder and livelier, and Percy would invariably become the center of a laughing group.

In spite of his extravagance of manner, his irresponsibility, his passion for misquoting poetry, he had been marked down by several discriminating heads of the firm as "a smart boy."

He was indeed a very smart boy, from his gay clothes to his sparkling repartée with Daphne and Gladys. To Daphne it was known that he was an especial favorite. He would hold her hand across the bar, and smile at her engagingly, and say:

"And how is the moon of my delight!" And other enigmatic and brilliant things.

And Daphne would look at him with her sleepy, passionate eyes, and say:

"Oh, go on! You are a one!"

She was a silent little thing, incredibly ignorant. She was not pretty, but she had masses of gold-brown hair, and a figure rather over-developed. There was about her something extremely attractive to the men who frequented "The Duchess of Teck," a kind of brooding motherliness. She had an appealing way of sighing, and her eyes were always watchful, as though in the face of every stranger she might discover the solution of her troubles.

Bultishaw hated Percy for several reasons. One was essentially a question of personality. He hated his aggressive exuberance, his youthfulness, his ridiculous clothes, his way of brushing back his hair, and incidentally of scoring off Bultishaw. He hated him because he had the habit of upsetting the placid calm of "The Duchess of Teck." He created a restlessness. People did not listen so well when Percy was in the room.

Moreover, he hated the way he took possession of Daphne. It is difficult to know what Bultishaw's ideas were with regard to Daphne. He was himself a widower, aged fifty-six, and he lived in a small flat in Bloomsbury with his two daughters, who were both about Daphne's age. He never made love to her, but he treated her with a sort of proprietary sense of confidence. He told her all about himself. In the morning when the bar was empty he would expatiate on the various ailments which had assailed him overnight, his sleeplessness, his indigestion, his loss of appetite. And he found her very sympathetic. She would say:

"Oh, reely, Mr. Bultishaw! I am sorry! It's too bad! Have you ever tried Ponk's Pills?"

They would discuss Ponk's Pills exhaustively, and their effect on the system, but eventually Mr. Bultishaw would say that he thought he would try "just a wee drop of Scotch." And so he would start his day.

It must, alas! be acknowledged that the accumulated years of his convivial mode of life were beginning to tell on Bultishaw. He was not the man he was. At his best he was a good salesman. He knew the cork lino industry inside out. He had had endless experience. But there were days of fuddlement, days when he would make grievous mistakes, forget appointments, go wrong in his calculations. And the directors were not unobservant of the deterioration of his work and of his personal appearance. There was a very big rumor that Bultishaw was to be superseded by a younger man. This rumor had reached Bultishaw himself, and he accepted it with ironic incredulity.

"How can any one manage lino without'sperience?" he said.

Nevertheless the rumor had worried him of late, and had increased his sleeplessness. He was conscious of himself— the vast moral bulk of himself rolling down the hill. He knew he would never be able to give up drinking. He had no intention of trying. He had been at it too long. He had managed in his time to save nearly a thousand pounds. If he were sacked it would bring in a little bit, but not enough to live on. About fifty pounds a year, but he spent quite this amount in the bar of "The Duchess of Teck" alone. He would have to hunt round for another job. It would be ignominious, and it might be difficult to secure at his age.

This was, then, another reason for disliking Percy, for "the smart boy's" name had been mentioned in this very connection. And what did this soapy-headed young fool know about cork carpets! What'sperience had he had! A paltry two years. He was, too, so insufferably familiar and insolent. He had even once had the audacity to address Bultishaw as "Mr. Bulkychops," a pseudonym that was not only greeted with roars of laughter but had been adopted by others.

On this morning then when Percy made his accustomed entrance with its bravura accompaniment: "Hullo! hullo! HULLO! So here we all are!" Mr. Bultishaw's hand trembled, and he turned his back and muttered:

"That young—!"

The yellow face of Ticknett turned in the direction of Percy, but it was quite expressionless and he made no comment. He lighted another cigarette and looked across the bar at Daphne. The girl's cheeks were dimpled with smiles. Percy was talking to her. Suddenly Ticknett said to her in his chilling voice:

"I want two more Scotch whiskies and a split soda."

The girl looked up, and the dimples left her cheeks. She seemed almost imperceptibly to shrink within herself. She poured out the drinks and handed them to Ticknett. Bultishaw continued his querulous complaints about the insolence of young and ignorant men, trying to oust older and more experienced men from their hardly fought for positions.

And Ticknett listened, and his dark mustache moved in a peculiar way as he said:

"Yes, yes, I quite agree with you, Mr. Bultishaw. It's too bad."

ii

A WEEK LATER there was a sudden and dramatic turn of events in the firm of Cotterway's. Much to everybody's surprise, Percy was suddenly sacked without any reason being given, and Bultishaw was retained. In fact, Bultishaw was given another two years' contract on the same terms as before.

To what extent Ticknett was responsible for this development or what was really at the back of it all, nobody was ever quite clear. It is certain that on the day of Percy's dismissal these two friends dined together, and spent an evening of a somewhat bacchanalian character. It is known that at that time Ticknett had been conspicuously successful over some deal in tapestries with a French firm, and that he had lunched one day alone with Mr. Joseph Cotterway. It is doubtful even whether he ever gave the precise details of his machinations to Bultishaw himself. The result certainly had the appearance of quickening their friendship. They called each other "dear old feller," and there were many whispered implications about "insolent young swine."

The career of Percy was watched with interest. Of course he took his dismissal with a laugh, and entertained a party of his friends to a hilarious farewell supper.

But it happened that that summer was a peculiarly stagnant one in the furnishing world. The brilliant youth did not find it so easy to secure another situation. He was observed at first swinging about the West End in his splendidly nonchalant manner, and he Still frequented the bar of "The Duchess of Teck." But gradually these appearances became more rare. As the months went by he began to lose a little of his self-assurance and swagger, and it is even to be regretted that his gay clothes began to show evidences of wear. He once secured a situation at a small firm in Bayswater, but at the end of three weeks he was again dismissed, the proprietor going bankrupt owing to some unfortunate speculation. It would be idle to imagine what Percy's career would have been had not the war broken out in August when he was still out of employment. He volunteered for service the morning after war was declared, and then indeed there was a great scene of bibulous enthusiasm in "The Duchess of Teck." He was toasted and treated, and every one was crying out:

"Well, good luck, Percy, old man."

And Percy was in the highest spirits, and borrowed money from every one to stand treat to every one else. And Daphne cried quite openly, and in the corner of the bar Bultishaw was whispering to Ticknett:

"This'll knock the starch out of the young swine."

And Ticknett replied:

"He'll get killed."

There was at times a certain curious finality about Ticknett's statements that had a way of making people shudder.

Bultishaw laughed uncomfortably and repeated:

"It'll knock the starch out of him."

The departure of Percy was soon almost forgotten in the bewilderment of drama that began to convulse Europe. Others went also. There was upheaval,

and something of a panic in the furnishing world. Every man had his own interests to consider, and there was the big story unfolding day by day to absorb all spare attention. Perhaps the only man among all the devotees of "The Duchess of Teck" who thought considerably about Percy was Bultishaw. It was very annoying, but he could not dismiss the young man from his thoughts.

When the autumn came on, and the cold November rains washed the London streets, Bultishaw would suddenly think of Percy and he would shiver. Percy had been sent to some camp in Essex for his training, and often in the night Bultishaw would wake up and visualize Percy sleeping out in the open, getting wet through to the skin, possibly getting rheumatic fever. He was a ridiculously delicate-looking young man, quite unfitted to be a soldier. It occurred to Bultishaw more than once that if he and Ticknett hadn't...if Percy had secured his position, which everybody said was his due...he wouldn't have been sent out into all this.

And "all this" was a terrible thing to Bultishaw. During the fifty-six years of his life he had made a god of comfort. He loved warmth, good cheer, food, drink, security. The alternative seemed to him hell. He could not believe that there could be any sort of compensation in discomfort, and hardship, in restraint, and discipline, and self-abnegation. It was the thing he could not understand. And then at the end was the Awful Thing itself. He could not bear to dwell on that. He drank more prodigiously than ever.

The firm of Cotterway's was reorganized, and Bultishaw would undoubtedly have had the sack if it had not been for his two years' contract. As it was, expenses in every respect were cut down, and Bultishaw's royalties only amounted to a very small sum. He lived above his salary, and broke into his capital. He seemed more and more to rely on Ticknett. The manager of soft goods seemed to him the one stable thing in a shifting world.

When Percy one day made his sudden, meteoric, and final appearance in "The Duchess of Teck" the whole thing seemed like a dream. The usual crowd was gathered just before lunch, drinking gins and bitters, and whisky, and beer, and talking about "*our*" navy, and "*our*" army, and "*our*" Government, and what "*we*" should do to the Germans, when the level hum of conversation was broken by a loud and breezy:

"Hullo! hullo! HULLO! So here we all are!"

And lo! and behold, there was Percy, looking somehow bigger than usual, the general gaiety of his appearance emphasized by a pink complexion, a distinct increase of girth, and a beautiful khaki suit. And Bultishaw found himself clapped on the back and the same voice was exclaiming:

"Well, 'ow are you, Bulky-chops? Lookin' better than ever, 'pon my word!"

And then the bar was immediately in a roar of conviviality. Everybody struggled for the honor of standing Percy drinks, for he explained that he was off the next day to France. It is to be feared that during that afternoon Percy got rather drunk. He certainly indulged in violent moods between boisterous hilarity and a certain sullen pugnacity. At intervals he would continually ask for Ticknett, but to Bultishaw's surprise, Ticknett had disappeared almost immediately Percy entered the bar, and was not seen again that day. While, on the other side, Daphne stood cowering against the mahogany casings, looking deadly pale, with great black rings around her eyes.

Percy was quite friendly to Bultishaw, and introduced him to a friend of his in the same regiment, named Prosser, a young man who had previously been in a drapery store. It was not till later in the evening that the dull rumble of some imminent tragedy caused the vast bulk of the linoleum manager's body to tremble. He had been conscious of it all the afternoon. He was frightened. He did not like the way Percy had asked for Ticknett. He did not like Ticknett's disappearance, and above all he did not like the way Daphne had cowered against the wall. There was something at the back of all this, something uncomfortable. He dreaded things of this nature. Why couldn't people go on quietly, eating and drinking and being comfortable? He avoided "The Duchess of Teck," and actually stayed late at his work and caught up some arrears. He decided to go quickly home. When he got outside he commenced to walk, when suddenly Percy came out of a doorway and took hold of his arm. Bultishaw started.

"What is it? What do you want?" he said.

There was something very curious about Percy. He had never seen him like that before. He had been drinking, but he was not drunk. In fact, Bultishaw had never seen him in some ways so sober, so grimly serious. His lips were trembling, and his eyes were unnaturally bright. He gripped Bultishaw's coat and said:

"Where is your friend Ticknett?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen him since this morning," Bultishaw answered.

"Will you swear he isn't in the building? and that you don't know where he is?"

"Yes," gasped the cork-lino manager.

Percy looked into his eyes for some moments, and then he said queerly:

"Ticknett knows that I've got to report first thing in the morning. I've just seen Daphne home. There'll be a packet for Ticknett, do you see? I say there'll be a packet for him. D' you understand, Bulky-chops?"

Bultishaw was very frightened. He did not know a bit what the young man meant. He only knew that he wanted to get away. He didn't want to be mixed up in this. He mumbled:

"I see— er— a packet?...I'll tell him."

"No, you needn't tell him," answered the soldier. "I'm sayin' this for your benefit. I say there'll be a packet for him. D' you understand? There'll be a packet for him."

And he melted into the night...

iii

FROM THE DAY when Percy disappeared with these mysterious words on his lips to the day when the news came that he had been killed there was an interval of time that varied according to the occupation and the preoccupation of his particular acquaintances. To Bultishaw it appeared a very long time, but this may have been partly due to the fact that in the interval he had spent most of the time in bed with a very serious illness. He had been lying on his back, staring at the ceiling, and he had not been allowed to drink. The time had consequently hung very heavily on his hands, and his thoughts had been feeding on each other. The exact time was in effect eleven weeks.

During the latter part of this period his friend Ticknett paid him many visits, and had been very kind and attentive. And it was he indeed who brought the news that Percy had been killed.

It was one evening when it was nearly dark, and Bultishaw was sitting up in his dressing-gown in front of the fire, and his daughter Elsie was sitting on the other side of the fireplace, sewing. Ticknett paid one of his customary visits. Elsie showed him to an easy chair between the two, and after Ticknett's solicitous enquiries regarding Bultishaw's health, the two men reverted to their usual discussion of the staff of Cotterway's and their friends. Suddenly Ticknett remarked quite casually:

"Oh, by the way, young Percy has been killed at the front."

And then the room seemed to become violently darker. Bultishaw struggled to frame some suitable comment upon this but the words failed to come. He sat there with his fat, puffy hands pressing the sides of his easy chair. At last he said:

"Elsie, you might go and get my beef-tea ready."

When his daughter had gone out of the room, he still had nothing to say. He had not dismissed her for the purpose of speaking about the matter to Ticknett, but simply because a strange mood had come to him that he could not trust himself. In the gathering darkness he could see the sallow mask of his

friend's face looking at the fire, and his cold eyes peering beneath his heavy brows. Bultishaw at length managed to say:

"Any particulars?"

And Ticknett replied:

"No. It was in the papers yesterday."

And then Ticknett smiled and added:

"So you won't have to bother about your job any longer, Mr. Bultishaw."

And Bultishaw thought:

"There'll be a packet for you, Ticknett. A packet. Do you understand? And by God! you'll deserve it!"

He was still uncertain of what "the packet" would contain, but he had thought a lot about it during his illness, and he was sure the packet would contain something unpleasant, if not terrible. And yet Ticknett was his friend, in fact his only friend; the man who had saved him in a crisis, and who waited on him in his sickness. He tried to pull himself together, and he managed to say in his normally wheezy voice:

"I hope to be back next week."

And indeed on the following Tuesday he did once more report himself to the heads of the firm. He was still very weak and ill, and the doctor had warned him to avoid alcohol in any form. But by half-past twelve he felt so exhausted he decided that a little whisky and milk might help to get him through the day. He crawled round to "The Duchess of Teck" and was soon amongst his congenial acquaintances. It was very warm, very pleasant and ingratiating, the atmosphere of the bar. He ordered his whisky and milk, and then became aware of a striking vacancy. Daphne was not there. Mrs. Clarke and Gladys were busy serving drinks, and a tall thin girl was helping them. A peculiar sense of misgiving came to Bultishaw. He did not like to say anything about it to Mrs. Clarke, but he turned to an old habitué, named Benjamin Strigge, and he whispered:

"Where's Daphne to-day, Mr. Strigge?"

And Mr. Strigge answered:

"Daphne? She ain't been here for nearly three months. There was some story about her and young Percy. I've really forgotten what it was all about. Of course, you 've been away, Mr. Bultishaw. You 've missed all the spicy news, eh? They never interest me. Ha, ha, ha! Can I order you another whisky and milk?"

Bultishaw declined with thanks, and stood there sucking his pipe. In a few minutes Ticknett entered the bar. He appeared to be quite cheerful, and for him garrulous. He was very solicitous about Bultishaw's health, and insistent that he should not stand near a draught. He talked optimistically about the

war, and Bultishaw replied in monosyllables. And all the time the ridiculous thought kept racing through his mind:

"You 're going to get a packet, my friend."

It was a week later that Prosser turned up. He was one of eleven men, the sole survivors of a regiment— Percy's regiment. Prosser was slightly wounded in the foot, and strangely altered. He stammered and was no longer a gay companion. He had a wild, abstracted look, as though he had lost the power of listening, and was entirely occupied with inner visions. They could get little information out of him about Percy. He described certain scenes and experiences very vividly, but the description did not convey much to most of the men, for the reason that they were entirely devoid of imagination. The regiment had, as a matter of fact, been ambushed, and practically annihilated. A mine had done some deadly work. He had seen Percy and another man come into the lines in the morning. It was just daybreak. They had been on listening patrol. He had seen them both making their way along a trench to a dug-out, to the very spot where five minutes later the mine blew up.

"Didn't you never see Percy again!" some one asked.

"No," answered the warrior. "But I 'eard 'im laugh."

"Laugh!"

"Yes. You know the way he used to laugh. Loud and clear-like. He must have been two hundred yards away. Suddenly he laughed, and I says to Peters, who was on my right, ''Ark at that blighter, Percy! Seems to think even this is amusin'.' I 'adn't got the words out of my mouth when...just as though the whole bally earth had burst into a gas...not a quarter of a mile away— thought I was gone myself...right over in the quarter where Percy had gone...thousands of tons of mud flung up into the sky...you could 'ear the earth being ripped to pieces, and there were men in it...Oh, Gawd!"

Bultishaw shuddered and felt faint, and the rest of the company seemed to think they were hearing a rather highly colored account of some quite inconceivable phenomenon. Prosser was further detailing his narrative, when he happened to drop a phrase that was very illuminating to Bnltishaw. He was speaking of another man some of them knew, named Bates. The phrase he used was:

"Charley Bates got a packet too!"

A packet! Bnltishaw paid for his drink and went out into the street. He felt rather hot and cold round the temples. He took a cab home, and went straight to bed, explaining to his daughters that he had had 'a very heavy day.' When he rolled between the sheets the true meaning of that sinister phrase "getting a packet" kept revolving through his mind. It was evidently the military expression, and very terse and grim and sardonic it was. These men who met a

violent end "got a packet." Percy had got a packet, Bates had got a packet, but why should Ticknett, dividing his days between a furnishing house and a saloon bar, get a packet? It was incredible, preposterous. Men who went out to fight for their country, well— they might expect it. But not men who lead simple, honest, commercial lives. If Ticknett got a packet, why should he not himself get a packet! He passed a sleepless night, but there was one problem he determined to try and solve on the morrow.

iv

SOMEHOW Bultishaw could not bring himself to ask Mrs. Clarke about Daphne, and Gladys, whom he always suspected of laughing at him, he would certainly not question. He eventually got her address from a potman, who had carried some of her things home for her.

When he did get her address, it took him over a week to make up his mind to visit her. He thumbed the envelope and breathed heavily on it, put it back in his pocket and took it out again, and tried to dismiss it from his mind, but the very touch of it seemed to burn his body. At length, on the following Saturday night, he tucked it finally into his waistcoat pocket, and set out in the direction of Kilburn.

It was very dark when he found the obscure street. And the number of the address was a gaunt house of four stories above a low-class restaurant where sausages and slabs of fish were frying in the window, to tempt hungry passers-by. He stumbled up the dark stairs, and was told by two children whom he could not see that "Miss Allen" lived on the third floor. He rang the wrong bell on the third floor (there were two lots of inhabitants) and was told by a lady that "she liked his bleeding cheek waking her in her first sleep, ringing the wrong bell," and the door was slammed in his face.

He tried the other bell, and the door was opened immediately by a gaunt woman who said:

"Who's that? Oh, I thought it was the doctor!"

Bultishaw asked if Miss Daphne Allen lived there, and gave his own name.

The woman stared at him and then said:

"Wait a minute."

She shut the door and left him outside. After a time she came back and said:

"What do you want?"

Bultishaw said, "I just want to speak to her for a few minutes."

The woman again retired, and left him for nearly five minutes. He stood there shivering with cold on the stone stairs, and listening to the strange

mixture of noises: children quarreling in the street below, and in the room opposite some one playing a mouth organ. At last the woman came back. She said:

"Come in."

He followed her into a poky room, dimly lighted by a tin paraffin lamp with a pink glass. In the corner of the room was a bed on which a woman was lying, feeding a baby. Her face looked white and thin and her hair was bound up in a shawl. It was Daphne. She looked at him listlessly, and said:

"Well, have you brought any money from him?"

Bultishaw stood blinking at her, unable to comprehend. Whom did she mean by "him"? He coughed, and tried to formulate some sympathetic enquiry, when suddenly the gaunt woman who had shown him in turned on him and cried:

"Well, what the hell are you standing there like that for? You've come from him, I suppose? You're 'is greatest pal, ain't yer? We've never seen a farthing of 'is money yet since the dirty blackguard did 'er in. What 'ave you come slobbering up 'ere for, if it ain't to bring some money? The b—y 'ound! If it 'adn't been for 'im, she might be the wife of a respectable sowljer, and gettin' 'er maintenance and pension, and all that."

There was a mild sob from the bed, and a pleading voice that cried:

"Aunty! Aunty!"

And the baby started to cry. While these little things were happening, the slow-moving mind of Bultishaw for once worked rapidly, came to a conclusion, and formed a resolution. He moved ponderously to the lamp, and took out his purse. He looked across the lamp at Daphne and said:

"He sends you this. He's sorry not to have sent before. He..."

The elder woman dashed toward the table, and looked at the money.

"How much is it?" she said, and then turning to Daphne, she rasped: "It's two quid. That's better than nothing. Is there any more to come?"

Bultishaw again looked at Daphne. She was bending over the child. She seemed indifferent. A strand of her hair had broken loose beneath the shawl. Bultishaw stammered:

"Yes— er— of course. There'll be— er— the same again."

"'Ow often?" whined the elder woman.

"Er— two pounds— every fortnight. Er— I'll bring it myself."

The big man blew his nose, and shuffled from one foot to another.

"Are you getting better? Is there anything else?" he mumbled.

"Oh, no," whined the elder woman. "We 're living in the lap of luxury. Everything we could want. Ain't we, Cissy?"

The woman on the bed did not answer, and Bultishaw fumbled his way out of the room.

That night Bultishaw had a mild return of his illness. He was very feverish. His mind became occupied with visions of Percy. Percy, the gay, the debonair. There was a long line of poplars by a canal, and some low buildings of a factory on the left. The earth was seamed with jagged cuts and holes. Men were burrowing their way underground like moles. The thing was like a torn fringe of humanity, wildly insane. It was very dark, but one was conscious that vast numbers of men were scratching their way toward each other, zigzagging in a drunken, frenzied manner. There was a stench of decaying matter, and of some chemical even more penetrating. There were millions and millions of men, but they were all invisible, silently scratching and listening. Suddenly amidst the dead silence there was the loud burst of Percy's laughter— just as he had laughed in the bar of "The Duchess of Teck"— and his voice rang through the night:

"Hullo! hullo! HULLO! So here we all are!"

And this challenge seemed to awaken the lurking passions of the night. Bultishaw groaned, and started up in bed, and cried out:

"O God! a thousand tons of mud! a thousand tons of mud!"

On the following day Bultishaw made a grievous mistake in his accounts. He was severely hauled over the coals by the directors. As the weeks proceeded he made other mistakes. He became morose and abstracted. He drank his whisky with less and less soda, till he was drinking it almost neat.

"Old Bulky-chops's brain's going," said some of the other salesmen.

He would lean up against the bar, and stare at Ticknett. Their old conversational relationship became reversed. It was Bultishaw who listened, and Ticknett who did the talking. The soft goods manager appeared to be in excellent trim at the time. He seemed more light-hearted than he had been for years. He spoke in his quiet voice about the tactics of Russian generals, and the need for general compulsion in this country for everybody up to the age of forty-five (Ticknett was forty-seven). At Christmas-time he sent Bultishaw a case of old port wine. His position in the firm became more assured. It was said that Ticknett had bought a large block of shares in Cotterway's, Limited, and that he stood a good chance of being put on the board of directorship.

