PAST MASTERS 189

F Scott Fitzgerald
Edgar Wallace
Irvin S Cobb
Charles Dickens
H De Vere Stacpoole
Melville Davisson Post
Anatole France
James Joyce

and more

PAST MASTERS 189

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: Artistic Expression

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

The Home: an Australian Quarterly, 1 Feb 1938

THE little shop in Dingy Street, with the muslin curtains always looking freshly washed and stiffened, intrigued my curiosity from the first glimpse. It was so futile and feminine.

The owner of the big house whose grounds were now a crowded suburb had named one of the streets after his yacht; and to call one of the off-shooting thoroughfares Dingy Street was a humorous after-thought. Actually it proved a more convenient thoroughfare than the larger road; and time, circumstance and the public idea of the fitness of things made it Dingy Street.

In the midst of the dull street the little new shop stood out strangely with its quaint array of baby clothes, crude paintings on easels, cushions, and articles reminiscent of fashionable crazes of years before— in all the weird collection not enough to make a decent business if such goods were marketable; and amongst them a card indicating that a room was "To Let."

Every time I passed I paused to have a look at the window and wonder about its proprietress. For, of course, it was a proprietress. The signs of that were all over it. I had met so many of the unbusinesslike women who, needing money, and full of the conviction that they are capable of "succeeding in business, had opened up establishments which were equally grotesque in their way, though seldom as mixed. Nearly always these little women, old or young, were bright, likeable creatures, maintaining a steady optimism that assured them they would succeed in time. But invariably the day arrived when the landlord was hard, and the poor little assets vanished.

I considered what sort of a woman it was who had chosen the little shop in Dingy Street for her venture, and the wonder increased as the grotesque but dainty window continued its existence, seemingly untroubled by landlords and other dangers common to all business. The wondering led me into all sorts of excursions into the lands of imagination; but it was always some little, faded woman, intensely eager to welcome any stray customer, but restraining her eagerness to avoid giving the Impression that a customer was a rarity, who rose in my vision. And then, one day I met the shopkeeper by the grace of a sporting-looking man, recognised as a bookmaker, with whom I had had racecourse dealings. I had decided to make the arrival of a baby in the house where I was staying an excuse for a purchase, and met the sporting-looking man on the doorstep.

"D'yer know the party who keeps this place?" he asked, pausing to speak and jerking his head towards the door.

"No," I answered.

"A regular character," he said. "A weird old party. If you're coming in I'll introduce you."

The introduction put me into a state of amazement. Standing behind a counter, which was daintily decorated, like the window, was a man who by no stretch of the imagination could be designated dainty. He was fat and fairly tall, and a little fuzzy hair grew on top of his otherwise bald head. His shirt-sleeves were rolled over massive, if flabby, arms to the elbows, the shirt being by no means clean; his face was calmly benevolent, but it needed a shave. He wore no collar, and, although his waistcoat was fastened, his corpulence had sundered waistcoat from trousers, and in the gap showed the not-clean shirt and the tabs of untidy braces.

"This is Mr. Poison— we call him 'the artist of Dingy Street'," said the sporting man.

"Always pleased to meet a friend of yours, Mr. Keeling," said Poison, holding out his hand.

It was a big and stubby hand; but there was something beautiful in his voice, and it helped to subdue the laughter within me. There was nothing feminine about it, but a quality of remarkable gentleness; and that, incidentally, is not invariably a feminine quality.

"I've gotta pal wants some pitchers for the walls of his 'ouse, so you might as well send 'alf a dozen up —I'll pay the carrier and send you a cheque," said Keeling, offhandedly, as if he was in the habit of ordering pictures on the basis of groceries. 'Poison paints all these 'ere pitchers himself." His fingers circled round, indicating crude canvases on the walls.

" 'E's an all-round artist, Poison. Not only paints pitchers, but carves wood; and then 'e can do work with a needle— lace sort of things and all that— would surprise you! An' show 'im the statooette you made with wax, Polly."

Poison, flushed with pleasure, hastened to show us, and went from the little wax statuette, which had been made worse by colour crudely applied, to a host of other "artistic" achievements. Indeed, it seemed that there was nothing approaching artistic work Poison had not touched, from fine needlework in gaudy silks to clay modelling. As he showed us his samples, with all the excitement of a child pleased with its accomplishments, there was some pleasure in listening to his voice, and in observing his complete innocence of failure.

"Do you find it easy to sell these things about here?" I asked.

"Not easy," he admitted; "but you would be surprised at the love of art there really is in a neighbourhood like this."

His artlessness was amazing; and, when we had spent some time in inspecting the various items he produced for our delectation, I felt almost ashamed to bring him down to such a mundane thing as the sale of a pair of bootees. But he had ecstasies for the design even of these. "There is art in everything," he said enthusiastically, as he wrapped them up.

Keeling delayed until I had completed my purchase, and left the shop with me.

"A wonderful man!" he said when we had gone some paces.

"Do you buy many of those pictures?" I asked, looking at him curiously.

"I ain't strong in art," he said, and his eye gave a half-wink; "but I 'ave some cobbers 'oo don't think much of 'is paintings, some'ow— say they would spoil the walls. So I don't 'ang them in my 'ouse; at least, not unless I know 'e's coming out. But I buy 'em." Then, after a pause: "You see, I reckon he's a fine sort of chap; and I owe something to him. There was a girl, a sort of relation. She 'ad married a crook jockey, and got in bad with 'er people over 'im; so bad that, when 'e left 'er, she was afraid to go home. And when she wrote no notice was took. So she was down here, crook and starvin', and, ordered to clear out of 'er room, was at the end of things when Poison 'ears of it; and along 'e goes to 'er, and, sayin' 'is room was vacant, tells 'er she might as well 'ave it until it's let, an' then takes down the sign so as he won't let it, and gets 'er food an' waits on 'er like a woman— better'n a lot of women. An' when I 'ears about 'er 'aving written and no notice being took, I goes along an' finds 'im standing to 'er like that— 'im as poor as a twelve-stone jockey!"

He paused again; there was genuine feeling in his voice when he resumed.

"I'd nursed that girl on my knee as a kiddy, and I felt sore when I see what she 'ad come down to. She died, poor girl; an' the kid's out at my place. I feel as if I owe a sorter debt to old Polly."

That was my first introduction to the good acts of Poison, but afterwards, as we became friendly, I found that they were many. It may have been because of them that he gained reputation as a man of artistic attainments.

I soon found that "the artist of Dingy Street" was a well-known identity, and the little business not so poor a thing as I had imagined. Many a local resident was satisfied that a gift which would show artistic taste could safely be procured at Poison's.

One of my meetings with him was in the street, and, as an hotel was near, I suggested a drink. It rather surprised me that he accepted; somehow it added an incongruity to his association with the quaint little shop.

But he was anxious to get "back to the kids"; and he wanted also to ask my opinion about a piece of music he had composed.

"Music, too?" I questioned amusedly.

"Yes; I go in for music, too," he returned; "and writing poetry besides. I think I'd sooner write a bit of poetry that got into print than do all the other things. But," he added sadly, "I haven't had any success yet."

As we went along he told me that he had let his room to a woman with a couple of little girls. He enthused over the woman, and said he intended to paint her— as the Madonna. Secretly, I wondered what sort of a daub he would make of it, and whether the lady would be flattered when she saw the work.

Apparently she was a casual person who, on the strength of occupying his room, had left the children in his charge. They were in his sitting-room at the back of the shop— which I saw now for the first time; two little girls, who rushed at him affectionately as he entered, and called him "Daddy."

"I like them to call me that," he said. "Their mother asks me sometimes to keep an eye to them, and I do. Look what Hilda here has been doing! Oh, it's only a picture that isn't much good, and I told her she could play with it— look how she's chalked out the out-lines! Only eleven, too! She'll be an artist, that girl. And Nora here's a musician. She's standing behind the piano all the time I am playing."

"Play something," said the smaller girl, who, of course, was Nora.

The room was littered with evidences of Poison's activities, and against one wall stood a ramshackle piano which appeared as if it had been several times secondhand before Poison got hold of it. He exhibited a sheet of music-paper dotted with single notes.

"This is it!" he cried. "I dotted it down here as I picked it out; and I think you'll say it's fine! You see, I don't know much about music, and I'll have to get someone to write in the bass; but that should be easy for a man who knows how, if he's given the air, don't you think? And this is a good air."

He sat at the piano and strummed, with one hand, an air that was certainly pleasing.

"What do you think of it?" he asked, turning with the triumph of one who knows he has earned appreciation. "Don't you think that will make a hit?"

"It sounds familiar," I said cautiously.

"Does it?" His face showed disappointment.

"It's very like the 'Blue Danube'," I suggested.

He pondered thoughtfully for a moment; and then disappointment blanked out the ingenuous delight of a creator.

"So it is," he asserted. "It is the 'Blue Danube.' But I might have made a name for myself with that if someone had not done it before me."

It was an amazing point of view, which I let pass, for a rustle in the doorway occurred, and Poison was speaking past me. "Home again!" he cried cheerfully. "The children and I left some lunch for you, seeing you were so late and might like it."

"Oh, it's all right; I had lunch with Mr. Keeling," came the answer. The voice was hard, and there was no thanks in it. Turning, I saw a woman in whose face the hardness of the voice was repeated. It was a handsome face, certainly, or had been; but there were vicious lines upon it, indications of the character of the woman, which filled me with a sense of danger for Poison, whose eyes were adoringly upon her, and for the bright children who were his charges.

Poison walked with me to the shop door, when the woman, after a little conversation, had taken the children upstairs with her.

"My friend," he said. "I feel as if a great happiness had come into my life. It is only a couple of weeks that Mary— Mrs. Ogden— has been with me; but never before, since the days when I was a young man, have I had the same feeling for any woman. And I love her children, too. I have asked her if she will marry me, and I think she will."

Grown fond of the simple-hearted fellow, I went away bitterly sorry, judging the woman as I did; but an absence from Sydney prevented me from going to see him again. On my return I got my next news from Keeling, whom I happened to meet in town. And he was full of indignation.

"That damned woman!" he said. "You met her. She was a bad egg right through. She was kidding poor old Polly all the time she was going out with me. I ain't so short of cash that I mind spending a bit on a woman if I take a fancy to 'er; but to think she was kiddin' poor old Polly like that! She got on his soft side by tellin' about the 'ard life she'd 'ad with a crook 'usband. 'Er 'usband's dead, but that was the only true part of 'er yarn."

"But what's happened?" I demanded.

"Gone and bolted with a crook just out of gaol, leavin' the two kids on poor old Polly's 'ands. And never paid a berjn for 'er lodgings— not that Polly would mind that, poor coot! The other nearly broke 'is 'eart. It was the way she did it that was so cruel."

"That's better than if she had married Poison," I commented.

"Rather," he snorted. "I wouldn't have stood for that, knowing her as I did. I wouldn't have stood and seen 'er marry Polly."

"And the children?" I asked.

"Polly's going to look after them as if they was 'is," said Keeling. "That shows you 'ow wicked she is— leaving 'er kids like that. Why any decent

person thinks about kids, even if they ain't their own. I tell you what; I made 'er a fair offer; to keep her and give 'er enough to look after the kids, too; but she goes off and marries this crook. Some women 'ave no moral sense."

There was a suggestion of something that was not distinctly virtuous about Keeling's complaint; and it gave a touch of humour to Keeling's virtuous indignation.

When I called upon Poison I found him with the children, who were happy enough and appeared to have no regrets for the mother who had deserted them; and Poison seemed interwoven in their happiness. He was determined in his intention to keep the children, but was concerned about their future.

"It is strange how sorrow helps you in art," he said. "I've achieved something that all my life I've been trying for; I've had a poem published in *The Mercury*. Yes, I've got one in! I'll show it to you; I'm sure you will like it. But, I say, do you think there is much in what they say about a taint being handed down from generation to generation, always likely to break out?"

I saw the anxiety that caused him to check on his way to secure the printed proof of his poetic triumph, and answered, comfortingly, with assurances of all that environment might do to counteract the effects of heredity. What was worrying him was obvious.

"Ah, that's it— environment," he said, thoughtfully and as if consoled. "There must be a good environment. It is the weeds spread their seeds, not the soil that produces them."

Afterwards I remembered that I had not been shown the verses which, normally, would have been produced with much eagerness; and the omission struck me as a pathetic indication of his preoccupation.

When I called a few weeks later the door of the shop was closed, and, knocking having produced no response, I was turning away, when he came up suddenly. He was in work-soiled clothes, his hands were grimy, and the marks of sweat were on his face.

"Glad to see you," he said, opening the door. "You see, I've taken on a job wharf-labouring, and it's only when there's nothing doing on the wharves that I can open the shop."

"And the children?" I asked.

"I've got them at a school a good school, where they'll get all the training that's right. The proper environment, you know, which this place doesn't have," he said. "That's the reason of the job. By myself I could grub along with the little shop, but there wasn't enough in it to pay school fees."

He said it cheerfully, but I saw the magnitude of the sacrifice. I shook hands; I had to go away on a long business trip, and I took leave of him as of one who was doing a good deed.

When I returned from an absence that was prolonged even beyond expectations many activities kept me from going near Dingy Street; and a long time passed before, impelled by a desire to see Poison and hear how his life had gone, I went that way. But the shop that had so drawn my fancy had been refronted, and in a much-improved window a medley of sweets and fruit appealed to purchasers. The Italians in charge knew nothing of Poison; and, even when recalled at all, the "artist of Dingy Street" was only a vague memory. The nearest definite information I received was that "the old bloke went over a year ago."

Then I met Keeling unexpectedly. He had retired from the turf, and "the religious side of the family" having apparently claimed him, he told me, with some pride, that he was a church-warden in the suburb where he was now residing. He was genial; the main change religion had made in him apparently being to mend his speech, quieten his clothes, and give him a certain steadiness of demeanour. When I mentioned my desire to see Poison he whisked me into a car and drove me away.

The shop was labelled "Art Furnishings, Ltd.," and in its prosperous-looking window, with the name, "F. Poison, Manager" neatly done in gilt on one side, were many articles that might easily attract. I was soon shaking hands with a Poison strangely burnished, from his now snowy and more plentiful hair to his shoes. His well-cut clothes and gold pince-nez challenged comparison with his former array. And Poison, easily and without offence, laughed as he noticed my surprise.

"My daughter Hilda's responsible," he said. "She was only a girl when she got the idea of getting me out of the old shop; and she put it to Keeling here. Well, we got the money, and the thing pays— and here we are! A great girl that! Business-like as anything; and a manager— why, she managed to brush me up. Nora's going to be a great musician; but Hilda's an artist— look, there's some of her work!"

It surprised me. It was immature, of course; but the quality was good, and indicated strong talent. I took a look at several pictures, and came across one or two that were reminiscent of the old shop.

"There's just one or two of mine," he said hurriedly. "I still dabble in paint a bit; but we don't try to sell them. It's only for my own amusement now. I get my satisfaction in seeing Hilda's pictures. She's engaged to a young chap— an artist and a wholesome young fellow—and they intend to work together. You must come to their wedding. Why, as you came in I was writing a poem to have ready for it."

"You had a poem published, I remember," I reminded him. "I happened never to have seen it."

"Why, I've got it here!" he cried pleased. "I brought it in to help me with this one. But, after all, it's not only in painting pictures or writing poems that there's art. There's art in everything."

As he spoke he had been leading us towards his office at the end of the shop, where, with a rummage amongst some papers, he picked up a printed slip and handed it to me. Then he broke away at a merry-voiced babble in the shop, where there was an incursion of youth— two fine-looking girls, one with her hair still "down" (it was in the long style) and an equally good-looking youth— excellent types.

I laughed at the paper in my hand. The printed triumph of Poison was a verse published as a shocking example with a comment in the "Answers to Correspondents" column.

But as I looked up, laughing, and saw the girls around Poison, it seemed to me that the man who had wandered along so many blind alleys in his search for artistic expression had attained an artistic achievement in what those girls— whose fate might have been so harsh— had become.

2: The Safety Match

Helen Simpson

1897-1940

The Strand Magazine Oct 1934

Australian Worker (Sydney) 1 May 1935

THE man with the tray of matches who had been standing since 11 o'clock, shifted from one foot to the other as men and women passed him, hurrying to or from lunch. He, the man with the tray, was perfectly free to leave the kerb if he so desired; he too might have hurried, had he chosen to do so. Only a couple of wearisome negations— he had sold no matches that day, and he had not eaten during the same period— kept him fixed at his pitch. As the weight of his body seemed to increase, so his head seemed to grow light, until suddenly, and surprisingly to himself, he put a hand on the sleeve of a passer-by, and said, in a voice which once had weighed Latin quantities at Oxford:

'Will you buy a match? Sorry to stop you.'

The passer-by turned, astonished, and not much pleased. His name was Perceval Wing. He was a small, prim young man with round glasses, employed in an antiquarian bookshop, knowledgeable in its wares, and a considerable prig. He had something like fifteen shillings in his pocket, and could perfectly well have afforded to turn the whole lot into the match-seller's tray; unfortunately he was one of those who can resist the petition of a human being far more readily that the appeal of an apt quotation, and one of Dr. Johnson's sayings had just leapt to his tongue. He answered, therefore:

' "A man might spend four hundred pounds yearly in London streets, and do no good by it." That was said nearly two hundred years ago, but it happens to be true to-day.'

'I'm sorry,' the match-seller repeated. 'I used to hate being asked myself. But I'm hungry.'

'You talk like an educated man,' said Perceval. 'How did it happen?'

'Sorry,' said the match-seller for the third time; 'but I'm afraid that's my business.'

Even educated men get ill; even educated men lose jobs; he had not time to explain all this to Perceval. 'Will you be so good as to buy a match?'

'I don't smoke,' Perceval responded, angry at the snub. 'But here's sixpence, if that's any good to you.'

And from among the fifteen shillings' worth of change he fished out a sixpence, which he dropped into the tray. The match-seller offered one of his boxes.

Perceval shook his head. 'No thanks, I never carry them,'

'Take a box, please,' the match-seller insisted, a curious little flush showing like a burn on his cheekbones. 'I didn't beg from you. I asked you to buy.'

'And I've told you I don't carry matches,' Perceval answered, rejecting: the box. He added with an attempt at heartiness: 'Good luck, all the same.'

He went on, hastening a little, for there had been a telephone message that morning that an Australian client was expected who might be interested in the Britling Psalter. The match-seller looked at the sixpence, and took it out of his tray as if he would have thrown it after the donor; but emptiness gave too urgent a command; he pocketed it instead, and went slouching off towards a food-shop.

PERCEVAL arrived at the shop to discover that he would have to deal with the Australian collector alone. His principal was to have flown over from Paris, where he had been negotiating with the Bibliotheque Nationale; but a telegram informed his subordinate of fog in the Channel, and proclaimed his arrival by tram, late that night. The telegram also gave a sequence of numbers which Perceval knew to be the combination to which the lock of the strong-room had been set. (His principal enjoyed this lock, and was a trifle childish about it.)

Perceval had just time to descend, manipulate it, and bring up the Psalter, before the client was upon him, a brusque and bristling man . in shabby clothes, but wearing a cheque-book stuffed into one bulking pocket. Perceval, who had never seen him before, knew the type; self-opinionated, lavish in large matters, mean with stamps and string.

'Well,' said the collector, looking round in a cursory manner at the shelves,: 'you've got a nice show here,' but this small stuff's no good to me. . I buy for. value.'

Perceval intimated that this was the only prudent way to purchase books.

'If a thing's unique enough,' went on the collector, 'there's always a market for it. Now, this Psalter you've got; what's the period?'

Perceval, a little astonished that the collector had not yet asked to see it, gave him details; fifteenth century, possibly by one of the brothers of Pol de Limbourg- ? '

'All right,' said the collector, interrupting. 'Fifteenth century, that's good enough, that always sells. It's the margins; they're very telling. You think,' said the collector, shrewdly assessing Perceval's expression, 'I oughtn't to talk about values. You think I ought to look at this book first. But I've got to make sure it's what I want. Never buy what you don't want, and you'll always be able to buy what you do.'

Perceval laughed at this maxim, and ventured to recount his own experience with the match-seller.

The collector listened, and at the end clapped him in a friendly manner on the arm.

'Good-o!' said the client, approvingly. 'That's the stuff. Give— all right. Buy— all right. But never mix the two. And never litter yourself up with things you don't want. Don't smoke, eh? That saves a lot of money?'

His opinion of Perceval had gone up, and he was in an excellent humour when the Psalter was shown at last. Its margins, inhabited by all the birds of the fifteenth-century air, by beetles, angels, stars and monkeys, enchanted him. The ten great miniatures, bright with burnished gold, interested him less, for they dealt with religious subjects, martyrdoms mostly, and lacked what he called human appeal! He knew his business, though; looked closely, and proved, when the price was mentioned, that he was well aware of the previous sums for which it had changed hands.

At last, straightening himself abruptly, he informed Perceval that he would buy. The cheque-book was brought out, the considerable sum made payable, and the signature written. Then came the question of delivery, which the client solved in his own manner.

'I don't want the thing on my hands at a hotel. I'm sailing on Friday. Keep it for me till then. Safer with you.'

Perceval agreed, inwardly reflecting that this arrangement would give them time to clear the cheque.

'I won't forget you,' went on the collector, tapping Perceval's breast pocket with formidable jocularity; 'you've got sense, for a youngster. Don't you forget what I told you. Never buy what you don't want—'

'And you'll always be able to buy the things you do!' Perceval completed the maxim.

They both laughed, the collector strode from the shop, and their transaction was ended.

AT six o'clock, when all the day's business was done, Perceval Wing took up the Psalter and went down with it to the strongroom— a kind of enormous safe. The caretaker followed, for the purpose of replacing two light bulbs, one in the safe itself, one just outside. He accomplished his first task, while Perceval, bending among the dim golds and reds and browns of lineaged books, wrapped the Psalter in its silk cover and reverently laid it in place. The caretaker then, half closing the door of the safe to give room, turned his attention to the outer light, standing on tiptoe, for it was hung high. He got the old bulb out, and stretched up to insert the new; there was a splitting sound

and a crack. Startled, he lost his balance and fell against the safe door, which closed irrevocably, and without much noise, upon Perceval.

'Hi!' said that individual's voice, muffled. 'What the devil are you doing? My light's out.'

The caretaker by this time had recovered his balance and was awake to the situation.

'Fuse gone. I'll get a candle.'

'Quick as you can, you fool. Get me out of here. There's not much air.'

'Right, sir. Breathe easy. Back in two twos.'

And back he was in under two minutes, with a lamp from his bicycle.

'Now, sir. Give me the combination.'

Silence from within the safe. The caretaker, alarmed, called out, unnecessarily: 'You there, sir? The combination?'

'I know,' answered the muffled voice, and even through a foot of steel it had an odd sound, as though the speaker were reining back terror. 'I'm trying to remember.'

Silence again. The caretaker looked at his watch. Five minutes had passed, and he was aware there was no ventilation inside the safe. He called, as casually as he could: 'Haven't you got it on you— written down.'

Silence again. Then, suddenly and horribly, a mad yelling and drumming, whose sound pursued the caretaker during his flight upstairs in search of a locksmith, an electrician, any kind of help.

They were an hour getting the safe open, and it was just too late for Perceval. The telegram with the combination written on it was found in his pocket. He could have read it, and told them the number, if he had only had a match.