And Bultishaw watched his upward progress with a curious intentness. He himself was blundering down the hill. He had made a large inroad into his capital, and the day could not be far distant when he would be dismissed. Every fortnight he went out to Kilburn and took two sovereigns, and he never spoke of this to Ticknett.

v

ELSIE BULTISHAW was very mysterious. In her black crepe dress she bustled about the small room, holding the teapot in her hand.

"They say you should never speak ill of the dead," she whispered to her visitor. She emptied a packet of tea into a caddy, and tipped three teaspoonsful into the pot.

"Of course," she continued, "it's very hard on me and Dorothy. It's lucky Dorothy's got that job at the War Office, or I don't know what we'd do."

"Tour pore father was not a careful man, I know, my dear," said the visitor.

Elsie poured the boiling water on to the tea-leaves, and sighed.

"It wasn't only that, my dear," she answered. She coughed and then added in a low voice:

"There was some woman in the case. A barmaid, in fact. Of course, pore father's illness cost a lot of money, what with doctors, and specialists, and loss of time and that. But it seems he'd been keeping this woman too, taking her money every fortnight. When everything's settled up, there won't be more 'n twenty pounds a year for me and Dorothy."

"Dear, dear!" said the visitor. "It's all very tragic, my dear."

"You can't think," Elsie continued, warming to the excitement of her narrative, "what we 've been through. We could never have *lived* through it, if it hadn't been for Mr. Ticknett. He's been kindness itself. And such an extraordinary hallucination pore father had about him. I didn't tell you, did I, dear?"

"No, dear."

"I'll never forget that night father came home. He'd been drinking, of course. But it wasn't only that. I've never seen him like it. He just raved. It was very late, and me and Dorothy were going to bed. He came stumbling into this room, his eyes lookin' all bright and glassylike. He started by saying that the dead could speak. He said he'd only obeyed the voice of the dead. And then he said something about a packet, and about Mr. Ticknett. I was terrified. He described something he said he'd just done. He walked about the room. He pointed to that corner. 'Look,' he says, 'Ticknett was standin' there.' There'd been a dinner to celebrate Mr. Ticknett's election on to the board of directors of Cotterway's. 'I never take my eyes off him all the evening,' father says. 'It was after the dinner, and we went into the saloon. Ticknett was surrounded by his friends. I watched his lying, treacherous, yellow face smirkin' all around. And suddenly a voice spoke to me, a voice from some dim field in France. It says, "Ticknett's going to have a packet." And then I drew my revolver and shot him through the face!' Dorothy shrieked, and I tried to get father to bed. Of

course it was all rubbish. He'd never shot no one. It was just raving. Everybody knows that Mr. Ticknett's been father's best friend. He's helped him crowds of times. A nicer man you couldn't meet. He's coming to tea on Sunday. We managed to get poor father to bed, and to get a doctor. But it was no good. He babbled like a child all night. It was so funny like. He really was like a child. He kept on repeating, 'A thousand tons of mud!' and then suddenly, about mornin', he got quite quiet, and his face looked like some great baby's lying there...He died quite peaceful."

Elsie performed a little mild weep, and the visitor indulged in various exclamations of sympathy and interest.

"Oh, dear," she concluded, "it's dreadful the things people imagine when—they're like that."

Elsie went over all the details again, and the visitor recounted a tragic episode she had heard of in connection with a corporal's widow, who was a relation of her own landlady. They discussed the dreadful war, and its effect on the price of bacon and margarine.

After her departure, Elsie washed out and ironed some handkerchiefs, and then prepared her sister's supper. Dorothy arrived home about seven, and the two sisters discussed the events of the day. They sat in front of the fire and listened to a pot stewing. At a sudden pause, Dorothy looked into the fire, and said:

"Do you think Ticknett's really keen on me, Elsie!"

Elsie giggled, and kissed her sister.

"You'd have to be blind not to see that," she said; and then she whispered:

"Are you really keen on him!"

The younger sister continued staring into the fire.

"I don't know. I think I am. I— Isn't this stew nearly done!"

Elsie again giggled, and proceeded to dish up the stew. Before this operation was completed, there was a knock at the door.

Elsie said, "Oh, curse!" and went, and opened it.

In the doorway stood a woman with a small parcel. Her face was deadly white and her lips colorless. She looked like a woman to whom everything that could happen had happened long ago, and the result had left her lifeless and indifferent. She said listlessly:

"Are you Miss Bultishaw?"

And Elsie said, "Yes."

The woman entered, and looked round the room.

"May I speak to you a moment? Is this your sister?" she said.

Elsie answered: "Yes; what do you want?"

"I want to make an explanation, and to give you some money."

She untied the packet, and placed some notes on to the table-cloth.

"What the hell's this?" exclaimed Elsie.

"This is all I could find," muttered the listless woman. "I found them in his breast-pocket. They belonged to your father. It wasn't your father at all who—ought to have paid. *He* ought to have paid. So I've taken them from him. I hope there's enough. I'm afraid there may not be. It's all I have. It's only right you should have it."

The two sisters stared at her, and involuntarily drew closer together. It was Dorothy who eventually managed to speak:

"What are you talking about?" she said. "Who do you mean by 'him'?"

"Ticknett!"

The sisters gasped, and Dorothy gave a little cry.

"Here! what do you mean?" she said breathlessly. "Have you pinched this money from Ticknett? You'd better be careful. He's coming here. We'll have you arrested."

The listless woman shook her head.

"No, no," she said in her toneless voice. "Don't you believe that. He won't come here."

"Why won't he come here?" rasped Dorothy, with a note of challenge.

The strange visitor stood staring vacantly at the fire. She seemed not to have heard. Her lips were trembling. Suddenly she answered in the same dull, lifeless manner:

"Because he's lying on my bed with a bullet through his heart."

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16: Auxons

Julia Truitt Bishop

1852-1931

The Black Cat, July 1902

The Black Cat was a story magazine that specialised in the "different".

RICHARD FANNING threw down the mormng paper and lay out at length on the silk-draped lounge. His hands were clasped back of his head. He was staring at the ceiling with a look of unutterable boredom. The new valet moved a chair slightly and cleared his throat discreetly. He was but a new valet, and doubtless he felt that to look at that face just now was like listening at a keyhole.

"Don't knock the furniture about, if you please, Edouard," suggested Fanning, not turning his eyes from the ceiling. "Upon my honor, I believe my nerves are going."

"Has Monsieur any orders?" asked the new valet softly. It was the softness of his tones that had led Fanning to engage him. His former valet had possessed a hoarse croak that made excellent service of none effect. Of what value was money if one could not buy pleasing voice as well as ready hand?

"Oh, no orders," said Fanning with the same unchanging stare. "I am tired, Edouard— deadly tired. If I knew what to do, I give you my word I'd do it." Edouard stood respectfully near, looking down.

"Why, for instance, does not Monsieur travel?" he asked with quiet suggestion. A tired smile curled one corner of Fanning's mouth.

"Because, for instance, my good Edouard," he replied, "I have travelled until I am more tired of that than of anything else. Talk of travel to a man that knows Port Said by heart, and could find his way blindfold about Teheran ! Try something else, man."

Edouard laid his hand on a chair-back.

"But while Monsieur has travelled, he has, perchance, never seen Auxons," he suggested again.

"Auxons? what is that?" asked Fanning, turning. his eyes for a moment toward the face of the quiet Edouard.

"It is but a little town, Monsieur— a little town in the mountains of my country," Edouard hastened to assure him; "but it is very old, and is not without interest."

Then for the first time Fanning laughed. "Now, why should you imagine," he said, "that I have any desire to see every little old garlic-smelling French town on the map— or not on it? Give me my coat, Edouard— and don't be an idiot."

Receiving his coat, and being duly brushed, he went down to his club, from whose almost empty windows he stared vacantly at the street outside and was consumed with weariness. No one was there whom he cared to meet, and he avoided the smiling old club Nestor with a haste that was almost rudeness. He was on the point of leaving when a certain Mr. Clermont strolled in and met him with evident pleasure.

Mr. Clermont had brought European letters of introduction to the club three days ago.

"Well met!" cried Mr. Clermont. "I have wished to see you to say good-bye, as it may be that I shall leave New York for my own land to-morrow. And when shall I see you in Paris ?"

"I do not think of going soon," said Fanning, with a weary smile that was scarcely at the trouble to smile at all. "You see, I have visited Paris so many times—"

"Ah, but have you seen Auxons?" asked Mr. Clermont with enthusiasm. "Depend upon it, my friend, it is worth the visit to France merely to see Auxons."

A flash of interest lit Fanning's eyes. Twice within an hour, this place of which he had never heard before had been mentioned by men of very different stations in life. He would have asked further, but at that moment Mr. Clermont was called away, and he did not see him again.

The unutterable dullness of the club drove him out, and in his wanderings he passed a public library, hesitated and turned back. A dark young man who seemed to be a stranger went up the marble steps after him. Fanning chose a book and sat down. Sometimes a book might be found that was fairly endurable. A while later he was aroused by a voice at his side.

"Pardon, Monsieur," the dark young man was saying in French, "but will you assist me in finding if there is a paper here, published in the little town of Auxons?"

For a moment Fanning was dumb with amazement. Then he courteously arose and began the search. But there was no such paper, as he presently communicated to the stranger.

"Ah," said the young man with a look of disappointment; "doubtless that is because Auxons is not one of the large cities. You have, by chance, seen it, Monsieur? True, it is very small, but it is very old, and not without interest, Monsieur."

The repetition of Edouard's words gave Fanning a sudden, uneasy sense that all this had happened long ago, and that he knew what was going to happen next. What did happen next was that the young man disappeared with a murmur of thanks, and that he restored the book to its place on the shelves.

"Why should I?" he kept asking scornfully of the Self that was already resolving upon a certain thing; and the Self replied, "Why not?"

And perhaps it was because there was no reason for doing it that he did it.

"Edouard," he said, half an hour later, "do you know how to reach this Auxons of which you speak?"

"Assuredly, Monsieur," said Edouard, after the slightest pause.

"Then we will start to-morrow," said Fanning. "There's money— take it, and manage the trip, and spare me the worries."

Edouard did not even raise his eyes. There were times when Edouard was very impassive. "Monsieur will find everything ready," he said very quietly.

A LITTLE BRANCH of the Loire tumbled noisily down a gorge; a little old, old village held a scanty foothold on the slanting edge of it. Higher up on the slope, with the torrent a hundred feet down and the cliff a thousand feet up, clung the half-ruined chateau.

Fanning stood beneath the chateau and looked up and looked down.

"And this is Auxons!" he said. There was a note of contempt in his voice. He had come such a way— to see this!"

Monsieur is looking upon an old town," said Edouard in the very quiet tones Fanning had liked. "Its foundations were laid by the Gauls— it was old in the days of Cresar, Monsieur. The chateau has sheltered Clovis and Charlemagne, and has been the abode of one family since before their day.''

"Judging from its looks, they have fallen upon evil times," said Monsieur indifferently.

"It would seem so, Monsieur," said Edouard. "Does Monsieur wish that I tell the chateau's story in the chateau itself? One must be careful of the steps— see how the stones fall away! This is the chapel, Monsieur— newer than the remainder of the chateau, and yet very old— so old that it, too, falls to decay."

They stood in the ruined chapel, its walls crumbling, its roof sagging. At the end was a great stained-glass window, almost entire, but the ivy had grown over it on the outside so that most of the light was shut off. The old chapel would have been in darkness, but that once in a while, the leaves, stirred by the wind, parted and let a dull glow through, as though it shone from the heart of an opal.

After a little, Fanning saw that the dark masses on the floor were heaps of stones fallen from the thick walls. After a little more he saw that the dark something beneath the winking glow of the great window was a tomb, with a marble slab closing it. Edouard stood near him, very quiet.

"It is not a pleasant story, that of the chateau," he said, when Fanning had turned his eyes upon him and waited for him to speak.

"It was, as I told Monsieur, a very old family— very old and very noble. The men have been great men always— great statesmen, great generals, what you will; —and the time was when they helped kings with their money. Once their lands swept down that valley yonder, and as far as the eye could see in three directions from this hill-top. But the Revolution took away much, Monsieur, and it was only because Auxons was so far away and hidden that it left them even the chateau."

Monsieur was inclined to find the story a little dull. He rested one foot on a heap of stones and lit a cigar, encircling the flame of the match with his hands. The yellow light, striking up into his face, showed how dull he found the story.

"For a hundred years, Monsieur, they have been poor," Edouard went on, after the match had died out. "Some of them, one may suppose, died broken-hearted; but at last there was left only a broken old man, with his grandchildren. One of these was a girl."

For a single moment Edouard paused again; then the low, inflexible voice went on: "One of them was a girl, and she was in a convent, being educated. But at last the fortunes fell so low that she must be brought home; and then her brothers, grown desperate, left her with the old man and sold themselves as mercenaries to whatever government would buy."

"Is this a continued story, Edouard?" asked Monsieur. "Because if it is, I will take the remainder of it at that little hole-in-the-wall you were pleased to call an inn."

"Monsieur will find that it is near the end," said Edouard with a voice that was like velvet. "Monsieur has but to note that, the brothers being gone away, the old man died; and that the girl, being left penniless, was glad to take a position with an English family as governess. Monsieur has but to remember, also, that she was just out of a convent, with the face of a Madonna and the eyes of an infant."

Monsieur spent some silent moments remembering this statement. During these moments the point of fire on the end of his cigar died out.

"Did you mention the name of this— this family, Edouard?" he asked carelessly. It was a carelessness that was somewhat marred by a certain thickness of utterance, as of a dry tongue. A light sound at the other end of the chapel drew his eyes. He saw two men moving slowly up through the shadows.

"The girl," said Edouard, "was Mademoiselle Adrienne Louise de la Vivaseur. Monsieur will, perhaps, be kind enough to reflect if he has ever heard such a name."

Monsieur had, apparently, not heard such a name. There was silence. The ivy leaves parted and shot down a crimson ray upon the tomb.

"Monsieur finds the story more interesting?" asked Edouard of the velvet voice. "Monsieur will remember that she was the daughter of kings and nobles, and that blood of the Crusaders ran in her veins. Yet her brothers found her one morning lying beside that tomb, dead, with a dead babe in her arms."

The two shadowy figures moved up a step nearer, but Monsieur did not heed them. He was staring as if fascinated at the tomb with the spot of crimson dancing upon it. There was silence so deep and so long that it might have lasted for years. When Monsieur moved, it was toward the tomb. The spot of red wavered and trembled upon a carved lettering.

"To One Forgotten," he read. He still had command of himself.

"They placed that above her? Yet she is not forgotten," he said to Edouard.

"Monsieur takes that for her tomb?" asked Edouard, softly.

"But indeed, she was not buried there. She lay down beside it to die, but the tomb was not for her. It is reserved, Monsieur, for the man who played with the little convent girl, and sent her home to die."

To eyes accustomed to the shadows, it could be seen that Monsieur's face had whitened. Yet he spoke lightly. He even smiled.

" 'To One Forgotten,' " he repeated, looking Edouard in the face. "But he is not forgotten. Perhaps he is not even dead."

"Monsieur," said Edouard, softly, "he is both!"

Edouard had stooped and touched something at his feet, and the slab of marble was mysteriously lifted and swung away. Thick darkness lay within. Monsieur was aware that the two shadows had closed up, and were on either hand. He turned his eyes from one to the other of them. Clennont, of the club, and the dark young stranger of the library. A sense came upon him that the club and the library were worlds of space and thousands of years away— that the only realities were these three dark figures and the tomb by whose cold side the daughter of kings and Crusaders had lain down to die.

It could not be more cold within than it had been without. And yet he had not meant—

"I see," he said, wearily, at the end of that long pause. "No doubt you would prefer that I should do this thing voluntarily, Monsieur de la Vivaseur?"

"We should greatly prefer it, Monsieur," said that one who had lately been Edouard.

Monsieur stepped into the tomb and sat down.

"You won't object to my smoking?" he asked, taking out a fresh cigar and a match.

"It will shorten things, maybe." Monsieur de la Vivaseur's face was set.

"Adieu, Monsieur," he said, giving another touch to that mysterious something on the floor. There was the glow of a cigar in the darkness as the stone swung back and settled into its place. At the farther end of the chapel a door opened, and a bent figure found its way among the stones.

"Have you brought the cement, Jean?" asked Monsieur de la Vivaseur.

"It is here, Your Grace," said the old man.

"Seal up the tomb— it has been opened for the last time," said Monseigneur; and the three went out, without looking back.

The old man listened for a furtive moment, with his ear at the edge of the marble slab. Silence. Then he took the cement and sealed up every crevice, and went his way. The red glow from the window leaped from the tomb to the floor, and crept along it, over the fallen stones, and up the wall, as though it were eager to get away. Down among the shadows lay the dim gray shape given over to the use of One Forgotten.

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17: The Iron Shroud

William Mudford

1782-1848

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Aug 1830

Much reprinted tale of terror

THE CASTLE of the prince of Tolfi was built on the summit of the towering and precipitous rock of Scylla, and commanded a magnificent view of Sicily in all its grandeur. Here, during the wars of the middle ages, when the fertile plains of Italy were devastated by hostile factions, those prisoners were confined, for whose ransom a costly price was demanded. Here, too, in a dungeon, excavated deep in the solid rock, the miserable victim was immured, whom revenge pursued— the dark, fierce, and unpitying revenge of an Italian heart.

Vivenzio— the noble and the generous, the fearless in battle, and the pride of Naples in her sunny hours of peace— the young, the brave, the proud Vivenzio, fell beneath this subtle and remorseless spirit. He was the prisoner of Tolfi, and he languished in that rock-encircled dungeon, which stood alone, and whose portals never opened twice upon a living captive.

It had the semblance of a vast cage, for the roof and floor and sides were of iron, solidly wrought, and spaciously constructed. High above there ran a range of seven grated windows, guarded with massy bars of the same metal, which admitted light and air. Save these, and the tall foldingdoors beneath them which occupied the centre, no chink or chasm or projection broke the smooth black surface of the walls. An iron bedstead, littered with straw, stood in one corner; and beside it, a vessel with water, and a coarse dish filled with coarser food.

Even the intrepid soul of Vivenzio shrunk with dismay as he entered this abode, and heard the ponderous doors triple locked by the silent ruffians who conducted him to it. Their silence seemed prophetic of his fate, of the living grave that had been prepared for him. His menaces and his entreaties, his indignant appeals for justice, and his questioning of their intentions were alike vain. They listened, but spoke not. Fit ministers of a crime that should have no tongue!

How dismal was the sound of their retiring steps! And, as their faint echoes died along the winding passages, a fearful presage grew within him, that never more the face or voice or tread of man would greet his senses. He had seen human beings for the last time! And he had looked his last upon the bright sky, and upon the smiling earth, and upon a beautiful world he loved and whose minion he had been! Here he was to end his life— a life he had just begun to revel in! And by what means? By secret poison or by murderous assault? No—

for then it had been needless to bring him hither. Famine perhaps— a thousand deaths in one! It was terrible to think of it; but it was yet more terrible to picture long, long years of captivity, in a solitude so appalling, a loneliness so dreary, that thought, for want of fellowship, would lose itself in madness or stagnate into idiocy.

He could not hope to escape, unless he had the power of rending asunder, with his bare hands, the solid iron walls of his prison. He could not hope for liberty from the relenting mercies of his enemy. His instant death, under any form of refined cruelty, was not the object of Tolfi, for he might have inflicted it, and he had not. It was too evident, therefore, he was reserved for some premeditated scheme of subtle vengeance; and what vengeance could transcend in fiendish malice either the slow death of famine, or the still slower one of solitary incarceration, till the last lingering spark of life expired or till reason fled, and nothing should remain to perish but the brute functions of the body?

It was evening when Vivenzio entered his dungeon, and the approaching shades of night wrapped it in total darkness, as he paced up and down, revolving in his mind these horrible forebodings. No tolling bell from the castle, or from any neighboring church or convent, struck upon his ear to tell how the hours passed. Frequently he would stop and listen for some sound that might betoken the vicinity of man; but the solitude of the desert, the silence of the tomb, are not so still and deep as the oppressive desolation by which he was encompassed. His heart sank within him, and he threw himself dejectedly down upon his couch of straw. Here sleep gradually obliterated the consciousness of misery, and bland dreams wafted his delighted spirit to scenes which were once glowing realities for him, in whose ravishing illusions he soon lost the remembrance that he was Tolfi's prisoner.

When he awoke, it was daylight; but how long he had slept he knew not. It might be early morning, or it might be sultry noon, for he could measure time by no other note of its progress than light and darkness. He had been so happy in his sleep, amid friends who loved him, and the sweeter endearments of those who loved him as friends could not, that, in the first moments of waking, his startled mind seemed to admit the knowledge of his situation as if it had burst upon it for the first time, fresh in all its appalling horrors. He gazed round with an air of doubt and amazement, and took up a handful of the straw upon which he lay, as though he would ask himself what it meant. But memory, too faithful to her office, soon unveiled the melancholy past, while reason, shuddering at the task, flashed before his eyes the tremendous future. The contrast overpowered him. He remained for some time lamenting, like a truth,

the bright visions that had vanished; and recoiling from the present, which clung to him as a poisoned garment.

When he grew more calm, he surveyed his gloomy dungeon. Alas! the stronger light of day only served to confirm what the gloomy indistinctness of the preceding evening had partially disclosed, the utter impossibility of escape. As, however, his eyes wandered round and round, and from place to place, he noticed two circumstances which excited his surprise and curiosity. The one, he thought, might be fancy; but the other was positive. His pitcher of water, and the dish which contained his food, had been removed from his side while he slept, and now stood near the door. Were he even inclined to doubt this, by supposing he had mistaken the spot where he saw them overnight, he could not, for the pitcher now in his dungeon was neither of the same form nor color as the other, while the food was changed for some other of better quality. He had been visited, therefore, during the night. But how had the person obtained entrance? Could he have slept so soundly that the unlocking and opening of those ponderous portals were effected without waking him? He would have said this was not possible, but that in doing so, he must admit a greater difficulty, an entrance by other means, of which he was convinced there existed none. It was not intended, then, that he should be left to perish from hunger. But the secret and mysterious mode of supplying him with food seemed to indicate he was to have no opportunity of communicating with a human being.

The other circumstance which had attracted his notice was the disappearance, as he believed, of one of the seven grated windows that ran along the top of his prison. He felt confident that he had observed and counted them; for he was rather surprised at their number, and there was something peculiar in their form, as well as in the manner of their arrangement, at unequal distances. It was much easier, however, to suppose he was mistaken than that a portion of the solid iron, which formed the walls, could have escaped from its position, and he dismissed the thought from his mind.

Vivenzio partook of the food that was before him, without apprehension. It might be poisoned; but if it were, he knew he could not escape death, should such be the design of Tolfi, and the quickest death would be the speediest release.

The day passed wearily and gloomily; though not without a faint hope that, by keeping watch at night, he might observe when the person came again to bring him food, which he supposed he would do in the same way as before. The mere thought of being approached by a living creature, and the opportunity it might present of learning the doom prepared, or preparing, for him, imparted some comfort. Besides, if he came alone, might he not in a

furious onset overpower him? Or he might be accessible to pity, or the influence of such munificent rewards as he could bestow if once more at liberty and master of himself. Say he were armed. The worst that could befall, if nor bribe, nor prayers, nor force prevailed, was a friendly blow, which, though dealt in a damned cause, might work a desired end. There was no chance so desperate but it looked lovely in Vivenzio' s eyes, compared with the idea of being totally abandoned.