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3: The Hero of Sebastopol

J. H. M. Abbott

1874-1953

The Australian Woman's Mirror, 30 Dec 1924

FOR a reason peculiarly her own, and very characteristic of her, that good woman whom our grandmothers knew as a leader of Sydney Society about the year of Inkerman— Mrs. Armand De Boulie— always interspersed amongst her spoken words a good deal of exceedingly bad French. It was, she considered, "Cum eel foe" to do this— for her married name had to be lived up to.

She herself came from Clapham, and Mr. Be Boulie was a typical Yorkshireman who was very proud of Leeds as his native city. The West Riding of Yorkshire was the finest country in the British Empire— of course, the greatest empire the world had ever seen up till 1856; Leeds its most important city, governed with an enlightenment that was incomparable in municipal affairs; and the River Aire— which only impresses outsiders, in these days at any rate, as a discolored ditch of evil odor— the most beautiful river in the world. Port Jackson had its good points, to be sure— but if you wanted aquatic scenery you should go to Leeds and cast your eye along the Aire from any of the six bridges which spanned its course through the city.

Although his origins, far back, were Huguenot, Mr. De Boulie took no pride in the fact. He was Yorkshire through a long line of female ancestry, and could not help his despised name. Had it not been for his wife it is almost certain that he would have changed it to "Bewlay." He often confessed to a hankering after this version.

"Ah, laad," he would say to his friend Jock Bulling of Lancashire, "if 'twern't for t' domned notions of t'owd woman Ah'd have as good a name as yours. Ancestry be domned! Ah've no pride in a dom' runaway French man who permitted himself to be thrown out of his own country by a lot of domned Mickies and Dagoes. Not a bit, laad. Ah'm good Yorkshire— an' proud o't. Happen t'owd woman should die afoor my own time cooms Ah'll be Bewlay reet enough. And Ah'll take my colonial oath young Tom's a-goin' for to change his name; else he gets none o' t' brass Ah've maade. Dommit, one thing Ah stook out for when t' laad was christened— Ah wudden't have him ca'd Armand, after me. No dom' fear. T' laad's good Australian happen he can't be Yorkshire an' he wasn't a-goin' for to be saddled wi' no Froggie naame like Ah've been. Not if t'owd man knew any thing about it."

There was no doubt as to his son and daughter being good Australians. Tom was twenty-five, six-feet-two, thirteen stone, wiry, strong and active. He managed his father's station— Box Tree Springs— out on the Liverpool Plains,

and was as typical a young Cornstalk as might be found between Gabo Island, Fort Bourke and Cape Byron.

And Ann— Mrs. De Boulie insisted unavailingly that it was Annette— even in all the monstrosities of crinoline, hair-net, poke-bonnet and quaint little inefficient parasol, you would have agreed that she was a daughter of Australia of whom her fellow-Australians, of any generation since Governor Phillip's time, might have been justly proud. Tall, and with raven hair and dark eyes, she was one of the beauties of her day. And perpetually was she at variance with her mother, because she could never be induced to adopt that langor of demeanor, that swooning frailty of attitude that was supposed to confer grace and attractiveness upon the misses of the mid-Victorian period— an era when female anaemia was looked upon rather as a virtue than a misfortune.

Up at Box Tree Springs Ann would go mustering cattle with the stockmen, clad in peg-top breeches and thigh-boots— a dreadful scandal assiduously hushed-up by her mother. She could ride a buck-jumper. She was a good cook. She abominated crewel-work and curates. She was almost a whole lifetime before her proper setting.

There was hardly anything mid-Victorian about Ann De Boulie— except her costumes when she came to Sydney; and even those fearful and wonderful garments she wore with a distinction and charm that was of her fine nature.

It is to be feared that at La Pleasaunce— the big, square house at Elizabeth Bay overlooking the harbor and Garden Island, where Armand De Boulie retired each even ing from his mercantile den in Macquarie Place— poor Mrs. De Boulie was in a hopeless minority, so far as her own family was concerned. They did not laugh at her, but they refused to take the French legend seriously.

With the servants it was different. It was, always, with them, "Madame is not at home," or "Madame requires the carriage," or "Yes, madame," and "No, madame" when they addressed her.

Came Mr. De Boulie home one winter evening by water— he kept a boatman to ferry him to and from his place of business— having in his company the most devilish fellow Ann had ever seen. The adjective is used here not to denote any thing sinister in the character of the Honorable Claude Ticester— pronounced Tister— but merely in its meaning of those vanished days of seventy years ago.

He was sumptuously arrayed, and was probably the most creditable thing to Bond street that had ever been south of the Cape of Good Hope. Even bluff and hearty Mr. De Boulie, reading the letter of introduction presented by the tall and handsome exquisite who had called at his office that morning, could not refrain from glancing over the top of the page more than once, with some expression of awe in his red face, at the tremendous swell who sat in the

straight-backed arm-chair before his writing-table. "Bless my soul!" he cogitated, "he'd do for a Governor's aide-de-camp— and even then be too splendid for the job!"

Mr. Ticester's fair hair was cut short, and his fair whiskers long. His monocle was rimmed with tortoise-shell and hung on his flowered satin waistcoat supported by a ribbon of watered silk. His gloves were of lavender kid. His cutaway jacket was of dark-blue broadcloth, and his light colored peg-top pantaloons had a wide stripe down each outer seam. His hair was pomaded and parted in the middle. It was undeniable that he was very good looking, even in that curious rig of the period— one by which man has seldom better achieved the ridiculous in his clothing through all the ages of civilisation. From his queer, flattish bowler hat (it must be understood that he was dressing down to the colonies, and was not in his completest splendor) to his varnished little boots, he was all that was decreed by fashion-plates for men as properly belonging to the year of grace 1857. There was no exaggeration in his costume— it was only the correct thing, the highest ideal of Picadilly or Pall Mall, as visioned by the wonderful creatures who set the fashions for fashionable men. That these were, and are, sardonic humorists has long been suspected.

"Mong sher ammy," said Mrs. De Boulie, patting the white hand of the visitor at the end of the evening as he was about to de part for town in hospitable Mr. De Boulie's dog-cart, "Say tray bong, then? You will come up to the station in September— next month? And then we can have such sharmong paries dee lar bell Frongsay. One can not but adore the country the old De Boulies came from— lar patree, nay see par? Vraymong— see nay par posseeble! Good-bye. Come and see us often. Ah beeang toe— we will see you soon again?"

Even Mr. De Boulie had been a little impressed by the ex-guardsman who, during the war, had been an ensign in the Coldstreams, but was now, to its great loss, retired from the Army, which was an institution that gave but scant recognition to military genius. He had retained his humble rank right through the Crimean campaign. Jealousy, he supposed. Oh, shocking— the amount of it that hindered merit; positively hindered it. Yes, Sebastopol, he was easily able to demonstrate, might have fallen much sooner than it did had he been listened to by the Commander in-Chief. Lord Raglan's death, in June, '55, had occurred a year too late.

Soldiering, however, was a deuced bawh, you know. For his part, he had a sufficiency of it— quite a sufficiency. He would become a squattah— a delaightful occupation— and the first thing he would do would be to establish a pack of hounds, wherever he should settle down. He would introduce the

fox, in order to improve the horsemanship of the colonial youth, who had no "hands." And he would breed rabbits— for the encouragement of good shooting. It was a mistake to neglect sport, you know. Sport had made Englishmen what they were. Pigeon shooting. Cock-fighting, you know. Boxing. And so on. A great deal might be done here, you know. Good material. But it was wrong of the colonies to object to transportation. Cheap labor, you know. Colonials were apt to get "notions"— which must be quietly, but firmly, snubbed. He hoped to have the pleeshah of hearing Miss De Boulie sing again, before long. Society here was— well— very mixed. But a new country, you know. One must be tolerant of a great deal. Oh, yaas— indeed!

"Father," said Ann, after her mother had retired, "a long-tailed lamb. I'll ear-mark him! He'll get his colonial experience. Yes."

Paddy's Mountain— that huge basaltic hump in the Dividing Range situated at the eastern end of what used to be the old Box Tree Springs holding before the country became "closer settled"— affords a wonderful view of the Liverpool Plains from Quirindi to Gunnedah. Seated on their horses, Ann De Boulie and Mr. Ticester— the stockmen had nicknamed him "Mister Worcester Sauce"—surveyed the beautiful prospect. The girl— riding astride in her moleskins and long boots— was speaking. Down below them, squatted on his hunkers, Billy Magee the overseer was filling his pipe, his stockwhip looped over his left arm, his reins in the crook of his right elbow.

"Of course, Mr. Ticester"— Ann was demure and serious, but there was a twinkle in her fine eyes— "of course I'm quite sensible of the honor you do me. It's not everyone would want to marry a colonial girl—a Currency Lass."

"My deah Ann! You must not class your— ah— incomparable self with these others. I assure you, I—"

"Just a moment," she interrupted him. "I was going to say that if you'll follow Billy down the mountain I'll marry you. If you can't keep up with him I won't. I must have a husband who can go where I can go. I don't want to be left to my own resources, you know. That little mare you're riding— Violet— is like a cat. She'll take you anywhere. I'll follow, and see how you shape."

"Oh, bai Jove! And very sporting, too! Of course, my deah girl. Delaighted. Where do we go down?"

"Just here. Down the spur, to the flat on Tarlo Creek."

Mr. Ticester adjusted his monocle and stood up in his stirrups to survey the proposed route to the bottom of the mountain. Its aspect caused him to catch his breath. It is certain that his answer earned him the reward that Miss De Boulie knew well would not be his.

"Oh, certainly," he said, "what a charm ing road! So deuced romantic— and all that, you know. What?"

"Bill-ee!" called the girl. "We'll take a jog down the spur. Will you give us a lead? We'll have to hurry, you know. 'Tis getting on to sundown. We'll keep up with you. You needn't loiter."

The young Cornstalk stood up, and looked at the Lightning Lass as her father's men had named her when she was quite a little girl. A slow grin spread across his lean and freckled face.

"In a hurry, Miss Ann?"

"Yes."

"Right-o. Half a mo'—till I get a light."

THE TERSE chronicle of Billy Magee may conclude the story.

"My oath— she did so. Flogged him down the mount'n. I tell you. My colonial! Off I goes, and Wor'ster Sauce after me. I let Ben Bolt have his head, and in a few seconds we was a-flyin' down th' mount'n, hell-for-leather. You know, 'twas a bit rough. I takes a look back, about half way down, an' sees him deadly white— but goin'. She's close behind him. Cripes! You'd ha' thought th' mount'n was a tumblin' down, th' way th' loose stones shot after us. Like a waterfall. One of 'em took my hat— neat as ninepence. When I looks back agin, presently, he's fallen behind a bit. I could see little Vi a-tossin' her head, and reckoned he was takin' a pull. Cripes!— l don't blame him. And then I hears the Lightning Lass's whip go crack!

"Agin and agin she cracks th' whip jest be Vi's flank. It's pretty rough— damme if it's not! That —— noo chum! Nerve!— he's got nerve all right! My Gawd, I tell you I near fell off Ben Bolt when he races by me— Vi with the bit in her teeth. They goes through them yaller-jackets at th' bottom o' th' spur like a w'irlwind— an' she after him, still a-crackin' her whip. Then I goes slow to the bottom.

"As I rides out o' th' timber I sees Wor'ster Sauce a-huggin' of her, an' hears her say— s'help me Alfred David, I did— 'Oh, Claude darlin'— l love yer. An' I meant to break your neck. Yes, dear— of course. Didn't I promise?'

"My oath! Them wimmen's queer heifers!"

———————

4: Mrs. "Corporal" Smith

Anonymous

Western Champion (Barcaldine, Qld) 12 Feb 1901

One of many stories published anonymously in newspapers of this period. Interesting in the way the narration wanders from past tense to present tense, sometimes in the same sentence.

THE scene— the dining-room of a well-known club in Portsmouth.

The time— the morning after a big service ball, at which all Southsea has disported itself. Among the guests were General Sir John Scott, K.C.B., and his nephew Dick Scott, the recently-appointed Lieut-Commander of H.M's gunboat *Growler*, which has just been commissioned, and will sail for the Persian Gulf within the next five or six weeks, probably remaining there for three or four years.

Now, Dick Scott is bent upon being married before he sails, and it is to try and arrange matters with his uncle that they have met. Last night, at the ball, be had introduced the object of his affections to Sir John, who had expressed himself perfectly satisfied so far as the young lady's manners and appearance were concerned; but the General has been longer in the world than Dick. Naturally, he is anxious to learn if his nephew's choice has anything more than surpassing beauty and a very charming manner to recommend her, and, so with an eye to the main point, he straightway proceeds in rather matter-of-fact tones to put Master Dick through his facings, a process rendered doubly difficult by that young officer's ill-concealed reserve of manner, as well as his impatience under the cross-examination.

Now, for some time back Sir John has been aware of Dick's engagement to Miss Moreton; he has heard that she is an orphan, whose father had been for a short time in the army; that Dick had met her at the house of old and valued friends, who had had the care of her ever since they had brought her from Melbourne to England to be educated, some eight or ten years before this story begins. Beyond these few facts Sir John knew very little, and until Dick wrote, urging him to meet him, so as to arrange for his speedy marriage, it had not occurred to him to make more explicit inquiries.

And Dick. What did Dick know of his future wife's antecedents? Well, very little more. He knew that he was in love, head over ears in love, and he was determined to be married before the *Growler* sailed; therefore, it was with feelings of disgust and annoyance that he listened to Sir John's very calmly-expressed views.

"Well, Dick," the General observed, after listening to a long list of Ethel Moreton's perfections, "I have nothing to soy against the girl's manners and

appearance— they are beyond criticism. I will help you as far as I can; but you know, boy, without my telling you, it is quite impossible you can marry without money."

Sir John paused, and looking at Dick, who sat twirling his napkin ring, added, "God forbid you should ever marry for money, but in these expensive times it would be little short of madness for a man with your tastes and habits to dream of setting up even ever so small an establishment on less than five or six hundred a year."

Dick's face fell as he listened to his uncle's dictum.

"Oh, come, sir," he replied, deprecatingly, " Ethel and I are not extravagant: we could get along on half that. She is quite prepared to stay on with Mrs. Dennison while I am at sea. And with my pay and what you are good enough to allow me, I am sure we could do well."

"I dare say you think you could," said prudent Sir John, "but you and I know you have never been able to do more than live on your pay and allowance. However, that is not the question now, but rather what more do you expect to get with Miss Moreton? I think you told me her father died very rich; if that be the case, of course, as she is the only child he made ample provision for her."

"But that's just what he didn't do," replied Dick, ruefully; "he left everything to Mrs. Moreton— at least, so she declares." This doubtfully.

"Well," says Sir John, cheerfully, " no doubt Mrs. Moreton will meet me halfway." Then, noticing how troubled and disturbed Dick looks, the old soldier prepares to make things as easy as he can for his well-beloved nephew, so he says briskly, "We don't want millions, Dick, only that your wife shall pay your own mess bills if I pay yours. Tell you what I'll do, lad, I'll allow you three hundred and fifty-a-year."

Dick looks slightly relieved, but the relief is only momentary, for Sir John concludes in measured tones, " If Mrs Moreton agrees to settle an equivalent on her beautiful daughter."

"Step daughter, uncle," corrects Dick, a little confusedly.

"Step-daughter! Eh, what? Stepdaughter!" repeats Sir John, in tones of surprise and annoyance combined. "What do you mean?" he asks, amazed that Dick should mention in such a casual way a circumstance which might mean a great difference in the arrangements under discussion. "You ought to have told me this before," he said, reproachfully. "You seem to have rushed the whole affair, and now it is left for me to see that you don't make an ass of yourself. I must see Mrs Moreton at once, before things go a step further. If she agrees with me as to settlement, everything will be right. You can be married before you sail; but unless she does— well, well, you must just be content to be engaged, and wait till you come home to be married."

"I can't do that, sir," says Dick, stoutly. "Ethel's life will be a misery to her if I leave her with that woman."

"Oh!" said Sir John, "is that how the land lies? Then you anticipate difficulties with Mrs. Moreton?"

"I do, sir," replied Dick, frankly. "Uncle," he goes on, quickly, "I may as well be candid and above board. Mrs. Moreton refuses her consent to our marriage. She has the whole and sole control of her late husband's enormous fortune, and, worst of all, is trying to force Ethel to marry a fellow who does business for her in the City— a Jew, who offers to make big settlement on Ethel without asking awkward questions as to why she, Mrs. Moreton, gives Ethel nothing."

"So this is the state of affairs. Why did you not tell me all this before?" asks Sir John, a little angrily.

"Well, sir— er, well because— partly because I was a beastly fool, and partly because— er, I thought, and hoped, that once you saw and knew Ethel, you would agree to stand by us, and we could afford to ignore Mrs. Moreton."

Then, warming to his subject, and forgetting the prudence which had hitherto characterised his confidences, he went on, impulsively, "And that isn't the worst of it— she had the impudence to tell me last night that—"

"Heavens above, Dick!" Sir John interrupts, almost furiously, " you don't mean to say that the Behemoth in yellow satin and diamonds to whom you were doing the civil at supper is your future mother-in-law?"

"I'm afraid she is, sir," murmurs Dick, regardless of grammar; "but, you know, I am not going to marry her."

"Lucky for you," answers Sir John. "The woman drank more champagne than any one in the room. After you left her, she was joined by a flash-looking fellow, who plied her with liquor and fetched her brandy-and-soda, which she tossed off like so much water. Gad, her husband may have been a gentleman— I hope he was— but nothing under the sun would ever make a lady of that over-fed, underbred mass of humanity. Mark my words, Dick" (here the General grew very solemn), "we shall have trouble with that woman."

Here he ceased speaking, quite as much from loss of breath as from dismay at the prospect Dick's matrimonial affairs were assuming.

Dick listened patiently enough to his uncle's opinions, which, to tell the troth, entirely coincided with his own. Last night he had seen and been introduced to Mrs. Moreton for the first time at the ball, to which she had insisted upon coming with the Dennison party, uninvited, and his hypercritical taste had received a shock, the violence of which was only equalled by the fear which possessed him lest his aristocratic uncle should come into contact with her before Ethel had made the running. All his efforts had been concentrated

upon keeping them apart; judge, then, of his feelings on discovering that Sir John had not only seen her, but had now, through his imprudent speech, identified her as Ethel's stepmother. What the next move in the game was to be he hardly dared to think, but Sir John soon solved the question for him. He determined to interview Mrs. Moreton, and for that purpose caused Dick to sit down and write her a brief note, requesting the honour of an interview with her at her earliest convenience. The note written, was then despatched by the club messenger to the hotel where Mrs. Moreton and her stepdaughter were staying. This done, Sir John strolled round to the Athenaeum, a club he still belonged to, while Dick remained at this, waiting Mrs. Moreton's reply.

While the foregoing conversation is being carried on at the club, in a private sitting-room of their hotel Mrs. Moreton is employed "ragging" her step-daughter with considerable vehemence.

"I tell you, Miss," the handsome virago reiterates for the twentieth time, "I won't let you marry that conceited, poverty-stricken young jackanapes coming after you for your money, or the money he thinks he's going to get with you. What will he say when he hears your father left it all for me, to do just what I like with, and you, too, for the matter of that?" Then a triumphant sneer wreathed the coarse lines of her still finely-curved lips, as she remembered how cleverly she had managed the making of Frank Moreton's will— how she had sent Ethel to England with the Dennisons, giving them special remuneration for undertaking the care of the girl. How, after getting rid of her, she had deliberately get herself to work her wicked will on the infatuated fool, separating him by degrees from every acquaintance or friend who might have influenced him for good, pandering to his vices, supplying him with unlimited drink, until the unhappy victim became a mere tool— a wretched cypher in her unscrupulous hands.

"Here, you listen to me," she goes on her rude, boisterous manner: "don't sit there as if you were deaf and dumb," for Ethel Moreton made no reply; she made it a point never to wrangle with this terrible woman.

"Here, read that," she continues, tossing into the girl's lap Dick Scott's note. "Answer it, too," she goes on, " and tell your genteel friends I'll have nothing to say to them."

"In that case," replies Miss Ethel, glancing over the note, "I think you had better answer it yourself, for I shall certainly not do so." This with quiet determination.

"So I just will," returns Mrs. Moreton, going out on the landing. The next moment Ethel hears her shout over the banisters to the willing messenger in the hall: "Tell Lieutenant-General Scott, or whatever he calls himself, that Mrs.

Moreton declines to see him, or hold any communication with him or his precious nephew either."

Having delivered herself of this ultimatum, Mrs. Morton betakes herself to the bar, fortifies herself with a brandy-and-soda, and, like a giant refreshed, returns to the attack.

"Come now, there's a dear," she begins, in a wheedling tone.

"Do you intend to see General Sir John Scott?" interrupts Ethel, quietly, thinking it wiser to ignore the fact that she has overheard Mrs. Moreton's polite message.

"I do not," replies Mrs. Moreton, excitedly; "and, what's more, you sha'n't see him neither. You shall marry Solomons; he's ready to take you off my hands and settle a thousand a-year on you, and he'll be here in half an hour to take us for a drive. So just you go and make yourself smart, and give him his answer this very evening."

"I shall certainly obey your last order," replied Ethel, with dignified composure, a dangerous gleam lighting her grey eyes. "I refuse to marry your friend, Mr. Solomons; neither shall I go out to drive with you;" then, gathering courage as she notes Mrs! Moreton's amazement at her daring she continues, calmly, "and, finally, you can tell him from me that nothing either he or you can do or say, will force me into marrying him. I look upon him as— well, to be very plain, the greatest specimen of the genus cad it has ever been my lot to meet. This afternoon I shall return to Mrs. Dennison, to stay with them until—"

At this point Mrs. Moreton had so far recovered herself that she burst in excitedly, "Until your beggarly Lieutenant comes along to marry you. And who, may I ask, is going to pay for your keep with them paupers? Not me ; I'll swear they've had too much of my money as it is." Then, half-choked with fury, she thundered, "Here, out of this with you; pack up and go, if that's your little game, and never let me get sight on your impudent face again."

Before she had reached the end of her tirade Ethel had risen, passed through the half-open door, and gained the quiet of her own room. There she remained locked in, trembling a little, it is true, although she had managed to come off victor in the passage of arms. Bye and bye, the sound of vanishing wheels warned her that Mrs. Moreton and Mr. Solomons had gone "carriage driven," as that lady was in the habit of indicating vehicular locomotion.

By the time she returned Ethel had gone, taking all her belongings with her, and leaving no address, as her friend, the lady in the bar, suavely informed Mrs. Moreton, when supplying her with her usual refresher. This was a poser, for, by Mr. Solomon's advice, she had quite intended to adopt conciliatory measures, and was completely taken aback by the girl's determined stand, and the situation now would require to be thought over. Thinking over a thing has

never been Mrs. Moreton's forté; she is more at home in decisive action, so, for the present, we shall leave here and return to Dick Scott, who, standing on the steps of the club, makes a step forward to receive from the hands of the messenger the expected reply to his note.

"Got an answer, Smith?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied Smith, with a respectful gesture; "got a hanser, sir, right enough, sir, but it's a werbal one."

So Dick goes nearer to the man, who stands at attention, and the men to whom he has been chatting pass out of hearing into the club, but not before they have noticed that the "werbal" message, delivered word for word, has had a disturbing effect on their messmate. Ten minutes later Dick drives up to Mrs. Dennison's door; as he is paying his driver, a growler with luggage on top arrives, and from it descends Ethel Moreton. Her beautiful face lights with joy as she greets Dick, and together they enter the house.

STANDING in the bow window of the Athenaeum Club are General Sir John Scott and his old friend, Major Patrick Brien, late of Her Majesty's —th Regiment, engaged in private conversation of a deeply interesting nature.

"Tell me all you can recollect about the man, O'Brien," urges Sir John, eagerly. "It is from no spirit of idle curiosity I make the request, as you will see later on. You say he joined soon after you were gazetted to the —th?"

"He did, sure enough," says Major O'Brien; and a bigger scamp than the said Francis Moreton it has never been my lot to meet; not but what if he had fallen into good hands be might have turned out a better man. Well, his first performance after joining us at Bellampore was to fall in love with and propose for a young niece of the Colonel's wife— a sweet, pretty, little soul who hadn't a relation in the whole world but the Paultons. They jumped at the notion of settling her, as it was near the Colonel's time to go, so they thought they couldn't do better than marry her to Moreton, who, added to being a very handsome fellow, had more money to spend in a month than any man in the regiment in a year, so the marriage was hurried on all the more quickly, for the reason Moreton didn't seem inclined to get spliced ; this because he was carrying on a game on the sly with the daughter of the sergeant-major— a fine buxom young woman, who would gladly have thrown over the man she was engaged to— a corporal in my company— for dashing, graceless Frank Moreton. I need hardly tell you Colonel Paulton wasn't going to stand this sort of thing; he sent for Moreton one fine morning, and the result of the interview was that before a month was over Frank Moreton and the Colonel's niece were man and wife. But, my goodness! marriage didn't settle the fellow; in less than three months he was again philandering after Priscilla Mills. Then the

youngsters began to talk among themselves of meeting the pair strolling about in all sorts of impossible places at all hours, and the Colonel getting to hear of it, waxed furious that such an open scandal should occur in the regiment. This time Sergeant-Major Mills was interviewed, and told it was time his giddy, good-looking daughter was tied up; the Sergeant-Major thought so too, and the following week he had another wedding in the regiment,

"After this things settled down for a bit, but it was only a calm previous to an awful row; Mrs. Corporal Smith behaved even worse than Miss Priscilla Mills; Moreton went up to Nagpore on a shooting expedition— she followed him. While he was away his poor little wife died, a few hours after the birth of her little girl; and, though he got back in time to act as chief mourner, he showed precious little grief. At last things came to such a pass that Colonel Paulton would stand it no longer; he and Moreton had a final explosion; Moreton, who was always complaining that a fellow could not do as he liked in the service, chucked, sent in his papers, said good-bye to the service, and made tracks for Australia, where, it was reported, he took to sheep-farming. The child and her ayah went with him.

"Well, he had not been six months gone when the ayah re-appeared, 'sent back,' and said, 'by the Sahib, who had got an English nurse for the Missee Baba.' Then a queer thing happened. Mrs. Corporal Smith, who had returned to her forgiving husband after the Sagpore excursion disappeared. He only knew that she had gone to bathe at five a.m., her cloak and mantle were found on the river bank! 'Drowned, I suppose,' said our new Colonel, who had only just joined. 'Hang these woman, they will bathe against orders, and the river swarms with alligators.'

"But we, who were in the know, knew better; she never went to bathe, nor the alligators didn't have her, either. She just followed Frank Moreton to Australia, and from that good hour to this I never heard of. nor saw her ; no, no people like her go to bathe with their pockets full of rupees, as Smith told me she did, and the ayah let out that she had given her Moreton's address."

"O'Brien," said Sir John, in tones of suppressed agitation, "would you know this she-devil again if you saw her?"

"Well, possibly I might, for she was a downright handsome woman; but if I didn't, why, there is her husband, Smith, he would; he is my valet now— but why do you ask? She surely hasn't crossed your path?"

"That she has," returns Sir John; "and is at present not ten minutes' walk from us, posing as the widow of Frank Moreton, whose only child is engaged to my nephew, Dick Scott, and laying claim to every penny Moreton left behind him."

"Thunder and turf!" ejaculated the Irish Major. "The world is very small; and what steps do you intend to take to prevent the clever hussy from slipping through your fingers?"

"I shall want you and your man Smith," grins Sir John, "to come to town with me to my lawyers."

"No need to go to town, old fellow," says O'Brien; "Seekemout and Sons are as sharp a firm as any in town; their shop isn't five minutes drive from here; employ them, and twenty-four hours hence Mrs Moreton will have disgorged. Good Lord! to think of her turning again, and that you and I should meet after all these years, just in the nick of time."

Seekemout and Sons fully deserved the character for smartness given them by their client, Major O'Brien. The following day, accompanied by Corporal Smith, they had -an interview with

Moreton, with such effect, that she not only resigned all claims to Frank Moreton's money, but made a statement as to how she had led him to believe

that her husband, Smith, had died of cholera a few weeks before she followed him to Australia; under this delusion he had married her, really believing her to be a widow.

There was no trial for bigamy; Sir John Scott had intended to prosecute, but he detested scandal, and, rightly or wrongly, did not prosecute her.

Dick and Ethel were married, but not quite so soon as they first intended. He did not sail for the Persian Gulf, but retired from the service, and bought a big place in the country, where Sir John Scott and Major O'Brien are frequent visitors; and nothing is more amusing than to hear the two old soldiers congratulating each other on the astute manner in which they linked the circumstances which connected Mrs. Corporal Smith and Mrs. Frank Moreton together. Smith continues to act as Major O'Brien's valet— he refused point blank to have anything to do with his *ci devant* wife; on gala occasions he is often called into the smoking-room to regale the two veterans with an account of the scene between himself and his Priscilla on the occasion when Mr. Seekemout, sen., produced him as the only required witness in the threatened suit for bigamy, which must certainly have been entered on had the woman been fool enough to resist the chain of evidence so rapidly produced by Major O'Brien, Sir John Scott, and Corporal William Smith, late of Her Majesty's —th regiment.

5: In Portofino

Alan Sullivan

1868-1947

The English Review 1927

It seems it was not editorial practice of the original publisher to use italics for foreign words, so I have left this story as I found it.

HE seemed, coming towards me through the olive grove, to have detached himself from it, so perfectly did the graygreen of him blend with the twisted roots and narrow, faintly shimmering curtain overhead, an old man, gnarled and bent, with something of the unexpected angularity of the trees around him, dark eyes that retained an active luster, broad, stooping shoulders, and knotted fingers. He carried a pannier of cones from the slopes above, where olive yields to pine, and the pine dwindles as it climbs the naked sun-smitten heights that march magnificently along the Ligurian coast. He was taking the cones to Portofino, three kilometers away.

"Buon giorno," I said. "Fa bello tempo."

He sat down, the basket still on his back, and one could almost hear his bones creak like the dry wicker.

"The weather, yes, it is good," he answered with a grave smile; "but this tramontane wind, it does not promise well. Look! "

His English surprised me, but I looked. The tops of the hills behind Chiaveri were obscured, their summits melting vaguely into hanging clouds. But it was the best day we had had for a week.

"You have traveled," I ventured.

He nodded. "Yes, but one comes back."

I could understand that, never having found a spot so serene, so welcoming, as this God-given refuge, to which I had only that day returned. Portofino and what went with Portofino was a sheer gem. I had lived there previously for months above the Ristorante Nazionale, where Catina, her hair in a tight knot, brought in the bath water and opened the shutters to let in the morning sun; where Lena Razzolo made delectable things in a kitchen that would have delighted Arthur Rackham; and Alessandro, her brother, drove the two unimpressionable white horses that pulled the diligence to Santa Margherita, and modern hotels with central heat and the Italian luxury tax.

"You have lived here long?"

He made himself a ragged cigarette. "Forty years, signore, since I came back."

"Then you must have set out very young."

"Yes, young. Twenty-three years old when I sailed from Genova." He lit the cigarette. "It was for America."

It seemed strange, knowing what I did about the westward tide of his countrymen, that he should have spent but seven years across the Atlantic. The object was generally a competence on which to retire, and this was a poor man.

"Seven years in America," he added thoughtfully, "and five were in Sing Sing. But life passes."

I looked at this son of the terraced soil, and tried to imagine him in prison. He seemed to have a nature like a pool of mountain water.

"It was a mistake, of course?"

His shoulders went up in an inimitable shrug. "It is now as though it had not been; but it was no doubt a mistake that I waited so long in Ettore's saloon."

I said nothing, which reassured him.

"Near Ninth Street and Seventh Avenue— perhaps it is there yet. But you could not tell."

"No."

"I promised the padrone Razzolo at the Ristorante to have the cones there by five," he murmured with a wintry smile; "otherwise, perhaps, I could tell you."

"I stay there," I said hastily. "The padrone and I are excellent friends."

"Ebbene, he is a just man, e di buon cuore. There was, of course, a woman in this affair; also Ettore Giannino, large, strong, and very black. His father lived near the oil mill at Paraggi. You have seen that, without doubt?"

I nodded.

"Ettore, as I say, was very strong. I have seen him carry two hundred kilos of wood up to The Castello without stopping for breath— no other man in Portofino could do that. So, for a year, it was between us two. On one Sunday Costanza would walk with me over the hills to San Fruttuoso, and the next with Ettore to Portofino Vetta, from which one regards the harbor of Genova. The signore has been there, too?"

"I have, and it is a great sight."

"Well, those in the village asked themselves which she liked best, San Fruttuoso or the view of Genova, and for a year it went thus, Ettore and I, each with our own sentiero, our own path. Each of us worked— Mother of God, how we worked!— putting away a lira at a time, for two thousand lire was the figure the father of Costanza had set, and who reached that first should have the girl. For herself she did not seem to care which it was, but laughed all day, asking us at evening how much we had, and said that she liked the view of San Fruttuoso as well as that of Genova. Ettore, he nearly broke his back with the

loads he carried, and I, not so strong, went on with my mason work. There was much building of villas at that time, and though a mason earns more than a contadino, Ettore worked so hard that his wages were as much as mine. Then, when we were both at eighteen hundred lire, the thing happened. And will the signore tell me his name?"

I did not reply at once, but sat staring at a very small and weatherbeaten house that lay in a wrinkle of the hill close by. I could hear a cracked old voice humming inside. It was at a point from which one might see San Fruttuoso. Then I told him my name, and he gave me a long, quiet look.

"Mine is Adriano Costo. My father made baskets, too, in that house, so he was well named. What happened was that Costanza found that she liked best the view of Genova, liked it so well that she went there with Ettore on a Saturday, and did not come back. It was on Sunday that I found my loss. I had been robbed!"

"Ettore?"

"Chi lo sa? They all went at the same time— Costanza and he and the money. That night I walked to Genova, thirty miles, having nothing wherewith to buy a ticket. What was the use? There was no proof. And one poor man in Genova with empty pockets! I went to the mole, and, behold, a steamer sailing for New York. Already it had moved as far as one can throw a stone. I had good eyes, signore, in those days, and there, in the middle of five hundred others, Ettore and Costanza. His arm was round her, and while I looked they waved farewell to Italy, and kissed. So I walked back to Portofino. Yesterday that was forty-seven years ago. I tell you this, because to-day I am content."

He looked content. There was peace in his eye, and a benignant calm; but he had not the appearance of a successfully retired mason. Such do not carry cones to Portofino.

"You are interested, yes?"

"I am, very."

"Well, for another year I worked, but it was no use. Other women— yes— but not Costanza. So what I made I spent. At the end of the year came one who put a notice on the Municipio wall. Tickets to America, six hundred lire. As it happened, I had seven hundred."

"You went to New York?"

"All Italians go there, non e vero? So many had already gone that it was like Genova itself, and with many Napolitanos whom it is hard for us people to understand. For the first day I walked all the day, and got to another part where there were no Italians. Very magnifico it was, and very strange, but no one laughed or talked as amongst our own. Why is that?"

"Perhaps they had no time."

He made an inimitable gesture. "What is time? It seemed to me they were not happy enough to talk. However, later, I found a place where they talked even less. There were many named Giannino where my countrymen lived, but it was not long before I found Ettore."

"Where was he?"

"In a saloon, of which he was padrone. Very wonderful, that saloon— a palace. Never had I seen anything like it, with Ettore's name in gold letters on big windows, and every morning two facchini swept it out, polishing silver and brass till it glittered amazingly. There was a big counter, very long, with multitudes of bottles behind, and three big men, Ettore himself the biggest. He had grown already corpulento, and still oiled his black hair. They wore white aprons, these three, and knew all who came in, calling them by name. And the money followed like rain."

"Had he bought that already, after one year?"

"At first I wondered, too, but it seems it was not his at all. Pietro Machairo, him of Nervi who came in the winter time to see his mother in Portofino, him I met in New York about that time. He told me that Ettore was not proprietario, but the place was that of a big man of the city, molto importante, who put Ettore there and his name in gold outside, for mire politice— what do you call?"

"Political reasons?"

"Veramente. That was why. Sometimes the man came there himself; he was Irlandese, and no one paid anything that night. It was all very strange till I understood. He was rich by reason of poli— poli—"

"Politics?"

"Yes— so that he could do this as often as he wished, and yet not become poor. He was bigger even than Ettore, with a voice very round and loud, and a thick gold chain, heavy like an anchorchain, across his stomach. And up above all this richness lived Costanza. She had one bambino now, and very happy she looked. I was afraid to speak to her, and sometimes in the evening waited to watch when she came out of her own door at the side, her dress very fine. She, too, was fatter, but very beautiful. She had large soft eyes."

It was not my place to say anything, but I noticed the change of tense.

"Ebbene, one day Pietro took me by the arm and into that saloon, and the minute Ettore saw me he knew me, but instead of turning all colors he gave a great laugh of welcome and put his hand out and asked what I would drink. What, signore, could I do? I a poor mason, and this rich man with all his friends. So I reasoned with myself, saying, if he has made Costanza happy, that is what my money was meant for— let it go! So I tried to do that, and, after we had drunk, we went upstairs by the porta privata, and he called to Costanza.

She came in with the bambino in her arms, and that very minute I knew she was happy."

"You were a generous man," I said, "and a brave one."

He sent me a twisted smile. "When one loves, nothing is impossible— and I still loved, very greatly. Picture me, signore. I am a man that is called consistene— I have begun to forget my English— so what could I do at that time? She was his, and she also loved, and I said to myself, What is eighteen hundred lire against the peace of a woman's heart— and such a woman? I knew in a second that she had no thought of Ettore being a thief, or she could not have saluted me with talk of Portofino and many people there. Then he left us for a while, which he would not have done in Italy, and she said: 'Is it not well what Ettore has done in little more than a year? Out of his eighteen hundred lire but little was left when we got here— and behold!' Then I saw more clearly than ever that Ettore was innocent in her mind."

"But every one knew of the robbery in Portofino."

"Per Bacco, it was the talk of the village till something else happened, but there could be no proving. Nor did any of the talk reach Costanza, I think, because she did not write home for many months— when it had been forgotten. So it came that I got the habit of going to that saloon. Sometimes when the doors were shut I stayed and talked with them, till it came to one night that Ettore was very worried about mire politice in which he had an enemy, one Simone Gardarino, a Napolitano. I, too, knew this Simone to be a bad man— even for Napoli. Perhaps Ettore was infelice that night, and needed a friend, because he looked at me and said, 'Between you and me, Adriano, there is a matter of eighteen hundred lire.' "

He twisted his old shoulders out of the basket straps, and accepted a cigarette.

"It is half a lifetime since one of these touched my lips. Well, I told Ettore that the money was a matter of his— his— "

"Cosienza?"

"Yes, his cosienza. Whereupon he regarded me strangely, and said that when he carried wood past where I laid stone, he always hoped greatly that the wall I built would fall and kill me, and that for the love of a woman it is easy for a man to become a devil, and the more desirable the woman, the easier it was. Has the signore noticed that when one is anxious and perhaps frightened, he often speaks a great truth?"

There was wisdom here, but I only nodded again.

"Well, Ettore opened his heart that night. It may have been on account of our talk about Portofino and the sun and the children playing in the piazza and the Chiesa di San Gorgio looking down on the harbor which, as the signore

knows, is round and small with much color in the water. But, whatever it was, he became gentle, and promised to get me the best wages in New York, where a mason can be rich in a short time if he is friends with the Irlandese politicos. And he went presently to a drawer behind the counter, and began reckoning how much eighteen hundred lire would be, with interest, signore, for the use of my money, when, molto subito, a man who was hiding there jumped up, and struck him through the back with a knife that Ettore used for cutting lemons. Ettore fell down dead, and the man ran out very quickly at the back door, but not before I saw that it was Simone Gardarino."

"You were left— with that?"

"Yes, picture it. I gave a great shout, and tried to lift Ettore, and Costanza came running down, and, seeing what she did, and the money drawer open, regarded me with hate like fire, and burst into the street with many cries so that immediately there came in two Irlandese policemen. And they, seeing Ettore dead on the floor and the money drawer open, took me away very quickly."

I could imagine him hustled along between the blue-coated men, followed by a shouting crowd of Italians who would cluster round the station door.

"What a misfortune! But they could have done nothing else."

"Veramente, that is so. And there followed soon the prova— the trial— at which my story made laughter and curses, for Costanza, in a new black dress, and the bambino in her arms which made all people molto sympatico, told how Ettore and I came from Portofino in Ligure, and that I was also her lover there, but she loved Ettore the better and came with him, and in one year I came also to find him, and make friends that I might do this thing. Then, when I told my story of Simone Gardarino, there rose up three men, also Napolitani, who made giuramento— I have forgotten the word—"

"Who made oath?"

"Yes— that at that time Simone was with them in another saloon a kilometer away, and remained there till midnight. Then I went to Sing Sing, to be hanged by and by."

He had forgotten now all about Portofino and Padrone Razzolo, and I tried to picture him in a forbidding structure fitted with iron bars, this son of the olive-green hillside, with his passion, his love, and his childlike soul.

"It is a hard thing for a man to be in captivity, thus, and innocent. So many thoughts he has, and without help. I had not long to live, two months, so I wrote to my mother, asking the Dirretore of the prison not to post it till the week after I was hanged. In this I told my mother only the truth. Also I wrote to Pietro, asking him and the rest to say nothing at home. Then six weeks went, very slow and isolate, and there came to me in my cell news, molto privata,

that on the day of my death there would be a rebellione in that prison. These men talked to each other by small strokes on the wall, of which they gave me the secret, being about to die. But the guards knew nothing. Then I said to myself, Is it not enough that one innocent man dies on that day, for they had planned to kill many? So I asked to see the Dirretore, and made the rebellione known to him, and again made giuramento that I had not killed Ettore.

"There was much talk between him and other hard-faced men, after which they asked me to explain the language on the wall. This I would not, because perhaps it would lead other innocents into trouble; but it came that they found I was right about the rebellione, whereupon the Dirretore consulted with others, very high and powerful, so instead of hanging me they kept me for five years and then gave me a hundred dollars and my liberta."

Freedom! He was not looking at me then, but toward San Fruttuoso, and I could find nothing but a great patience and gentleness in his brown face. Five innocent years in Sing Sing, and forty under the olives!

"That hundred dollars," he continued, "I spent looking for Costanza. You see the saloon was now operated by another put there by the Irlandese politico. It made no difference to him, the death of Ettore, but the vota of the Italians, he sought that. Pietro had gone away, and Costanza, she was, I think, in Chicago. Perhaps at that time it was as well that I, an assassino, for such I still was, did not find her. I was very lonely, with the marks of the prison on my face, signore. I wanted to come home, but I feared to come. Then, very suddenly, I wrote to my mother, and said I was coming. Ebbene, I did. From Genova I walked to Portofino, taking the trail that leads above San Fruttuoso, and came to this cottage. It was empty— with no windows, to avoid the tax. Hard-by worked a man I did not know, so him I asked where Maria Cesto might be, and he looked at me and said that five years ago there was a Maria Cesto who had from her son a letter from America, sent to her after he was hanged, and, reading it, she dropped down dead."

"That letter?" I asked, horrified.

"Veramente. It seemed that in error it was posted."

He told me all this not with any gloom, but in a sort of quiet retrospect, as though the grim outline of experience were softened by the haze of the past.

"When an evil thing is done, how often is it the innocent suffer most, having little defense! Well, I had my pardone, which I took to the Municipio for all to see, and an awocato Inglese who was with Razzolo did it into Italian that all might read. But the family of Ettore neither read nor forgot anything. Nor was there any one who wanted me to build them a house, because it was said it would fall down. So I lived here for many years, till one day the priest, Juliano Collonno, came quickly up the hill, and all out of breath, and took both my

hands in his, and kissed me and said: 'It is well with my son, and there is word for him from America.' "

"Word of Costanza?"

"No, but of Simone, who was now dead, having himself been hanged in Boston. It was Simone's turn to be hanged, and this time there was no pardone. So, knowing this, he spoke very openly to the priest, who spent that last night with him, and told him how it was he who had killed Ettore in New York more than twenty years before. That priest confessed him, and told the Dirretore of that prison. So they made a writing that Simone signed, and a copy of this writing was sent to the priest of San Giorgio, and immediately it came he climbed quickly up to tell me. He sat there, signore, where you sit, with the tears running down his face, and asked me what he could do for me. And I said to put that writing in the Municipio where all might read, though it was too late now for a writing to make any difference, and I went on with my work. In one hour and a half, signore, Portofino came up the hill to this place to see me."

"What a wonderful day for you!"

"Perhaps: I do not know. One does not forget five years in Sing Sing in an hour and a half. There was much talk, especially from the famiglia of Ettore, and, within a week, a villa to build for Gregorio, the contractor, of Paraggi. But again it was too late, and I desired to lay no more stone. The priest told me I should marry, and I said to him to find Costanza for me, and I would marry even though I were carried up the sentiero to San Giorgio. So the years passed, signore, till it came that there arrived in Portofino a woman who had seen much of the world."

Here he paused, sending me a look infinitely boyish. Every wrinkle of him was charged with contentment, his eyes had an expression at once roguish and amused, and one perceived in him the resilient Latin who responds to a pleasing thought as the sea changes when a cloud glides from the face of the sun.

"When I saw her, signore, I seemed to feel young again, and that after all it was not too late; so when she came this way, I asked her if she liked the view of San Fruttuoso well enough to marry me, and, per Bacco, she did, counting my years as nothing. And so we were married but yesterday."

"Splendid!" I said. "You're a wise man. It does not do to cling too closely to the past."

He smiled so that his eyes nearly closed. "That is as it may be. I have talked much, and the signore is without doubt tired with hearing me, so will he drink a little vino rosso? I have only the red wine of the country."

"With pleasure— to your health— to both your healths."

"Costanza!" he called gayly. "Costanza! The signore and I come for some vino rosso. An American— and a patient man."

The old woman waved a hand from the cabin window. Even at this distance one could see that once she must have been very beautiful.

6: A Chapter From The Life Of An Ant
Irvin S. Cobb
1876-1944
The Saturday Evening Post, 11 March 1916

SOMEONE said once— the rest of us subsequently repeating it on occasion— that this world is but an ant hill, populated by many millions of ants, which run about aimlessly or aimfully as the case may be. All of which is true enough. Seek you out some lofty eminence, such as the top floor of a skyscraper or the top of a hill, and from it, looking down, consider a crowded city street at noon time or a county fairground on the day of the grand balloon ascension. Inevitably the simile will recur to the contemplative mind.

The trouble, though, with the original coiner of the comparison was that he did not go far enough. He should have said the world was populated by ants— and by anteaters. For so surely as we find ants, there, too, do we find the anteaters. You behold the ants bustling about, making themselves leaner trying to make themselves fatter; terrifically busied with their small affairs; hiving up sustenance against the hard winter; gnawing, digging and delving; climbing, crawling, building and breeding— in short, deporting themselves with that energy, that restless industry which so stirred the admiration of the Prophet of old that, on his heavenward pilgrimage, he tarried long enough to tell the sluggard— name of the sluggard not given in the chronicles— to go to the ant and consider of her.