The night came, and Vivenzio watched. Morning came, and Vivenzio was confounded! He must have slumbered without knowing it. Sleep must have stolen over him when exhausted by fatigue, and in that interval of feverish repose he had been baffled: for there stood his replenished pitcher of water, and there his day's meal! Nor was this all. Casting his looks toward the windows of his dungeon, he counted but *five*! Here was no deception; and he was now convinced there had been none the day before. But what did all this portend? Into what strange and mysterious den had he been cast? He gazed till his eyes ached; he could discover nothing to explain the mystery. That it was so, he knew. Why it was so, he racked his imagination in vain to conjecture. He examined the doors. A simple circumstance convinced him they had not been opened.

A wisp of straw, which he had carelessly thrown against them the preceding day, as he paced to and fro, remained where he had cast it, though it must have been displaced by the slightest motion of either of the doors. This was evidence that could not be disputed; and it followed there must be some secret machinery in the walls by which a person could enter. He inspected them closely. They appeared to him one solid and compact mass of iron; or joined, if joined they were, with such nice art that no mark of division was P Tceptible. Again and again he surveyed them— and the floor— and the roof— and that range of visionary windows, as he was now almost tempted to consider them : he could discover nothing, absolutely nothing, to relieve his doubts or satisfy his curiosity. Sometimes he fancied that altogether the dungeon had a more contracted appearance— ^that it looked smaller; but this he ascribed to fancy, and the impression naturally produced upon his mind by the undeniable disappearance of two of the windows.

With intense anxiety, Vivenzio looked forward to the return of night; and as it approached, he resolved that no treacherous sleep should again betray him. Instead of seeking his bed of straw, he continued to walk up and down his dungeon till daylight, straining his eyes in every direction through the darkness, to watch for any appearances that might explain these mysteries. While thus engaged, and as nearly as he could judge (by the time that afterward elapsed before the morning came in) about two o'clock, there was a

slight tremulous motion of the floors. He stooped. The motion lasted nearly a minute; but it was so extremely gentle, that he almost doubted whether it was real or only imaginary. He listened. Not a sound could be heard. Presently, however, he felt a rush of cold air blow upon him; and dashing toward the quarter whence it seemed to proceed, he stumbled over something which he judged to be the water ewer. The rush of cold air was no longer perceptible; and as Vivenzio stretched out his hands, he found himself close to the walls. He remained motionless for a considerable time; but nothing occurred during the remainder of the night to excite his attention, though he watched with unabated vigilance.

The first approaches of the morning were visible through the grated windows, breaking, with faint divisions of light, the darkness that still pervaded every other part, long before Vivenzio was enabled to distinguish any object in his dungeon. Instinctively and fearfully he turned his eyes, hot and inflamed with watching, toward them. There were four! He could see only four: but it might be that some intervening object prevented the fifth from becoming perceptible; and he waited impatiently to ascertain if it were so. As the light strengthened, however, and penetrated every corner of the cell, other objects of amazement struck his sight. On the ground lay the broken fragments of the pitcher he had used the day before, and at a small distance from them, nearer to the wall, stood the one he had noticed the first night. It was filled with water, and beside it was his food. He was now certain that, by some mechanical contrivance, an opening was obtained through the iron wall, and that through this opening the current of air had found entrance. But how noiselessly! For had a feather almost waved at the time, he must have heard it. Again he examined that part of the wall; but, both to sight and touch, it appeared one even and uniform surface, while, to repeated and violent blows, there was no reverberating sound indicative of hollowness.

This perplexing mystery had for a time withdrawn his thoughts from the windows; but now, directing his eyes toward them, he saw that the fifth had disappeared in the same manner as the preceding two, without the least distinguishable alteration of external appearances. The remaining four looked as the seven had originally looked; that is, occupying, at irregular distances, the top of the wall on that side of the dungeon. The tall folding-door, too, still seemed to stand beneath, in the centre of these four, as it had at first stood in the centre of the seven. But he could no longer doubt, what, on the preceding day, he fancied might be the effect of visual deception. The dungeon was smaller. The roof had lowered— and the opposite ends had contracted the intermediate distance by a space equal, he thought, to that over which the three windows had extended. He was bewildered in vain imaginings to account

for these things. Some frightful purpose— some devilish torture of mind or body— some unheard-of device for producing exquisite misery, lurked he was sure, in what had taken place.

Oppressed with this belief, and distracted more by the dreadful uncertainty of whatever fate impended, than he could be dismayed, he thought, by the knowledge of the worst, he sat ruminating, hour after hour, yielding his fears in succession to every haggard fancy. At last a horrible suspicion flashed suddenly across his mind, and he started up with a frantic air. "Yes!" he exclaimed, looking wildly round his dungeon, and shuddering as he spoke— "Yes! it must be so! I see it !— I feel the maddening truth like scorching flames upon my brain! Eternal God!— support me! it must be so! Yes, yes, that is to be my fate! Yon roof will descend!— these walls will hem me round— and slowly, slowly crush me in their iron arms! Lord God! look down upon me, and in mercy strike me with instant death! O fiend— O devil— is this your revenge?"

He dashed himself upon the ground in agony— tears burst from him, and the sweat stood in large drops upon his face— he sobbed aloud— he tore his hair— he rolled about like one suffering intolerable anguish of body, and would have bitten the iron floor beneath him; he breathed fearful curses upon Tolfi, and the next moment passionate prayers to Heaven for immediate death. Then the violence of his grief became exhausted, and he lay still, weeping as a child would weep. The twilight of departing day shed its gloom around him ere he rose from that posture of utter and hopeless sorrow. He had taken no food. Not one drop of water had cooled the fever of his parched lips. Sleep had not visited his eyes for six-and-thirty hours. He was faint with hunger; weary with watching, and with the excess of his emotions. He tasted of his food; he drank with avidity of the water; and, reeling like a drunken man in his straw, cast himself upon it to brood again over the appalling image that had fastened itself upon his almost frenzied thoughts.

He slept. But his slumbers were not tranquil. He resisted, as long as he could, their approach; and when, at last, enfeebled nature yielded to their influence, he found no oblivion from his cares. Terrible dreams haunted him— ghastly visions harrowed up his imagination— he shouted and screamed, as if he already felt the dungeon's ponderous roof descending on him— he breathed hard and thick, as though writhing between its iron walls. Then would he spring up— stare wildly about him— stretch forth his hands, to be sure he yet had space enough to live— and, muttering some incoherent words, sink down again, to pass through the same fierce vicissitudes of delirious sleep.

The morning of the fourth day dawned upon Vivenzio. But it was high noon before his mind shook off its stupor, or he awoke to a full consciousness of his situation. And what a fixed energy of despair sat upon his pale features, as he

cast his eyes upward, and gazed upon the three windows that now alone remained! The three!— there were no more!— and they seemed to number his own allotted days. Slowly and calmly he next surveyed the top and sides, and comprehended all the meaning of the diminished height of the former, as well as of the gradual approximation of the latter. The contracted dimensions of his mysterious prison were now too gross and palpable to be the juggle of his heated imagination. Still lost in wonder at the means, Vivenzio could put no cheat upon his reason, as to the end. By what horrible ingenuity it was contrived, that walls and roof and windows should thus silently and imperceptibly, without noise, and without motion almost, fold, as it were, within each other, he knew not. He only knew they did so; and he vainly strove to persuade himself it was the intention of the contriver to rack the miserable wretch, who might be immured there, with anticipation, merely, of a fate, from which, in the very crisis of his agony, he was to be reprieved.

Gladly would he have clung even to this possibility, if his heart would have let him; but he felt a dreadful assurance of its fallacy. And what matchless inhumanity it was to doom the sufferer to such lingering torments— to lead him day by day to so appalling a death, unsupported by the consolations of religion, unvisited by any human being, abandoned to himself, deserted of all, and denied even the sad privilege of knowing that his cruel destiny would awaken pity! Alone he was to perish!— alone he was to wait a slow coming torture, whose most exquisite pangs would be inflicted by that very solitude and that tardy coming!

"It is not death I fear," he exclaimed, "but the death I must prepare for! Methinks, too, I could meet even that— all horrible and revolting as it is— if it might overtake me now. But where shall I find fortitude to tarry till it comes? How can I outlive the three long days and nights I have to live? There is no power within me to bid the hideous spectre hence— none to make it familiar to my thoughts, or myself patient of its errand. My thoughts, rather, will flee from me, and I grow mad in looking at it. Oh! for a deep sleep to fall upon me! That so, in death's likeness, I might embrace death itself, and drink no more of the cup that is presented to me than my fainting spirit has already tasted!"

In the midst of these lamentations, Vivenzio noticed that his accustomed meal, with the pitcher of water, had been conveyed, as before, into his dungeon. But this circumstance no longer excited his surprise. His mind was overwhelmed with others of a far greater magnitude. It suggested, however, a feeble hope of deliverance; and there is no hope so feeble as not to yield some support to a heart bending under despair. He resolved to watch, during the ensuing night, for the signs he had before observed; and should he again feel the gentle tremulous motion of the floor, or the current of air, to seize that

moment for giving audible expression to his misery. Some person must be near him, and within reach of his voice, at the instant when his food was supplied; some one, perhaps, susceptible of pity. Or if not, to be told even that his apprehensions were just, and that his fate was to be what he foreboded, would be preferable to a suspense which hung upon the possibility of his worst fears being visionary.

The night came; and as the hour approached when Vivenzio imagined he might expect the signs, he stood fixed and silent as a statue. He feared to breathe, almost, lest he might lose any sound which would warn him of their coming. While thus listening, with every faculty of mind and body strained to an agony of attention, it occurred to him he should be more sensible of the motion, probably, if he stretched himself along the iron floor. He accordingly laid himself softly down, and had not been long in that position when— yes— he was certain of it— the floor moved under him! He sprang up, and, in a voice nearly suffocated with emotion, called aloud. He paused— the motion ceased— he felt no stream of air— all was hushed— no voice answered to his— he burst into tears, and as he sank to the ground, in renewed anguish, exclaimed: " O my God! my God! You alone have power to save me now, or strengthen me for the trial you permit."

Another morning dawned upon the wretched captive, and the fatal index of his doom met his eyes. Two windows!— and two days— and all would be over! Fresh food— fresh water! The mysterious visit had been paid, though he had implored it in vain. But how awfully was his prayer answered in what he now saw! The roof of the dungeon was within a foot of his head. The two ends were so near, that in six paces he trod the space between them. Vivenzio shuddered as he gazed, and as his steps traversed the narrowed area. But his feelings no longer vented themselves in frantic wailings. With folded arms, and clenched teeth, with eyes that were bloodshot from much watching, and fixed with a vacant glare upon the ground, with a hard quick breathing, and a hurried walk, he strode backward and forward in silent musing for several hours. What mind shall conceive, what tongue utter, or what pen describe the dark and terrible character of his thoughts? Like the fate that moulded them, they had no similitude in the wide range of this world's agony for man. Suddenly he stopped, and his eyes were riveted upon that part of the wall which was over his bed. Words are inscribed there! A human language, traced by a human hand! He rushes toward them; but his blood freezes as he reads:

"I, Ludovico Sforza, tempted by the gold of the prince of Tolfi, spent three years in contriving and executing this accursed triumph of my art. When it was completed, the perfidious Tolfi, more devil than man, who conducted me hither one morning, to be witness, as he said, of its perfection, doomed me to be the first victim of my own pernicious skill;

lest, as he declared, I should divulge the secret, or repeat the effort of my ingenuity. May God pardon him, as I hope he will me, that ministered to his unhallowed purpose. Miserable wfetch, whoe'er thou art, that readest these lines, fall on thy knees, and invoke, as I have done. His sustaining mercy who alone can nerve thee to meet the vengeance of Tolfi— armed with this tremendous engine, which, in a few hours, must crush *you* as it will the needy wretch who made it."

A deep groan burst from Vivenzio. He stood, like one transfixed, with dilated eyes, expanded nostril's, and quivering lips, gazing at this fatal inscription. It was as if a voice from the sepulchre had sounded in his ears, "Prepare!" Hope forsook him. There was his sentence, recorded in those dismal words. The future stood unveiled before him, ghastly and appalling. His brain already feels the descending horror— his bones seem to crack and crumble in the mighty grasp of the iron walls! Unknowing what it is he does, he fumbles in his garment for some weapon of selfdestruction. He clenches his throat in his convulsive gripe, as though he would strangle himself at once. He stares upon the walls, and his warring spirit demands, "Will they not anticipate their office if I dash my head against them?" An hysterical laugh chokes him as he exclaims, "Why should I? He was but a man who died first in their fierce embrace; and I should be less than man not to be able to do as much!"

The evening sun was descending, and Vivenzio beheld its golden beams streaming through one of the windows. What a thrill of joy shot through his soul at the sight! It was a precious link, that united him, for the moment, with the world beyond. There was ecstasy in the thought. As he gazed, long and earnestly, it seemed as if the windows had lowered sufficiently for him to reach them. With one bound he was beneath them— with one wild spring he clung to the bars. Whether it was so contrived, purposely to madden with delight the wretch who looked, he knew not; but, at the extremity of a long vista, cut through the solid rocks, the ocean, the sky, the setting sun, olive groves, shady walks, and, in the farthest distance, delicious glimpses of magnificent Sicily, burst upon his sight. How exquisite was the cool breeze as it swept across his cheek, loaded with fragrance! He inhaled it as though it were the breath of continued life. And there was a freshness in the landscape, and in the rippling of the calm green sea, that fell upon his withering heart like dew upon the parched earth. How he gazed, and panted, and still clung to his hold! sometimes hanging by one hand, sometimes by the other, and then grasping the bars with both, as loath to quit the smiling paradise outstretched before him; till exhausted, and his hands swollen and benumbed, he dropped helpless down, and lay stunned for a considerable time by the fall.

When he recovered, the glorious vision had vanished. He was in darkness. He doubted whether it was not a dream that had passed before his sleeping

fancy; but gradually his scattered thoughts returned, and with them came remembrance. Yes! he had looked once again upon the gorgeous splendor of nature! Once again his eyes had trembled beneath their veiled lids, at the sun's radiance, and sought repose in the soft verdure of the olive-tree, or the gentle swell of undulating waves. Oh, that he were a mariner exposed upon those waves to the worst fury of storm and tempest; or a very wretch, loathsome with disease, plague-stricken, and his body one leprous contagion from crown to sole, hunted forth to gasp out the remnant of infectious life beneath those verdant trees, so he might shun the destiny upon whose edge he tottered!

Vain thoughts like these would steal over his mind from time to time, in spite of himself; but they scarcely moved it from that stupor into which it had sunk, and which kept him, during the whole night, like one who had been drugged with opium. He was equally insensible to the calls of hunger and of thirst, though the third day was now commencing since even a drop of water had passed his lips. He remained on the ground, sometimes sitting, sometimes lying; at intervals, sleeping heavily; and when not sleeping, silently brooding over what was to come, or talking aloud, in disordered speech, of his wrongs, of his friends, of his home, and of those he loved, with a confused mingling of all.

In this pitiable condition, the sixth and last morning dawned upon Vivenzio, if dawn it might be called— the dim, obscure light which faintly struggled through the one solitary window of his dungeon. He could hardly be said to notice the melancholy token. And yet he did notice it; for as he raised his eyes and saw the portentous sign, there was a slight convulsive distortion of his countenance. But what did attract his notice, and at the sight of which his agitation was excessive, was the change his iron bed had undergone. It was a bed no longer. It stood before him, the visible semblance of a funeral couch or bier! When he beheld this, he started from the ground; and, in raising himself, suddenly struck his head against the roof, which was now so low that he could no longer stand upright. "God's will be done!" was all he said, as he crouched his body, and placed his hand upon the bier; for such it was. The iron bedstead had been so contrived, by the mechanical art of Ludovico Sforza, that, as the advancing walls came in contact with its head and feet, a pressure was produced upon concealed springs, which, when made to play, set in motion a very simple though ingeniously contrived machinery, that effected the transformation. The object was, of course, to heighten, in the closing scene of this horrible drama, all the feelings of despair and anguish which the preceding ones had aroused. For the same reason, the last window was so made as to admit only a shadowy kind of gloom rather than light, that the wretched

captive might be surrounded, as it were, with every seeming preparation for approaching death.

Vivenzio seated himself on his bier. Then he knelt and prayed fervently; and sometimes tears would gush from him. The air seemed thick, and he breathed with difficulty; or it might be that he fancied it was so, from the narrow limits of his dungeon, which were now so diminished that he could neither stand up nor lie down at his full length. But his wasted spirits and oppressed mind no longer struggled within him. He was past hope, and fear shook him no more. Happy if thus revenge had struck its final blow; for he would have fallen beneath it almost unconscious of a pang. But such a lethargy of the soul, after such an excitement of its passions, had entered into the diabolical calculations of Tolfi; and the artificer of his designs had imagined a counteracting device.

The tolling of an enormous bell struck upon the ears of Vivenzio! He started. It beat but once. The sound was so close and stunning that it seemed to shatter his very brain, while it echoed through the rocky passages like reverberating peals of thunder. This was followed by a sudden crash of the roof and walls, as if they were about to fall upon and close around him at once. Vivenzio screamed, and instinctively spread forth his arms, as though he had a giant's strength to hold them back. They, had moved nearer to him, and were now motionless. Vivenzio looked up, and saw the roof almost touching his head, even as he sat cowering beneath it; and he felt that a farther contraction of but a few inches only must commence the frightful operation. Roused as he had been, he now gasped for breath. His body shook violently— he was bent nearly double. His hands rested upon either wall, and his feet were drawn under him to avoid the pressure in front. Thus he remained for an hour, when that deafening bell beat again, and again there came the crash of horrid death. But the concussion was now so great that it struck Vivenzio down. As he lay gathered up in lessened bulk, the bell beat loud and frequent— crash succeeded crash— and on, and on, and on came the mysterious engine of death, till Vivenzio's smothered groans were heard no more! He was horribly crushed by the ponderous roof and collapsing sides— and the flattened bier was his *Iron Shroud*.

———————

18: The Messenger

Robert W. Chambers

1865-1933

In: *The Mystery of Choice*, Robert W. Chambers, 1897

This edition: *Famous Modern Ghost Stories*, Putnam's, 1921

Little gray messenger,
Robed like painted Death,
Your robe is dust.
Whom do you seek
Among lilies and closed buds
At dusk?

Among lilies and closed buds
At dusk,
Whom do you seek,
Little gray messenger,
Robed in the awful panoply
Of painted Death?
R.W.C.

All-wise,
Hast thou seen all there is to see with thy two eyes?
Dost thou know all there is to know, and so,
Omniscient,
Darest thou still to say thy brother lies?
R.W.C.

"THE BULLET entered here," said Max Fortin, and he placed his middle finger over a smooth hole exactly in the center of the forehead.

I sat down upon a mound of dry seaweed and unslung my fowling piece.

The little chemist cautiously felt the edges of the shot-hole, first with his middle finger, and then with his thumb.

"Let me see the skull again," said I.

Max Fortin picked it up from the sod.

"It's like all the others," he repeated, wiping his glasses on his handkerchief. "I thought you might care to see one of the skulls, so I brought this over from the gravel pit. The men from Bannalec are digging yet. They ought to stop."

"How many skulls are there altogether?" I inquired.

"They found thirty-eight skulls; there are thirty-nine noted in the list. They lie piled up in the gravel pit on the edge of Le Bihan's wheat field. The men are at work yet. Le Bihan is going to stop them."

"Let's go over," said I; and I picked up my gun and started across the cliffs, Portin on one side, Môme on the other.

"Who has the list?" I asked, lighting my pipe. "You say there is a list?"

"The list was found rolled up in a brass cylinder," said the chemist. He added: "You should not smoke here. You know that if a single spark drifted into the wheat— "

"Ah, but I have a cover to my pipe," said I, smiling.

Fortin watched me as I closed the pepper-box arrangement over the glowing bowl of the pipe. Then he continued:

"The list was made out on thick yellow paper; the brass tube has preserved it. It is as fresh to-day as it was in 1760. You shall see it."

"Is that the date?"

"The list is dated 'April, 1760.' The Brigadier Durand has it. It is not written in French."

"Not written in French!" I exclaimed.

"No," replied Fortin solemnly, "it is written in Breton."

"But," I protested, "the Breton language was never written or printed in 1760."

"Except by priests," said the chemist.

"I have heard of but one priest who ever wrote the Breton language," I began.

Fortin stole a glance at my face.

"You mean— the Black Priest?" he asked.

I nodded.

Fortin opened his mouth to speak again, hesitated, and finally shut his teeth obstinately over the wheat stem that he was chewing.

"And the Black Priest?" I suggested encouragingly. But I knew it was useless; for it is easier to move the stars from their courses than to make an obstinate Breton talk. We walked on for a minute or two in silence.

"Where is the Brigadier Durand?" I asked, motioning Môme to come out of the wheat, which he was trampling as though it were heather. As I spoke we came in sight of the farther edge of the wheat field and the dark, wet mass of cliffs beyond.

"Durand is down there— you can see him; he stands just behind the mayor of St. Gildas."

"I see," said I; and we struck straight down, following a sun-baked cattle path across the heather.

When we reached the edge of the wheat field, Le Bihan, the mayor of St. Gildas, called to me, and I tucked my gun under my arm and skirted the wheat to where he stood.

"Thirty-eight skulls," he said in his thin, high-pitched voice; "there is but one more, and I am opposed to further search. I suppose Fortin told you?"

I shook hands with him, and returned the salute of the Brigadier Durand.

"I am opposed to further search," repeated Le Bihan, nervously picking at the mass of silver buttons which covered the front of his velvet and broadcloth jacket like a breastplate of scale armor.

Durand pursed up his lips, twisted his tremendous mustache, and hooked his thumbs in his saber belt.

"As for me," he said, "I am in favor of further search."

"Further search for what— for the thirty-ninth skull?" I asked.

Le Bihan nodded. Durand frowned at the sunlit sea, rocking like a bowl of molten gold from the cliffs to the horizon. I followed his eyes. On the dark glistening cliffs, silhouetted against the glare of the sea, sat a cormorant, black, motionless, its horrible head raised toward heaven.

"Where is that list, Durand?" I asked.

The gendarme rummaged in his despatch pouch and produced a brass cylinder about a foot long. Very gravely he unscrewed the head and dumped out a scroll of thick yellow paper closely covered with writing on both sides. At a nod from Le Bihan he handed me the scroll. But I could make nothing of the coarse writing, now faded to a dull brown.

"Come, come, Le Bihan," I said impatiently, "translate it, won't you? You and Max Fortin make a lot of mystery out of nothing, it seems."

Le Bihan went to the edge of the pit where the three Bannalec men were digging, gave an order or two in Breton, and turned to me.

As I came to the edge of the pit the Bannalec men were removing a square piece of sailcloth from what appeared to be a pile of cobblestones.

"Look!" said Le Bihan shrilly. I looked. The pile below was a heap of skulls. After a moment I clambered down the gravel sides of the pit and walked over to the men of Bannalec. They saluted me gravely, leaning on their picks and shovels, and wiping their sweating faces with sunburned hands.

"How many?" said I in Breton.

"Thirty-eight," they replied.

I glanced around. Beyond the heap of skulls lay two piles of human bones. Beside these was a mound of broken, rusted bits of iron and steel. Looking closer, I saw that this mound was composed of rusty bayonets, saber blades, scythe blades, with here and there a tarnished buckle attached to a bit of leather hard as iron.