The anteater for the moment may not actually be in sight, but be assured he is waiting. He is waiting around the corner until the ant has propagated in numbers amounting to an excess; or, in other words, until the class that is born every second, singly— and sometimes as twins— has grown plentiful enough to furnish a feasting. Forth he comes then, gobbling up Brer Ant, along with his fullness and his richness, his heirs and his assigns, his substance and his stock in trade.

To make the illustration concrete, we might say that were there no ants there would be no Wall Street; and by the same token were there no anteaters there would be no Wall Street either. Without anteaters the ants would multiply and replenish the earth beyond computation. Without ants the anteaters would have to live upon each other— which would be bad for them but better for the rest of creation. War is the greatest of the anteaters— it feeds upon the bodies of the ants. Kings upon their thrones, devisers of false doctrines, crooked politicians, grafters, con men, card sharks, thimbleriggers— all these are anteaters battening on the substance of simple-hearted, earnest-minded ants. The ant believes what you tell him; the greedsome anteater thrives upon this credulity. Roughly, then, for purposes of classification, one

may divide the world at large into two groups— in this larger group here the ants, in that smaller group there the anteaters.

So much, for purposes of argument, being conceded, we may safely figure Emanuel Moon as belonging in the category of the ants, pure and simple— reasonably pure and undeniably simple. However, at the time whereof I write I doubt whether it had ever occurred to anyone to liken him to an ant. His mother had called him Mannie, his employers called him plain Moon, and to practically everybody else he was just little Mr. Moon, who worked in the Commonwealth Bank. He had started there, in the bank, as office boy; by dint of years of untiring fidelity to the interests of that institution he had worked up to the place of assistant cashier, salary seventy-five dollars a month. Privately he nursed an ambition to become, in time, cashier, with a cashier's full powers. It might be added that in this desire he stood practically alone.

Emanuel Moon was a little man, rising of thirty-five, who believed that the Whale swallowed Jonah, that if you swore a certain form of oath you were certain of hell-fire, and that Mr. Hiram Blair, president of the Commonwealth Bank, hung the Big Dipper. If the Bible had put it the other way round he would have believed as sincerely that it was Jonah who swallowed the Whale. He had a wistful, bashful little smile, an air of being perpetually busy, and a round, mild eye the colour of a boiled oyster. He also had a most gentle manner and the long, prehensile upper lip that is found only in the South American tapir and the confirmed clarinet player. Emanuel Moon had one besetting sin, and only one— he just would play the clarinet.

On an average of three nights a week he withdrew himself from the company assembled about the base-burner stove in the parlour if it were winter, or upon the front porch of Mrs. Teenie Morrill's boarding house if it were seasonable weather, and went up to his room on the third floor and played the clarinet. Some said he played it and some that he merely played at it. He knew Annie Laurie off by heart and for a term of years had been satisfied in that knowledge. Now he was learning another air— The Last Rose of Summer.

He prosecuted his musical education on what he called his off evenings. Wednesday night he went to prayer meeting and Sunday night to the regular church service. Tuesday night he always spent at his lodge; and perhaps once in a fortnight he called upon Miss Katie Rouser, who taught in the High School and for whom he was believed to entertain sentiments that did him credit, even though he had never found words in which to voice them.

At the lodge he served on the committees which did the hard work; that, as a general proposition, meant also the thankless work. If things went well someone else took the credit; if they went ill Emanuel and his colabourers

shared the blame. The conditions had always been so— when he was a small boy and when he was a youth, growing up. In his adolescence, if there was a picnic in contemplation or a straw ride or a barm dance, Mannie had been graciously permitted by common consent of all concerned to arrange with the livery-stable man for the teams, to hire the coloured string band, to bargain with the owner of the picnic grounds or the barn, to see to ice for the ice-water barrel and lemons for the lemonade bucket.

While he thus busied himself the other youths made dates for the occasion with all the desirable girls. Hence it was that on the festal date Emanuel went partnerless to the party; and this was just as well, too, seeing that right up until the time of starting he would be completely occupied with last-moment details, and, after that, what with apologising for any slipups that might have occurred, and being scolded and ordered about on errands and called upon to explain this or that, would have small time to play the squire to any young person of the opposite sex, even had there been one convenient.

It was so at the bank, where he did more work than anybody and got less pay than anybody. It was so, as I have just stated, at the lodge. In a word, Emanuel had no faculty as an executive, but an enormous capacity for executing. The earth is full of him. Whereever five or more are gathered together there is present at least one of the Emanuel Moons of this world.

It had been a hot, long summer, even for a climate where the summers are always long and nearly always hot; and at the fag end of it Emanuel inclined strongly toward a desire for a short rest. Diffidently he managed to voice his mood and his need to Mr. Blair. That worthy gentleman had but just returned home, a giant refreshed, after a month spent in the North Carolina mountains. He felt so fit, so fine, so robust, he took it as a personal grievance that any about him should not likewise be feeling fit. He cut Emanuel off pretty short. Vacations, he intimated, were for those whose years and whose services in behalf of humanity entitled them to vacations; young men who expected to get along in business had best rid their thoughts of all such pampered hankerings.

Emanuel took the rebuke in good grace, as was his way; but that evening at the supper table he created some excitement among his fellow boarders by quietly and unostentatiously fainting, face forward, into a saucer of pear preserves that was mostly juice. He was removed to his room and put to bed, and attended by Doctor Lake. The next morning he was not able to go to the bank. On being apprised of the situation Mr. Blair very thoughtfully abated of his previous resolution and sent Emanuel word that he might have a week or even ten days off— at his own expense— wherein to recuperate.

Some thirty-six hours later, therefore, Emanuel might have been found on board the fast train bound for Louisville, looking a trifle pulled down and shaky, but filled with a great yearning. In Louisville, at a certain establishment doing a large mail-order business, was to be had for thirty-eight dollars, list price, fifteen and five off for cash, a clarinet that was to his present infirm and leaky clarinet as minted gold is to pot metal.

To be sure, this delectable instrument might be purchased, sight unseen, but with privilege of examination, through the handy medium of the parcel post; the house handling it was in all respects reliable and lived up to the printed promise of the catalogue, but to Emanuel half the pride and pleasure of becoming its proprietor lay in going into the place and asking to see such and such a clarinet, and fingering it and testing its tone, and finally putting down the money and carrying it off with him under his arm. He meant, first of all, to buy his new clarinet; for the rest his plans were hazy. He might stay on in Louisville a few days or he might go elsewhere. He might even return home and spend the remainder of his vacation perfecting himself in his still faulty rendition of *The Last Rose of Summer*.

For an hour or so after boarding the train he viewed the passing scenery as it revealed itself through the day-coach window and speculated regarding the personalities of his fellow passengers. After that hour or so he began to nod. Presently he slumbered, with his head bobbing against the seat-back and one arm dangling in the aisle. A sense of being touched half roused him; a moment later he opened his eyes with the feeling that he had lost his hat or was about to lose it. Alongside him stood a well-dressed man of, say, thirty-eight or forty, who regarded him cordially and who held between the long, slender fingers of his right hand a little rectangle of blue cardboard, having punch marks in it.

"Excuse me, friend," said this man, "but didn't this fall out of your hat? I picked it up here on the floor alongside you."

"I reckon maybe it did," said Emanuel, removing his hat and noticing that the customary decoration conferred by the conductor was absent from its band. "I'm certainly much obliged to you, sir."

"Don't mention it," said the stranger. "Bet-ter stick it in good and tight this time. They might try to collect a second fare from you if you couldn't show your credentials. Remember, don't you, the story about the calf that ate up his express tag and what the old nigger man said about it?"

The stranger's accent stamped him as a Northerner; his manner revealed him indubitably as a man of the world— withal it was a genial manner. He bestowed a suit case alongside in the aisle and slipped into the seat facing Emanuel. Emanuel vaguely felt flattered. It had promised to be rather a lonely journey.

"You don't mind my sitting here a bit, do you?" added the man after he was seated.

"Not at all— glad to have you," said Emanuel, meaning it. "Nice weather— if it wasn't so warm," he continued, making conversation.

It started with the weather; but you know how talk runs along. At the end of perhaps ten minutes it had somehow worked around to amusements— checkers and chess and cards.

"Speaking of cards now," said the stranger, "I like a little game once in a while myself. Helps the time to pass away when nothing else will. Fact is, I usually carry a deck along with me just for that purpose. Fact is, I've got a new deck with me now, I think." He fumbled in the breast pocket of his light flannel coat and glanced about him. "Tell you what— suppose we play a few hands of poker— show-down, you know— for ten cents a corner, say, or a quarter? We could use my suit case for a card table by resting it on our knees between us." He reached out into the aisle.

"I'm much obliged," said Emanuel with an indefinable sense of pain at having to decline so friendly an invitation; "but, to tell you the truth, I make it a point never to touch cards at all. It wouldn't do— in my position. You see, I'm in a bank at home."

With newly quickened alertness the stranger's eyes narrowed. He put the cards back into his pocket and straightened up attentively. "Oh, yes," he said, "I see. Well, that being the case, I don't blame you." Plainly he had not been hurt by Emanuel's refusal to join in so innocent a pastime as dealing show-down hands at ten cents a side. On the contrary he warmed visibly. "A young man in a bank can't be too careful— especially if it's a small town, where everybody knows everybody else's business. You let a young fellow that works in a bank in a small town, or even a medium-sized town, play a few hands of poker and, first thing you know, it's all over the place that he's gambling and they've got an expert on his books. Let's see now— where was it you said you lived?" Emanuel told him.

"Well, now, that's a funny thing! I used to know a man in your town. Let's see— what was his name? Parker? Parsons?" He paused. Emanuel shook his head.

"Perkins? Perkins? Could it have been Perkins?" essayed the other tentatively, his eyes fixed keenly on the ingenuous countenance of his opposite; and then, as Emanuel's head nodded forward affirmatively: "Why, that's the name— Perkins," proclaimed the stranger with a little smile of triumph.

"Probably J. W. Perkins," said Emanuel. "Mr. J. W. Perkins is our leading hardware merchant. He banks with us; I see him every day— pretty near it."

"No; not J. W. Perkins," instantly confessed his companion. "That's the name all right enough, but not the initials. Didn't this Mr. Perkins have a brother, or a cousin or something, who died?"

"Oh, I know who you mean, now," said Emanuel, glad to be able to help with the identification. "Alfred Perkins— he died two years ago this coming October."

"How old was he?" The Northerner had the air about him of being determined to make sure.

"About fifty, I judge— maybe fifty-two or three."

"And didn't they use to call him Al for short?"

"Yes; nearly everybody did— Mr. Al Perkins."

"That's the party," agreed the other. "Al Perkins! I knew him well. Strange, now, that I can't think where it was I met him— I move round so much in my business, being on the road as a travelling man, it's hard keeping track of people; but I know we spent a week or two together somewhere or other. Speaking of names, mine is Caruthers— John P. Caruthers. Sorry I haven't got a card with me— I ran out of cards yesterday."

"Mine," said our townsman, "is Emanuel Moon."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Moon," said Mr. Caruthers as he sought Emanuel's right hand and shook it heartily.

"Very glad indeed. You don't meet many people of your name— Oh, by Jove, that's another funny thing!"

"What?" said Emanuel.

"Why," said Mr. Caruthers, "I used to have a pal— a good friend— with your name; Robert Moon it was. He lived in Detroit, Michigan. Fine fellow, Bob was. I wonder could old Bob Moon have been your cousin?"

"No," said Emanuel almost regretfully; "I'm afraid not. All my people live South, so far as I know."

"Well, anyhow, you'd enjoy knowing old Bob," went on the companionable Mr. Caruthers. "Have a smoke?"

He produced both cigars and cigarettes. Emanuel said he never smoked, so Mr. Caruthers lighted a cigar.

Up to this point the conversation had been more or less general. Now, somehow, it took a rather personal and direct trend. Mr. Caruthers proved to be an excellent listener, although he asked quite a number of leading questions as they went along. He evinced a kindly curiosity regarding Emanuel's connection with the bank. He was interested in banks, it seemed; his uncle, now deceased, had been, he said, a very prominent banker in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Emanuel had a rôle that was new to him; a pleasing rôle though. Nearly always in company he had to play audience; now he held the centre of the stage, with another listening to what he might say, and, what was more, listening with every sign of, deep attention. He spoke at length, Emanuel did, of the bank, its size, its resources, its liabilities, its physical appearance and its personnel, leading off with its president and scaling down to its black janitor. He referred to Mr. Blair's crustiness of manner toward persons of lesser authority, which manner, he hastened to explain, was quite all right if you only understood Mr. Blair's little ways.

He mentioned in passing that Herb Kivil, the cashier, was addicted to tennis, and that on Tuesdays and Fridays, when Herb left early to play tennis, he, Moon, closed up the vault and took over certain other duties which ordinarily fell to Herb. From the bank he progressed by natural stages to Mrs. Morrill's boarding house and from there to his own individual tastes and likings. In this connection it was inevitable that the subject of clarinet playing should obtrude. Continuing along this strain Emanuel felt moved to disclose his principal object in journeying to Louisville at this particular time.

"There's a store there that carries a clarinet that I'm sort of interested in," he stated— but got no farther, for here Mr. Caruthers broke in on him.

"Well, sir, it's a mighty little world after all," he exclaimed. "First you drop your punch check out of your hat and I come along and pick it up, and I sit down here and we get acquainted. Then I find out that I used to know a man in your town— Abner Perkins."

"Alfred," corrected Mr. Moon gently.

"Sure— Alfred Perkins. That's what I meant to say but my tongue slipped. Then you tell me your name, and it turns out I've got a good friend that, if he's not your own cousin, ought to be on account of the name being the same. One coincidence right after another! And then, on top of all that, you tell me you want to buy a new clarinet. And that's the most curious part of it all, because— Say, Moon, you must have heard of Galling & Moore, of Boston, New York, and Paris, France."

"I can't say as I ever did. I don't seem to place them," admitted Emanuel.

"If you're interested in a clarinet you ought to know about them, because Gatling & Moore are just the biggest wholesale dealers in musical instruments in the United States; that's all— just the whole United States. And I— the same fellow that's sitting right here facing you— I travel this territory for Gatling & Moore. Didn't I say this was a small world?"

A small world indeed— and a cozily comfortable one as well, seeing that by its very compactness one was thrown into contact with so pleasing a

personality as this Mr. John Caruthers betrayed. This was the thought that exhilarated Mr. Emanuel Moon as he answered:

"You sell clarinets? Then you can tell me exactly what I ought to pay— "

"No; don't get me wrong," Mr. Caruthers hastened to explain. "I said I travelled for Gatling & Moore. You see, they sell everything, nearly— musical instruments is just one of their lines. I handle— er— sporting goods— playing cards, poker chips, guns, pistols, athletic supplies; all like that, you understand. That's my branch of the business; musical goods is another branch.

"But what I was going to suggest was this: Izzy Gottlieb, who's the head of the musical department in the New York office, is one of the best friends I've got on this earth. If I was to walk in and say to Izzy— yes, even if I was to write in to him and tell him I had a friend who was figuring on buying a clarinet— I know exactly what old Izzy would do. Izzy would just naturally turn the whole shop upside down until he found the niftiest little old clarinet there was in stock, and as a favour to me he'd let us have it at just exactly cost. That's what good old Izzy would do in a blooming minute. Altogether it ought to come to about half what you'd pay for the identical same article out of a retail place down in this country."

"But could you, sir— would you be willing to do that much for a stranger?" Stress of emotion made Emanuel's voice husky.

"If you don't believe I would do just that very thing, why, a dime'll win you a trip to the Holy Land!" answered back the engaging Caruthers beamingly and enthusiastically.

Then his tone grew earnest: "Listen here, Moon: no man that I take a liking to is a stranger to me— not any more. And I've got to own up to it— I like you. You're my kind of a man— frank, open, on the level; and yet not anybody's easy mark either. I'll bet you're a pretty good hand at sizing up people offhand yourself. Oh, I knew you'd do, the minute I laid eyes on you."

"Thank you; much obliged," murmured Emanuel. To all intents he was overcome.

"Now, then," continued his new-found friend warmly, "let me suggest this: You go ahead and look at the clarinet that this piking Louisville concern's got for sale if you want to, but don't buy. Just look— there's no harm in that. But don't invest.

"I'm on my way back to New York now to— to lay in my new lines for the trade. I'll see old Izzy the first thing after I blow in and I'll get the niftiest clarinet that ever played a tune— get it at actual cost, mind you! I'll stick it down into one of my trunks and bring it back with me down this way.

"Let's see"— he consulted a small memorandum book— "I ought to strike this territory again in about ten days or two weeks. We'll make it two weeks, to

be sure. Um— this is Wednesday. I'll hit your town on Tuesday, the twenty-ninth— that's two weeks from yesterday. I ought to get in from Memphis sometime during the afternoon. I'll come to your bank to find you. You're always there on Tuesdays, ain't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Emanuel. "Don't you remember my telling you that on Tuesdays Herb Kivil always left early to play tennis and I closed up?"

"So you did," confirmed Mr. Caruthers. "I'd forgotten your telling me that."

"For that matter," supplemented Emanuel, "I'm there every day till three anyhow, and sometimes later; so if— "

"We'll make it Tuesday, the twenty-ninth, to be sure," said Mr. Caruthers with an air of finality.

"If you should want the money now— " began Emanuel; and he started to haul out the little flat leather purse with the patent clasp wherein he carried his carefully saved cash assets.

With a large, generous gesture the other checked him.

"Hold on!" counselled Caruthers. "You needn't be in such a hurry, old boy. I don't even know what the thing is going to cost yet. Izzy'll charge it to me on the books and then you can settle with me when I bring it to you, if that's satisfactory."

He stood up, carefully flicking some cigar ashes off the trailing ends of his four-in-hand tie, and glanced at a watch.

"Well, it's nearly six o'clock. Time flies when a fellow is in good company, don't it? We'll be in Louisville in less than an hour, won't we?— if we're on time. I've got to quit you there; I'm going on to Cincy to-night. Tell you what— let's slip into the diner and have a bite and a little nip of something together first— I want to see as much of you as I can. You take a little drink once in a while, don't you?"

"I drink a glass of light beer occasionally," admitted Emanuel.

Probably in his whole life he had consumed as much as five commercial quarts of that liquid, half a pint at a time.

"Fine business!" said Caruthers. "Beer happens to be my regular stand-by too. Come on, then." And he led the way forward for the transported Emanuel.

They said at the bank and at the boarding house that Moon looked better for his week's lay-off, none of them knowing, of course, what had come into the little man's dun-coloured life.

On the twenty-eighth of the month he was so abstracted that Mr. Blair, desiring his presence for the moment in the president's office, had to call him twice, a thing which so annoyed Mr. Blair that the second time he fairly shouted Emanuel's name; and when Emanuel came hurrying into his presence inquired somewhat acidly whether Emanuel was suffering from any auricular

affection. On the morning of the twenty-ninth Emanuel was in quite a little fever of anticipation. The morning passed; the noon or dinner hour arrived and passed.

It was one-thirty. The street drowsed in the early autumnal sunshine, and in front of his bookstore, in a tilted-back chair, old Mr. Wilcox for a spell slumbered audibly. There is a kind of dog— not so numerous since automobiles have come into such general and fatal use— that sought always the middle of the road as a suitable spot to take a nap in, arousing with a yelp when wheels or hoofs seemed directly over him and, having escaped annihilation by an eighth of an inch, moving over perhaps ten feet and lying down again in the perilous pathway of traffic. One of this breed slept now, undisturbed except by flies, at the corner of Front and Franklin. For the time being he was absolutely safe. Emanuel had been to his dinner and had returned. He was beginning to worry. About two-thirty, just after the cashier had taken his tennis racket and gone for the day, Emanuel answered a ring at the telephone.

Over the wire there came to him the well-remembered sound of the blithe Crutherian voice:

"That you, old man?" spake Mr. Caruthers jovially. "Well, I'm here, according to promise. Just got in from down the road."

"Did— you— bring— it?" inquired Emanuel, almost tremulously.

"The clarinet? You bet your life I brought it— and she's a bird too."

"I'm ever so much obliged," said Emanuel. "I don't know how I can ever thank you— going to all that trouble on my account. Are you at the hotel? I'll be over there just as soon as I can close up— I can't leave here till three."

"Stay right where you are," bade his friend. "I'll be over to see you inside of fifteen or twenty minutes."

He was as good as his word. At ten minutes before three he walked in, the mould of city fashion in all his outward aspects; and when Emanuel had disposed of Mr. Herman Felsburg, who dropped in to ask what Felsburg Brothers' balance was, and when Mr. Felsburg had gone, Caruthers' right hand and Emanuel's met in an affectionate clasp across the little shelf of the cashier's window. Followed then an exchange of inquiries and assurances touching on the state of health and well-being of each gentleman.

"I'd like mightily to ask you inside," said Emanuel next, anxious to extend all possible hospitalities; "but it's strictly against the rules. Take a chair there, won't you, and wait for me— I'll be only a few minutes or so."

Instead of taking one of the row of chairs that stood in the front of the old-fashioned bank, Mr. Caruthers paused before the wicket, firing metropolitan

pleasantries across at the little man, who bustled about inside the railed-off inclosure, putting books and papers in their proper places.

"Everybody's gone but me, as it happens," he explained, proud to exhibit to Mr. Caruthers the extent and scope of his present responsibilities.

"Nobody on deck but you, eh?" said Caruthers, looking about him.

"Nobody but me," answered back Emanuel; "and in about a minute and a half I'll be through too."

The cash was counted. He carried it into the depths of the ancient and cumbersome vault, which blocked off a section of the wall behind the cashier's desk, and in their appointed niches bestowed, also, certain large ledgerlike tomes. He closed and locked the inner steel door and was in the act of swinging to the heavy outer door.

"Look here a minute!" came sharply from Mr. Caruthers.

It was like a command. Obeying involuntarily, Emanuel faced about. From under his coat, where it had been hidden against his left side, Mr. Caruthers, still standing at the wicket, was drawing forth something long and black and slim, and of a most exceeding shininess— something with silver trimmings on it and a bell mouth— a clarinet that was all a clarinet should be, and yet a half brother to a saxophone.

"I sort of thought you'd be wanting to get a flash at it right away," said Mr. Caruthers, holding the magnificent instrument up in plain sight. "So I brought it along— for a surprise."

With joy Emanuel Moon's round eyes widened and moistened. After the fashion of a rabbit suddenly confronted with lettuce his lower face twitched. His overhanging upper lip quivered to wrap itself about that virgin mouthpiece, as his fingers itched to fondle that slender polished fountain of potential sweet melodies. And he forgot other things.

He came out from behind the counter and almost with reverence took the splendid thing from the smiling Mr. Caruthers. He did remember to lock the street door as they issued to the sidewalk; but from that juncture on, until he discovered himself with Caruthers in Caruthers' room on the third floor of the hotel, diagonally across the street and down the block from the bank, and was testing the instrument with soft, tentative toots and finding to his extreme gratification that this clarinet bleated, not in sheeplike bleats, as his old one did, but rather mooed in a deep bass voice suggestive of cows, all that passed was to Mr. Moon but a confused blur of unalloyed joyousness.