I picked up a couple of buttons and a belt plate. The buttons bore the royal arms of England; the belt plate was emblazoned with the English arms and also with the number "27."

"I have heard my grandfather speak of the terrible English regiment, the 27th Foot, which landed and stormed the fort up there," said one of the Bannalec men.

"Oh!" said I; "then these are the bones of English soldiers?"

"Yes," said the men of Bannalec.

Le Bihan was calling to me from the edge of the pit above, and I handed the belt plate and buttons to the men and climbed the side of the excavation.

"Well," said I, trying to prevent Môme from leaping up and licking my face as I emerged from the pit, "I suppose you know what these bones are. What are you going to do with them?"

"There was a man," said Le Bihan angrily, "an Englishman, who passed here in a dog-cart on his way to Quimper about an hour ago, and what do you suppose he wished to do?"

"Buy the relics?" I asked, smiling.

"Exactly— the pig!" piped the mayor of St. Gildas. "Jean Marie Tregunc, who found the bones, was standing there where Max Fortin stands, and do you know what he answered? He spat upon the ground, and said: 'Pig of an Englishman, do you take me for a desecrator of graves?' "

I knew Tregunc, a sober, blue-eyed Breton, who lived from one year's end to the other without being able to afford a single bit of meat for a meal.

"How much did the Englishman offer Tregunc?" I asked.

"Two hundred francs for the skulls alone."

I thought of the relic hunters and the relic buyers on the battlefields of our civil war.

"Seventeen hundred and sixty is long ago," I said.

"Respect for the dead can never die," said Fortin.

"And the English soldiers came here to kill your fathers and burn your homes," I continued.

"They were murderers and thieves, but— they are dead," said Tregunc, coming up from the beach below, his long sea rake balanced on his dripping jersey.

"How much do you earn every year, Jean Marie?" I asked, turning to shake hands with him.

"Two hundred and twenty francs, monsieur."

"Forty-five dollars a year," I said. "Bah! you are worth more, Jean. Will you take care of my garden for me? My wife wished me to ask you. I think it would be worth one hundred francs a month to you and to me. Come on, Le Bihan— come along, Fortin— and you, Durand. I want somebody to translate that list into French for me."

Tregunc stood gazing at me, his blue eyes dilated.

"You may begin at once," I said, smiling, "if the salary suits you?"

"It suits," said Tregunc, fumbling for his pipe in a silly way that annoyed Le Bihan.

"Then go and begin your work," cried the mayor impatiently; and Tregunc started across the moors toward St. Gildas, taking off his velvet-ribboned cap to me and gripping his sea rake very hard.

"You offer him more than my salary," said the mayor, after a moment's contemplation of his silver buttons.

"Pooh!" said I, "what do you do for your salary except play dominoes with Max Portin at the Groix Inn?"

Le Bihan turned red, but Durand rattled his saber and winked at Max Fortin, and I slipped my arm through the arm of the sulky magistrate, laughing.

"There's a shady spot under the cliff," I said; "come on, Le Bihan, and read me what is in the scroll."

In a few moments we reached the shadow of the cliff, and I threw myself upon the turf, chin on hand, to listen.

The gendarme, Durand, also sat down, twisting his mustache into needlelike points. Fortin leaned against the cliff, polishing his glasses and examining us with vague, near-sighted eyes; and Le Bihan, the mayor, planted himself in our midst, rolling up the scroll and tucking it under his arm.

"First of all," he began in a shrill voice, "I am going to light my pipe, and while lighting it I shall tell you what I have heard about the attack on the fort yonder. My father told me; his father told him."

He jerked his head in the direction of the ruined fort, a small, square stone structure on the sea cliff, now nothing but crumbling walls. Then he slowly produced a tobacco pouch, a bit of flint and tinder, and a long-stemmed pipe fitted with a microscopical bowl of baked clay. To fill such a pipe requires ten minutes' close attention. To smoke it to a finish takes but four puffs. It is very Breton, this Breton pipe. It is the crystallization of everything Breton.

"Go on," said I, lighting a cigarette.

"The fort," said the mayor, "was built by Louis XIV, and was dismantled twice by the English. Louis XV restored it in 1730. In 1760 it was carried by assault by the English. They came across from the island of Groix— three shiploads, and they stormed the fort and sacked St. Julien yonder, and they started to burn St. Gildas— you can see the marks of their bullets on my house yet; but the men of Bannalec and the men of Lorient fell upon them with pike and scythe and blunderbuss, and those who did not run away lie there below in the gravel pit now— thirty-eight of them."

"And the thirty-ninth skull?" I asked, finishing my cigarette.

The mayor had succeeded in filling his pipe, and now he began to put his tobacco pouch away.

"The thirty-ninth skull," he mumbled, holding the pipe stem between his defective teeth— "the thirty-ninth skull is no business of mine. I have told the Bannalec men to cease digging."

"But what is— whose is the missing skull?" I persisted curiously.

The mayor was busy trying to strike a spark to his tinder. Presently he set it aglow, applied it to his pipe, took the prescribed four puffs, knocked the ashes out of the bowl, and gravely replaced the pipe in his pocket.

"The missing skull?" he asked.

"Yes," said I, impatiently.

The mayor slowly unrolled the scroll and began to read, translating from the Breton into French. And this is what he read:

"On the Cliffs of St. Gildas,
April 13, 1760.

"On this day, by order of the Count of Soisic, general in chief of the Breton forces now lying in Kerselec Forest, the bodies of thirty-eight English soldiers of the 27th, 50th, and 72d regiments of Foot were buried in this spot, together with their arms and equipments."

The mayor paused and glanced at me reflectively.

"Go on, Le Bihan," I said.

"With them," continued the mayor, turning the scroll and reading on the other side, "was buried the body of that vile traitor who betrayed the fort to the English. The manner of his death was as follows: By order of the most noble Count of Soisic, the traitor was first branded upon the forehead with the brand of an arrowhead. The iron burned through the flesh and was pressed heavily so that the brand should even burn into the bone of the skull. The traitor was then led out and bidden to kneel. He admitted having guided the English from the island of Groix. Although a priest and a Frenchman, he had violated his priestly office to aid him in discovering the password to the fort. This password he extorted during confession from a young Breton girl who was in the habit of rowing across from the island of Groix to visit her husband in the fort. When the fort fell, this young girl, crazed by the death of her husband, sought the Count of Soisic and told how the priest had forced her to confess to him all she knew about the fort. The priest was arrested at St. Gildas as he was about to cross the river to Lorient. When arrested he cursed the girl, Marie Trevec—"

"What!" I exclaimed, "Marie Trevec!"

"Marie Trevec," repeated Le Bihan; "the priest cursed Marie Trevec, and all her family and descendants. He was shot as he knelt, having a mask of leather over his face, because the Bretons who composed the squad of execution refused to fire at a priest unless his face was concealed. The priest was l'Abbé Sorgue, commonly known as the Black Priest on account of his dark face and swarthy eyebrows. He was buried with a stake through his heart."

Le Bihan paused, hesitated, looked at me, and handed the manuscript back to Durand. The gendarme took it and slipped it into the brass cylinder.

"So," said I, "the thirty-ninth skull is the skull of the Black Priest."

"Yes," said Fortin. "I hope they won't find it."

"I have forbidden them to proceed," said the mayor querulously. "You heard me, Max Fortin."

I rose and picked up my gun. Môme came and pushed his head into my hand.

"That's a fine dog," observed Durand, also rising.

"Why don't you wish to find his skull?" I asked Le Bihan. "It would be curious to see whether the arrow brand really burned into the bone."

"There is something in that scroll that I didn't read to you," said the mayor grimly. "Do you wish to know what it is?"

"Of course," I replied in surprise.

"Give me the scroll again, Durand," he said; then he read from the bottom: "I, l'Abbé Sorgue, forced to write the above by my executioners, have written it in my own blood; and with it I leave my curse. My curse on St. Gildas, on Marie Trevec, and on her descendants. I will come back to St. Gildas when my remains are disturbed. Woe to that Englishman whom my branded skull shall touch!"

"What rot!" I said. "Do you believe it was really written in his own blood?"

"I am going to test it," said Fortin, "at the request of Monsieur le Maire. I am not anxious for the job, however."

"See," said Le Bihan, holding out the scroll to me, "it is signed, 'L'Abbé Sorgue.'"

I glanced curiously over the paper.

"It must be the Black Priest," I said. "He was the only man who wrote in the Breton language. This is a wonderfully interesting discovery, for now, at last, the mystery of the Black Priest's disappearance is cleared up. You will, of course, send this scroll to Paris, Le Bihan?"

"No," said the mayor obstinately, "it shall be buried in the pit below where the rest of the Black Priest lies."

I looked at him and recognized that argument would be useless. But still I said, "It will be a loss to history, Monsieur Le Bihan."

"All the worse for history, then," said the enlightened Mayor of St. Gildas.

We had sauntered back to the gravel pit while speaking. The men of Bannalec were carrying the bones of the English soldiers toward the St. Gildas cemetery, on the cliffs to the east, where already a knot of white-coiffed women stood in attitudes of prayer; and I saw the somber robe of a priest among the crosses of the little graveyard.

"They were thieves and assassins; they are dead now," muttered Max Fortin.

"Respect the dead," repeated the Mayor of St. Gildas, looking after the Bannalec men.

"It was written in that scroll that Marie Trevec, of Groix Island, was cursed by the priest— she and her descendants," I said, touching Le Bihan on the arm. "There was a Marie Trevec who married an Yves Trevec of St. Gildas—"

"It is the same," said Le Bihan, looking at me obliquely.

"Oh!" said I; "then they were ancestors of my wife."

"Do you fear the curse?" asked Le Bihan.

"What?" I laughed.

"There was the case of the Purple Emperor," said Max Fortin timidly.

Startled for a moment, I faced him, then shrugged my shoulders and kicked at a smooth bit of rock which lay near the edge of the pit, almost embedded in gravel.

"Do you suppose the Purple-Emperor drank himself crazy because he was descended from Marie Trevec?" I asked contemptuously.

"Of course not," said Max Fortin hastily.

"Of course not," piped the mayor. "I only— Hellow! what's that you're kicking?"

"What?" said I, glancing down, at the same time involuntarily giving another kick. The smooth bit of rock dislodged itself and rolled out of the loosened gravel at my feet.

"The thirty-ninth skull!" I exclaimed. "By jingo, it's the noddle of the Black Priest! See! there is the arrowhead branded on the front!"

The mayor stepped back. Max Fortin also retreated. There was a pause, during which I looked at them, and they looked anywhere but at me.

"I don't like it," said the mayor at last, in a husky, high voice. "I don't like it! The scroll says he will come back to St. Gildas when his remains are disturbed. I— I don't like it, Monsieur Darrel— "

"Bosh!" said I; "the poor wicked devil is where he can't get out. For Heaven's sake, Le Bihan, what is this stuff you are talking in the year of grace 1896?"

The mayor gave me a look.

"And he says 'Englishman.' You are an Englishman, Monsieur Darrel," he announced.

"You know better. You know I'm an American."

"It's all the same," said the Mayor of St. Gildas, obstinately.

"No, it isn't!" I answered, much exasperated, and deliberately pushed the skull till it rolled into the bottom of the gravel pit below.

"Cover it up," said I; "bury the scroll with it too, if you insist, but I think you ought to send it to Paris. Don't look so gloomy, Fortin, unless you believe in werewolves and ghosts. Hey! what the— what the devil's the matter with you, anyway? What are you staring at, Le Bihan?"

"Come, come," muttered the mayor in a low, tremulous voice, "it's time we got out of this. Did you see? Did you see, Fortin?"

"I saw," whispered Max Fortin, pallid with fright.

The two men were almost running across the sunny pasture now, and I hastened after them, demanding to know what was the matter.

"Matter!" chattered the mayor, gasping with exasperation and terror. "The skull is rolling up hill again," and he burst into a terrified gallop, Max Fortin followed close behind.

I watched them stampeding across the pasture, then turned toward the gravel pit, mystified, incredulous. The skull was lying on the edge of the pit, exactly where it had been before I pushed it over the edge. For a second I stared at it; a singular chilly feeling crept up my spinal column, and I turned and walked away, sweat starting from the root of every hair on my head. Before I had gone twenty paces the absurdity of the whole thing struck me. I halted, hot with shame and annoyance, and retraced my steps.

There lay the skull.

"I rolled a stone down instead of the skull," I muttered to myself. Then with the butt of my gun I pushed the skull over the edge of the pit and watched it roll to the bottom; and as it struck the bottom of the pit, Môme, my dog, suddenly whipped his tail between his legs, whimpered, and made off across the moor.

"Môme!" I shouted, angry and astonished; but the dog only fled the faster, and I ceased calling from sheer surprise.

"What the mischief is the matter with that dog!" I thought. He had never before played me such a trick.

Mechanically I glanced into the pit, but I could not see the skull. I looked down. The skull lay at my feet again, touching them.

"Good heavens!" I stammered, and struck at it blindly with my gunstock. The ghastly thing flew into the air, whirling over and over, and rolled again down the sides of the pit to the bottom. Breathlessly I stared at it, then,

confused and scarcely comprehending, I stepped back from the pit, still facing it, one, ten, twenty paces, my eyes almost starting from my head, as though I expected to see the thing roll up from the bottom of the pit under my very gaze. At last I turned my back to the pit and strode out across the gorse-covered moorland toward my home. As I reached the road that winds from St. Gildas to St. Julien I gave one hasty glance at the pit over my shoulder. The sun shone hot on the sod about the excavation. There was something white and bare and round on the turf at the edge of the pit. It might have been a stone; there were plenty of them lying about.

ii

WHEN I entered my garden I saw Môme sprawling on the stone doorstep. He eyed me sideways and flopped his tail.

"Are you not mortified, you idiot dog?" I said, looking about the upper windows for Lys.

Môme rolled over on his back and raised one deprecating forepaw, as though to ward off calamity.

"Don't act as though I was in the habit of beating you to death," I said, disgusted. I had never in my life raised whip to the brute. "But you are a fool dog," I continued. "No, you needn't come to be babied and wept over; Lys can do that, if she insists, but I am ashamed of you, and you can go to the devil."

Môme slunk off into the house, and I followed, mounting directly to my wife's boudoir. It was empty.

"Where has she gone?" I said, looking hard at Môme, who had followed me. "Oh! I see you don't know. Don't pretend you do. Come off that lounge! Do you think Lys wants tan-colored hairs all over her lounge?"

I rang the bell for Catherine and Fine, but they didn't know where "madame" had gone; so I went into my room, bathed, exchanged my somewhat grimy shooting clothes for a suit of warm, soft knickerbockers, and, after lingering some extra moments over my toilet— for I was particular, now that I had married Lys— I went down to the garden and took a chair out under the fig-trees.

"Where can she be?" I wondered, Môme came sneaking out to be comforted, and I forgave him for Lys's sake, whereupon he frisked.

"You bounding cur," said I, "now what on earth started you off across the moor? If you do it again I'll push you along with a charge of dust shot."

As yet I had scarcely dared think about the ghastly hallucination of which I had been a victim, but now I faced it squarely, flushing a little with mortification at the thought of my hasty retreat from the gravel pit.

"To think," I said aloud, "that those old woman's tales of Max Fortin and Le Bihan should have actually made me see what didn't exist at all! I lost my nerve like a schoolboy in a dark bedroom." For I knew now that I had mistaken a round stone for a skull each time, and had pushed a couple of big pebbles into the pit instead of the skull itself.

"By jingo!" said I, "I'm nervous; my liver must be in a devil of a condition if I see such things when I'm awake! Lys will know what to give me."

I felt mortified and irritated and sulky, and thought disgustedly of Le Bihan and Max Fortin.

But after a while I ceased speculating, dismissed the mayor, the chemist, and the skull from my mind, and smoked pensively, watching the sun low dipping in the western ocean. As the twilight fell for a moment over ocean and moorland, a wistful, restless happiness filled my heart, the happiness that all men know— all men who have loved.

Slowly the purple mist crept out over the sea; the cliffs darkened; the forest was shrouded.

Suddenly the sky above burned with the afterglow, and the world was alight again.

Cloud after cloud caught the rose dye; the cliffs were tinted with it; moor and pasture, heather and forest burned and pulsated with the gentle flush. I saw the gulls turning and tossing above the sand bar, their snowy wings tipped with pink; I saw the sea swallows sheering the surface of the still river, stained to its placid depths with warm reflections of the clouds. The twitter of drowsy hedge birds broke out in the stillness; a salmon rolled its shining side above tidewater.

The interminable monotone of the ocean intensified the silence. I sat motionless, holding my breath as one who listens to the first low rumor of an organ. All at once the pure whistle of a nightingale cut the silence, and the first moonbeam silvered the wastes of mist-hung waters.

I raised my head.

Lys stood before me in the garden.

When we had kissed each other, we linked arms and moved up and down the gravel walks, watching the moonbeams sparkle on the sand bar as the tide ebbed and ebbed. The broad beds of white pinks about us were atremble with hovering white moths; the October roses hung all abloom, perfuming the salt wind.

"Sweetheart," I said, "where is Yvonne? Has she promised to spend Christmas with us?"

"Yes, Dick; she drove me down from Plougat this afternoon. She sent her love to you. I am not jealous. What did you shoot?"

"A hare and four partridges. They are in the gun room. I told Catherine not to touch them until you had seen them."

Now I suppose I knew that Lys could not be particularly enthusiastic over game or guns; but she pretended she was, and always scornfully denied that it was for my sake and not for the pure love of sport. So she dragged me off to inspect the rather meager game bag, and she paid me pretty compliments, and gave a little cry of delight and pity as I lifted the enormous hare out of the sack by his ears.

"He'll eat no more of our lettuce," I said attempting to justify the assassination.

"Unhappy little bunny— and what a beauty! O Dick, you are a splendid shot, are you not?"

I evaded the question and hauled out a partridge.

"Poor little dead things'" said Lys in a whisper; "it seems a pity— doesn't it, Dick? But then you are so clever— — "

"We'll have them broiled," I said guardedly, "tell Catherine."

Catherine came in to take away the game, and presently 'Fine Lelocard, Lys's maid, announced dinner, and Lys tripped away to her boudoir.

I stood an instant contemplating her blissfully, thinking, "My boy, you're the happiest fellow in the world— you're in love with your wife'"

I walked into the dining-room, beamed at the plates, walked out again; met Tregunc in the hallway, beamed on him; glanced into the kitchen, beamed at Catherine, and went up stairs, still beaming.

Before I could knock at Lys's door it opened, and Lys came hastily out. When she saw me she gave a little cry of relief, and nestled close to my breast.

"There is something peering in at my window," she said.

"What!" I cried angrily.

"A man, I think, disguised as a priest, and he has a mask on. He must have climbed up by the bay tree."

I was down the stairs and out of doors in no time. The moonlit garden was absolutely deserted. Tregunc came up, and together we searched the hedge and shrubbery around the house and out to the road.

"Jean Marie," said I at length, "loose my bulldog— he knows you— and take your supper on the porch where you can watch. My wife says the fellow is disguised as a priest, and wears a mask."

Tregunc showed his white teeth in a smile. "He will not care to venture in here again, I think, Monsieur Darrel."

I went back and found Lys seated quietly at the table.

"The soup is ready, dear," she said. "Don't worry; it was only some foolish lout from Bannalec. No one in St. Gildas or St. Julien would do such a thing."

I was too much exasperated to reply at first, but Lys treated it as a stupid joke, and after a while I began to look at it in that light.

Lys told me about Yvonne, and reminded me of my promise to have Herbert Stuart down to meet her.

"You wicked diplomat!" I protested. "Herbert is in Paris, and hard at work for the Salon."

"Don't you think he might spare a week to flirt with the prettiest girl in Finistere?" inquired Lys innocently.

"Prettiest girl! Not much!" I said.

"Who is, then?" urged Lys.

I laughed a trifle sheepishly.

"I suppose you mean me, Dick," said Lys, coloring up.

"Now I bore you, don't I?"

"Bore me? Ah, no, Dick."

After coffee and cigarettes were served I spoke about Tregunc, and Lys approved.

"Poor Jean! He will be glad, won't he? What a dear fellow you are!"

"Nonsense," said I; "we need a gardener; you said so yourself, Lys."

But Lys leaned over and kissed me, and then bent down and hugged Môme— who whistled through his nose in sentimental appreciation.

"I am a very happy woman," said Lys.

"Môme was a very bad dog to-day," I observed.

"Poor Môme!" said Lys, smiling.

When dinner was over and Môme lay snoring before the blaze— for the October nights are often chilly in Finistere— Lys curled up in the chimney corner with her embroidery, and gave me a swift glance from under her dropping lashes.

"You look like a schoolgirl, Lys," I said teasingly. "I don't believe you are sixteen yet."

She pushed back her heavy burnished hair thoughtfully. Her wrist was as white as surf foam.

"Have we been married four years? I don't believe it," I said.

She gave me another swift glance and touched the embroidery on her knee, smiling faintly.

"I see," said I, also smiling at the embroidered garment. "Do you think it will fit?"

"Fit?" repeated Lys. Then she laughed

"And," I persisted, "are you perfectly sure that you— er— we shall need it?"

"Perfectly," said Lys. A delicate color touched her cheeks and neck. She held up the little garment, all fluffy with misty lace and wrought with quaint embroidery.

"It is very gorgeous," said I; "don't use your eyes too much, dearest. May I smoke a pipe?"

"Of course," she said selecting a skein of pale blue silk.

For a while I sat and smoked in silence, watching her slender fingers among the tinted silks and thread of gold.

Presently she spoke: "What did you say your crest is, Dick?"

"My crest? Oh, something or other rampant on a something or other— — "

"Dick!"

"Dearest?"

"Don't be flippant."

"But I really forget. It's an ordinary crest; everybody in New York has them. No family should be without 'em."

"You are disagreeable, Dick. Send Josephine upstairs for my album."

"Are you going to put that crest on the— the— whatever it is?"

"I am; and my own crest, too."

I thought of the Purple Emperor and wondered a little.

"You didn't know I had one, did you?" she smiled.

"What is it?" I replied evasively.

"You shall see. Ring for Josephine."

I rang, and, when 'Fine appeared, Lys gave her some orders in a low voice, and Josephine trotted away, bobbing her white-coiffed head with a "Bien, Madame!"

After a few minutes she returned, bearing a tattered, musty volume, from which the gold and blue had mostly disappeared.

I took the book in my hands and examined the ancient emblazoned covers.

"Lilies!" I exclaimed.

"Fleur-de-lis," said my wife demurely.

"Oh!" said I, astonished, and opened the book.

"You have never before seen this book?" asked Lys, with a touch of malice in her eyes.

"You know I haven't. Hello! What's this? Oho! So there should be a de before Trevec? Lys de Trevec? Then why in the world did the Purple Emperor— "

"Dick!" cried Lys.

"All right," said I. "Shall I read about the Sieur de Trevec who rode to Saladin's tent alone to seek for medicine for St. Louise? Or shall I read about— what is it? Oh, here it is, all down in black and white— about the Marquis de

Trevec who drowned himself before Alva's eyes rather than surrender the banner of the fleur-de-lis to Spain? It's all written here. But, dear, how about that soldier named Trevec who was killed in the old fort on the cliff yonder?"

"He dropped the *de*, and the Trevecs since then have been Republicans," said Lys— "all except me."