Indeed, from that point thenceforward he was not quite sure of anything except that, over his protests, Mr. Caruthers declined to accept any reimbursement whatsoever for the cost of the new clarinet, he explaining that, thanks to the generosity of that kindly soul, Izzy Gottlieb, the requisite outlay

had amounted to so trifling a sum as not to be worthy of the time required for further discussion; and that, following this, he played Annie Laurie all the way through, and essayed the first bars of The Last Rose of Summer, while Mr. Caruthers sat by listening and smoking, and seemingly gratified to the utmost at having been the means of bringing this pleasure to Mr. Moon.

If Mr. Caruthers was moved, in chance intervals, to ask certain questions touching upon the banking business, with particular reference to the methods employed in conducting and safeguarding the Commonwealth Bank, over the way, Emanuel doubtlessly answered him full and truthfully, even though his thoughts for the moment were otherwise engaged.

In less than no time at all— so it appeared to Emanuel— six o'clock arrived, which in our town used to mean the hour for hot supper, except on Sunday, when it meant the hour for cold supper; and Emanuel reluctantly got up to go. But Caruthers would not listen to any suggestions of their parting for yet a while. Exigencies of business would carry him on his lonesome way the next morning; he had just stopped over to see Emanuel, anyway, and naturally he wished to enjoy as much of his society as was possible during a sojourn so brief.

"Moon," he ordered, "you stay right where you are. We'll have something to eat together here. I'll call a waiter and we'll have it served up here in this room, so's we can be sort of private and sociable, and afterward you can play your clarinet some more. How does that little programme strike you?"

It struck Emanuel agreeably hard. It was rarely that he dined out, and to dine under such circumstances as these, in the company of so fascinating and so kindly a gentleman as Mr. John P. Caruthers, of the North— well, his cup was simply overflowing, that's all.

"I'd be glad to stay," he said, "if you don't think I'm imposing on your kindness. I was thinking of asking you to go to Mrs. Morrill's with me for supper— if you would."

"We can have a better time here," said Caruthers. He stepped over to the wall telephone. "Have a cocktail first? No? Then neither will I. But a couple of bottles of beer won't hurt us— will it?"

Emanuel was going to say a small glass of beer was as much as he ever imbibed at a sitting, but before he could frame the statement Caruthers was giving the order.

It was at the close of a most agreeable meal when Emanuel, following Mr. Caruthers' invitation and example, had emptied his second glass of beer and was in the act of putting down the tumbler, that a sudden sensation of drowsiness assailed his senses. He bent back in his chair, shaking his head to clear it of the mounting dizziness, and started to say he believed he would step

to the window for a breath of fresh air. But, because he felt so very comfortable, he changed his mind. His head lolled over on one side and his lids closed down on his heavy eyes. Thereafter a blank ensued.

When Emanuel awoke there was a flood of sunshine about him. For a moment he regarded an unfamiliar pattern of wall paper, the figures of which added to their unfamiliarity by running together curiously; he was in a strange bed, fully dressed, and as he moved his head on the rumpled pillow he realised that he had a splitting headache and that a nasty dryish taste was in his mouth. He remembered then where he was and what had happened, and sat up with a jerk, uttering a little remorseful moan.

The disordered room was empty. Caruthers was gone and Caruthers' suit case was gone too. Something rustled, and a folded sheet of hotel note paper slid off the bed cover and fell upon the floor. With trembling fingers he reclaimed the paper, and, opening it, he read what was scrawled on it in pencil:

"Dear Old Scout:

I'm sorry! I didn't suppose one bottle of beer would put you down and out. When you took the count all of a sudden, I figured the best thing to do was to let you sleep it off; so I got you into the bed. You've been right there all night and nobody's any the wiser for it except me. Sorry I couldn't wait until you woke up, but I have to catch the up train; so I've paid my bill and I'm beating it as soon as I write this. Your clarinet is with you. Think of me sometimes when you tootle on it. I'll let you hear from me one of these days.

"Yours in haste,

"J. P. C.

"P. S. If I were you I'd stay off the beer in future."

The up train? Why, that left at eight-forty-five! Surely it could not be that late! Emanuel got out his old silver watch, a legacy from a long-dead sire, and took one look at its two hands; and then in a quiver of haste, with no thought of breakfast or of his present state of unwashed untidiness, with no thought of anything except his precious clarinet, which he tucked under his coat, he let himself out of the door, leaving the key in the lock, and slipping through the deserted hallway he hastened down two flights of stairs; and taking a short cut that saved crossing the lobby, where inquisitive eyes might behold him in all his unkemptness and distress, he emerged from the side door of the Hotel Moderne.

Emanuel had proper cause to hurry. Never in all his years of service for the Commonwealth Bank had he failed to be on hand at eight o'clock to sort out the mail; and if his watch was to be believed here it was a quarter of nine! As he padded across the street on shaky legs a new apprehension that he had

come away the day before without locking the combination of the vault smote him. Suppose— suppose something was wrong!

The street door of the Commonwealth stood open, and though the interior seemed deserted he realised, with a sinking of the heart, that someone had arrived before him. He darted inside, dropped the clarinet out of sight in a cuddy under his desk, and fairly threw himself at the vault.

The outer door was closed and locked, as it should be. Nevertheless, his hands shook so that he could hardly work the mechanism. Finally, the tumblers obeyed him, and he swung open the thick twin slabs, unlocked the inner door with the key which he carried along with other keys on his key ring— and then fetched a sigh of relief that was half a sob. Everything was as it should be— cash, paper money, books, files and securities. As he backed out of the vault the door of the president's office opened and Mr. Blair stood there in the opening, confronting him with an accusing glare.

"Young man," said Mr. Blair, "you're late!"

"Yes, sir," said Emanuel. "I'm very sorry, sir. I must have overslept."

"So I judge!" Mr. Blair's accents were ominous. "So I judge, young man— but where?"

"W-where?" Emanuel, burning with shame, stammered the word.

"Yes, sir; that's what I said— where? Twenty minutes ago I telephoned to Mrs. Morrill's to find out what was keeping you from your duties, and they told me you hadn't been in all night— that your bed hadn't been slept in."

"Yes, sir; I slept out."

"I gathered as much." Mr. Blair's long white chin whiskers quivered as Mr. Blair's condemning eyes comprehended the shrinking figure before him from head to foot— the rumpled hair; the bloodshot eyes; the wrinkled clothes; the soiled collar; the skewed necktie; the fluttering hands. "Look here, young man; have you been drinking?"

"No, sir— yes, sir; that is, I— I had a little beer last night," owned Emanuel miserably.

"A little beer, huh?"

Mr. Blair, being popularly reputed to keep a private quart flask in his coat closet and at intervals to refresh himself therefrom behind the cover of the closet door, had a righteous contempt for wantons who publicly plied themselves with potables, whether of a malt, a spirituous or a vinous nature.

"A little beer, huh?" He put tons of menace into the repetition of the words. "Forever and a day traipsing off on vacations seems to breed bad habits in you, Moon. Now, look here! This is the first time this ever happened— so far as I know. I am inclined to excuse it this once. But see to it that it doesn't happen again— ever!"

"No, sir," said Emanuel gratefully. "It won't."

And it did not.

So shaken was Emanuel as to his nerves that three whole nights elapsed before he felt equal to practicing on his new clarinet. After that, though, in all his spare moments at the boarding house he played assiduously.

For the purposes of this narrative the passage of the ensuing fortnight is of no consequence. It passed, and that brings us to a Friday afternoon in mid-October. On the Friday afternoon in question the paymaster of the Great Western Crosstie Company deposited in the Commonwealth Bank, for overnight safeguarding, the funds to meet his semimonthly pay roll due to contractors, subcontractors, tow-boat owners and extra labourers, the total amounting to a goodly sum.

Next morning, when Herb Kivil opened the vault, he took one look and uttered one strangled cry. As Emanuel straightened up from the mail he was sorting, and as Mr. Blair stepped in off the street, out from between the iron doors staggered Herb Kivil, white as a sheet and making funny sounds with his mouth. The vault was empty— stripped of cash on hand; stripped of the Great Western Company's big deposit; stripped of every scrap of paper money; stripped of everything except the bank books and certain securities— in a word, stripped of between eighteen and nineteen thousand dollars, specie and currency. For the thief, whoever he might be, there was one thing to be said— he had an instinct for thoroughness in his make-up.

To say that the news, spreading with a most miraculous rapidity, made the town hum like a startled hive, is to state the case in the mildest of descriptive phrases. On the first alarm, the chief of police, accompanied by a good half of the day force, came at a dogtrot. Having severely questioned the frightened negro janitor, and examined all the doors and windows for those mysterious things known as clews, the chief gave it as his deliberate opinion that the robbery had been committed by some one who had means of access to the bank and its vault.

Inasmuch as there was about the place no evidence of forcible entry, and inasmuch as the face of the vault was not so much as scratched, and inasmuch, finally, as the combination was in perfect order, the population at large felt constrained to agree that Chief Henley had deduced aright. He took charge of the premises for the time being, Mr. Blair having already wired to a St. Louis detective agency beseeching the immediate presence and aid of an expert investigator.

It came out afterward that privily Mr. Blair suggested an immediate arrest, and gave to Henley the name of the person he desired to see taken into custody. But the chief, who was good-hearted— too good-hearted for his own

good, some people thought— demurred. He stood in a deep and abiding awe of Mr. Blair. But he did not want to make any mistakes, he said. Anyhow, a big-city sleuth was due before night.. Would not Mr. Blair consent to wait until the detective had arrived and made his investigation? For his part, he would guarantee that the individual under suspicion did not get away. To his postponement of the decisive step Mr. Blair finally agreed.

On the afternoon train over the Short line the expert appeared, an inscrutable gentleman named Fogarty with a drooping red moustache and a brow heavily wrinkled. This Mr. Fogarty first conferred briefly with Mr. Blair and with Chief Henley. Then, accompanied by these two and trailed by a distracted group of directors of the bank, he made a careful survey of the premises from the cellar coal hole to the roof scuttle, uttering not a single word the while. His manner was portentous. Following this he asked for a word in private with the head of the rifled institution.

Leaving the others clustered in a group outside, he and Mr. Blair entered Mr. Blair's office. Mr. Fogarty closed the door and faced Mr. Blair.

"This here," said Mr. Fogarty, "was what we call an inside job. Somebody here in this town— somebody who knew all there was to know about your bank— done it. Now, who do you suspicion?"

Lowering his voice, Mr. Blair told him, adding that only a deep sense of his obligations to himself and to his bank inspired him now to detail certain significant circumstances that had come to his personal attention within the past three weeks— or, to be exact, on a certain Wednesday morning in the latter part of September.

In his earlier movements Mr. Fogarty might have been deliberate; but once he made up his mind to a definite course of conduct he acted promptly. He came out of Mr. Blair's presence, walked straight up to Emanuel Moon, where Emanuel sat at his desk, and, putting his hand on Emanuel's shrinking shoulder, uttered the words:

"Young man, you're wanted! Put on your—"

Then Mr. Fogarty silently turned and beckoned to Chief Henley, invoking the latter's official co-operation and assistance.

Between the imported detective and the chief of police, Emanuel Moon, a silent, pitifully shrunken figure, walked round the corner to the City Hall, a crowd following along behind, and was locked up in a cell in the basement calaboose downstairs. Lingering about the hall after the suspect had been taken inside.

Divers citizens ventured the opinion that if the fellow wasn't guilty he certainly looked it. Well, so far as that goes, if a face as pale as putty and

downcast eyes brimming with a numbed misery betokened guilt Emanuel had not a leg left to stand on.

However, looks alone are not commonly accepted as competent testimony under our laws, and Emanuel did not abide for very long as a prisoner. The Grand Jury declined to indict him on such dubious proof as the bank people and Mr. Fogarty could offer for its consideration. Undoubtedly the Grand Jury was inspired in its refusal by the attitude the Commonwealth's attorney maintained, an attitude in which the circuit judge concurred.

It was known that Mr. Blair went to Commonwealth's Attorney Flournoy, practically demanding that Emanuel be held for trial, and, failing in that quarter, visited Judge Priest with the same object in view. But perversely the judge would not agree with Mr. Blair that the evidence in hand justified such a course; would not on any account concede that Emanuel Moon was the only person, really, who might properly be suspected.

On that head he was as one with Prosecutor Flournoy. They held— these two— that possession of a costly musical instrument, regarding which the present owner would admit nothing except that it was a gift from an unknown friend, coupled with that individual's stubborn refusal to tell where he had spent a certain night and in whose company, did not constitute a fair presumption that he had made away with nearly nineteen thousand dollars.

"But look here, Judge Priest," hotly argued Mr. Blair upon the occasion of his call upon His Honour, "it stands to reason Moon is the thief. Why, it couldn't have been anybody else! And I want the facts brought out."

"Whut facts have you got, Hiram?" asked the judge.

"Moon knew the combination of the safe, didn't he? He carried the keys for the inside door of the safe, didn't he? And a key to the door of the building, too, didn't he?"

"Hiram," countered Judge Priest, looking Mr. Blair straight in the eye, "ef you expect the authorities to go ahead on that kind of evidence I reckin we'd have to lock you up too."

Mr. Blair started as though a physical blow had been aimed at his head.

"Why— why— What do you mean by that, Judge?" he demanded, gripping the arms of his chair until his knuckles showed white through the skin.

"You carry the keys of the bank yourself, don't you? And you know the combination of the safe, don't you? And so does Herbie Kivil."

"Do you mean to insinuate—"

"Hiram, I don't mean to insinuate nothin'. Insinuations don't make the best of evidence in court, though I will admit they sometimes count for a good deal outside of court. No, Hiram; I reckin you and your detective friend from St. Louis will have to dig up somethin' besides your personal beliefs before you kin

expect the Grand Jury of this county to lay a charge aginst a man who's always enjoyed a fair standin' in this here community. That's all I've got to say to you on the subject."

Taking the hint, Mr. Blair, red-faced and agitated, took his departure. After he was gone Judge Priest remained immersed in reflection for several hours.

So Emanuel went free. But he might almost as well have stayed in jail, for the smell of it seemed to cling to his garments— garments that grew shabbier as the weeks passed, for naturally he did not go back to the bank and just as naturally no one cared to offer employment to one who had been accused by his late employer of a crime. He fell behind with his board at Mrs. Morrill's. He walked the streets with drooping shoulders and face averted, shunning people and shunned by them. And, though he kept to his room in the evening, he no longer played on his clarinet. And the looting of the Commonwealth Bank's vault continued, as the *Daily Evening News* more than once remarked, to be "shrouded in impenetrable mystery."

One evening at dusk, as Judge Priest was going home alone from the courthouse, on a back street he came face to face with Emanuel.

The younger man would have passed by him without speaking, but the old man thrust his broad shape directly in the little man's course.

"Son," he said, putting a hand on the other's arm, "I want to have a little talk with you— ez a friend. Jest you furgit all about me bein' a judge. I wisht, ef you ain't got anythin' else to do, you'd come up to my house to-night after you've had your supper. Will you, son?"

Emanuel, his eyes filling up, said he would come, and he did; and in the judge's old sitting-room they spent half an hour together. Father Minor always said that when it came to hearing confessions the only opposition he had in town came from a nonprofessional, meaning by that Judge Priest. It was one of Father Minor's little jokes.

"And now, Judge Priest," said Emanuel, at the latter end of the talk, "you know everything— why I wouldn't tell 'em how I got my new clarinet and where I spent that night. If I had to die for it I wouldn't bring suspicion on an innocent party. I haven't told anybody but you— you are the only one that knows."

"You're shore this here friend of yourn— Caruthers— is an innocent party?" suggested the judge.

"Why, Judge, he's bound to be— he's just naturally bound to be. If he'd been a thief he'd have robbed the bank that night when I was asleep in his room at the hotel. I had the keys to the bank on me and he knew it."

"Then why didn't you come out and say so."

"Because, as I just told you, it would be bringing suspicion on an innocent party. He holds a responsible position with that big New York firm I was telling you about and it might have got him into trouble. Besides"— and Emanuel hung his head— "besides, I hated so to have people know that I was ever under the influence of liquor. I'm a church member, Judge, as you know. I never drank— to excess— before that night, and I don't ever aim to touch another drop as long as I live. I'd almost as lief be called a drunkard as a thief. They're calling me a thief— I don't aim to have them calling me the other thing too."

Judge Priest cloaked an involuntary smile behind a pudgy hand.

"Well, Emanuel," he said, "jest to be on the safe side, did it ever occur to you to make inquiry amongst the merchants here as to whether a travelling gent named Caruthers sold goods to any of 'em?"

"No, Judge; I never thought of that."

"Did you look up Gatling & Moore— I believe that's the name— in Bradstreet's or Dun's to see ef there was sech a firm?"

"Judge, I never thought of that either."

"Son," said the old man, "it sorter looks to me like you ain't been doin' much thinkin' lately." Then his tone changed and became warmly consoling. "But I reckin ef I was the trouble you're in I wouldn't do much thinkin' neither. Son, you kin rest easy in your mind— I ain't a-goin' to betray your confidences. But ef you don't mind I aim to do a little inquirin' round on my own account. This here robbery interests me powerfully, someway. I've been frettin' a heap about it lately.

"And— oh, yes— there's another thing that I was purty nigh furgittin'," continued Judge Priest. "I ain't purposin' to pry into your personal affairs— but tell me, son, how are you off fur ready money these days?"

"Judge, to tell you the truth, I'm just about out of money," confessed Emanuel desperately. "I owe Mrs. Morrill for three weeks' board now. I hate to keep putting her off— her being a widow lady and dependent for her living on what she takes in. I'd pack up and go somewhere else— to some other town— and try to get work, only I can't bear to go away with this cloud hanging over my good name. It would look like I was running away; and anyway I guess the tale would follow me."

The judge dug into his right-hand trousers pocket. He exhumed a small wad of bills and began counting them off.

"Son," he said, "I know you won't mind my makin' you a temporary loan to help you along till things git brighter with you. By the way, how would you like to go to work in the circuit clerk's office?"

"Me, Judge! Me?" Fresh-kindled hope blazed an instant in Emanuel Moon's voice; then the spark died.

"I reckon nobody would hire me," he finished despondently.

"Don't you be so shore. Lishy Milam come to me only yistiddy sayin' he needed a reliable and experienced man to help him with his books, and askin' me ef I could suggest anybody. He ain't had a capable deputy sense little Clint Coombs died on him. I sort of figger that ef he gave you a job on my say-so it'd go a mighty long way toward convincin' this town that we both regarded you ez an honest citizen. I'll speak to 'Lishy Milam the very first thing in the mornin'— ef you're agreeable to the notion."

"Judge," exclaimed Emanuel, up on his feet, "I can't thank you— I can't tell you what this means— "

"Son, don't try," bade the old judge. "Anyhow, that ain't whut I want to hear frum you now. Set down there agin and tell me all you kin remember about this here friend of yourn— Caruthers; where you met up with him and whut he said and how he said it, and the way he looked and walked and talked. And how much beer you drunk up that night and how much he drunk up, and how you felt when you woke up, and whut Hiram Blair said to you when you showed up at the bank— the whole thing all over agin from start to finish. I'm interested in this here Mr. Caruthers. It strikes me he must 'a' been a mighty likely feller."

When Emanuel Moon walked out of Judge Priest's front door that night he was pumped dry. Also, for the first time in weeks, he walked with head erect and gaze straightforward.

In the morning, true to his promise, Judge Priest made recommendations to Circuit Clerk Milam. This done, he left the courthouse and, going down Legal Row, dropped in at the law office of Fairleigh & Fairleigh, to find young Jere Fairleigh, junior member of the firm, sitting by the grate fire in the front room.

"Jere," asked Judge Priest, directly the young man had made him welcome, "whutever become of them three post-office robbers that hired you to defend 'em— still over in the Marshallville jail, ain't they?"

"Two of them are," said young Fairleigh. "The one they call the Waco Baby got out on bail and skipped. But the other two— Frisco Slim and Montreal Red— are in jail over there awaiting trial at the next term of United States Court."

Judge Priest smiled softly.

"Young man," he said, "it certainly looks to me like you're climbin' mighty fast in your chosen profession. All your clients 'pear to have prominent cities named alter 'em. Tell me," he went on, "whut kind of persons are the two that are still lingerin' in Marshallville?"

"Well," said the young lawyer, "there's a world of difference between 'em. Frisco is the glum, morose kind; but Montreal Red— his real name is Mooney, he tells me, though he's got half a dozen other names— he's certainly a wise individual. Just associating with him in my capacity as his counsel has been a liberal education to me in the ways of the underworld. I firmly believe he knows every professional crook in the country."

"Aha! I see," said Judge Priest. "I figger Mister Montreal is the party I want to meet. I'm thinkin' of runnin' down to Marshallville on business right after dinner to-day. I reckin you wouldn't mind— in strict confidence— givin' me a little note of introduction to your client, tellin' him I seek his advice on a private matter, and sayin' that I kin be trusted?"

"I'll be mighty glad to," said Fairleigh, Junior, reaching across his desk for pen and paper. "I'll write it right now. Turning detective, Judge?"

"Well, son," conceded Judge Priest, "you mout call it that and not make sech an awful big mistake."

"Sort of a Sherlock Holmes, eh?"

The judge made a gesture of modest disclaimer.

"No; I reckin Sherlock would be out of my class. By all accounts Sherlock knowed purty nigh ever'thing wuth knowin'. If he'd struck two different trails, both seemin'ly p'intin' in the same direction, he'd know right off which one of 'em to take. That's where he'd be one pawpaw above my tallest persimmon. Sometimes I git to thinkin' I'm a poor purblind old idiot that can't see a thing when it's shoved right up under my nose. No; I ain't aspirin' none to qualify ez a Sherlock. I'm only endeavourin' to walk ez an humble disciple in the hallowed footsteps of Old Cap Collier."

"What do you know about Old Cap Collier?" demanded Fairleigh, astonished. "I thought I was the only grown man in town that still read nickel libraries— on the sly."

"Boy," said Judge Priest, "you and me have got a secret bond between us. Wasn't that there last one that come out a jim-dandy?— the one called Old Cap Collier and the Great Diamond Robbery.

"It was so," stated Fairleigh. "I read it last night in bed."

Three o'clock of that same day disclosed Judge Priest perched on the side of a bunk in a cell in the Marshallville jail, close up alongside a blocky person of unkempt appearance whom we, for convenience, may call Montreal Red, more especially as this happens to be the title to which he commonly answered within the fraternity of which he was a distinguished member.

They made a picture sitting there together— the old man, nursing his soft black hat between his hands, with the half light bringing out in relief his bald round skull, his chubby pink face and his tuft of white beard; the captive

yeggman in his shirt sleeves, with no collar on and no shoes on, holding Mr. Fairleigh's note in his hand and, with the look upon his face of one who feels a just pride in his professional knowledge, hearkening while the Judge minutely described for him a certain individual. Before the Judge was done, Montreal Red interrupted him.

"Sufficiency, bo," he said lightly; "you've said enough. I know the gun you're talkin' about without you goin' any farther— it's Shang Conklin, the Solitary Kid."

"But this here gentleman went by the name of Caruthers!" demurred the Judge.

"Wot else did you figure he'd be doin'?" countered Montreal Red. "He might 'a' called himself Crowley, or Lord Copeleigh, or half a dozen other things. He might 'a' called himself the King of Bavaria— yes, and got away with it, too, because he's there with the swell front and the education. The Solitary Kid's got a different monniker for every day in the week and two for Sundays. It couldn't be nobody else but him; you've called the turn on him same as if you'd mugged him for the Gallery."

"You know him personally, then?" asked Judge Priest.