"That's quite right," said I; "it is time that we Republicans should agree upon some feudal system. My dear, I drink to the king!" and I raised my wine glass and looked at Lys.

"To the king," said Lys, flushing. She smoothed out the tiny garment on her knees; she touched the glass with her lips; her eyes were very sweet. I drained the glass to the king.

After a silence I said: "I will tell the king stories. His majesty shall be amused."

"His majesty," repeated Lys softly.

"Or hers," I laughed. "Who knows?"

"Who knows?" murmured Lys; with a gentle sigh.

"I know some stories about Jack the Giant-Killer," I announced. "Do you, Lys?"

"I? No, not about a giant-killer, but I know all about the werewolf, and Jeanne-la-Flamme, and the Man in Purple Tatters, and— O dear me, I know lots more."

"You are very wise," said I. "I shall teach his majesty, English."

"And I Breton," cried Lys jealously.

"I shall bring playthings to the king," said I— "big green lizards from the gorse, little gray mullets to swim in glass globes, baby rabbits from the forest of Kerselec—"

"And I," said Lys, "will bring the first primrose, the first branch of aubepine, the first jonquil, to the king— my king."

"Our king," said I; and there was peace in Finistere.

I lay back, idly turning the leaves of the curious old volume.

"I am looking," said I, "for the crest."

"The crest, dear? It is a priest's head with an arrow-shaped mark on the forehead, on a field— — "

I sat up and stared at my wife.

"Dick, whatever is the matter?" she smiled. "The story is there in that book. Do you care to read it? No? Shall I tell it to you? Well, then: It happened in the third crusade. There was a monk whom men called the Black Priest. He turned apostate, and sold himself to the enemies of Christ. A Sieur de Trevec burst into the Saracen camp, at the head of only one hundred lances, and carried the Black Priest away out of the very midst of their army."

"So that is how you come by the crest," I said quietly; but I thought of the branded skull in the gravel pit, and wondered.

"Yes," said Lys. "The Sieur de Trevec cut the Black Priest's head off, but first he branded him with an arrow mark on the forehead. The book says it was a pious action, and the Sieur de Trevec got great merit by it. But I think it was cruel, the branding," she sighed.

"Did you ever hear of any other Black Priest?"

"Yes. There was one in the last century, here in St. Gildas. He cast a white shadow in the sun. He wrote in the Breton language. Chronicles, too, I believe. I never saw them. His name was the same as that of the old chronicler, and of the other priest, Jacques Sorgue. Some said he was a lineal descendant of the traitor. Of course the first Black Priest was bad enough for anything. But if he did have a child, it need not have been the ancestor of the last Jacques Sorgue. They say he was so good he was not allowed to die, but was caught up to heaven one day," added Lys, with believing eyes.

I smiled.

"But he disappeared," persisted Lys.

"I'm afraid his journey was in another direction," I said jestingly, and thoughtlessly told her the story of the morning. I had utterly forgotten the masked man at her window, but before I finished I remembered him fast enough, and realized what I had done as I saw her face whiten.

"Lys," I urged tenderly, "that was only some clumsy clown's trick. You said so yourself. You are not superstitious, my dear?"

Her eyes were on mine. She slowly drew the little gold cross from her bosom and kissed it. But her lips trembled as they pressed the symbol of faith.

iii

ABOUT nine o'clock the next morning I walked into the Groix Inn and sat down at the long discolored oaken table, nodding good-day to Marianne Bruyere, who in turn bobbed her white coiffe at me.

"My clever Bannalec maid," said I, "what is good for a stirrup-cup at the Groix Inn?"

"Schist?" she inquired in Breton.

"With a dash of red wine, then," I replied.

She brought the delicious Quimperle cider, and I poured a little Bordeaux into it. Marianne watched me with laughing black eyes.

"What makes your cheeks so red, Marianne?" I asked. "Has Jean Marie been here?"

"We are to be married, Monsieur Darrel," she laughed.

"Ah! Since when has Jean Marie Tregunc lost his head?"

"His head? Oh, Monsieur Darrel— his heart, you mean!"

"So I do," said I. "Jean Marie is a practical fellow."

"It is all due to your kindness—" began the girl, but I raised my hand and held up the glass.

"It's due to himself. To your happiness, Marianne"; and I took a hearty draught of the schist. "Now," said I, "tell me where I can find Le Bihan and Max Fortin."

"Monsieur Le Bihan and Monsieur Fortin are above in the broad room. I believe they are examining the Red Admiral's effects."

"To send them to Paris? Oh, I know. May I go up, Marianne?"

"And God go with you," smiled the girl.

When I knocked at the door of the broad room above little Max Fortin opened it. Dust covered his spectacles and nose; his hat, with the tiny velvet ribbons fluttering, was all awry.

"Come in, Monsieur Darrel," he said; "the mayor and I are packing up the effects of the Purple Emperor and of the poor Red Admiral."

"The collections?" I asked, entering the room. "You must be very careful in packing those butterfly cases; the slightest jar might break wings and antennas, you know."

Le Bihan shook hands with me and pointed to the great pile of boxes.

"They're all cork lined," he said, "but Fortin and I are putting felt around each box. The Entomological Society of Paris pays the freight."

The combined collection of the Red Admiral and the Purple Emperor made a magnificent display.

I lifted and inspected case after case set with gorgeous butterflies and moths, each specimen carefully labelled with the name in Latin. There were cases filled with crimson tiger moths all aflame with color; cases devoted to the common yellow butterflies; symphonies in orange and pale yellow; cases of soft gray and dun-colored sphinx moths; and cases of grayish nettle-bed butterflies of the numerous family of Vanessa.

All alone in a great case by itself was pinned the purple emperor, the Apatura Iris, that fatal specimen that had given the Purple Emperor his name and quietus.

I remembered the butterfly, and stood looking at it with bent eyebrows.

Le Bihan glanced up from the floor where he was nailing down the lid of a box full of cases.

"It is settled, then," said he, "that madame, your wife, gives the Purple Emperor's entire Collection to the city of Paris?"

I nodded.

"Without accepting anything for it?"

"It is a gift," I said.

"Including the purple emperor there in the case? That butterfly is worth a great deal of money," persisted Le Bihan.

"You don't suppose that we would wish to sell that specimen, do you?" I answered a trifle sharply.

"If I were you I should destroy it," said the mayor in his high-pitched voice.

"That would be nonsense," said I, "like your burying the brass cylinder and scroll yesterday."

"It was not nonsense," said Le Bihan doggedly, "and I should prefer not to discuss the subject of the scroll."

I looked at Max Portin, who immediately avoided my eyes.

"You are a pair of superstitious old women," said I, digging my hands into my pockets; "you swallow every nursery tale that is invented."

"What of it?" said Le Bihan sulkily; "there's more truth than lies in most of 'em."

"Oh!" I sneered, "does the Mayor of St. Gildas and St. Julien believe in the *loup-garou*?"

"No, not in the *loup-garou*."

"In what, then— Jeanne-la-Flamme?"

"That," said Le Bihan with conviction, "is history."

"The devil it is!" said I; "and perhaps, Monsieur the mayor, your faith in giants is unimpaired?"

"There were giants— everybody knows it," growled Max Fortin.

"And you a chemist!" I observed scornfully.

"Listen, Monsieur Darrel," squeaked Le Bihan; "you know yourself that the Purple Emperor was a scientific man. Now suppose I should tell you that he always refused to include in his collection a Death's Messenger?"

"A what?" I exclaimed.

"You know what I mean— that moth that flies by night; some call it the Death's Head, but in St. Gildas we call it 'Death's Messenger.'"

"Oh!" said I, "you mean that big sphinx moth that is commonly known as the 'death's-head moth.' Why the mischief should the people here call it death's messenger?"

"For hundreds of years it has been known as death's messenger in St. Gildas," said Max Fortin. "Even Froissart speaks of it in his commentaries on Jacques Sorgue's *Chronicles*. The book is in your library."

"Sorgue? And who was Jacques Sorgue? I never read his book."

"Jacques Sorgue was the son of some unfrocked priest— I forget. It was during the crusades."

"Good Heavens!" I burst out, "I've been hearing of nothing but crusades and priests and death and sorcery ever since I kicked that skull into the gravel pit, and I am tired of it, I tell you frankly. One would think we lived in the dark ages. Do you know what year of our Lord it is, Le Bihan?"

"Eighteen hundred and ninety-six," replied the mayor.

"And yet you two hulking men are afraid of a death's-head moth."

"I don't care to have one fly into the window," said Max Fortin; "it means evil to the house and the people in it."

"God alone knows why he marked one of his creatures with a yellow death's head on the back," observed Le Bihan piously, "but I take it that he meant it as a warning; and I propose to profit by it," he added triumphantly.

"See here, Le Bihan," I said; "by a stretch of imagination one can make out a skull on the thorax of a certain big sphinx moth. What of it?"

"It is a bad thing to touch," said the mayor wagging his head.

"It squeaks when handled," added Max Fortin.

"Some creatures squeak all the time," I observed, looking hard at Le Bihan.

"Pigs," added the mayor.

"Yes, and asses," I replied. "Listen, Le Bihan: do you mean to tell me that you saw that skull roll uphill yesterday?"

The mayor shut his mouth tightly and picked up his hammer.

"Don't be obstinate," I said; "I asked you a question."

"And I refuse to answer," snapped Le Bihan. "Fortin saw what I saw; let him talk about it."

I looked searchingly at the little chemist.

"I don't say that I saw it actually roll up out of the pit, all by itself," said Fortin with a shiver, "but— but then, how did it come up out of the pit, if it didn't roll up all by itself?"

"It didn't come up at all; that was a yellow cobblestone that you mistook for the skull again," I replied. "You were nervous, Max."

"A— a very curious cobblestone, Monsieur Darrel," said Fortin.

"I also was a victim to the same hallucination," I continued, "and I regret to say that I took the trouble to roll two innocent cobblestones into the gravel pit, imagining each time that it was the skull I was rolling."

"It was," observed Le Bihan with a morose shrug.

"It just shows," said I, ignoring the mayor's remark, "how easy it is to fix up a train of coincidences so that the result seems to savor of the supernatural. Now, last night my wife imagined that she saw a priest in a mask peer in at her window—"

Fortin and Le Bihan scrambled hastily from their knees, dropping hammer and nails.

"W-h-a-t— what's that?" demanded the mayor.

I repeated what I had said. Max Fortin turned livid.

"My God!" muttered Le Bihan, "the Black Priest is in St. Gildas!"

"D-don't you— you know the old prophecy?" stammered Fortin; "Froissart quotes it from Jacques Sorgue:

"'When the Black Priest rises from the dead,
St. Gildas folk shall shriek in bed;
When the Black Priest rises from his grave,
May the good God St. Gildas save!'"

"Aristide Le Bihan," I said angrily, "and you, Max Fortin, I've got enough of this nonsense! Some foolish lout from Bannalec has been in St. Gildas playing tricks to frighten old fools like you. If you have nothing better to talk about than nursery legends I'll wait until you come to your senses. Good-morning." And I walked out, more disturbed than I cared to acknowledge to myself.

The day had become misty and overcast. Heavy, wet clouds hung in the east. I heard the surf thundering against the cliffs, and the gray gulls squealed as they tossed and turned high in the sky. The tide was creeping across the river sands, higher, higher, and I saw the seaweed floating on the beach, and the lancons springing from the foam, silvery threadlike flashes in the gloom. Curlew were flying up the river in twos and threes; the timid sea swallows skimmed across the moors toward some quiet, lonely pool, safe from the coming tempest. In every hedge field birds were gathering, huddling together, twittering restlessly.

When I reached the cliffs I sat down, resting my chin on my clenched hands. Already a vast curtain of rain, sweeping across the ocean miles away, hid the island of Groix. To the east, behind the white semaphore on the hills, black clouds crowded up over the horizon. After a little the thunder boomed, dull, distant, and slender skeins of lightning unraveled across the crest of the coming storm. Under the cliff at my feet the surf rushed foaming over the shore, and the lancons jumped and skipped and quivered until they seemed to be but the reflections of the meshed lightning.

I turned to the east. It was raining over Groix, it was raining at Sainte Barbe, it was raining now at the semaphore. High in the storm whirl a few gulls pitched; a nearer cloud trailed veils of rain in its wake; the sky was spattered with lightning; the thunder boomed.

As I rose to go, a cold raindrop fell upon the back of my hand, and another, and yet another on my face. I gave a last glance at the sea, where the waves were bursting into strange white shapes that seemed to fling out menacing arms toward me. Then something moved on the cliff, something black as the black rock it clutched— a filthy cormorant, craning its hideous head at the sky.

Slowly I plodded homeward across the somber moorland, where the gorse stems glimmered with a dull metallic green, and the heather, no longer violet and purple, hung drenched and dun-colored among the dreary rocks. The wet turf creaked under my heavy boots, the black-thorn scraped and grated against knee and elbow. Over all lay a strange light, pallid, ghastly, where the sea spray whirled across the landscape and drove into my face until it grew numb with the cold. In broad bands, rank after rank, billow on billow, the rain burst out across the endless moors, and yet there was no wind to drive it at such a pace.

Lys stood at the door as I turned into the garden, motioning me to hasten; and then for the first time I became conscious that I was soaked to the skin.

"However in the world did you come to stay out when such a storm threatened?" she said. "Oh, you are dripping! Go quickly and change; I have laid your warm underwear on the bed, Dick."

I kissed my wife, and went upstairs to change my dripping clothes for something more comfortable.

When I returned to the morning room there was a driftwood fire on the hearth, and Lys sat in the chimney corner embroidering.

"Catherine tells me that the fishing fleet from Lorient is out. Do you think they are in danger, dear?" asked Lys, raising her blue eyes to mine as I entered.

"There is no wind, and there will be no sea," said I, looking out of the window. Far across the moor I could see the black cliffs looming in the mist.

"How it rains!" murmured Lys; "come to the fire, Dick."

I threw myself on the fur rug, my hands in my pockets, my head on Lys's knees.

"Tell me a story," I said. "I feel like a boy of ten."

Lys raised a finger to her scarlet lips. I always waited for her to do that.

"Will you be very still, then?" she said.

"Still as death."

"Death," echoed a voice, very softly.

"Did you speak, Lys?" I asked, turning so that I could see her face.

"No; did you, Dick?"

"Who said 'death'?" I asked, startled.

"Death," echoed a voice, softly.

I sprang up and looked about. Lys rose too, her needles and embroidery falling to the floor. She seemed about to faint, leaning heavily on me, and I led her to the window and opened it a little way to give her air. As I did so the chain lightning split the zenith, the thunder crashed, and a sheet of rain swept into the room, driving with it something that fluttered— something that flapped, and squeaked, and beat upon the rug with soft, moist wings.

We bent over it together, Lys clinging to me, and we saw that it was a death's-head moth drenched with rain.

The dark day passed slowly as we sat beside the fire, hand in hand, her head against my breast, speaking of sorrow and mystery and death. For Lys believed that there were things on earth that none might understand, things that must be nameless forever and ever, until God rolls up the scroll of life and all is ended. We spoke of hope and fear and faith, and the mystery of the saints; we spoke of the beginning and the end, of the shadow of sin, of omens, and of love. The moth still lay on the floor quivering its somber wings in the warmth of the fire, the skull and ribs clearly etched upon its neck and body.

"If it is a messenger of death to this house," I said, "why should we fear, Lys?"

"Death should be welcome to those who love God," murmured Lys, and she drew the cross from her breast and kissed it.

"The moth might die if I threw it out into the storm," I said after a silence.

"Let it remain," sighed Lys.

Late that night my wife lay sleeping, and I sat beside her bed and read in the *Chronicle of Jacques Sorgue*. I shaded the candle, but Lys grew restless, and finally I took the book down into the morning room, where the ashes of the fire rustled and whitened on the hearth.

The death's-head moth lay on the rug before the fire where I had left it. At first I thought it was dead, but when I looked closer I saw a lambent fire in its amber eyes. The straight white shadow it cast across the floor wavered as the candle flickered.

The pages of the *Chronicle of Jacques Sorgue* were damp and sticky; the illuminated gold and blue initials left flakes of azure and gilt where my hand brushed them.

"It is not paper at all; it is thin parchment," I said to myself; and I held the discolored page close to the candle flame and read, translating laboriously:

"I, Jacques Sorgue, saw all these things. And I saw the Black Mass celebrated in the chapel of St. Gildas-on-the-Cliff. And it was said by the Abbé Sorgue, my kinsman: for which deadly sin the apostate priest was seized by the most noble Marquis of Plougastel and by him condemned to be burned with hot irons, until his seared soul quit its body and fly to its master the devil. But when the Black Priest lay in the crypt of Plougastel, his master Satan came at night and set him free, and carried him across land and sea to Mahmoud, which is Soldan or Saladin. And I, Jacques Sorgue, traveling afterward by sea, beheld with my own eyes my kinsman, the Black Priest of St. Gildas, borne along in the air upon a vast black wing, which was the wing of his master Satan. And this was seen also by two men of the crew."

I turned the page. The wings of the moth on the floor began to quiver. I read on and on, my eyes blurring under the shifting candle flame. I read of battles and of saints, and I learned how the Great Soldan made his pact with Satan, and then I came to the Sieur de Trevec, and read how he seized the Black Priest in the midst of Saladin's tents and carried him away and cut off his head first branding him on the forehead. "And before he suffered," said the Chronicle, "he cursed the Sieur de Trevec and his descendants, and he said he would surely return to St. Gildas. 'For the violence you do to me, I will do violence to you. For the evil I suffer at your hands, I will work evil on you and your descendants. Woe to your children, Sieur de Trevec!'" There was a whirr, a beating of strong wings, and my candle flashed up as in a sudden breeze. A humming filled the room; the great moth darted hither and thither, beating, buzzing, on ceiling and wall. I flung down my book and stepped forward. Now it lay fluttering upon the window sill, and for a moment I had it under my hand, but the thing squeaked and I shrank back. Then suddenly it darted across the candle flame; the light flared and went out, and at the same moment a shadow moved in the darkness outside. I raised my eyes to the window. A masked face was peering in at me.

Quick as thought I whipped out my revolver and fired every cartridge, but the face advanced beyond the window, the glass melting away before it like mist, and through the smoke of my revolver I saw something creep swiftly into the room. Then I tried to cry out, but the thing was at my throat, and I fell backward among the ashes of the hearth.

WHEN my eyes unclosed I was lying on the hearth, my head among the cold ashes. Slowly I got on my knees, rose painfully, and groped my way to a chair. On the floor lay my revolver, shining in the pale light of early morning. My mind clearing by degrees, I looked, shuddering, at the window. The glass was unbroken. I stooped stiffly, picked up my revolver and opened the cylinder. Every cartridge had been fired. Mechanically I closed the cylinder and placed the revolver in my pocket. The book, the Chronicles of Jacques Sorgue, lay on the table beside me, and as I started to close it I glanced at the page. It was all splashed with rain, and the lettering had run, so that the page was merely a confused blur of gold and red and black. As I stumbled toward the door I cast a fearful glance over my shoulder. The death's-head moth crawled shivering on the rug.

THE SUN was about three hours high. I must have slept, for I was aroused by the sudden gallop of horses under our window. People were shouting and calling in the road. I sprang up and opened the sash. Le Bihan was there, an image of helplessness, and Max Fortin stood beside him polishing his glasses. Some gendarmes had just arrived from Quimperle, and I could hear them around the corner of the house, stamping, and rattling their sabres and carbines, as they led their horses into my stable.

Lys sat up, murmuring half-sleepy, half-anxious questions.

"I don't know," I answered. "I am going out to see what it means."

"It is like the day they came to arrest you," Lys said, giving me a troubled look. But I kissed her and laughed at her until she smiled too. Then I flung on coat and cap and hurried down the stairs.

The first person I saw standing in the road was the Brigadier Durand.

"Hello!" said I, "have you come to arrest me again? What the devil is all this fuss about, anyway?"

"We were telegraphed for an hour ago," said Durand briskly, "and for a sufficient reason, I think. Look there, Monsieur Darrel!"

He pointed to the ground almost under my feet.

"Good heavens!" I cried, "where did that puddle of blood come from?"

"That's what I want to know, Monsieur Darrel. Max Fortin found it at daybreak. See, it's splashed all over the grass, too. A trail of it leads into your garden, across the flower beds to your very window, the one that opens from the morning room. There is another trail leading from this spot across the road to the cliffs, then to the gravel pit, and thence across the moor to the forest of Kerselec. We are going to mount in a minute and search the bosquets. Will you join us? Bon Dieu! but the fellow bled like an ox. Max Fortin says it's human blood, or I should not have believed it."

The little chemist of Quimperle came up at that moment, rubbing his glasses with a colored handkerchief.

"Yes, it is human blood," he said, "but one thing puzzles me: the corpuscles are yellow. I never saw any human blood before with yellow corpuscles. But your English Doctor Thompson asserts that he has—"

"Well, it's human blood, anyway— isn't it?" insisted Durand, impatiently.

"Ye-es," admitted Max Fortin.

"Then it's my business to trail it," said the big gendarme, and he called his men and gave the order to mount.

"Did you hear anything last night?" asked Durand of me.

"I heard the rain. I wonder the rain did not wash away these traces."

"They must have come after the rain ceased. See this thick splash, how it lies over and weighs down the wet grass blades. Pah!"

It was a heavy, evil-looking clot, and I stepped back from it, my throat closing in disgust.

"My theory," said the brigadier, "is this: Some of those Biribi fishermen, probably the Icelanders, got an extra glass of cognac into their hides and quarreled on the road. Some of them were slashed, and staggered to your house. But there is only one trail, and yet— and yet, how could all that blood come from only one person? Well, the wounded man, let us say, staggered first to your house and then back here, and he wandered off, drunk and dying, God knows where. That's my theory."

"A very good one," said I calmly. "And you are going to trail him?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"At once. Will you come?"

"Not now. I'll gallop over by-and-bye. You are going to the edge of the Kerselec forest?"

"Yes; you will hear us calling. Are you coming, Max Fortin? And you, Le Bihan? Good; take the dog-cart."

The big gendarme tramped around the corner to the stable and presently returned mounted on a strong gray horse, his sabre shone on his saddle; his pale yellow and white facings were spotless. The little crowd of white-coiffed women with their children fell back as Durand touched spurs and clattered away followed by his two troopers. Soon after Le Bihan and Max Fortin also departed in the mayor's dingy dog-cart.

"Are you coming?" piped Le Bihan shrilly.

"In a quarter of an hour," I replied, and went back to the house.

When I opened the door of the morning room the death's-head moth was beating its strong wings against the window. For a second I hesitated, then walked over and opened the sash. The creature fluttered out, whirred over the flower beds a moment, then darted across the moorland toward the sea. I called the servants together and questioned them. Josephine, Catherine, Jean Marie Tregunc, not one of them had heard the slightest disturbance during the night. Then I told Jean Marie to saddle my horse, and while I was speaking Lys came down.

"Dearest," I began, going to her.

"You must tell me everything you know, Dick," she interrupted, looking me earnestly in the face.

"But there is nothing to tell— only a drunken brawl, and some one wounded."

"And you are going to ride— where, Dick?"

"Well, over to the edge of Kerselec forest. Durand and the mayor, and Max Fortin, have gone on, following a— a trail."

"What trail?"

"Some blood."

"Where did they find it?"

"Out in the road there." Lys crossed herself.