"Who don't know him?" said Montreal Red. "Everybody that knows anybody knows Solitary. And I'll tell you why! You take 'most any ordinary gun and he's got just one regular line— he's a stick-up, or he's a moll buzzer, or a peterman, or a con man; or he belongs to the hard-boiled people, the same as me. But Shang he doubles in brass; it's B. and O. for him. Bein' there with the front, he's worked the wire; and before that he worked the bat. Knowin' all there is to know about the pasteboard papes, he'd done deep-sea fishin' in his time— playin' for rich guys on the big liners, you know.

"And when it comes to openin' boxes— bo, since old Jimmy Hope quit the game and sneezed in, I guess Shang Conklin's the wisest boxman that ever unbuttoned a combination crib with his bare hands. He's sure the real McCoy there— not no common yegg, you understand, with a steel drill and a gat in his kicks and a rubber bottle full of soup tied under his coat; but doin' the real fancy stuff, with nothin' to help him but the old ten fingers and the educated ear. And he never works with a mob neither. Any time you make Shang he'll be playin' the lone hand— providin' his own nut and goin' south with all the clean-up. No splittin' with anybody for Shang— it's against his business principles. That's why he's labelled the Solitary Kid."

Most of this was as pure Greek to Judge Priest, who, I may say, knew no Greek, pure or otherwise. Suddenly aware of the bewilderment revealed in the countenance of his interviewer, Montreal Red checked up and took a new track.

"Say, bo, you ain't makin' me, are you? Well, then, maybe I'd better spiel it out slow. Know wot a peterman is?"

The judge shook his head.

"Well, you know wot a box is, don't you?"

"I'm skeered that I don't, though I believe I'm beginnin' to git a faint idea," said Judge Priest.

As though deploring such ignorance Montreal Red shook his flame-coloured head.

"I'll frame it for you different— in sucker language," he said.

And accordingly he did, most painstakingly.

"Now then," he said at the end of five minutes of laborious translation, "do you get me?"

"I git you," said Judge Priest. "And I'm mighty much obliged. Now, then, ef it ain't too much trouble, I'd like to git in touch with this here Mister Conklin, et cetery. Do you, by any chance, know his present whereabouts?"

Before replying to this the Montreal Red communed with himself for a brief space.

"Old-timer," he said finally, "if I thought you was playin' in with the dicks I'd see you in Belgium before I tipped you off to anything. But this here mouthpiece of mine"— he indicated the note from young Mr. Fairleigh— "says you're on the level. I judge he wouldn't take my good fall-money and then cross me this way. I take it you ain't tryin' to slip one over on Shang? All right, then; I'll tell you where he is— he's in Atlanta, Georgia."

"And whut is his address there?" pursued Judge Priest.

"The Federal prison— that's all," said Montreal tied. He smiled softly. "If I don't beat this little case of mine I'm liable to meet him down there along toward spring, or maybe even sooner. The bulls nailed him at Chattanooga, Tennessee, about a month ago for a little national-bank job, and right quick he taken a plea and got off with a short bit in Uncle Sammy's big house. I was readin' about it in the papers. You wouldn't have no trouble findin' him at Atlanta— he'll be in to callers for the next five years."

"Bein' an amateur Old Cap Collier certainly calls fur a lot of travellin' round," murmured Judge Priest, half to himself, and he sighed a small sigh of resignation as he arose.

"Wot's that? I don't make you?" asked Montreal Red.

"Nothin'," said Judge Priest; "nothin' a-tall. I was jest thinkin' out loud; it's a sort of failin' of mine ez I git older. You said, didn't you, that these here sleepin' potions which you was mentionin' a minute ago are mostly administered in beer?"

"Mostly in beer," said Montreal Red. "The little old knock-out seems to work best in the lather stuff. I don't know why, but it does.

"It's like this: You take the beer—"

"Oh, I wasn't figgerin' on usin' it myself," explained Judge Priest hastily. "Much obliged to you all the same, young man."

A night in a sleeping car brought Judge Priest to Atlanta. A ride in a trolley car brought him to the warden's office of a large reformatory institution beyond the suburbs of that progressive city. A ten-minute chat with the warden and the display of divers credentials brought him the privilege of an interview, in private, with a person who, having so many names to pick from, was yet at this time designated by a simple number. Even in convict garb, which is cut on chastely plain lines and which rarely fits perfectly the form of its wearer, this gentleman continued somehow to bespeak the accomplished metropolitan in his physical outlines and in his demeanour as well, maintaining himself, as you might say, jauntily.

In the first few moments of his meeting with Judge Priest there was about him a bearing of reserve— almost of outright suspicion. But half a dozen explanatory sentences from the judge served speedily to establish an atmosphere of mutual understanding. I believe I stated earlier in my tale that Judge Priest had a little knack for winning people's confidences. Perhaps I should also explain that at a suitable time in the introductory stages of the conversation he produced a line in the characteristic handwriting of Mr. Montreal Red. Being thereby still further enlightened as to the disinterestedness of the venerable stranger's motives, the Solitary Kid proved frankness itself. Preliminarily, though, he listened intently while Judge Priest recited in full a story that had mainly to do with the existing plight of Emanuel Moon.

"Now then, suh," said Judge Priest at the conclusion of his narrative, "I've laid all the cyards that I hold on the table right in front of you. Ef I'm correct in my guess that you're the party of the second part in this here transaction. I don't need to go on, because you know a sight more about the rest of it than whut I do. The way I figger it, a decent, honest little man is in serious trouble, mainly on your account. Ef you're so minded I calculate that you kin help him without hurtin' yourself any. Now then, presumin' sech to be the case, is there anythin' you'd like to say to me— ez his friend?"

Conklin, alias Caruthers, alias Crowley, and so on, put a question of his own now:

"You say the president of that bank is the one that tried to fasten this job on Moon, eh? Well, then, before we go any further, suppose you tell me what that president looks like?"

Judge Priest sketched a quick word picture of Mr. Hiram Blair— accurate and fair, therefore not particularly complimentary.

"That's enough," said the convict grimly; "that'll do. Why, the long-whiskered old dog! Now then, Judge— you said you were a judge, didn't you?— I'm going to spill a funny yarn for you. Never mind what my reasons for coming through are. Maybe I want to get even with somebody that handed me a large disappointment. Maybe I don't want to see that little Moon suffer for something he didn't do. Figure it out for yourself afterward, but first listen to me."

"I'm listenin', son," said Judge Priest.

"Good!" said Conklin, lowering his voice cautiously, though he knew already they were alone in the warden's room.

"Up to a certain point you've got the thing figured out just as it came off. That day on the train going into Louisville I started to take the little man at cards. I was going to deal him the big mitt and then clean him for what he had; but when he told me he worked in a bank— a nice, fat little country bank— I switched the play, of course. I saw thousands of dollars where I'd seen lunch money before. Inside of an hour I knew everything there was to know about that bank— what he knew and what I could figure from what he told me. All I had to do was to turn the spigot once in a while and let him run on. And then, when he began to spill his cravings for a new clarinet, I almost laughed in his face. The whole thing looked like a pipe.

"The dope was working lovely when I hit that town of yours two weeks later. At the right minute I flashed the clarinet on him and made him forget to throw the combination of the vault. So far, so good. Then, when I got him where I wanted him— over in my room— I slipped the drops into his beer; not enough to hurt him but enough to start him pounding his ear right away. That was easy too— so easy I almost hated to do it.

"Then I waited until about two o'clock in the morning, him lying there all the time on my bed, dead to the world. So I took his keys off him and dropped across the street without being seen by anybody— the main street of your town is nice and quiet after midnight— I'll say that much for it anyway— and walked into the bank the same as if I owned it— in fact, I did own it— and made myself at home. I opened up the vault and went through it, with a pocket flash to furnish light; and then after a little I locked her up again, good and tight, leaving everything just like I'd found it, and went back to the hotel and put the keys in the little man's pocket, and laid down alongside of him and took a nap myself. D'ye see my drift?"

"I reckin I don't altogether understand— yit," said Judge Priest.

"You naturally wouldn't," said Conklin with the air of a teacher instructing an attentive but very ignorant pupil. "Here's what happened: When I took a good look at the inside door of that vault and tried the tumblers of the outside door I knew I could open her any time I wanted to— in five minutes or less. Besides, I wouldn't need the keys any more, seeing as I could make impressions of 'em in wax, which I did as soon as I got back inside of my room at the hotel. So I was sure of having duplicates whenever I needed 'em."

"I'm feared that I'm still in the dark," said Judge Priest. "You see it's only here right recently that I took up your callin' in life— ez a study."

"Well, figure it out for yourself," said Conklin. "If I made my clean-up and my getaway that night it was a cinch that they'd connect up Moon with his strange friend from New York; even a hick bull would be wise enough to do that. And inside of twenty-four hours they'd be combing the country for a gun answering to my general plans and specifications. At the beginning I was willing to take that chance; but after I had a look at that combination I switched my play. Besides, there wasn't enough coin in the box that night to suit me. I always play for the big dough when I can, and I remembered what the little man told me about that lumber company— you know the one I mean: that big cross-tie concern— depositing its pay roll every other Friday night. So why wouldn't I hold off?"

"I begin to see," said Judge Priest. "You're makin' me see a number of things that've been pesterin' me fur three-four days now."

"Wait till you get the final kick," promised the convict. "That'll open your eyes some, I guess. Well, I skinned out next morning and I went elsewhere— never mind where, but it wasn't far away. Then on the night of the fifteenth— the third Friday in the month— I came back again, travelling incog., as they say on the other side of the duck pond; and about two o'clock in the morning I paid another call to your little old Commonwealth Bank and opened up the vault— outside door and inside door— in four minutes by my watch, without putting a mark on her. That's my specialty— nice, clean jobs, without damaging the box or making any litter for the janitor to sweep up in the morning. But I didn't clean her out that time either."

"Ahem!" said Judge Priest doubtfully. "You didn't?"

"Oh, I didn't expect you to believe that right off," stated Mr. Conklin, prolonging his climax. "The reason I didn't clean her out then was because she was already cleaned out; somebody had beat me to it and got away with everything worth having in that little old box. It was considerable of a disappointment to me— and a shock too."

7: The Tentacles of Evil

Beatrice Redpath

1886-1937

MacLean's, 1 Jan 1926

IAN SAT OPPOSITE Is'bel eating his breakfast in silence, in the comfortable little dining room over the second-hand bookstore. There had been no quarrel between them; their marriage was a happy one; but still a sense of fear kept continually pulling at his elbow ever since he had realized the gradual encroaching menace of the slums. The little shop was in a backwater that was being engulfed by the poorer districts surrounding it.

Ian was a dreamer, wrapped up in his books. An enthusiastic reader of adventures in unheard of places, he got many a vicarious thrill from the horrors of the unspeakable jungle. For him the jungle held a fascination that obtruded on his every-day life. To him the jungle was a living force, treacherous, magnetic, gruesome.

In the midst of his reading one evening, Is'bel had appeared, precipitated by a sudden thunderstorm. She became to him, this little slum child, a symbol of the jungle. A strange denizen, too, an anomaly in slum land. For in spite of her lack of moral values, with all the curiosity of a wild thing, she had the charm of the snowdrop growing in some dingy backyard. That had been the first of many meetings, till gradually he had begun to find the jungle not so interesting unless it were shared with her.

The agony of the time when she had been absent. That dreadful time when they had convicted her of shop-lifting. Well, that was past. He had finally determined that she should not become one of the jungle folk. So he had married Is'bel and taken her away from the jungle which threatened to engulf her.

It was too much to expect a complete reclamation on the instant. Habits, unlike fetters, cannot be so easily cast aside. Is'bel loved him with all the passion of her fierce nature and if she had failed him as in that case of the customer's bag, which fortunately he had been in time to prevent her stealing, he had realized the insidious call of the jungle and had patiently fought with and for her, sure of the final outcome; certain that in the last summation love would be the weapon with which good would triumph over evil.

But now the jungle was creeping up on them. He felt sure that Is'bel would be happier away from everything that reminded her of the past. He had seen the house he wanted to buy across the park, a tall, narrow building on a broad, well paved street. It was well aired and faced the open spaces of the park. He had taken Is'bel to see it one day. She had been delighted with everything about it. Her quick mind had grasped immediately the possibilities of the large

rooms upstairs which could easily be converted into living quarters. Ian felt that it was just what he wanted, but he would have to wait until he could dispose of his old property.

"I'm going to see that house agent again this afternoon," he finally roused himself to say, going over to the mantelpiece for his pipe. "Would you mind being left alone to look after the store for a while?"

"Why would I mind?" Is'bel asked, lifting her face with its sweet, irregular features as he paused beside her chair; "isn't it my business as well as yours to look after the store? You'd think I was just a doll to be fussed up and put in a chair to sit still the way you treat me."

He laughed down into her clear, amber eyes.

"No one could turn you into a doll. You work too hard altogether."

"It's only ladies who can do nothing elegantly, and I'm no lady," she said, shaking her head solemnly.

A spark of laughter flashed into Ian's gray eyes.

"Well, don't turn yourself into one if it's going to make you different. I like you just the way you are."

"I'm not so sure that I like myself," she said with a shadow flitting over her face. Ian knew instinctively that she was recalling what had happened three months ago, and he laid his hand very tenderly on her copper-colored hair.

"I won't have you disparaging what belongs to me," he said, trying to dispel that shadow, and bring the flashing light back into her face.

IAN WENT that afternoon to see the house agent.

Something had happened in the neighborhood several days before, which had made him decide that he would sell the store at any price and move away from that locality. A jeweller had been shot in his shop and a large quantity of jewels had been stolen. Ian had no fear that his store would be robbed, for bookstores were no temptation to thieves, but he didn't like the idea of Is'bel living in a neighborhood where that kind of thing was going on.

The house agent gave him very little hope, however, of an early sale. People were not buying in that locality; stores were moving further uptown. The tide of progress was swiftly sweeping north and west. On the south-east side of the city only the dregs would remain. If Ian sold he would have to accept a loss, but he was prepared to do so. This recent event had made him feel that he must get rid of the store even if it went for a very low figure. The agent promised to try his best to bring about a sale, and with that Ian was obliged to be content.

It was dusk as he came back through the park, a gentle blue that melted substance into shadow until even the wrought-iron gates of the park appeared

soft and vaporish. Ian walked quickly, his footsteps ringing out sharply on the hard, gravelled paths which were deserted at this hour. As he turned out of the park he noticed that a house at the corner of his own street had hung out a "for sale" sign. Soon a dozen families would be habited there and the house would have all the appearance of a slattern with unwashed face and uncombed hair. That was what was happening on all sides, even in the streets which had until recently held themselves aloof from the encroaching slums. Tiny shops were springing up like fungi of evil growth, places where queer-looking foreigners gathered in the evenings, and where there was always the sound of rattling bottles and the tinkle of glasses coming through the open doorways.

Yes, decidedly he wanted to get Is'bel away from this locality. His thoughts flashed back to that first evening when she had come into his store for protection from the rain-slashed night. Even that first evening his heart had gone out to her brave, gay courage. Little child of the slum. How much she had grown to mean to him since then! Was he really as sure as he told himself he was that Is'bel would never return to the old ways?

As he passed the jeweller's store that had been the scene of the late robbery he saw a group of idlers lounging in front of it, discussing the robbery. Ian felt that in all probability some of them knew a great deal more than they pretended to know. He quickened his steps as he went by. Yes, he would be more than thankful to leave this neighborhood.

THE LIGHTS shone out from his own bookstore, making squares of light on the pavement, and as he came nearer he saw the door open and a man came out and stood looking down the street. As Ian passed under a street lamp the man rapidly crossed the road and was swallowed up in the mouth of a lane opposite. Ian looked after him curiously, wondering who it would be. Ian's customers did not belong to this neighborhood. They usually came in motors. It was seldom that anyone living in this neighborhood visited the store.

Is'bel was standing beside the magazine table, turning over the pages of an illustrated magazine. Her vivid face brightened as he came in.

"Who was only going to be gone an hour?" she cried.

"I know. The agent kept me talking and I had no idea it was so late. Who was that who just went out?"

"How could anyone go out when no one came in?"

Ian looked at her in astonishment.

"Why, I saw a man just come out and go across the street. He went into the lane opposite."

She shook her head, fluttering the pages of the magazine with nervous, restless fingers.

"There's been no one here since you went out. Not a soul."

"But I saw him. A small man wearing a cap. I was coming along on this side of the street when he came out. I saw him standing looking down the street. I couldn't possibly have been mistaken."

Again she shook her head.

"You were seeing things, I guess. There was no one here at all."

Ian stared at her averted face and saw that the color had risen in her cheeks. He stood hesitating, not knowing what to say or do. She was lying. There had certainly been a man in the store. What motive could she have for lying about it? Thoughts rushed upon him like a dark flight of evil wings, beating against his mind. Was this an old lover of Is'bel's? Was he perhaps someone out of her past who had some hold upon her? Who was he and where did he come from? What was his business in the store?

HE WENT away to hang up his hat and when he came back Is'bel had gone to prepare the supper.

He opened some letters, filed some bills, his mind always busy with the perplexity of Is'bel's lie. He couldn't make it out; he didn't know what to think or how to act.

"Supper's ready," she called to him and he dropped the letters which he was making a mere pretense at reading and rose with a sigh. "I've laid the table beside the fire in your study. It seems sort of damp and chilly to-night. I thought it would be kind of nice to have it down here."

She had lighted the candles in a tall, black, iron candelabrum, and the little book-lined room glimmered in the dancing lights. Ian stood on the threshold for a moment looking at the model of a ship over the mantelpiece which his father had made in his spare time. In the shadows over the fireplace he thought it was like a ghostly ship with sails set drifting into the further shadows of the unknown. An occasional gleam from the fire lit the sails like the reflection of a dying sun. He, too, felt himself to be sailing towards unknown waters, drifting into the shadows that were dark and impenetrable.

"Doesn't it all look pretty?" Is'bel cried gleefully, straightening a crease in the white cloth which covered the small, round table she had drawn up before the fire. "The candles make it seem like a party."

Ian wondered at her gay spirits. She did not even appear to be conscious that she had lied to him. He sat down heavily at the table and as he listened to her cheerful tones he became more and more sunk in a dark depression. Was

it of such small concern to her then that she had tried to deceive him? Why, he might believe anything of her— he might believe—

He drew himself up sharply and tried to rivet his attention upon what she was saying. He noticed that she had taken extra pains with the supper to-night. There was delicious fried sole, with slices of lemon and sprigs of parsley; fluffy tea biscuits; preserved apricots swimming in golden syrup in a fluted amber dish; a tall chocolate cake decorated with nuts. Is'bel loved to cook, and he always praised her for her proficiency, but to-night he had such a leaden weight upon his heart that he scarcely made even a pretence at eating.

"Isn't it what you want?" Is'bel inquired in distressed tones as Ian laid down his knife and fork and sat staring moodily into the fire.

"Why yes, of course," he said rousing himself, "everything's delicious."

He was glad when she began to clear it away and he could return to the comfort of his pipe. The tobacco cleared his brain and helped him to think. He wouldn't ask her again who had been in the store. He wouldn't force another lie to her lips. He remembered as he sat looking into the dancing, golden flames what she had confessed to him once— "it's just as though someone was whispering to me all the time, telling me to lie, telling me to steal, telling me to do anything that's dirty and mean"— and he had promised her then that they would fight it out together. They weren't through the jungle yet; it would be foolish to imagine they were. He wouldn't help her by standing aloof and being coldly critical of her conduct.

As he watched her passing in and out of the room there was such an ache in his heart that it seemed to ache through every muscle in his body. Why must the evil and the fine be so inextricably mixed? Is'bel, who had come like sunlight into his life, Is'bel, so sweet, so generous, so dear— with a lie on her lips, and who knew what depths of darkness hidden away in her heart. Pitiful things, human beings— pitiful.

He was afraid to speak to her again lest he should drive her quite away from him. When she came to him at last, after having straightened the room, and laid her hot cheek against his, he drew her closer with hands that trembled.

"Is'bel— little Is'bel," he murmured helplessly.

And over the fireplace, in the shadows, the little ship with set sails drifted out into the unknown.

HE WAS obliged to go to the bank the following morning and he was averse to leaving Is'bel alone in the store. He didn't want to think that that man might be dropping in again while he was away. He suggested that she should go uptown to do some shopping, but she appeared to be disinclined to do so.

"What's the good of spending money when I have everything I want?"

He saw that she was unwilling to go and his mind immediately seized on the idea that she had reason for not leaving the store that morning.

"Then perhaps you wouldn't mind doing some messages for me," he said, hurriedly trying to invent some immediate needs. A dark fit of depression took hold of him. Was it always to be like this? Wasn't he ever going to be able to leave the store without fearing what would take place in his absence? Life would be impossible if that were to be the case.

"I don't think I want anything very urgently after all," he said, slowly turning away.

Immediately her two arms were around his neck.

" 'Course I'd like to go shopping. I don't know why I didn't want to go when you first spoke of it. Just laziness, I guess."

She went out shortly afterwards and Ian was just preparing to leave the store when a shadow darkened the doorway. He turned, expecting to find a customer entering, but no one came in. He went curiously to the door and looked out. He was certain that someone had come right up to the door and looked in, and seeing him, had gone away.

He opened the door and went outside, looking up and down the street. He was turning back into the store when he caught sight of a small figure wearing a gray cap disappearing into the lane opposite.

It was the same man undoubtedly. Ian's first impulse was to run after him and demand what it was he wanted. Yet he could scarcely do that. The man had a perfect right to look in the store. It was quite clear that he must have been looking for Is'bel. Perhaps Is'bel had expected this visit and that was why she had been so reluctant to go uptown this morning.

Was he an old lover? In that event it wasn't a case for the police. It was his own affair to find out who this man was who was hanging around the bookstore. Was Is'bel afraid of this man? was she trying to shield him? She might even care for him; might already be regretting her impulsive marriage with himself.

Ravaged and tormented with these thoughts, Ian left the store and walked listlessly down the street. This worry seemed to be sapping all the energy from his mind and body. He felt sure that there was some danger threatening Is'bel; but danger of what he did not know.

Is'bel complained early that evening of feeling tired.

"It was so crowded in the stores," she said nervously, pushing back the heavy hair from her forehead. "I'm tired. I think I'll go to bed."

Ian followed her upstairs soon afterwards. He was tired himself. All day he felt as though he had been carrying around a weight which he could not shake off. He wanted to go to sleep and shut it all away.

IT WAS just before midnight that he awakened from a restless sleep, wondering whether a dream had awakened him, or some unaccustomed sound. He sat up in bed, listening intently. Light streamed into the room from the street light at the corner, lying in a broad, silver band across the bed. Is'bel was lying on her side, her cheek pillowed on her hand. As he looked at her he saw her eyelashes flutter, then fall again.

"Is'bel. Are you awake?"

No answer. He could have sworn that she was as wide awake as he was himself. He looked towards the bedroom door, which was slightly ajar, and fancied that he saw a faint light flicker for an instant over the white woodwork. He could hear the clock whirr before it struck then the slow, solemn strike. Twelve o'clock. The silence that engulfed the last strike seemed to Ian pregnant with terror.

It was absurd, he told himself, waking in the night like a terrified child. Perhaps a mouse had run across the floor; a shutter swung back; a board creaked. His nerves were in a bad way when he could start up from his sleep in such a state over nothing at all. He would go downstairs and have a look around to see that everything was all right, otherwise he would lie here listening for imaginary sounds half the night.

In the light from the street he found his clothes, slipped on his trousers, thrust his arms into the sleeves of a coat, then hesitated over his bedroom slippers. If there was anyone in the store they would hear him on the stairs unless he went noiselessly. He crept across the room to the cupboard and found a pair of running shoes and slipped them on his feet.

"Ian."

It was just the breath of a whisper from the bed.

"Ian."

"It's all right. Don't be frightened. I'm just going downstairs for a minute."

"You mustn't. Oh, you mustn't."

"I'll be back in no time."

"You mustn't go. Ian— you mustn't go."

She was sitting up in bed, her eyes wide open, staring at him in evident alarm. It was no use standing here arguing with her. Ian moved past the door and drew it closed behind him, then crept slowly to the top of the stairs and cautiously began to descend.

THE DOOR into the shop was open. As he stood on the threshold a flicker of light from the front of the store startled him. So, it hadn't been just fancy after all. There was someone in the store. But what would anyone be doing over there by the window? There was nothing there but books and magazines. The till was further back, but it was empty. There weren't even any books of value in the store at present. No one would be fool enough to steal books. If it had been a month ago when he had that first edition of Boccaccio he wouldn't have been so surprised. But that had been sold some time ago.

As Ian's eyes grew accustomed to the darkness he could make out a small figure wearing a cap. It was the same man; there was no doubt of that. But what could he want? He appeared to be searching for something quickly and quietly, drawing the books out of the shelves and putting them back again.

Ian stood puzzled, watching the tiny, round eye of the flashlight the man was holding in his left hand. The man wasn't there to steal money; he couldn't be such a fool as to steal books. Had Is'bel left something there for him? That appeared to be the only solution to the problem.

Suspicion and jealousy beat upon him in strong waves. Rage was like a rocket exploding inside of him. He stole slowly forward, stealthy and noiseless as a cat, all the time keeping his attention fixed on that small, busy figure over near the bookshelves. He had no conception of what he intended to do; he had no revolver, no weapon of any sort.

As Ian came opposite he saw the man draw something out from behind the last handful of books and turn swiftly towards the door. Ian sprang, his body like an uncoiling spring. A vase fell with a terrific shattering of pottery; a pile of books tumbled to the floor.

The man was like a shadow slipping between Ian's hands. The door swung back and the sharp crack of an automatic shook the air. A warmth ran down Ian's hand, numbing the fingers. He clung for a moment to the partly opened door while the silence of the street was broken by the sound of quickly running feet.

With a great effort Ian pulled himself together, a hard rage tearing at him. He had never felt such strong passions rising in him before. It was like something primitive, coming up from the profoundest depths of his being. It was mixed up with his love for Is'bel, savagery that was made up of jealousy and suspicion and a desire to protect where he loved. It poured a new strength into him, it fixed his determination to follow this thing through and find out the truth.

Starting after the man, he was just in time to see his shadow disappear into a lane near the upper end of the street. He realized that this man must know

the neighborhood better than he himself knew it. But he had no intention of allowing him to escape.

His light running shoes beat a thin staccato on the pavement as he ran at top speed towards the mouth of the lane. He was able to catch a glimpse of a flying figure between himself and a light far down the alley.

The lane opened into a mean street, one of those tributary streams whose wandering course finally emptied into the very heart of the slums. An instinct told him to turn to the right, and as he rounded a turn in the street he could make out the flying figure ahead.

A black shape leaped out at him on his left. He dodged, just in time to escape a blow dealt from an open doorway. He stumbled and slid, face down on the filthy pavement. The echo of a laugh wavered through the stillness as he gathered himself up and sped forward again. It was safer to keep to the middle of the road. He was in a neighborhood which was more friendly to the pursued than to the pursuer.

At moments his own sanity mocked him. Why this mad run through unknown streets, into the very heart of terror? Why not return to his warm bed, the security of locked doors, the shelter of his own surroundings? But he knew that it was not only this man in the gray cap whom he was hunting down. It was all the rest of the jungle folk— he would show them that Is'bel was not to be drawn back into their ways; he would teach them that they must leave her alone; that she belonged to them no more.

A hot writhing tongue of flame leapt up in the darkness of a lane ahead. Something whined over Ian's shoulder and simultaneously a thud sounded behind him. The bullet had sunk harmlessly into a tree or fence. Would the next bullet go home as harmlessly? Sweat broke out in cold drops on his forehead; his lips were dry and parched. But the madness of the pursuit still possessed him, regardless of this new danger.

Again came the warning flash, the whine, the thud. Ian plunged towards a doorway that was suddenly lit by the flash.

HE WAS in a small backyard. A door opened ahead of him, letting out a stream of light and a confused clamor of voices. He pushed the door further open and stepped inside.

A long bar ran lengthwise on his left. A few nondescript-looking men were lined up against it, and they turned to stare at him as he stood in the doorway, his eyes blinded after the darkness of the streets. A curious silence spread over the room. The bartender's small eyes were insolent and staring as he continued to pour some liquid from a thick-necked bottle into a glass.

Ian looked along the line of men sprawling at the bar and then searched the small tables that were scattered about the room. There was no sign of the man in the gray cap. Then, in that curious silence, he heard the sound of a man taking long, painful breaths as though he had been running. He looked around again and this time noticed a small figure crouched over one end of the bar, his shoulders rising and falling. Ian sprang forward, indifferent to everything except that small figure in the gray cap.

Instantly the room broke into confusion. The bartender shouted some remark to the man in the gray cap. Ian saw a door at the end of the room open, and then everything went spinning before him in black circles. Dizzily he knew by an exploding crash behind him that someone had flung a bottle at his head. It had grazed his temple before it struck the wall, falling in splinters of broken glass.

Blindly he made his way towards the door through which the man in the gray cap had gone. It would be wise to escape as quickly as possible from this unfriendly room. The door swung easily open beneath his hand and slammed behind him. He found himself on the threshold of a small room lit by a lamp. He leaned back against the door through which he had come, breathing heavily and painfully from exhaustion. Very faintly came the muffled sounds of shouting and confusion from the room he had left.

"Well, what's your trouble?"

Ian blinked rapidly. He had thought the room was empty. Now he saw a huge, bloated figure sitting at a desk in one corner, his chair tipped back against the wall, a thick cigar sticking aggressively out of the corner of his mouth. Ian recognized the figure instantly. He had seen photographs of the man too often not to know him at once for the notorious Boss Tucker, the leader of the Riverside district.

He stood staring at Tucker, while the man watched him, through half-closed eyes, slowly twisting his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other. There was something ominous and horrible in that enormous, bloated figure, something that silenced him, making words seem futile and ineffectual. It slowly dawned upon him that he must be in that notorious hotel on the river of which Tucker had been the proprietor before he had made himself prominent in politics.

"Were you born dumb?"

Ian moistened his lips. His throat felt dry and words wouldn't come. He stared fascinated at the man, his eyes falling to the thick, red hand on the edge of the desk that looked so much like raw beef.

"I want to know— where the man in the gray cap went," Ian stammered, feeling foolish before that insolent stare. "He came in here. A small man in a gray cap. I want to know what he was doing in my store just now."

Tucker removed the cigar from his mouth and languidly contemplated the ash before flicking it off with a thick finger. Then he abruptly jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of a door half concealed by a dingy, red curtain.

"He's gone in there. If you get a move on you might catch him."

IAN TURNED towards the door Tucker had indicated, perceiving the repulsive grin that spread over the man's face. He wanted to get away as fast as possible from that gross animal. Tucker rose as Ian pulled at the handle of the door. There was no light beyond; cool, damp air flowed up into his face from what appeared to be a cellar. Ian could just make out the beginning of a steep flight of steps before the door behind him was suddenly slammed, precipitating him forward. He clutched wildly at the rail to keep himself from falling into that pit of darkness below. Tucker was apparently not averse to the idea of him breaking his neck.

The railing just saved him from falling. He reached the bottom of the steps and searched in his pockets for a match. By the fitful, flickering light he could make out the vague outlines of packing boxes, piled high on all sides with a narrow passage way between which led on to further darkness beyond. These cases probably contained contraband of all sorts; goods smuggled into the city by way of the river. Or again they might be stolen goods, fruits of robberies in the city. It struck him with sickening force that it was not likely that Tucker would let him come down here if there were any means of escape. Either there was no way out, or there was danger lurking for him just outside. His chase was leading him further than he had intended.

The match died out. He struck another, but it broke off short. His heart was pounding violently. He kept telling himself that he was not afraid. There were small sounds all around him in the darkness; footsteps overhead. At any instant Tucker might appear at the head of the steps, peering down to see what had become of him. With a great effort at control over his trembling hands he struck another match and started down the passage way between the tall crates. At length he found himself before a small door. He turned the handle and to his relief and surprise found that it was unlocked.

The fresh night air was like a plunge into cold water. It seemed to splash in his face and revive him. He stared around curiously and found that he was on a small landing place just above the level of the river. On both sides of him rose

the slimy piles of a pier, while in front he could see the black shine of the river, almost turgid at this point.

The flare of a match struck away to his left made him start and look in that direction. A small figure with a cap was seated with his back turned to Ian, smoking a cigarette. It was the man whom he had chased; the man he wanted. Ian crept noiselessly forward along the water-logged planks and with a quick spring had both arms around the man's neck. They both came sprawling to the ground.

Ian clapped his hand over the man's mouth to prevent any outcry.

"You're the man I want. What the devil were you doing in my store?"

His muscles tightened as he strove to hold the struggling figure down.

The man jerked his head violently to one side to escape the smothering hand on his mouth.

"Let go, you! Let go."

"What were you doing in my store? You'll tell me first why you were hanging around there before I let you go."

"You poor fool. You better get out of this while the going's good. I don't know why the devil Tucker let you through. You haven't got the chance of a snowball unless you go quick. I'm telling you this for Is'bel's sake. She's not mixed up in this."

Ian released his hold. The man's tones were sincere. If Is'bel were not mixed up in some affair with this man, then he had no more concern with him. By the light of a lantern hanging on the pier he could see the man's face quite distinctly. He was scarcely more than a boy, with a weak, dissolute face.

"They're coming for me in the launch. For Is'bel's sake I'm going to show you a way out. You can sneak between those piles to the left, and there's a ladder to the top. Quick, I hear the boat coming."

Ian heard the faint sound of a motor boat in the distance. The boy's agitation communicated itself to him. There was nothing to be gained by staying until the launch appeared. He slipped between the piles and found the ladder. In a moment he had swung himself to the top. He was in a narrow lane beside the hotel. He passed along it and soon found himself in a maze of crooked streets.

His head reeled with the experiences of the last hour. He was still no nearer an understanding of what it all meant. He had no idea of what had brought the boy to the store. He had spoken of Is'bel. It was clear then that he knew her. Is'bel could not be quite innocent of some conspiracy.

He cursed himself for not having made the boy divulge what it was all about. He had accomplished nothing. He felt foolish and ineffectual. He hailed a passing taxi and climbed in, for his legs seemed as though they were giving

way beneath him, and his arm was growing stiff from the bullet wound in his hand. He gave the address of a doctor in his neighborhood, realizing in his utter weariness that he had better have it attended to at once.

Leaning back in one corner of the taxi little stabs of thought pierced his weary brain. He had been a fool not to have forced the truth from the boy. He felt sick and disgusted at his failure to accomplish anything. The jungle had defeated him.

AT LENGTH he arrived back at the bookstore, his hand bandaged and feeling slightly revived. The store was in darkness, but as he opened the door he saw that there was a light in his study. As he walked soundlessly in his light shoes he trod on something sharp, and stooping picked up something that glittered in the semi-darkness. It was a jewelled pendant.

Understanding flashed upon him, like a blaze of clear light. The jewel robbery. One of the thieves had hidden the jewel in the store. He had come to ask Is'bel to help him. To-night he had come to get the jewels. It was as clear as though it were written in flaming letters on the darkness before him. Why hadn't he thought of it before?

Is'bel was crouched in his large leather chair, her head buried on her arms. As Ian stood for an instant on the threshold she threw up her head. Her eyes were like a startled deer's in her panic-white face.

A little moan escaped from her white lips.

"I thought... you were killed."

For a moment he thought she was going to faint. Then color came slowly into her cheeks. Her eyes fell on his bandaged hand and again fear leaped into her eyes.

"It's nothing," he said, "only a scratch."

"I suppose you know all about it. I should never have let Jake put the jewels in the store. He offered me a pendant and I thought it was kind of pretty. I never knew how wrong I had done until I saw you going down stairs. You'd best let me go back to where I belong."

She looked at him with eyes filled with such pain that he felt suffocated with pity. He sat down on the arm of her chair and took her cold hands between his own.

"It was the jungle folk, dear, coming out of the jungle with their wiles to try and draw you back into it again. But they haven't got you— and they won't get you, for you're mine... just mine."

8: When the Desert Decides

Anonymous

Canberra Times, 24 Sep, 1 Oct 1926

Borax was discovered and mined in the deserts of California and Nevada in the late 19th C.

HEARTLESS, cruel, you call this desert? Well, perhaps it is, but I've seen it do some pretty fair things in the twenty years that I have run this little store in Sun-up Camp.

It is of a girl I'm thinking now. "Joe's woman," everyone called her, but she was only a girl. Surely you wouldn't have called the desert heartless if you had been here then.

Sun-up Camp has always been just like it is now, six shacks and a corral by a waterhole, where the waggon train freighting stuff from the end of the railroad at Lone Pine to the borax mines stop to rest up. It's forty miles to Lone Pine, and only fifty to the mines, and this is the only water on the desert between the two. I keep this store with supplies for the men and feed for their mules.

Twenty years I've been here, and I was forty when I came. Makes me older than you thought, doesn't it? But you can't tell a desert rat's age, and I am a desert rat— now.

When I first came, the boys on the freight outfits called me Judge Pete: for I had been a circuit judge before my broken health sent me to the desert. The name stuck, so I've been Judge Pete of Sun-up Camp for twenty years.

No one know where Joe and his woman ever came from. They drifted to here one evening with two burros hitched to a drunken sort of waggon and moved into that shack up there on the hill. See it? Yes, that's the one off by itself, windows gone now, and roof falling in. I haven't been near it for years. Gives me a queer feeling; and I'm not a sentimental old fool, either.

They weren't long moving in. All they had was a few boxes, a tin stove and a wash-tub with some things in. I remember watching them. I was sitting out in front of the store here, about like we are now, talking to someone. We were naturally interested in any new folks arriving, for there were only five or six freighters' shacks in this place then.

The woman seemed to do most of the work of carrying things into the house, the man making a lot of gestures and talking. We couldn't understand what he said, but his voice, gruff and sort of commanding, came down to us on the evening breeze. I didn't like the sound of it.

Pretty soon we saw smoke coming from the chimney of the shack, and knew the woman was inside getting supper. The man took his burros off a ways and stacked them out, then started back to the house. He was a big bulk of a fellow. We could see that even in the dusk. He walked with a lolling gait

that, somehow, I didn't like. I guess it was because I had soon other men walk like that, murderous brutes who had come up for trial in my court.

He hadn't been in the shack long when we heard his voice, like an animal snarl, and I sat up to listen.

Then a woman screamed. It was not as if she were calling for help; simply a scream as from unbearable torture.

I jumped up from my chair, and the fellow I had been talking to stood up beside me.

"Lets go up!" he said.

Not a sound came from the shack as we ran toward it, but as we drew near there came a shuffle of feet from within. It seemed a long time before anyone answered our knock at the door. Then we heard a murmuring of voices— rather one voice, the gruff one— and the man appeared.

He was about what I had expected.

Big and coarse framed, with a black, scowling face that might have looked middle-aged if it had not been covered with a heavy beard.

He stood glowering down at us and for a moment I almost forgot what we had come for. Then I said, "We thought we heard someone in trouble up here. Everything all right?"

"No one called for your help, did they?" he retorted.

My determination to know what had caused that scream led me on. "When a woman screams," I replied, "there's usually something wrong."

The fellow stood looking at me, bulging the muscles of his face in that tense way. I stared past him into the room.

The woman was bending over a rusty stove, and I could see her face in the firelight. It was flushed a deep crimson, and not from the heat of the stove either. She kept running her fingers through her light brown hair and pressing her hand to the crown of her head, then gingerly removing it.

Se wasn't very old, and pretty, too, but so tired looking.

The man must have been following my gaze, for presently he said, "Maybe you did hear her holler— gets tantrums once in a while."

At this the girl stiffened, half-turned toward the man, then leaned back over the stove.

"But let me tell you something stranger," he continued. "It'll be right healthier for you down at your store if you don't hear any more noise in this shack." And slammed the door in our faces.

We heard him cross the room, then silence. There was nothing we could do— the girl had not complained— so we went back to the store.

The fellow came around the next morning, and I greeted him as if we had never seen each other.

"Morning, stranger; been long on the road?"

"Tolerable," he sort of grunted. "I want a sack of flour."

"Going to locate here permanent?" I asked, getting out what he ordered.

"I'll be needin' a side a bacon, too," he said, insolently ignoring my question.

This riled me a bit, and I looked at him— pretty hard, I guess, for he said hotly, "Your's runnin' this store business, ain't you?"

I said I was, wondering what was coming next.

"Then I'll need some salt with that flour and bacon," was the reply.

I knew what he meant, so I got the things he wanted, and he left without saying a word about himself.

But all the desert news, you know, drifts into my little store sooner or later. Prospectors, coming in for their grub, hang round the counter and tell me what's happened in the hills. Freighters, stopping for anything from a can of beans to a pair of corduroys, always pass along a bit of news before they leave. And of course there's the stage from Lone Pine once a week.

Things were just the same then. So I learned, one way and another, that the man went by the name of Joe— never did know what else— and the girl was simply Joe's woman. He was a prospector, someone told me, and was going to do some scratching around in Funeral Range as soon as a partner of his joined him.

That's Funeral Range straight ahead, cuts right across this little valley. Looks pretty doesn't it, away off there in the purple mist? But you'd change your mind if you were close to those hills. Rocks they are, piles of black rocks with sand-filled canyons between them, and you would find no trees or even brush after you get far in. Every-thing is dead. That's why they call it Funeral Range.

There's fifty miles of desert between here and those hills; fifty miles with-out a water-hole, and no water after that. Of course, it rains there some-times, but you know these desert storms — pours for a few minutes, then quits for months.

Joe couldn't have picked out a harder place to do his prospecting. I suppose he, like others before him, was drawn to the place by the phantom rumors of men who had come out of Funeral Range rich with nuggets of pure gold.

I heard those same tales when I first came here ,and I saw a few men go into the hills to find that treasure. Some of them came back.

In a few days Joe's partner appeared. Then they came around to the store, bought enough grub to last several months, and early next morning I saw them trailing behind the two burros off toward Funeral Range.

Of course, Joe left his woman behind. That was no trip for a woman, even a desert rat's woman.

One evening she came down to the store for something or other, and when I saw her, I fairly hated the man who had made her scream. You wouldn't have called her beautiful, what with her coarse dress patched and faded, sunburned face, and hair put up just to get it out of the way, but she was sweet and lovable for all that. Not very big, hardly an armful, and she talked quietly, looking at me unafraid out of deep brown eyes.

After getting the stuff she wanted I walked out to the stops with her. I was curious to know more about her. She looked so lonesome, but in a way that didn't ask for pity.

"Nice evening," I began "Won't you sit down a while?"

'Yes, I'd really like to," she said. "The nights seem so long now that Joe is gone."

"He's your husband?" I said, more as a statement than a question.

But the girl must have misunderstood it, for she glanced at me sharply, saying, "Yes — we're married." Then she turned her face from me and looked out across the desert.

We sat there on the steps for some time, neither saying a word, just gazing toward Funeral Range, and I know we were both thinking of the same man. Then she talked.

Her name was Caroline, and she had been with Joe ever since she was a little girl. Her father and the man were partners, first in the freighting game, then in prospecting. She had no remembrance of her mother.

For years she had gone everywhere with her father except on a few trips he had made into the high hills, and always Joe had been with them. So to her the world had meant desert mining camps, people by rough, drunken men, who frightened her. Quite naturally, then, the only folks she cared for, or trusted, were her father and Joe.

That was her life until one day her father was caught and fatally injured

by a falling rock in a shaft he was digging. Before he died he asked his partner to look after Caroline for he had no other friend or relative. This Joe did by marrying her. I can see why he did it, for she must have been a very pretty girl, then, and I suppose she did it because he knew of nothing else to do. Perhaps there was some sort of love in her heart, but surely not the kind a girl gives to her husband.

Within a year after their marriage they left the worthless dam and began the life of wandering, a life filled with hardships and nothing but curses and abuse for the girl. She was glad, she said, when Joe heard the story of Funeral

Range and decided to try his luck there. She knew he could not take her with him, and she wanted to be alone.

Presently the girl stood up. "I must be going now — I'm afraid I have talked too much."

"No," I said, "you haven't. Please come down again."

She went up to her shack and I watched until I saw a light in the window. It burned for a long time, then went out; but I still sat in front of the store, thinking of the girl.

The tragedy of her life moved me deeply. At the age when most girls were experiencing the first warm glow of love she was married to an old man who beat her. There was nothing in her life but curses and abuse. There never would be anything else, and yet she showed no bitterness in her heart. I believed that was because she had known no other life, no other men, and I wondered what she would do if there ever came to her the love of youth.

After that first meeting I saw her often, and we became good friends. Her father had sent her to whatever schools the mining camps afforded when she was a little girl, and she had gained an unusual fondness for reading, so she was not entirely uneducated. We found much in common to talk about and we saw each other often. But always she was so quiet, as if she were simply drifting along with nothing ahead worth living for.

About a week after the girl and I began to know each other the stage from Lone Pine brought me a letter. It was from an old friend, and I can see every line of it yet. It read:

Dear Judge:

Old friends are the best when you're in trouble, aren't they? That is why I am writing to you. Perhaps you remember my son as a little lad. Well he's out of college now— kicked out— and he seems to have gone on the rocks. Of course the doctors can give a good name to his trouble, but I know it is the result of his cussed way of living. You know.

Worse than that, he doesn't know what a real man is made of. There's good stuff in him, I know, but it will never show up if he stays in the city. I want to get him away for a time— some places where he can get back his strength and his bearings. How about the desert? You often tell me that there is where a man really finds himself. Will you take him? I know he could not be in better hands than yours.

His name is the same as mine

JIM WILSON.

That letter stuck in my mind— particularly the sentence, "I know he could not be in better hands than yours"— for I had good reason to remember it.

Of course the prospects of having a visitor suited me, so I answered the letter right away. A week later the stage brought Jim Wilson, Jr.

One look at the lad told me his father had been correct in his diagnoses of his case. The young man plainly showed the effects of dissipation. Not an utterly bad fellow, but a good sport ready to stretch the limit to suit himself. And he was polished; college was stamped all over him. His hair was parted at the correct angle, face white and massaged, fingernails severely manicured and clothes quite the latest thing— which was all very good for the city, but not the desert.

The driver winked at me and drove on, leaving Jim Wilson swearing at the world in general and particularly at the part covered by a certain desert.

His greeting to me was, "Why don't you live in hell and be done with it?" Then he laughed and extended his hand.

"You'll change your mind about this place," I said, helping him with his bags. He had half a dozen of them, and looked as if he had come to stay a year instead of two months.

On the porch in front of the store he stopped to look around.

"Where's the town?" he asked.

I pointed to the few brown buildings. "That's it," I said.

He grunted. "Dad said I was coming to a quiet place, but I didn't know anywhere could be as quiet as this. Why it makes your ears hurt for lack of something to work on! Oh, well, l guess I need the change."

"Yes," I agreed. "Your father said you had been sick."

"Not sick— overwork. You know how it is in college. These professors realise a fellow is human. They hand out too much work. You study like hell trying to keep up, and pretty soon—"

"Yes, I know how you overworked," I answered. "Went to college myself."