"Does it come near our house?"

"Yes."

"How near?"

"It comes up to the morning room window," said I, giving in.

Her hand on my arm grew heavy. "I dreamed last night— — "

"So did I— " but I thought of the empty cartridges in my revolver, and stopped.

"I dreamed that you were in great danger, and I could not move hand or foot to save you; but you had your revolver, and I called out to you to fire—"

"I did fire!" I cried excitedly.

"You— you fired?"

I took her in my arms. "My darling," I said "something strange has happened— something that I cannot understand as yet. But, of course, there is an explanation. Last night I thought I fired at the Black Priest."

"Ah!" gasped Lys.

"Is that what you dreamed?"

"Yes, yes, that was it! I begged you to fire—"

"And I did."

Her heart was beating against my breast. I held her close in silence.

"Dick," she said at length, "perhaps you killed the— the thing."

"If it was human I did not miss," I answered grimly. "And it was human," I went on, pulling myself together, ashamed of having so nearly gone to pieces. "Of course it was human! The whole affair is plain enough. Not a drunken brawl, as Durand thinks; it was a drunken lout's practical joke, for which he has suffered. I suppose I must have filled him pretty full of bullets, and he has crawled away to die in Kerselec forest. It's a terrible affair; I'm sorry I fired so hastily; but that idiot Le Bihan and Max Fortin have been working on my nerves till I am as hysterical as a schoolgirl," I ended angrily.

"You fired— but the window glass was not shattered," said Lys in a low voice.

"Well, the window was open, then. And as for the— the rest— I've got nervous indigestion, and a doctor will settle the Black Priest for me, Lys."

I glanced out of the window at Tregunc waiting with my horse at the gate.

"Dearest, I think I had better go to join Durand and the others."

"I will go, too."

"Oh, no!"

"Yes, Dick."

"Don't, Lys."

"I shall suffer every moment you are away."

"The ride is too fatiguing, and we can't tell what unpleasant sight you may come upon. Lys, you don't really think there is anything supernatural in this affair?"

"Dick," she answered gently, "I am a Bretonne." With both arms around my neck, my wife said, "Death is the gift of God. I do not fear it when we are together. But alone— oh, my husband, I should fear a God who could take you away from me!"

We kissed each other soberly, simply, like two children. Then Lys hurried away to change her gown, and I paced up and down the garden waiting for her.

She came, drawing on her slender gauntlets. I swung her into the saddle, gave a hasty order to Jean Marie, and mounted.

Now, to quail under thoughts of terror on a morning like this, with Lys in the saddle beside me, no matter what had happened or might happen was impossible. Moreover, Môme came sneaking after us. I asked Tregunc to catch him, for I was afraid he might be brained by our horses' hoofs if he followed, but the wily puppy dodged and bolted after Lys, who was trotting along the highroad. "Never mind," I thought; "if he's hit he'll live, for he has no brains to lose."

Lys was waiting for me in the road beside the Shrine of Our Lady of St. Gildas when I joined her. She crossed herself, I doffed my cap, then we shook out our bridles and galloped toward the forest of Kerselec.

We said very little as we rode. I always loved to watch Lys in the saddle. Her exquisite figure and lovely face were the incarnation of youth and grace; her curling hair glistened like threaded gold.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw the spoiled puppy Môme come bounding cheerfully alongside, oblivious of our horses' heels. Our road swung close to the cliffs. A filthy cormorant rose from the black rocks and flapped heavily across our path. Lys's horse reared, but she pulled him down, and pointed at the bird with her riding crop.

"I see," said I; "it seems to be going our way. Curious to see a cormorant in a forest, isn't it?"

"It is a bad sign," said Lys. "You know the Morbihan proverb: 'When the cormorant turns from the sea, Death laughs in the forest, and wise woodsmen build boats.'"

"I wish," said I sincerely, "that there were fewer proverbs in Brittany."

We were in sight of the forest now; across the gorse I could see the sparkle of gendarmes' trappings, and the glitter of Le Bihan's silver-buttoned jacket. The hedge was low and we took it without difficulty, and trotted across the moor to where Le Bihan and Durand stood gesticulating.

They bowed ceremoniously to Lys as we rode up.

"The trail is horrible— it is a river," said the mayor in his squeaky voice. "Monsieur Darrel, I think perhaps madame would scarcely care to come any nearer."

Lys drew bridle and looked at me.

"It is horrible!" said Durand, walking up beside me; "it looks as though a bleeding regiment had passed this way. The trail winds and winds about here in the thickets; we lose it at times, but we always find it again. I can't understand how one man— no, nor twenty— could bleed like that!"

A halloo, answered by another, sounded from the depths of the forest.

"It's my men; they are following the trail," muttered the brigadier. "God alone knows what is at the end!"

"Shall we gallop back, Lys?" I asked.

"No; let us ride along the western edge of the woods and dismount. The sun is so hot now, and I should like to rest for a moment," she said.

"The western forest is clear of anything disagreeable," said Durand.

"Very well," I answered; "call me, Le Bihan, if you find anything."

Lys wheeled her mare, and I followed across the springy heather, Môme trotting cheerfully in the rear.

We entered the sunny woods about a quarter of a kilometer from where we left Durand. I took Lys from her horse, flung both bridles over a limb, and, giving my wife my arm, aided her to a flat mossy rock which overhung a shallow brook gurgling among the beech trees. Lys sat down and drew off her gauntlets. Môme pushed his head into her lap, received an undeserved caress, and came doubtfully toward me. I was weak enough to condone his offense, but I made him lie down at my feet, greatly to his disgust.

I rested my head on Lys's knees, looking up at the sky through the crossed branches of the trees.

"I suppose I have killed him," I said. "It shocks me terribly, Lys."

"You could not have known, dear. He may have been a robber, and— if— not— did— have you ever fired your revolver since that day four years ago when the Red Admiral's son tried to kill you? But I know you have not."

"No," said I, wondering. "It's a fact, I have not. Why?"

"And don't you remember that I asked you to let me load it for you the day when Yves went off, swearing to kill you and his father?"

"Yes, I do remember. Well?"

"Well, I— I took the cartridges first to St. Gildas chapel and dipped them in holy water. You must not laugh, Dick," said Lys gently, laying her cool hands on my lips.

"Laugh, my darling!"

Overhead the October sky was pale amethyst, and the sunlight burned like orange flame through the yellow leaves of beech and oak. Gnats and midges danced and wavered overhead; a spider dropped from a twig halfway to the ground and hung suspended on the end of his gossamer thread.

"Are you sleepy, dear?" asked Lys, bending over me.

"I am— a little; I scarcely slept two hours last night," I answered.

"You may sleep, if you wish," said Lys, and touched my eyes caressingly.

"Is my head heavy on your knees?"

"No, Dick."

I was already in a half doze; still I heard the brook babbling under the beeches and the humming of forest flies overhead. Presently even these were stilled.

The next thing I knew I was sitting bolt upright, my ears ringing with a scream, and I saw Lys cowering beside me, covering her white face with both hands.

As I sprang to my feet she cried again and clung to my knees. I saw my dog rush growling into a thicket, then I heard him whimper, and he came backing out, whining, ears flat, tail down. I stooped and disengaged Lys's hand.

"Don't go, Dick!" she cried. "O God, it's the Black Priest!"

In a moment I had leaped across the brook and pushed my way into the thicket. It was empty. I stared about me; I scanned every tree trunk, every bush. Suddenly I saw him. He was seated on a fallen log, his head resting in his hands, his rusty black robe gathered around him. For a moment my hair stirred under my cap; sweat started on forehead and cheek bone; then I recovered my reason, and understood that the man was human and was probably wounded to death. Ay, to death; for there at my feet, lay the wet trail of blood, over leaves and stones, down into the little hollow, across to the figure in black resting silently under the trees.

I saw that he could not escape even if he had the strength, for before him, almost at his very feet, lay a deep, shining swamp.

As I stepped forward my foot broke a twig. At the sound the figure started a little, then its head fell forward again. Its face was masked. Walking up to the man, I bade him tell where he was wounded. Durand and the others broke through the thicket at the same moment and hurried to my side.

"Who are you who hide a masked face in a priest's robe?" said the gendarme loudly.

There was no answer.

"See— see the stiff blood all over his robe," muttered Le Bihan to Fortin.

"He will not speak," said I.

"He may be too badly wounded," whispered Le Bihan.

"I saw him raise his head," I said, "my wife saw him creep up here."

Durand stepped forward and touched the figure.

"Speak!" he said.

"Speak!" quavered Fortin.

Durand waited a moment, then with a sudden upward movement he stripped off the mask and threw back the man's head. We were looking into the eye sockets of a skull. Durand stood rigid; the mayor shrieked. The skeleton burst out from its rotting robes and collapsed on the ground before us. From between the staring ribs and the grinning teeth spurted a torrent of black blood, showering the shrinking grasses; then the thing shuddered, and fell over into the black ooze of the bog. Little bubbles of iridescent air appeared from the mud; the bones were slowly engulfed, and, as the last fragments sank out of sight, up from the depths and along the bank crept a creature, shiny, shivering, quivering its wings.

It was a death's-head moth.

I WISH I had time to tell you how Lys outgrew superstitions— for she never knew the truth about the affair, and she never will know, since she has promised not to read this book. I wish I might tell you about the king and his coronation, and how the coronation robe fitted. I wish that I were able to write how Yvonne and Herbert Stuart rode to a boar hunt in Quimperle, and how the hounds raced the quarry right through the town, overturning three gendarmes, the notary, and an old woman. But I am becoming garrulous and Lys is calling me to come and hear the king say that he is sleepy. And his highness shall not be kept waiting.

THE KING'S CRADLE SONG
Seal with a seal of gold
The scroll of a life unrolled;
Swathe him deep in his purple stole;
Ashes of diamonds, crystalled coal,
Drops of gold in each scented fold.

Crimson wings of the Little Death,
Stir his hair with your silken breath;
Flaming wings of sins to be,

Splendid pinions of prophecy,
Smother his eyes with hues and dyes,
While the white moon spins and the winds arise,
And the stars drip through the skies.
Wave, O wings of the Little Death!

Seal his sight and stifle his breath,
Cover his breast with the gemmed shroud pressed;
From north to north, from west to west,
Wave, O wings of the Little Death!

Till the white moon reels in the cracking skies,
And the ghosts of God arise.

19: The Woman in the Story

M. Forrest

Mabel Forrest (Helena Mabel Checkley Mills) 1872-1935

The Lone Hand (Sydney) 1 Oct 1915

"SOMETIMES," he said, "when you look at me, it seems as though you dropped a little shutter over your inner eye— a little, grey shutter."

"Does it?" She slid her feet towards the hill edge and grew grave, staring at him thoughtfully.

Below, the crests of the gum trees were full of gentle rustlings, a blue evening mist gathered in distant valleys, there was a curious streak of smoky pearl along the horizon, iron roofs, far off spires, made beautiful by their aloofness. Somewhere over the hills and sandy flats was the sea; blit the billowing gum crowns hid it. The long loop of road ran through the hills back to the city. At the tram terminus near at hand was a funny little shop, bearing upon a ragged edged piece of cardboard the ill-written inscription, "Soft drinks and lollies." The shop was attached by a miniature drawbridge to the roadside, and it rested upon piles as high as telegraph posts, standing among gum suckers, rusty iron tanks and rubbish cans in the sheer dip beneath.

Before them, as they sat on the grassy sweep, the hill appeared as though cut away, so straight it went to the gully below. It was very still. Sometimes a tram scraped down the ridge, unseen through the trees, sometimes a hidden bird piped. Blue and green solitudes, and the little grey shutters not down in her eyes to-day. The soul looked through at him, and he found it good.

"Tell me a story; *pour passer le temps*," she said.

"A story?" He dug dry tobacco out of his pipe and refilled it wastefully. "Do you think I have enough imagination to make up a story?"

In some forest track a cart jolted, the faint metallic knocking of a loose chain came sharp through the leafy avenues.

"A true one, then."

He had never seen her look so young so

irresponsible, as she did to-day. Usually a fine worry-line spoiled her wide, low forehead; the deep curve of her lips was not a merry one. But today—today—something seemed to stir in the deeps of her changeful hazel eyes —a spirit of youth, that was not dead after all, only slumbering.

"A true one." His brown face was turned from her. He lay full length on the grass, his feet towards the cliff edge.

She thought what nice boots he always wore. She wondered if she could ever care much for a man who did not wear nice boots. The toes of her little tan ones were dusty. The road by which they came had been soft and mealy with summer dust.

"A true one." There was a subtle difference in his musing tone. Something that made her heart strings tighten, and a quiver in her throat, like the tiny beginning of a sob.

He had forgotten to light his pipe.

"This is the preface," he said. "In the grey dawns of life— the very first days— men were not the companions of men. Man's natural companion was woman. He looked upon other men with suspicion. They might copy his weapons, purloin his foodstuffs or— steal his wife."

Silence. The cart-jolts dying away in twig runnels. Then lightly. "How is that for a beginning?"

"It sounds like Hall Caine. Go on. I wonder what kind of story you will attach to a preface like that?"

"The old one, of two on a hillside."

Her face was averted now. He could see the lobe of one ear, a tilt of hat brim, a stray tress of dark hair.

"Two on a hillside— only trees— you are fond of trees, aren't you? I've often heard you say they were such companionable things— never bitter, never backbiting, never cruel like one's fellows?"

"Yes; I am fond of trees." Her voice was intentionally flat, the little tremor subdued in her small white throat, her hands clasped loosely in her lap. He could see the pearl buckle that fastened the ribbon at her waist gleaming like an opal in the westering light. Tucked into the ribbon was a bunch of pink tufted Natal grass. He had pulled it for her as they came.

"And one on the hillside was a woman— and one was a man."

"Also— since the beginnings of things."

"And up in a cave near the mountain top— a black, frowning mountain it was, too— where the clouds settled like grey smoke, and there were little rivers of brown waters down the crevasses of the rock, and in the winter, snow, white as koalin on the summit."

"You have the imagination, after all," she laughed. She was her calm self again; but the little shutters were still up in her eyes, the soul seemed to challenge him.

"Up in the cave (how you do interrupt!)" He was sitting up now, lighting his pipe with steady hand.

"Up in the cave was the woman's keeper— a black-visaged, fierce male of another tribe, for the woman and the man on the hillside were of the same peoples—fairer, and of lighter build."

The sun was dipping to a mass of feathery cloud that lay over the trees. Presently the western sky would flaunt the *drapeau rouge*. A last defiance to constable night ere it was locked away behind the bars of dusk.

"Said the man to the woman. 'Are you not weary of the cave places, the airless caverns, the crouching life, the sanded floors, the dripping walls, the bones of bear and elk that lie about you, the smell of wild animals whose skins your keeper, mighty hunter, brings ever home. What thought has he beside the slaying of fierce beasts, the taking life from singing bird, from soft-footed ground creature, by cunning or by force. But I would take you where the fine ferns make an arch of beauty above streams clear as moonlight; where the young trees are a green haze overhead. I will show you the white flowers woven in Spring's marriage robe, the drowsy scarlets of poppies in summer fields. We would make a trail in the wilderness together, you and I, where the stars are golden pins to hold the heaven together. We would leave the frowning peaks, the bare, still mountain for the heart of the forest, the leaf gossip of the trees, drop of an acorn in the hushed night, sweet resins of murky pines, and the peace of love satisfied.' "

The little tremor was in her throat again. It was more than the beginnings of a sob. The air seemed full of electricity. She could feel a strange, nerve-throbbing all over her slender body— wireless messages of the emotions, like lightning in a cloud. It was as though something was strained to vibrating point, and in a moment might—

Might what?

The far uplift of ranges took on a luminous purple, soft grey inconsequences of twilight gathered in the valley.

He was looking at her compelling, burning eyes, eager, questioning.

"And what did the woman in the story do?"

To her own ears her voice sounded sharp, almost shrewish, unmusical with feeling. He laughed, smoked, watched her through the blue curl.

"I leave it to you to finish the story."

Two red spots of color leapt to her face, her eyes grew dark as velvet.

"The woman? The woman in the story?"

"Yes, the woman in the story—or the real woman."

He laid his pipe on the grass beside him, bowl downwards. It smouldered on the green. He locked his hands about his knees, still carefully observant.

But she looked out to the west where the cloud was growing to a flurry of red.

"The woman. She forgot the cave and the keeper, the wild flowers she had gathered for the vases of shells the man had brought her from where the great seas moaned on littered beaches. She forgot the kindling wood she had come out to find, forgot that the gourd was unfilled, the thorns for the piecing together of the stripped skins ungathered— forgot— forgot that in the winter season, when the passes were black with frost and the mountain trail was

slippery with ice, the keeper had gone forth, himself starving, to find food for her, had dared the sabre toothed tiger in the jungle, the woolly rhinocerous in the reeds, that his woman might not want, She forgot the scars on the big, hairy chest, the lifelong limp the fierce bull elk had given him ere he buried his stone axe in its brain— forgot all, except the soft voiced woodsman who wooed her so well upon a hillside— forgot.

"For the night called, and the songs of trees and the silver tinkle of waters, and, most of all, most of all,"— her voice broke and sank— "the peace of love— love satisfied."

He was white under his brown now, white and keen. He stretched out his hands, hungry for hers.

"You will come, Doreen," he said, huskily, And even as he spoke he glanced over his shoulder at the empty road— the empty road, the little lolly shop, the mutter of a tram coming up from the city, the link with the life they would leave behind, the "cave" life. But she laughed, stood up, shook out her linen skirt, consulted a watch on her slim wrist.

"What a long afternoon we have had! Does one good, the country air, doesn't it? But duty calls! We must not miss this tram. I have to dress for the Ellerslie's bridge party. Bore, isn't it? Are you going?"

The shutters were down in her eyes again. The soul had gone back to it's retreat. It was a very composed woman who faced him now as he, too, stood erect, a stupid wonder on his face, something eternally quenched in his blue eyes.

But he made one more throw.

"Doreen, Doreen, O! my dear!" he said. "Can't you make it— true?"

"I?" she said. There was a polite amazement in her face. "What do you mean? What have I to do with it? Be quick, we shall miss this car and get talked about! Don't be silly. I was making believe, just as you were. That part was only the woman in the story."

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20: The Baby Ghost

Charles Curtz Hahn

1858-1938

In: *The Wreck of the South Pole*, New York, 1899

EVER SINCE there has been a ghost in the world, children have been interested in them, but the only chance the little things ever have of hearing about them is at night, when some kind-hearted servant girl takes pity on them during the absence of the old folk. Parents have frowned upon their children hearing about ghosts and this may be in part because no properly written ghost stories have ever been published for use in the nursery. This is a great oversight on the part of literary caterers to the children's page of the newspapers.

The following ghost story has been compiled for the purpose of filling this long felt want and providing the nursery with a genuine, simon-pure ghost story, to which no parent can object.

There was once a family that had a ghost, more correctly speaking, the house they lived in had one, for the family were renters and the ghost was entailed with the house.

The ghost gave the various tenants a great deal of trouble, and in consequence none of them had ever stayed very long in it. People who rent like all the modern conveniences and luxuries thrown in, but they do not like ghosts. They are airy and keep such late hours. Still, every one who saw this particular spirit had a sort of a kindly feeling for it, because it was a baby ghost. People would rent the house, stay a night or two, and see a baby in airy night clothes creeping about and moaning dismally. Then they would leave. They never got angry at the ghost, but they did at the landlord (who was an Irishman), for not telling them that the place was rented already. As to the spectral baby, they only felt sorry for it.

Still, they would not stay in the house.

The family under whose reign the ghost left the house was named Otto— a good old German name such as I love to hear. They had been in the house a week before they saw the ghost, for it had been ill with colic and had to stay in bed.

But when it did appear, it created a sensation.

Mrs. Otto was for leaving at once. She said that she was not a proud woman, but that she was exclusive. She did not mind treating even a beggar politely, but when it came to receiving people in her bed chamber she was compelled to be exclusive and she drew the line on ghosts. Besides, she added, she did not need a baby ghost, for she had several young infants already.

This caused a parley. The cook wept when she heard of the manifestation, and said that the poor thing ought to be treated kindly, for no doubt it had died unbaptized and so was compelled 'to walk.'

But then the ghost did not pass its nights in her bedroom.

But to the parley, which occurred at night, as all intelligent persons well know, for a ghost never appears in the day time. People could see through it too plainly then.

Well, the Otto family were all in bed, father and mother Otto side by side, and the three little Ottos ranged in a row in the trundle bed at the foot. All were asleep, and at 12 o'clock the clock struck and all awoke.

Mamma Otto turned over and asked what the children wanted, and father Otto turned over and asked why the little brats could not keep still. Mamma Otto then began a curtain lecture, but it was broken off suddenly and she cried:

"Oh, James, what is that?"

"By my soul," said James, "it is the baby ghost."

"Oh, mamma," screamed the three little Ottos, "see that baby all in white like me! But, oh!— I can see right through it, and it hasn't any insides. Who is it?"

Papa Otto looked out and saw the baby creeping around upon the floor and making a moaning noise. He was tenderhearted toward babies, but he did not feel particularly friendly toward their ghosts. So his speech proved a mixture of tenderness and roughness.

"Look here," he began quite fiercely— then: "Chick-a-biddie, what do you want?"

At the first word the spectre did not pay any attention to him, but at the magic baby words, "Chick-a-biddie," it looked up.

"Dear 'ittle baby," said Mrs. Otto, trying to pacify it, "'ot doo 'oo 'ont?"

"Shut up, you fool," exclaimed Mr. Otto. "Can't you talk sense even in the face of a spectre? Let me talk."

"I say," he said to the white gown, which was now trying to climb into bed with his children, "what do you want?"

"I 'ont a dwink."

"Good Lord! Have they nothing to drink where you live?"

"I 'ont to go to bed," continued the infant, not minding what he said.

"Well, go to bed then," said Mr. Otto. "Who is keeping you from it? Haven't you beds in your ghost world? Who are you, anyhow?"

"I'm a baby ghost."

"So I know you are. But what do you want to be one for? Out here in America we don't have ghosts unless there is some reason for them. But you

are so young, you never did anything wrong. What reason have you for prowling around in this way?"

"I'm a baby ghost."

"A baby ghost!" repeated Mr. Otto, becoming excited. "What excuse is there in that? If you're a ghost, you're a ghost, and it don't make any difference what kind. One is as much a spirit as another, even if it isn't quite so big. You don't have to come here unless you want to."

"But where else can I go?"

"Where else can you go? Why, go home. Haven't you any friends or relatives in the other world to take care of you?"

"My father was murdered in India and has 'to walk' there; my mother was murdered in England, and has 'to walk' there; and I am left an orphan ghost in America. Please tell me where I am to walk and I will go there."

"Seems to me you talk pretty well for a baby. How comes it that you can talk so plain when you want to?"

"Ghost babies know more than other babies."

"So I should think, and I believe you are shamming."

Well, the end of the parley was that the Ottos felt downright sorry for the ghost, and would have done anything for it but let it live with them.

"Why," said Mrs. Otto, "the next thing it would be coming to me for its dinner."

As a compromise they at last agreed to let it crawl around on the floor if it would not bother the children, but the ghost said it liked babies above everything else, and would not live without them.

"Then why don't you die?" said Mr. Otto.

"Because I can't."

"Then if you can't die, I guess you can live without babies."

"Yes, I suppose I can; but I won't."

That ended the parley, and the Ottos decided to move, not because they disliked the ghost, but because the children did not like it for a bed-fellow. Besides, it had such a dismal way of moaning.

When the landlord, Mr. Mulligan, heard that his new tenants were about to leave, he said:

"Oi wish the divil would take the cursed ghost an' be done wid it. It's no good. It damages me property. It's bad. To h—l wid it, Oi say!"

The ghost heard him and went to his house to live.

About I o'clock that night he called to it and asked what it meant by coming over and bothering a decent man in that manner.

"Because you cursed me," said the baby ghost naively, and then fell to moaning and creeping about the floor again.

"Sure an' Oi did," said Mr. Mulligan. "But Oi'll fix ye to-morrow."

There was no more sleep in that house the rest of the night, but Mr. Mulligan did not pass his time parleying. A wise man was Mr. Mulligan, and he had his plan.

Early in the morning he put on his hat and went over to Mr. Otto's.

"Good-mornin' to yees," he said, quite politely. "Oi came to speak to yees about yer ghost. An' how did yees rest last noight?"

"Very well, indeed. Her babyship did not put in an appearance at all."

"No wonder, and Oi'll tell ye why and perhaps give ye a pointer that'll rid ye of it altogether. Ye know ghosts can be exorcised. Oi knew one to be laid by Father O'Neill, over in owld Ireland wonst. They can't stand a cursin'. Yesterday Oi got a bit angry and as landlord of th' house gave this bit o' a spectre a downright cursin' an' see, it did not appear to yees at all last noight. Oi thought likely an' so came over to see about it. Now, phat Oi would riccommind would be this— that yees do the same and curses all the curses ye can think of on th' poor thing's head."

That night Mr. Mulligan went to bed chuckling to himself over his scheme, and fell asleep with the conscience of a man who will see no ghosts. But not long did he sleep before he was awakened by a low cry.

"The divil take the brat. Phat does it want now? Pat, shut your noise."

But Pat did not shut his noise, and Mr. Mulligan rolled out of bed in a passion. There at his feet was the baby ghost crawling about and moaning in a most heartrending manner.

"Oi beg your pardon," Mr. Mulligan said; "Oi didn't know it was you. Oi thought it was that boy Pat and got up to give him a batin'. Phat can Oi do for me little leddy?"

But the 'little leddy' made no reply.

The next morning the first thing Mr. Mulligan did was to hurry over to Mr. Otto's a second time to inquire why he had not exorcised the ghost. When he learned that Mr. Otto had done his best at heaping curses upon the poor baby's head he was completely non-plussed.

"Phat was the matter with the scheme?" he said to himself. "It was a good one, Oi know. Something must hev gone wrong."

That night was a repetition of the two previous ones, with the exception that Mr. Mulligan, knowing what he might expect, decided to sit up and await the arrival of the new addition to his family. Promptly on time the 'little leddy' appeared.

"An' phat can Oi do for your leddyship this avenin'," said he very politely, hoping to get on the good side of the ghost.

"I 'on't to go out."

"Go out, is it?" said Mr. Mulligan, with alacrity. "Sure, then, ye can, me darlin', and welcome," and he opened wide the door. But the baby never moved an inch.

"It's cold out there," it moaned and started to creep under the bed clothes with the children.

"Howly Vargin presarve us," cried Mr. Mulligan. "It's going to scare the poor children to death. Get out of there, ye spalpeen. What are yees doing here anyhow? Why aren't ye over hantin' Mr. Otto. Indade he towld me this mornin' that he cursed ye royally."

"So he did," replied the baby ghost, as it crept from the trundle bed and lay down by the fire.

"Warmin's its shins, by the howly Moses!" ejaculated Mr. Mulligan, "though how it can do that same Oi can't see." Then to the baby:

"But how comes it that ye are here and not over there if Mr. Otto cursed ye?"

"You put him up to it."

"Oh, murder! Then Oi'm to have ye here in the house wid me until Oi die!"

"And maybe afterward."

"But suppose Oi move away?"

"I will go with you."

"St. Patrick an' all the sants, hear that, will ye! An' can Oi do nothing to get ye to lave?"

"No, I'm a baby ghost. My father was murdered in India and has 'to walk' there; my mother was murdered in England and has 'to walk' there, and I am left an orphan ghost in America with no one to take care of me," and the baby ghost began to cry.

"Whist! whist! Don't cry," said the kind-hearted man. "Don't cry, an' we will try to fix up something for ye. Can't ye sleep?"

"Ess," replied the ghost, calmed by his words and dropping back into baby language. "Ess, in the daytime."

"Well, suppose we fit up a noice little room wid a bed in it, couldn't ye git along doorin' th' noight alone?"

"No, no. I want to be with the babies. I'm a baby myself."

Well, they kept it up all night without coming to an agreement, Mr. Mulligan making offers and the baby ghost finding excuses, so that by morning the former was too tired to work and too nervous to sleep. As a final resort he called upon Mr. Otto. His manner was not quite so hilarious as usual, but he did not forget his customary politeness.

"An' how did ye rest, Mr. Otto?" he asked.

"Very well, indeed, Mr. Mulligan, and I must thank you for it. Your advice was good. The ghost hasn't been in the house for two days."

"Indade, an' Oi'm delighted to hear it. But O'im sorry, too."

"Why so?" asked Mr. Otto in surprise.

"Because that same ghost has come to live wid me. It doesn't cost much for board, but Oi wouldn't room it for a fortune, not if Oi had a palace an' rooms to throw away. Indeed an' Oi don't know phat to do."

"With you, is it? Well, well. What made it go to you?"

"Oi can't say, but Oi'm thinking it has a likin' for me youngest gurl, Maggie, (ah, she's a swate crature). But Oi can't stand it! And the thing has promised to sthay wid me all me life and go into th' spirit world wid me."

"You won't mind it so much, then."

"Thrue for you, Mr. Otto. But how'm Oi to git along in th' meantime?"

"I tell you what, I will go over to your house to-night, and we will try to induce the thing to go over to England to its mother."

"Oi always sed yer honor had a clear head. Oi'll be expectin's ye."

That night, according to promise, Mr. Otto passed at the Mulligan residence, and prompt on time the spectre appeared.

After a very polite salutation on the part of Mr. Mulligan, Mr. Otto asked the ghost if it did not think it would like to see its mother, and if so, how it would like a trip across the water to England.

The ghost said that was just what it would like to do.

"Then ye shall start to-morrow," cried Mr. Mulligan impetuously.

"Who will go with me?"

"Who will go wid you?" said the astonished man. "Why, you will go alone, of course."

"I'm afraid to go alone."

And there they had to leave it.

AND DID Mr. Mulligan have to be haunted all the rest of his life by the baby ghost?

Oh, no; he got rid of it.

How?

He engaged steerage passage and took it over to England himself.

21: The Telephone Talks

Peter Cheyney

1896-1951

In: *Calling Mr Callaghan*, 1953

CALLAGHAN sat at the corner table in the deserted bar of the Blue Jay Club. His chair was tilted backwards against the wall. In front of him his third whisky and soda stood on the table. He looked up casually as the ponderous form of his assistant, Windemere Nikolls, came through the doorway, threaded its way between the tables.

Callaghan said: "Well, Windy?"

Nikolls sat down on a chair opposite Callaghan. He eyed the whisky and soda enviously. He said: "Look, believe it or not, we got some business."

"No?" said Callaghan. "At eight o'clock at night?"

"Yeah," said Nikolls. "I was just leaving the office an' she comes in. Boy— is she a babe! She's lovely. She's got a skin like grade A milk. She's a blonde— a real one— with the bluest sorta eyes that make you go all funny inside. An' does she know how to dress—"

Callaghan interrupted casually. He said: "She seems a considerable sort of girl. What does she want?"

Nikolls said: "I wouldn't know. But she needs a detective. She wouldn't talk to me. She wants to see you."

Callaghan asked: "Where is she now?"

Nikolls said: "She's gone off some place. She wanted to stick around in the waitin' room, but I wouldn't have that. I said maybe I could put my finger on you, that if I could maybe you'd come back to the office and see her at half past eight. I said she'd better come back then."

Callaghan nodded. He said: "All right."

Nikolls asked: "You gonna see her?"

Callaghan said: "Perhaps. Perhaps not. But you can go off, Windy. Come in at ten o'clock to-morrow moming."

"O.K.," said Nikolls. He went away.

Callaghan drank the whisky and soda slowly. Then he tilted his chair back against the wall again. He looked at his wristwatch. It was five past eight. He got up, put on his black soft hat, went out of the bar.

At twenty past eight, Callaghan unlocked the door of the outer office, crossed the room and entered his private oflice. He had time to switch on the lights, help himself to a cigarette from the silver box on the table, when the

telephone jangled. Callaghan picked it up. A harsh staccato voice said: "Is that Callaghan Investigations?"

Callaghan said: "Yes."

"Are you Callaghan?" asked the voice.

Callaghan said: "I'm Mr. Callaghan. What's your trouble?"

The voice said: "I haven't got any trouble. The trouble's all yours. You've either had a visit, or you're going to have a visit— from my wife— Mrs. Raven. You can't mistake her," the voice continued sarcastically, "she's very beautiful, But my advice to you, Callaghan— or Mister Callaghan if you prefer that— is not to take anything she says too seriously. She has a very vivid imagination. In fact her name ought to be Ananias, not Isobella."

Callaghan said: "Thank you for nothing. Is that all?"

The voice said: "Yes, that's all. I hope it's enough."

Callaghan said amiably: "Thank you for calling through. And nuts to you!"

He hung up the receiver with a jerk just as the outer office door bell rang.

THE WOMAN sat in the big leather armchair opposite the desk. Slumped back in his chair, Callaghan looked at her sideways through the haze of cigarette smoke. He thought that Nikolls had been right about her. She was beautiful, exquisitely turned out. Her furs were expensive, and the one hand not hidden by the small muff she carried, was small, white and artistic.

He said: "Well, Mrs. Raven?"

She spread her hands despairingly. Callaghan thought she was very beautiful. And her eyes were piteous— a woman who had been hurt badly, he thought.

She said: "I'm afraid it's the usual story, Mr. Callaghan, with, possibly, a slight variation. I have been married for eighteen months. I married my husband because I was practically forced into it by my people, both of whom have since died. Well, life hasn't been easy."

Callaghan said: "No, married life isn't easy sometimes. That's practically the first thing a private detective learns."

She went on: "I've stuck it as long as I could. Well, two or three months ago something happened."

Callaghan said: "I can guess. You fell in love with somebody else."

She nodded. "I fell in love with somebody else. Can you understand that, Mr. Callaghan?"

Callaghan said: "I can understand most things. All right, so you're in love with another man. Go on, Mrs. Raven."

She said: "My only other friend in the world besides this man is my uncle. Two or three months ago I went to him and told him the whole story. He was

sympathetic, but he did not believe it would be a good thing for me to break up my marriage. He believed that if my husband and I went on for a little longer we might straighten out our differences. He said that if we tried it for another six months— if I would promise not to see this man for six months— he would give my husband and myself five thousand pounds each, with which, as he put it, to begin life afresh."

Callaghan said: "I see. Well, is it worth the five thousand pounds you get if you go on living with your husband, Mrs. Raven?"

She said: "No. But I wanted the money, so I agreed. But I'm afraid I've fallen down on the job. I've continued to live with my husband, but I see the man whom I love. Oh, don't think there's anything wrong in it. We just have tea or something like that in a public restaurant. We feel we must see each other."

Callaghan said: "In other words you're trying to have it both ways?"

Her shoulders drooped. She said: "Can't you understand, Mr. Callaghan?"

Callaghan said: "I understand. Well?"

She said: "Mr. Callaghan, my husband is plotting something. I don't know what it is. I'm perfectly certain that he knows nothing of these clandestine meetings, but he suspects. He's a strange, odd man. I don't think he's. quite sane. He said the other day that he was perfectly certain I was only staying with him until I got that five thousand pounds, that once I'd got it I'd leave him."

Callaghan said: "He's right, isn't he?"

She said miserably: "Yes. He's right."

Callaghan said: "Well, you can't expect him to like it, can you?"

"No." She shook her head.

He asked: "Mrs. Raven, what's worrying you?"

She said slowly: "This: he said there was one way that he could stop me getting that money— one way."

Callaghan asked: "I wonder what that would be?"

She said: "I believe he's going to commit suicide. I believe that's what he meant. He thinks if he did that I shouldn't get the money."

Callaghan said: "Maybe you're right. He's not awfully fond of you, is he? He doesn't sound an awfully attractive sort of person."

She looked at him. Her cornflower blue eyes wide with amazement. She said: "What do you mean?"

Callaghan said: "He was on the telephone to me a few minutes ago. He said some very uncomplimentary things about you."

She asked tremulously: "And did you believe them?"

Callaghan said: "Now that I've seen you I can't say I do. By the way, how did he know you were coming here?"

She said: "That's my fault, I'm afraid. Two or three days ago a friend of mine mentioned your name. She said you were the best private detective in London, that you were clever and that underneath that very tough exterior you were sometimes kind. To-day I felt quite desperate about things. I made up my mind to telephone you. I went to the telephone in the hall, found your name in the book. Then I heard his key in the lock. I hung up the telephone, went away. But he's very clever, Mr. Callaghan, I've a habit that a lot of women have of scoring under the name I want to ring with my fingernail. Foolishly when I left the telephone I didn't close the book. There's not the slightest doubt that he looked through the names, found the fingernail mark under your name and put two and two together. He's that sort of man."

Callaghan said: "I see. Well, Mrs. Raven, and what do I do?"

She said pleadingly: "Mr. Callaghan, I want you to keep my husband under observation. I want you to see what he does, where he goes. I'm frightened. Perhaps -I can see you again in a few days and you can tell me what you think?"

Callaghan said: "Do you mean you would like me to go and talk to your husband, Mrs. Raven?"

She said: "If you thought it would do any good. If you would."

"All right," said Callaghan. "What's his address?"

"It's in St. John's Wood," she said. She gave him the address.

Callaghan said: "And the other man— the man you love— where does he live?"

She answered: "His name's Eustace Lyster. He lives in Kensington at 323 Alfred Place. But…"

Callaghan said: "It's all right. I shan't bother him. But I like to have all the facts. Come and see me in two or three days' time. Maybe I'll have some news for you."

She said: "Mr. Callaghan, I can't tell you how grateful I am."

He got up. He said: "I shouldn't think your meeting with your husband to-night would be very pleasant."

She said: "I shan't see him. Luckily I'm not going back home. I'd arranged to stay for a few days with a girl friend at Hampstead. My address will be 14 Towers Road."

Callaghan said: "Well, I'm glad of that. Your husband didn't sound too good-natured to me. Good-night, Mrs. Raven."

He showed her to the door.

SOMEWHERE in the neighborhood a clock struck ten. The cold had increased and a slight mist was creeping along the deserted street. Callaghan

pushed open the gate of the Raven house in St. John's Wood, walked up the tiled path to the front door. He pressed the bell button, waited. Nothing happened. He stood playing tunes on the bell-push for five minutes, then he took a bunch of keys from his pocket and started work on the door.

Three minutes later he stepped into the hall, closing the door quietly behind him.

A peculiar sense of heat, a rush of warm air, came towards him. At the end of the hallway he could see a gleam of light beneath a door. He crossed the hall, opened the door, stood in the doorway.

The room was small, comfortably furnished. The heat was terrific. A heaped coal fire blazed at one end of the room, at the other an electric fire burned. Slumped beside the armchair in front of the fire was the figure of a man. An automatic pistol lay close to his right hand. The carpet was soaked with blood.

Callaghan crossed the room, stood looking at the body. It seemed as if Raven had carried out his threat.

He went out of the room, across the hall, took the latch off the front door, went out into the street. He walked until he found a telephone box a hundred yards from the house. He called Nikolls. He said: "Listen, Windy, I'm at a house called Templeton just off Acacia Road, St. John's Wood. Get the car and get out here as quickly as you can. Bring a fingerprint outfit with you. Get a move on."

Nikolls said: "O.K."

Callaghan hung up. He went back to the house, stood in front of the fire, moodily smoking. At a quarter to eleven Nikolls said: "If there were any fingerprints on the butt of that gun, I've got 'em. But they'll be his, won't they? He shot himself— look at the powder burns round the wound."

Callaghan said: "Perhaps— perhaps not."

"All right," said Nikolls. "Maybe not. So who else done it— Mrs. Raven's boy friend, hey?"

"Why not?" said Callaghan. "It would be interesting to know what he was doing to-night."

Nikolls scratched his head ruminatively. "What the hell?" he said. "This guy threatened to commit suicide. It looks like a suicide."

"Perhaps it is," said Callaghan. He picked up the automatic pistol with his gloved hand, took out his handkerchief, wiped the gun butt.

Nikolls looked at him in amazement. He said: "Look, Slim, what is this—you get me round here to take the prints off this gun and then you clean it up? You know what you're doing— you're destroyin' evidence."

Callaghan said casually: "That's what I thought. Let's go."

They went out of the house.

Down the street Callaghan paused at the call box, went inside. He telephoned Whitehall 1212.

When Scotland Yard answered he asked for the information room. He was put through quickly. "He said: "There's a dead man in a ground floor sitting-room at a house called Templeton, just off the Acacia Road, St. John's Wood. I think he's shot himself. I thought you might like to know."

The soft voice of the policewoman on the switchboard said: "Thank you very much. And who are you, please?"

Callaghan said: "Santa Claus." He hung up.

When he came out of the call box, Nikolls said: "Look, if you're right, this boy friend of Mrs. Raven's is a tough egg."

Callaghan said: "He might be. I'll go and see him to-morrow. It would be amusing if he hadn't got an alibi for this evening. And by the way, Windy, I'm a little bit worried about Mrs. Raven. She's staying with a girl friend at 14 Towers Road, Hampstead. Just keep an eye on her for the next day or two. I don't want anything to happen to her."

AT ELEVEN o'clock next morning Callaghan went into a sitting-room at 323 Alfred Place, Kensington. Lyster came towards him, his hand outstretched.

"I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Callaghan," he said. "Isobella told me she was going to see you to ask your advice about her husband. I suppose you've come to see me about that."

Callaghan said: "Yes and no. Tell me something, Mr. Lyster. What were you doing last night between half past eight and ten o'clock?"

Lyster said: "Well, I'd made up my mind I was going to have a show-down with Raven. I'd made up my mind I was going to tell him exactly what I thought about him and his treatment of his wife. I walked out to his place in St. John's Wood, but when I got there I changed my mind. I just walked around for a bit and came home."

Callaghan said: "I see. You didn't take an automatic pistol with you, did you?"

"What!" exclaimed Lyster. Then he eyes moved to a desk across the room. He said: "Whatever do you mean?"

Callaghan said: "Raven either shot himself last night or somebody shot him. It looked like suicide. Perhaps you'd like to examine that desk you were just looking at and see if your gun's there."

Lyster crossed the room with quick strides. He opened the drawer. He said: "Good heavens— the pistol's gone."

Callaghan raised his eyebrows. He said: "So the pistol's gone. And you went for a walk last night to St. John's Wood to see Raven. But you didn't go into the house. Well, I hope the police believe your story, Lyster."

Lyster said: "But they must believe it. They…"

Callaghan said: "Take it easy." He held out his cigarette case in a gloved hand towards Lyster. He said: "Have a cigarette and relax. If you didn't do it, you'll be all right."

Lyster took the case, opened it, took a cigarette, lit it. His fingers were trembling. He handed the case back.

Callaghan said: "Well, I'll be on my way."

BACK IN THE oflice he handed the cigarette case to Nikolls. He said: "Check the prints on that case, Windy. They're Lyster's."

Nikolls answered: "If they're the same as the one's I took off the butt of that gun he's the guy."

Callaghan grinned at him. "That's right, Windy," he said. "Now get going."

OUTSIDE the evening rain beat- on the window pane. Callaghan sat relaxed in his office chair, a cigarette hanging from one corner of his mouth. He was playing a tattoo on his blotting pad with his fingers.

Effie Thompson came in. She said: "Mr. Callaghan, Mrs. Raven is here."

Callaghan said: "Show her in." He got to his feet as the woman came into the office. She wore a black coat and skirt underneath her fur coat, and a small, very smart, tailor-made hat.

Callaghan said: "I think you look wonderful. Won't you sit down?"

She sat down in the chair opposite his desk. He went on: "I'm sorry about your husband, Mrs. Raven."

She looked at him. She said: "Are you surprised? I told you he intended to commit suicide."

Callaghan nodded. He lit a cigarette. He said: "Yes. That's too bad. That means to say you don't get the five thousand pounds from your uncle."

She shook her head. She said: "No." She smiled at him. "I've been lucky. I saw him this morning. And he realizes what an outsider my husband was. He's given me the money. I'm glad because now I can pay you a proper fee, Mr. Callaghan."

Callaghan said: "That's marvellous." There was a pause, then he went on: "You know, Mrs. Raven, your husband didn't commit suicide."

She looked at him in astonishment. "No?"

"No," repeated Callaghan. "I went round to the St. John's Wood house after our first interview. I found him lying by the side of the armchair in front of the fire. I must say it looked like suicide."

She said: "It was suicide, surely."

Callaghan raised his eyebrows. "You really think so?" he said. He went on: "I got my assistant Nikolls round and we took the fingerprints off the gun. They were the prints of your boy friend Mr. Lyster. If it had been suicide they should have been the prints of your husband. They weren't. And Lyster had no alibi. He told me that he went round that evening to see your husband to have a showdown with him, that he changed his mind and went away. Incidentally, the gun belonged to Lyster."

She said :"My God! So Eustace killed him."

Callaghan said casually: "Yes, that's what the police would have thought, but I didn't see why they should. I didn't think it was a good idea. You see, Mrs. Raven, you're my client and I knew you were in love with Lyster. I knew you wouldn't want him pulled in on a murder charge."

She looked at him steadily. She said: "So…?"

Callaghan said: "So I cleaned the prints off the butt of the gun."

She said: "Wasn't that an extraordinary thing to do. Surely there ought to have been some prints on the gun. Somebody must have held it."

Callaghan said: "No, the prints of the person who shot your husband never appeared on it."

She moved a little in her chair. She said: "Exactly what do you mean?"

Callaghan said: "I mean you killed Raven." He looked at her. He was smiling.

She said: "Mr. Callaghan, I think you must be mad."

"No," said Callaghan. "I'm not mad— merely intelligent. You see, I had an idea that I'd like to keep an eye on you, so when I left the house after I'd found. your husband's body, and we'd taken the prints off the gun, I got Nikolls to keep an eye on you. He's been on your tail for the last two days. He knows about the gentleman you've been meeting—the man you're really in love with."

She looked at Callaghan. Her eyes were like burning coals.

He said: "You killed Raven before you even came to see me. Quite a clever idea, you know."

She laughed— a brittle laugh. She said: "Really, Mr. Callaghan, having regard to the fact that my husband telephoned you and warned you against me just before I came into your office, it would be difficult to know how I could have killed him."

Callaghan said: "Nevertheless, you killed him. You see, he didn't telephone me. The man who telephoned me was the man you've been visiting during the

last two days— not Lyster. Lyster was just your stooge." He went on: "About seven o'clock on the night that you came to see me, you had a talk with your husband in the sitting-room at St. John's Wood. You had stolen the automatic pistol from Lyster's desk, but you never handled it with your hands. You were wearing gloves. You carried it inside that muff that you had on the night you came to see me.

"Well… you went up near to your husband. You put the muff close to his head, and you shot him. You held the gun so close that there'd be powder marks round the wound. Then you put the gun by his side. The only fingerprints on it were Lyster's. You knew that. I rather think you encouraged Lyster to go and have an interview with your husband that night. He was stupid enough to go, but he didn't see your husband because he couldn't get in. He rang the doorbell but nobody answered. "Then you came to see me. You knew I wasn't in my office. You'd watched me leave. You came afterwards. You sent my assistant out to find me. You'd probably seen me go into the bar round the corner. You waited outside in the darkness. When you saw me come back to the office you telephoned your boy friend No. 2, and he rang through pretending to be your husband. He warned me against you— a very clever scheme."

He yawned. "That's why you made the fire up and turned on the electric fire in the St. John's Wood sitting-room before you left, so that the body should still be warm, so that rigor mortis wouldn't set in, so that the police doctor couldn't say within an hour or two as to what time Raven was actually killed."

He looked at her. She said nothing. Callaghan went on: "A marvellous idea. You got rid of Raven. Lyster would have been picked up for the murder if the police had seen his prints on the gun, if they'd known he'd been round to the St. John's Wood house on that night. And you'd have got your five thousand pounds and the man you want. As it is…" He shrugged his shoulders.

There was a knock at the door. Effie Thompson came in. She said: "Mr. Callaghan, the police car's here. Detective-Inspector Gringall is waiting outside."

Callaghan got up. He said: "Well, they've come for you, Mrs. Raven."

She said in a hard voice: "You're damned clever, Callaghan. But it was a good scheme."

Callaghan said: "Not too bad. Somebody once said that the criminal always makes a silly mistake. You made it."

She smiled. She looked very beautiful. She said: "Tell me my mistake, Mr. Callaghan."

Callaghan said: "At your first interview I asked you how your husband knew you were coming to see me. You told me you'd left the telephone book open,

that you'd scored underneath my name, with your fingernail, that he would realize you'd been me." He stubbed out his cigarette on the ashtray.

She said: "Well…?"

Callaghan said: "Well, you see, Mrs. Raven, my telephone number isn't in the telephone book."

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22: The Rope

Peter Cheyney

The Wireless Weekly 28 June 1939

AT FIRST he had simply played with the idea. Like everyone else, he read dozens of thrillers and police stories of murderers who'd got away with it or nearly got away with it, and it seemed to him that the discovery and arrest of these murderers was, in most cases, due to their own carelessness in their modus operandi. He thought too that murderers were always in too much of a hurry and rather vague in planning their murder. They missed some essential point or they were careless in the execution of the deed.

Getlin made up his mind that he would take lots of time over his murder. He knew just how he was going to do it.

GETLIN and Varne had been friends for years. Everybody in the small provincial town in which they lived believed that the friendship was of the David and Jonathan type. People believed that Getlin had spent the last three or four years trying to get Varne to give up drinking. What they didn't know was that it was the fact that Getlin had stolen Varne's girl years ago that had started Tommy Varne on the downward path. But Tommy had never told anyone the truth. Although he professed to be doing his utmost to stop Varne drinking, Getlin in fact encouraged him to do so. but always in circumstances in which no one would suspect the process.

Originally, when Varne had been indulging in one of his weekly bouts of alcohol, he had been very easy to handle, and it was during these periods that Getlin had induced him to advance sums of money. Unfortunately, as Tommy got himself more and more into the toils of liquor, his temper did not improve. Now the time had come when he wanted his money back.

He had gone so far as to write a note to Getlin to tell him that he was sorry to have to threaten an old friend, but unless the £700 which Getlin had had from him over the last three years was repaid promptly there was going to be trouble.

In addition to all this, Getlin disliked Varne. He had always disliked him. Underneath the superficialities of their reputed friendship there had been concealed in the breast of Getlin a definite hatred for his friend.

After a bit the idea of murdering Varne seemed quite easy, and, in fact, rather amusing. Getlin knew just how he was going to do it.

But no one would ever believe that Tommy Varne had been murdered. They would believe that he had committed suicide, and the greatest support to that obvious theory would come from Varne himself, who, during his bouts of

drinking, had informed all and sundry that he was fed up with life and would probably finish himself off one day during one of the fits of intense depression which so often came upon him.

The first thing that Getlin had done, the first move he had made, in his well-thought-out murder plot, was at the Christmas before— ten months ago—when he had presented Tommy with a new dressing-gown. The dressing-gown was one of those heavy wool affairs with a very thick strong silk cord.

Getlin knew that Varne was much too lazy to bother about tying a dressing-gown cord, that he would pull it out of its loops and throw it in the corner of his chaotic bedroom. He did just that thing, and it was Getlin who picked up the cord one day with a laugh at Tommy's untidiness and hung it on the hook behind the bedroom door. It had remained there ever since.

VARNE lived alone in a small house on the outskirts of the town. A woman came in daily to clean up the place. She arrived usually at 8 o'clock in the morning and left about 5. She had a key to the front door. Varne, of course, had his key and Getlin had a key which Varne had given to him. He said that he liked Getlin to be able to come in any time he wanted. The fact that Getlin had this key was known, but he considered that this would have no effect on his plot. Varne went on a drinking bout practically every week-end. He would start off when he closed his business on Friday night— a business which was losing money steadily owing to his neglect. By Saturday night he was usually "a case."

At 11 o'clock he would leave the local hostelry, stagger off to a "club" of which he was a member until 12, and when he left after that time he was quite stupid and hardly conscious of anything. He would stagger away down the street towards his house. Sometimes he was so drunk that he could not insert the key in the lock. He'd often been found next morning lying across the doorstep.

GETLIN realised that the time had come for him to act. Varne had been especially difficult of late, and was drinking more heavily than ever. During the previous three or four days he had told a dozen people that he was sick of life. Getlin decided that the time was ripe for Varne to "commit suicide."

It was Saturday night and it was the thirteenth of the month. With his tongue in his cheek. Getlin told himself that it was going to be a very unlucky day for Varne.

At 7 o'clock Getlin told his house-keeper that he had a bad headache and that he was going to lie down for an hour or so before going over to Thetterley. He often took a walk to Thetterley on a Saturday night, the journey usually taking him about three hours. Sometimes he did it in two hours and three-

quarters. and he invariably took the single-track paths or roads across the common. It was seldom that he met anyone on the walk out or the return.

Of course, he did not intend to go to Thetterley. But he knew that his housekeeper went to bed at 10.30. She would probably be asleep when he returned.

Getlin got up at 9 o'clock and washed. He put a pair of gloves in his pocket, put on his cap and took the ash stick which he used when walking, and set out.

He walked down the main street, across the bridge and in the direction of the common. He felt quite happy and perfectly certain that everything was going to be quite successful.

At 10 o'clock he struck away to the right, off the path, and began to walk across country. He was walking towards the straggling street in which was Varne's house.

At 11.15, having made a half-circle round the town, he stood in the coppice on the side of Mell's Hill. Below him, right at the end of the straggling street, was Varne's place.

Keeping in the shadow of the hedges, Getlin began to move in the direction of the house. And his luck was in. He passed nobody. Saw no one.

At 11.30 he quietly inserted his key— he had put on his gloves first— in Varne's front door and let himself in. He listened for a moment, but. as he expected, there was nothing to be heard. The house was empty.

Getlin stood in the dark hall for a moment smiling to himself, then he began to mount the stairs to Varne's bedroom. He selected this room to wait in because through the window, which looked along the street, he would be able to see Varne returning. He would be able to ascertain the exact condition of the man he proposed to murder.

He sat down in the chair beside the window in the dark room. He kept his gloves on. He was not taking any chances of finger-prints.

After a while he thought of something. He walked gingerly across the room in the darkness and felt behind the door to see if the dressing-gown rope was still there. It was.

He smiled again and returned to his vigil by the window.

IT was twelve-thirty when Getlin saw Varne returning home. Varne was in a bad way. He was staggering badly. Once he fell over and took two or three minutes to get to his feet. After this he reeled a few more steps and then leaned up against a wall.

Getlin told himself that Tommy Varne must have been drinking heavily. Varne, having pulled himself together sufficiently to leave the support of the wall, was negotiating the twenty-five yards which remained between himself

and his front door. He was fumbling in his waistcoat pocket for the key. He could not even find the pocket. He stood there —now only some fifteen yards from the front door, trying to find that elusive pocket.

Getlin thought quickly. He had foreseen such a possibility as this. He had foreseen that Varne might be too intoxicated to open the front door, and might, as he had done before, go to sleep on the doorstep. This did not suit Getlin at all.

He crossed the room, opened the door, descended the stairs, tiptoed to the front door and unlatched it. Then he waited in the dark hall. A minute or so later Varne cannoned against the door, which opened. He fell into the hallway. Getlin very quietly stepped up to the door and closed it. Then he took Varne by the arm and helped him up the stairs to the bedroom.

He propped Varne up against the wall just inside the room, walked across to the other side of the room and brought over the four-foot lounge. He placed the lounge in front of the door about two feet away from it.

Then he took hold of Varne. Who was still leaning— quite stupidly— against the wall, and pushed him on to the lounge. Varne with a hiccup subsided at full length, breathing heavily, almost unconscious.

Systematically Getlin searched him. He wanted to find the I.O.U. for the £700, which he knew Varne carried in his letter case. He found it. He found the letter case in Varne's breast pocket. Getlin took the case out into the passage and examined it by the light of his cigarette lighter. He found the I.O.U. and put it into his coat pocket. Then he went back and replaced the letter case in Varne's coat.

He smiled to himself in the darkness. Everything was going as planned.

He moved behind the lounge seat to the door and found the dressing-gown rope. He tied one end of it securely round the clothes hook. He threw the other end over the back of the lounge seat.

He opened the door so as to allow the cord to hang slackly. Then he tied the other end of the silk rope round Varne's neck. Varne, snoring drunkenly, made no movement. Then came the big job. Getlin, using all his strength, raised, pulled and pushed Varne into a kneeling position on the lounge. Then keeping the door at the back of the lounge half open with his foot, he pushed the lounge back until it was almost against the open door.

Now Varne was slumping forward in a kneeling position on the lounge, the noose around his neck. Getlin knew that when he sidled through the door and closed it behind him Varne would fall forward. He would not be able to move his bent knees from the lounge. He would strangle inside two minutes.

But when he was found he would present the picture of a suicide, the suicide of a drunken man who had pushed the lounge up to the door, put the noose round his neck and thrown himself forward.

Getlin took hold of the door with both hands. He pushed himself through the aperture into the passage. There he transferred both hands to the door handle his side and, exerting all his strength, dragged the door shut. He knew by the pressure from the other side that his plan had succeeded.

He went down the stairs. Opened the front door an inch and looked out. The street was deserted. Getlin sidled out into the shadows. All he had to do now was to burn the I.O.U.

IT was ten o'clock when Getlin's housekeeper knocked at the door of his bedroom and told him that a Police-Inspector was downstairs and wanted to see him as soon as possible.

Getlin said he would be down in a few minutes. He wasn't at all surprised. He knew just what had happened.

Varne's daily woman had arrived and found the "suicide." When she had tried to open the door of Varne's bedroom, the weight on the dressing-gown cord had pulled the door handle out of her hand. She had gone into the room, seen what was left of Varne and gone rushing round to the police station.

And, of course, the police had come to Getlin to make the usual routine enquiries from him, because he was Tommy Varne's nearest and best friend and because Tommy had no relatives. This was going to be easy!

He dressed himself, and. whistling a tune— because, of course, he had to be terribly surprised and shocked at the news, went downstairs.

THE Inspector looked rather odd and spoke coldly. Getlin was surprised at the tone of his voice.

"Mr. Getlin," said the Inspector. "Thomas Varne was murdered last night. We found him hanging from the hook on his bedroom door this morning. He was hanging over the edge of a lounge seat that had been shoved in front of the door.

"The Police Surgeon has done an autopsy. He says that there was much too good for a drunken man for him to have tied the knot on the door and the knot of the noose round his neck. The two knots were much too god for a drunken man. The surgeon doubts if Varne could have even moved the lounge across, but he might have been able to do that."

Getlin began to speak, but the Inspector interrupted him.

"I shouldn't say anything yet, Mr. Getlin," he said, quietly. Then he went on:

"There are only three people with keys to Varne's house," he said. "You see, the place wasn't broken into. Varne had one, his daily woman had one and, we're told, you had one."

He paused for a moment.

"The daily woman was over at Grantstone— she slept over at her sister's place there last night," he said

Getlin's throat began to feel odd. The muscles seemed to be contracting. His voice sounded strange when he began to talk.

"Well..." he said. "What of it? Varne had his own key...?"

"No, he hadn't," said the Inspector. "He dropped it in the street last night. Somebody found it and brought it into the Police Station at eleven o'clock. I was on duty at the time. I've had it ever since."

He put on his uniform cap.

"That leaves you, Mr. Getlin," he said. "Will you come along to the station, and," he went on, "I warn you that anything you say from now on may be used in evidence against you..."

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23: Fast Work

Peter Cheyney

The Wireless Weekly, 27 April 1940

Mr. ALONZO GREEN awoke at ten o'clock, screwed his eye-glass into his left eye; appreciated the sunshine which emerged from the curtains of his bedroom in Sussex Place. He ruminated for a few minutes on the mentality of the world in general and detective officers in particular, after which he rang for his tea and the newspapers.

The story was plastered on the front pages: "South Kensington Robbery— £40,000 Pearl Necklace Stolen. Thieves leave empty jewel-case on library table," the headlines ran.

"Telephone through to Scotland Yard— ask for information," he told the enterprising Frayne when that worthy answered the bell. "Find but who is handling this Jewel Robbery case—you'll probably find it's Latimer. If they want to know who you are, tell them that you are speaking for your master, Mr. Estello Marquand; but don't give them an address. Understand?"

Frayne grinned.

"O.K. chief," he said.

Mr. Green drank his tea, arose, bathed, shaved and arrayed himself in a suit of tasteful grey with brown shoes and a brown tie. He then went into his sitting-room and took the cover off a portable typewriter. He selected a sheet of expensive grey and black notepaper with the initials H.E.M. neatly embossed thereon, adjusted his eye-glass and waited.

Frayne came in.

"It's Latimer all right," he said. "Information at the Yard asked who I was. I said I was butler to Mr. Marquand and rang off quickly."

Alonzo Green nodded.

"I'm writing a letter to Latimer," he said. "It will be finished in twenty minutes. Then I want you to take it to the District Messenger office in Piccadilly and instruct them to send it by hand, immediately, to Scotland Yard. When you've done that, start packing. We shall be leaving at midday."

Frayne disappeared.

Green lit a cigarette. Then he wrote this letter, addressed to Chief-Detective Inspector Fergus Latimer, New Scotland Yard:

"Dear Inspector Latimer, —I feel I must write and tell you about this stolen necklace which isn't stolen at all. At the present moment it is quite safe in the drawer of my dressing table, but as I have no doubt you are rather excited about this so-called robbery, I feel I should tell you all about it.

"My name is Marquand— Henry Estello Marquand. I am in this country on holiday and previously worked for the Dettner Electric Safe Company in Montreal, which, having regard to everything, is rather a joke.

"Well, last night I went to a theatre. I go to a show two or three times a week and afterwards. I always stop at the South Kensington coffee stall for a final cup of coffee. I like watching the types that gather there, and I think I may say that I am both well-known and, I hope, popular there.

"Last night when I arrived there was only one other person at the stall— a woman. And what a woman! I've travelled quite a bit and I've seen plenty of females who could hit you for six to the boundary, but this one was the best ever...

"She was just above average height, slender, a decided brunette with amazing turquoise eyes. She was superbly dressed, and I could see that her evening kit had cost A lot of money. But she looked scared stiff.

"Beautiful women have always interested me and I like talking to them. So I passed her the sugar and suggested that she put her tea-cup down on the counter because her hand was trembling so much that she'd upset it in a minute. I said she looked very distressed and asked if I could be of any assistance.

"She began to cry. In between sobs she said that I couldn't do anything for her. That it was all quite hopeless and that she wished she were dead.

"I made her drink her tea and then I took her by the arm and suggested that we went for a little walk, away from the coffee stall, and that she should tell me about it— you know the old 'trouble shared is a trouble halved' stuff. She fell for this and we went off.

"Walking through Courtfield Gardens she spilled the beans. From under her cloak she produced a jewel case and showed it to me. Inside was the pearl necklace!

"Well, the long and short of it was that she'd been blackmailed into assisting in the burglary. Her job was to take the pearls out of the country to-day and meet the people who'd stolen them in Hamburg. She said that the burglary had been done while the Glenisdale family were at the opera. She said she'd lost her nerve and couldn't go through with it; that she never had been a crook and didn't want to start— you can imagine how she went on.

"Then I asked her what I could do for her. She pulled up dead and pressed the jewel case in my hands and begged me to go round to the Glenisdale House and return the pearls. Before I could say a word she turned and ran like a hare.

"Well, there I was. I couldn't run after her— I hate hurrying— and I thought the best thing I could do would be to walk round to Lord Glenisdale's house

and hand back the pearls. I knew the house was somewhere in the neighborhood.

"I met the policeman on the Gloucester Road beat and asked him where the Glenisdale house was. I was a bit surprised when, after he'd told me, he said that the Glenisdale family were away until to-day. Then I began to get suspicious and a funny idea came into my head. Supposing the whole thing was a frame up!

"However, I was amused at the adventure and I went round to the house and rang the bell. In a minute the door was opened by a perfectly turned out butler, and when I told him that I wanted to see Lord Glenisdale and return some pearls he nearly had a fit.

"However, he showed me along into the library, and there was my lord, smoking a cigar, and in the comer of the room was a safe— and it was a Dettner electric safe!

"I told the old boy the story and he was adequately surprised. He said that the job must have been done while they had been out at the opera and that the servants had heard nothing. I said the proper things and handed over the jewel case. He then started fiddling with the safe and after a minute rang for the butler and asked him if he could find the paper with the combination on it as he'd forgotten what it was.

"The butler went off and came back after a few minutes and said that he was sorry but he couldn't find the combination and he thought Lady Glenisdale had it, and she was still out.

"Then I knew it was a frame-up. It flashed into my head that these crooks had known that the family were away; that they could easily get into the house; but that they couldn't get the safe open. They'd found out about me. They knew I'd worked for the Dettner Company and knew the master combination. They knew that I went to the coffee stall after the theatre, and the whole business of the charming lady and her sob story had been a frame-up. It struck me like a brick that the pearl necklace she'd given me was a fake, and that the idea was that I'd open the safe for them so that they could steal the real one!

"I did. I told the old boy that I'd been employed by the Dettner Company; that I knew the master combination. He was agreeably surprised. Then I picked up the fake jewel case off the table, turned my back on him, opened the safe and had a quick look. There, sure as shooting, at the back of the safe was an exact replica of the jewel case in my hand.

"I was very quick. I knocked the electric table lamp on the table at my elbow over and while 'my lord' was fumbling in the darkness picking it up, I snatched the real pearls from their case, put them in my coat pocket, put the

fake pearls in the case in the safe, and casually, as he got the light going, put the empty case back on the table. I knew they wouldn't bother to open that. Then I turned around, leaving the safe door open, and after saying I was glad to have been of use and being profusely thanked and given a drink, I left— with the real Glenisdale pearls under my coat.

"When I got outside I looked for a policeman. Of course, there wasn't one.

"Suddenly I heard a noise and looked back. There, outside the house, was a car, and while I watched I saw the fake butler and the fake Lord Glenisdale get in and drive off. And the car was driven by the woman!

"But as 'Lord Glenisdale' got into the car, I suddenly realised that I had seen him somewhere before.

"I am very interested in crooks. I keep a cutting book about them. When I got home I looked it up, and there sure as a gun was a picture I had cut out of the *Sunday Graphic* two years before; a picture of 'Slim' Peters, Jimmy Fells and Marie Cartoule. They had just been arrested in Paris on suspicion of stealing a diamond necklace, and I recognised Marie Cartoule as the woman who had waited for me at the coffee stall and put up that splendid act for my benefit!

"I am writing this note from my rooms in Sussex Place, and I am going to send it round to you by hand immediately. Then after lunch I am going to wander round to Lord Glenisdale's place— the policeman said they would be back today— and hand over the real jewels to him. I shall be there about two-thirty o'clock. If you like to come along and meet me there I'll tell you anything else you want to know.

"Good wishes, Inspector; you ought to be very grateful to me. I have not only saved the necklace, but I have put you on to the three crooks who endeavored to steal it, but of course we must all do our best to help our splendid police force.

"Au revoir.

"Sincerely,

"H. E. Marquand."

NEXT DAY at four o'clock in the afternoon, Chief Detective Inspector Fergus Latimer was delighted to receive a telephone call from the Southampton police. "Slim" Peters, Jimmy Fells, and the woman, Marie Coutoule, had been arrested attempting to board a boat for America. Latimer smiled and caught the next train.

"Slim" Peters looked at him with disgust. "What's the game?" he asked. "What's the pinch for? There's going to be some trouble about this, I can tell you."

"Don't bluff, Slim," said Latimer. "Why don't you make it easy for yourselves. I'm charging you with breaking and entering and attempted robbery. The Glenisdale necklace you've got is the fake one. Mr. Marquand was too clever for you."

Peters grinned.

"I don't know what you're talkin' about," he said. "An' I don't know anything about the Glenisdale necklace or Mr. Marquand— whoever he may be— but then I haven't read the papers. Anyway, Jimmy an' Marie an' I have been stayin' down here for the last five days an' we can prove it, an' how do you like that?"

Latimer checked up. He found what Peters said was true. He didn't like it at all! Back at the police station he looked at Peters glumly.

"Listen, Mr. Latimer," said that worthy, "what's it all about? Somebody has pulled a fast one. Who put you on to us?"

Latimer explained. He told Peters about Mr. Marquand's letter.

Peters broke into a roar of laughter. He continued laughing, and when, eventually, he decided to stop, he addressed Latimer with a certain amount of satisfaction.

"That's Alonzo Green," he said. "He's taken you for a ride, like he took the French police an' the Austrian police for a ride! Don't you get it? He broke into the Glenisdale house. He pinched the real pearls and put the fake necklace in their place. He knew the family was away. Then he went home an' next morning he wrote you that hooey about a woman at the coffee stall under the name of Marquand— an' you fell for it!

"An' then what does he do? He tells you he's goin' to be round there to hand back the necklace at two-thirty o'clock in the afternoon, an' then he'll meet you there. But he don't do it. He goes round there right away, hands old Glenisdale back the necklace an' gets a reward out of the old boy— l bet he got £500— well, what about it?"

Latimer nodded.

"You're dead right, Slim," he said. "When I got round there at three Lord Glenisdale told me he'd been there at twelve o'clock, had pulled a sob-story on the old boy, who'd given him an open cheque for £600—Glenisdale was going to offer a reward of £1,000 anyway."

He sighed heavily.

Peters lit a cigarette.

"I wish I had his brains," he said.

"You got nothin' on him. You couldn't qyen bring a charge. You couldn't prove he broke into that house an' switched the necklaces. You couldn't prove that he didn't think he recognised us as the fake butler, the fake Lord

Glenisdale, and the fake woman at the coffee stall. You couldn't prove that he wrote the letter signed by Marquand.

"He's gone off with £600 an' he's laughin' at you. An' he'll laugh some more when I get through with you for malicious arrest just when we was goin' to America!"

End