The boy grinned. "I can see already," he promised, "that you and I will get along."

Supposedly he had come to work for me as well as to get away from the city, so I gave him a job moving stuff about the store. For two days I was kept busy thinking of things for him to do, anything to keep him active.

Then he met Caroline, and after that the only work he did was to carry supplies up to her shack— and that he did much too willingly.

At first I gave little attention to what was happening. It was quite natural that a man fresh from the city and used to having woman about him should seek the company of the only one he found when he was shoved off to a lonesome desert camp. And Caroline was an attractive girl.

But after a few days I began to worry.

There was more than casual friendship in the smiles they gave each other, and it was more than lonesomeness that kept them together constantly. If I

held him away from the shack on the hill for half a day, Caroline would find some excuse to come down to the store and stay there.

Soon they began to take long walks in the evenings, going nowhere in particular and returning I don't know when for I was usually asleep. Or they would sit on the porch saying things that meant nothing— except to them.

They drifted along like that for a month, and all the while I kept saying to myself that the companionship between the two would easily be broken when the time came; for of course that time would come.

Jim began to look like a regular fellow. The exercise and the desert air straightened him up and put color in his face. But I know this was only temporary. The old habits were still strong within him and would crop up again as soon as he returned to the city. I had not yet fulfilled my promise to the father, to make a man of his son; this change was due only to the desert life and to this girl, for whom he had nothing but respect.

And what a change came over Caroline! The tired look left her face. She fixed her clothes and her hair in a pretty way and sang as she went about her work in the shack on the hill. I knew the signs. For the first time in her life she had found someone who told her how pretty she was and did the many little things for her that a man does when he cares.

It hurt me to think of the happiness they could not have. I kept hoping they would realise this and settle things in their own way, but they didn't. They seemed blissfully unaware of the future— and of Joe.

Finally I knew I must interfere, and there seemed only one way. Jim had been with me two months, which was the length of time he had intended to stay, so I reminded him of it.

"Don't think I'm running you off, though," I hastened to add.

Jim looked at me squarely for a moment. "If you don't want to get rid of me," he asked, "why do you tell me that my time is up?'

I hesitated to say. "Is it Caroline?" he went on. "Are you afraid I will fall in love with her?"

"Yes."

"You're right, I have."

There was a look more serious than I had ever seen on Jim's care-free face:

"You can't," I told him. "She's married—"

"Hell! She never loved him. He took her when she was too young to know any better, that what."

"But she's married just the same," I argued. "You can never have her, so the best thing you can do is to forget her."

"Can't have her? Why not?" he retorted. "They mean nothing to each other, and she loves me."

"You don't know her man," I said. "Remember you are not in the city now where disputes are fought out in courts. That may not love her, but she is his property, just like one of his burros. It would go hard with the man who tried to steal his burros, or his woman. Arguing with him was worse than a waste of time; it only made him more set in his determination to stay. All his young life he had been given whatever he desired, and now he wanted this, a woman's love, if he had to fight for it.

The time approached when Jim should return. It was toward the end of summer, scorching hot and windless, the few clouds hanging in the sky emphasised the dryness of the desert. Funeral Range danced in the heat-wave. It was hot!

Late in the afternoon of such a day Jim called from in front of the store. "Hey, Judge, what the devil is this?'

I went out. He pointed to the desert. A faint black speck was moving out there, sending up a tiny cloud of dust. The look on my face must have told Jim my thoughts.

"Is it her old man coming back?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, "it must be." I looked into the boy's face.

He was smiling, and he said, "All right, I'm waiting for him."

We went back to our work in the stockroom of the store. Two hours later, just about dusk, Jim again went out in front. He could hardly have reached the window when he yelled "For Heaven's sake, come here!"

By the time I could reach him he had crossed the porch and started down the steps. He turned to me "Look at him!"

A few hundred yards in front of us coming on like a ghost through the evening twilight, a burro, a mere hide-bound skeleton, staggered through the camp. And astride it, clinging around its neck was a man. Even as we watched, the last bit of strength seemed to leave the man's arms, he lurched sideways and fell from the burro's back. The animal stumbled on alone.

We both started toward the fallen man, but Jim reached him first and carried him back to the store.

"Take him into the bunk," I ordered "I'll get some water."

While we were working over the prospector, Caroline, who had seen the burro, came into the room. She knelt beside the man. Then, for the first time since I had known her she seemed on the verge of breaking down completely and made no effort to hide her tears.

She was speaking to the unconscious figure. "Tell me— tell me, where he is.

I glanced at Jim, and saw his puzzled look. "This is Joe's partner," I explained.

We worked for half an hour before he regained consciousness, and then was some time before he could utter an intelligible word.

"Water!" was the first thing we could understand.

We wet his swollen lips and gave him a spoonful of water to swallow.

"Water," he begged again. Silence for a time, then, "Joe— in hills— left him— not much— water."

That told enough. The two men had run short of water. Both couldn't come on, so this one had ridden in to help. Jim understood, too.

"What! "he gasped. "Is there a man back in that range without water?"

"Yes, and someone's got to go after him."

I looked at Jim. He was looking at Caroline— and God knows what was in his mind. But the girl did not meet his eyes.

Suddenly she stood up.

"Get me some water-bags," she said. "I'm going."

"You!" Jim was standing beside her.

"Yes. The judge here is too weak to go; you don't know the desert, and there's not another man in camp. So I am going."

Jim stared at her amazed. The loyalty that would send a woman into the desert to risk her life for a man who would beat her was beyond his comprehension.

For a moment, he seemed to hesitate. Then, turning to me, he said, "Got the things I'll need Judge; I'm going after that man."

Caroline protested, but Jim was unheeding.

"I don't know the desert— I can't make it— not wise enough, eh? Well, I'm going— going after your man!"

None of us talked much while we got some food ready, then filled a canteen and two canvas desert bags with water.

There was not a horse or burro in camp, except the little fellow that had brought Joe's partner. All the freighters and their outfits were on the road. Water and a short rest had revived the exhausted animal somewhat, but he was weak, and trembled as we loaded the light pack on him.

"Take it easy." I advised Jim. "Give this critter a rest now and then as you go."

By the time Jim was ready to start the moon had come up, giving enough light to show the trail Joe's partner had made. He could follow that until it reached the rock hills, but there he would have to go entirely by land-marks vaguely described by the delirious man.

I had to force myself to speak calmly as I told him good-by. He laughed.

"Get of the box, Judge. Don't look so solemn."

Caroline, who had been standing beside him had not spoken for many minutes. The affection that had been theirs was seemingly blotted out by the sudden recalling of the husband.

But just as Jim turned away, she ran to him, threw her arms about his neck and kissed him, then fled from us.

Abruptly turning, laughing strangely, he faced the desert, and, leading the burro, headed toward Funeral Range.

In spite of my warning, Jim kept the weakened burro at a steady pace, throughout the night. Perhaps he gave it what seemed enough rest, but he knew nothing of the desert. During the unbearable heat of the next mid-day he was forced to stop, to struggle on again as soon as evening drew near.

Thus, travelling all night and part of the daytime, he reached the foot-hills of Funeral Range shortly after nightfall on the second day. Pushing on by moonlight, following the prominent landmarks of rock peaks and canyons, which Joe's partner had described he reached the ridge of the range by the third morning.

But Jim had overestimated his own strength. Driving himself on through the heat, denying himself water that he might save it for the man ahead he had fought off the weakness that had gradually come.

Stopping that morning on the ridge of the range he suddenly felt faintness coming on. Blindly he unloaded the canteen, and two waterbags from the burro's back, hurrying to make a camp in which to rest.

When he regained consciousness, he was lying staring up into the mid-day sun. His lips, swollen and dry, split into bleeding cracks as he moved them. The faintness returned when he tried to sit up, but, by rolling over once, he was in the shadow of a rock.

He looked for the burro, fearing it had left him. But it was standing peacefully in the shade of another rock, and he dropped back to the ground, trying to rest. Presently he looked toward the spot where he had started to make camp.

The two water-bags, with ragged holes chewed in their sides, lay flat, and empty. Jim looked at the burro — standing contentedly in the shade — and knew why the animal had not run away. Then he crawled to the canteen now his only supply of water, and dragged it back to the shade of the rock. There he unscrewed the top, wet his parched lips, and took one swallow than pushed the canteen far from him.

Finally, gathering the last of his waning strength, he pulled himself to his feet, and caught the burro. Then leaving his camp outfit and blankets and taking only the canteen of water, he started on.

Vaguely remembering the directions he had been given, he knew that Joe should not be far away. But soon he became confused. All rocks looked alike. All hills were the same mass of brown and black. All the canyons winding grooves through which flowed nothing but torturing heat, led him on blindly until, clinging grimly to the burro's neck, he let the animal go unguided.

The afternoon passed. Night came. The burro had stopped, and Jim lay on the ground beside it staring up at the stars.

Close down upon a hill-top outline against the light of the sky, there came a star bigger and brighter than the est. It grew, became red, died down flared and died.

He climbed to the back of the burro and forced the animal up the hillside toward the light. It took but a few minutes to reach it, and there, beside dying brush fire, Jim found the man. Joe explained that he had seen the burro struggling through the hills that afternoon, but his strength had failed him when he had tried to make his way toward it. Then after darkness he had built the signal fire to which Jim had been attracted.

The prospector, weakened from hunger and thirst, was in a serious condition. Jim, sliding from his burro, dropping the canteen of water before the man fell to the ground exhausted.

He lay in a stupor, dreaming wildly as a spent man sometimes does. His dreams were of Caroline, and he must have talked aloud of her in his feverish mumblings, for he saw Joe staring at him, studying him with a dark scowl, when he awoke.

Each man took a swallow from the canteen, now half empty, then started on the back trail, taking turns walking or riding the burro. It was still night, somewhat cooler. But the going was difficult, and treacherous in the dark. To those men, and especially to the one who was walking, every step was torture.

They took a more direct route back to the crest of the ridge than the one Jim had blindly followed that afternoon, and so in two hours they reached the spot where he had made his last camp. Here Joe stopped and told what had been brooding is his mind. He said they could never cross the desert, going as they were. One man might make it if he rode all the way, and one would have to stay behind. That was the same condition he had faced before, when his partner had gone on to the camp— with one exception. They had much less water now, and there would be none for the man who stayed.

Jim was too nearly exhausted to consider sanely what Joe was saying or doing. He threw himself down on the blanket and only half heard. Mechanically he drew the match from Joe's out-stretched hand, saw that the head was still on it, and knew he was the one to stay. Then for a moment his mind

cleared. Something about that lot-drawing hadn't seemed right, but it was too late then to object.

Joe was already preparing to leave. He was taking nothing with him except the canteen and a small supply of food. With Jim he left two empty canteens and the blankets. Before leaving, he drew something from his pocket, and dropped it beside the boy. It was a revolver with one unfired shell.

Throughout the night, Jim dozed in his camp in the hills. By morning, he felt rested, but his throat burned, and the thirst-weakness was still upon him. While his strength remained, he rigged up the blankets to make a shelter-tent, and sat down inside to wait.

There was only one thing to wait for. Often he picked up the revolver, then threw it from him.

So he waited, and during that day he scrawled a letter to me telling what I have just repeated. It was in his pocket.

SEVEN DAYS had passed since Jim had disappeared into the desert toward Fungal Range, seven days filled with more worry than I had ever known. But I knew my agony was nothing when I saw Caroline.

It was on the morning of the eighth day that I heard her cry out to me as she ran down toward the store. I met her out in front.

"Look!" she cried pointing, "Who is it? Oh, tell me— which one is it?"

I looked, and saw a man coming slowly up toward the camp, but he was too far away to be recognisable.

Then the girl must have noticed something that my eyes couldn't see, for she ran up to her shack, then re-appeared with her hat and carrying a small water-bag.

"Fix a bed for him," she cried as she passed me, and started out to meet the man. Half an hour later, she brought him in. He was nearly blind, and we had to carry him up the steps of the store. Then he collapsed in the girl's arms.

All day she worked to drive the fever from him, ordering me about, caring for the man with all the presumption of ownership. And the look on her face— I imagine those women at the tomb on that first Easter morning might have looked as she did then.

Yes, the man was Jim, but it was two days before he could tell all that had happened. In the meantime, I found the letter he had scratched, so was mighty curious to know what had happened later. I wondered whether he had found the water, for there was still a few drops of dark, evil-smelling stuff in one of his canteens.

Finally, he was able to tell me, and it was then that I realised how just the desert could be. I have already told you of these desert storms; a cloud come up, a lot of rain falls for a few minutes, and that is all.

That kind of a rain came up the second night Jim was alone. At first he tried to catch the water in a frying-pan. That was useless. Then he saw his blankets, and he stretched them out on the rocks.

When they became soaked, he wrung the water into his canteens— rotten stuff, but a man isn't particular when he's dying. Soon the rain ceased, but Jim had both canteens full. Then he fought his way down from the hills and across the desert.

Some freighters came along, and I sent them out to look for Joe. Halfway across the desert, but far off the direct line back to camp, they found his body, and made a pile of sand to mark his grave.

Now, don't you see what I mean by the justice of the desert? Perhaps you think it all happened to end that way because Joe didn't have a blanket with him to catch some water as Jim did. But he needed more than a blanket; the desert was against him. It rained only in the hills.

9: The Cheat
Arthur W. Marchmont

1852-1923

Evening Star (Boulder, W Australia) 23 Sep 1910

English journalist and editor. Active as a writer of novels and short stories from the 1890s to the mid 1910s, all of which are largely forgotten.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN very difficult for me at one time to have explained my feeling for Mollie Wentworth. I had known her as a child; for I had been her father's junior partner before I had come into enough money to enable me to abandon business and devote myself to my books.

There were nine years between us: and when her father died, leaving her a considerable fortune, she was fifteen and I twenty-four; and the gap seemed a very wide one indeed. She went to live with her aunt, Mrs. Chasedale; and as the latter was an old friend of mine I saw a great deal of Mollie, who regarded me as a sort of elder brother.

I was quite contented with that confidential relationship until John Maidstone came and told, me he was going to marry her. I awoke to the truth then, and realised quite clearly the nature of my feelings. I loved her; and the news was to me like a sentence of loneliness for life. I had believed that I was. wedded to my books.

My books! As I looked round the crowded shelves after he had gone, every volume seemed to laugh at me in mockery of the empty fiction with which I had deluded myself. Yet I was not jealous. He was a handsome young fellow, seven or eight years younger than I, well-to-do, in the way to make a career at the Bar, and enjoyed the good word of all who knew him. It was in every respect an excellent match; and my congratulations were perfectly sincere. I cared enough for Mollie to make her happiness the first consideration in my thoughts.

I remember that his way of telling me jarred somewhat. He put it that he was going to marry her; and the insistence upon the personal note was out of place and gave me a twinge of uneasiness. But then I am not a pushful person. I made another discovery, however— that he had been philandering with Clarice Gratton; and the change to Mollie had been made very abruptly. Moreover, Mollie was rich, while Clarice had very little.

But I put the suspicions aside as the distempered fancies of a bookworm and when I saw that Mollie seemed proud of her handsome lover and very fond of him, I slipped easily enough into the position of genuine well-wisher to them both, and thrust my own stillborn hopes right down into the bottom of my heart.

Clarice accepted the position, also, with smiling complacency, and remained one of Mollie's close friends. So matters stood one night a few weeks after his engagement, when I was at Miss Chasedale's for the game of bridge which has become a weekly custom with us four.

Both girls were unusually excited, Mollie especially being in the highest spirits. She was more than usually lucky that night, and to my surprise had suggested that our customary modest stakes should be considerably increased.

Maidstone had a touch of the gambling fever in his blood, and readily jumped at the proposals, and as he and Mollie were partners they won so largely that, fearing Clarice would be troubled by her losses, I threw out more than one suggestion that we should stop. Mollie, however, made some rather nasty remark about stopping if Clarice was afraid to go on; and, nettled by this, my partner declared she would see the thing through. So on we went.

I thought that Mollie acted, with much less consideration than usual, seeing that she had won so heavily, and it disturbed me. But as it turned out I did not understand the position at all. I am not quick in detecting undercurrents.

The game went on for a hand or two until it was Mollie's deal and she declared "No Trumps."

She had wonderful cards, and when she had made four or five tricks, Clarice pushed back her chair and turned to her, her face as white as the cards and her lips quivering with anger.

"I see now why I have lost," she exclaimed viciously. "Will you explain, or shall I?"

Mollie had also changed colour; and the two stared at one another defiantly.

"What is there to explain?" she asked, her voice hard and her words clipped short in anger.

"We have been playing against marked cards, Mr. Mellows," said Clarice to me.

"Clarice!" "Miss Gratton!" cried Maidstone and I in the same breath , literally aghast at the accusation.

"It is true," declared Clarice deliberately. "You can see for yourselves;" and she pointed at Mollie, who glanced quickly at us in turn, but did not speak.

Maidstone's face was a study. He had looked for an indignant repudiation of the charge from Mollie and when it did not come, a heavy frown gathered on his face, his features were set and stern, and his hands clenched almost fiercely.

"Mollie," he appealed in a low husky voice. She met his look for a moment steadily, and then shrugged her shoulders.

"You don't believe me capable of such a thing?" she asked. Her voice was steady, but her eyes full of concern, and trouble.

"You can see the marks on the cards," interposed Clarice, before he had time to reply; and she turned some of them over.

"This spot in the right-hand corner is for the hearts, the two spots for diamonds and so on," she added, holding up the cards as the spoke. The marks were there right enough.

"You will understand now how it was easy to make the right declarations, and can appreciate her wonderful run of— luck."

The pause before the last word and the scorn with which she uttered it were eloquent of malice.

Maidstone examined the marks critically for a few moments, and then tossed the cards on the table with a sigh, and sat back in his chair, the frown deeper than ever.

"You have not answered my question," said Mollie to him.

"The cards are certainly marked," he replied. "Anyone can see that. You can see it, can't you, Mellows?"

"Certainly I can," I said.

Mollie flashed her eyes on me then.

"You have known me all my life, Mr. Mellows. Do you believe I could do this?"

I smiled. "No, Mollie, not if you told me so yourself." The mere thought of such a thing was preposterous. Maidstone looked round at me quickly.

"What does it mean, then?"

Again Clarice intervened. "That is not all. If you will look under the table, you will find two or three other packs of cards there. Each has been carefully prepared so that all the good cards shall be dealt into certain hands."

Maidstone, with a lawyer's appetite for evidence, pushed back his chair and brought out a couple of packs.

It was a small folding table, with a shelf for books or papers, and he had found tile cards on this. He immediately dealt out one of the packs, face upwards, and the result was that nearly all the honor cards fell to Mollie and myself.

"The other has already been used." said Clarice. "It was that which raised my suspicions. When she was going to deal just now and the cards ad been cut she dropped her handkerchief, and in stooping to pick it up she changed the cards. That was the hand when you scored a little slam in o trumps. I myself then expected an indignant denial from Mollie. But none came.

"I did not think you were so observant," she said very quietly, and even smilingly.

"Mollie!" cried Maidstone, utterly bewildered.

"Don't be tragic, Jack. It's a very small matter. Of course, the money we won need not be paid," she replied lightly, and she shrugged her shoulders gain and got up from the table. "I suppose we shan't play any more now."

"Mollie! Do you mean that you admit all this?" cried Maidstone, greatly agitated now. "it's— it's cheating!"

"Is it any use for me to deny it? Will you believe me if I do?"

"But you impliedly admitted it. You can't treat it in this off-hand way; really you can't."

"I don't take the same view of it as you, Jack. The question is what you believe. If you don't believe me capable of such a thing, nothing else matters— at least to me. If you think I'm a cheat, well—" and she threw up her hands and left the sentence unfinished.

"I— I don't know what to think," he murmured, with a sigh of perplexity. "You don't even deny it." This appeared to anger her.

"Is it necessary that I should?" she retorted with a good deal of asperity.

"The thing can't rest where it is," he muttered uneasily, half under his breath.

"What do you say, Mr. Mellows?" she asked, turning again to me.

"I know you to be absolutely incapable of such a thing, Mollie; but if you know the explanation I think you should tell us."

Maidstone turned on me at this, apparently glad to be able to avoid speaking directly to her.

"Some one has been cheating, Mellows. You'll admit that, at any rate," he said in his most lawyer-like tone.

"I don't mean to argue the case at all, Maidstone. The marks may or may or may not mean anything, and so far—"

"But the pack of cards I dealt out," he interposed sharply. "You're not going to argue that the arrangement was merely accidental."

"I don't mean to argue the case at all. I don't understand the thing; but I say that if you believe Mollie could even think of such a thing as this you're making a fool of yourself."

Whether my warmth in replying angered him, or whether he had already made up his mind to believe the evidence, I can't say; but he answered me hotly, and left no doubt in my mind that he did believe Mollie had done it. And none in hers either.

"Wait a moment, Jack, please" she said, intervening presently, "It's a question in your mind whether you your faith in me, or what you keep calling the evidence. Which is it? If you think I'm a cheat, do at least have the courage to say so," and her eyes sparkled with indignation.

He paused, avoiding her gaze, and staring heavily in front of him.

"I don't wish to stop while this goes on," said Clarice, speaking for the first time for many minutes. Mollie took no notice of her. "Now Jack?" she said insistently.

"I don't know what to think. You offer no sort of explanation."

"Don't be a fool, Maidstone," I interjected quickly. But Mollie flashed round on me.

"This is between us two, Mr. Mellows, if you please. You find you can't disbelieve the evidence then, Jack, without some explanations from me? Your legal mind prefers evidence to trust. Is that it?"

There was no doubt about her indignation now. Clarice got up then.

"Good night, Mr. Mellows," she said, holding out her hand to me. But I took my cue from Mollie and affected not to hear her.

"Jack?" cried Mollie, quickly. He was silent and shook his head and tossed his hands with another heavy sigh.

"Then only one thing remains," said Mollie. She drew off her engagement ring and laid it on the table. "You would not marry a girl you believe to be a cheat, nor I a man who could believe me one. Mr. Maidstone will see you home" she added, turning to Clarice.

"Mollie! You don't mean this, I wouldn't—"

He stopped abruptly as he met the look in her eyes. At that moment Clarice moved towards the door; but Millie was first to reach it and set her back against it.

"Let me go at once. I do not care to be in such company as yours," said Clarice, angrily.

"You will not be in it long," replied Mollie with quiet contempt. "I have already said that you and Mr. Maidstone shall leave together. But before you go, give me back my pack of cards"; and she held out her hand for them.

I understood then, and so I think did Maidstone, for he winced and raised his hands like a who had been struck, and stared at the two girls in amazement.

Mollie did not even look at him.

"I don't pretend to understand you," said Clarice, with a sneer and a shrug.

"The pretence has been mine, not yours," was Mollie's retort. "Will you give them up quietly, or compel me to charge you with stealing them? We must have the truth now. Mr. Mellows, you are with me in this, I know. And you can now see the trick which has been played on me under the garb of friendship.

"How dare you say such a thing," cried Clarice, still full of fight.

"I was at your house to-day, as you know; but, as you do not know, I saw there the cards which you had began to mark. I was struck by the fact that they were all of the same pattern as mine, and I half-guessed what you intended to do. I decided to let you make the attempt. I understood your motive; to try and take Mr. Maidstone from me by branding me as a cheat. I let the attempt go on, because I thought it would prove a valuable test of the sincerity of his faith in me. It has," she said, with a swift glance at I him.

"Mollie!" he exclaimed, but the appeal was unnoticed, and he dropped into a chair with a groan of futile regret as Mollie continued—

"But I do not intend that you shall succeed in your other effort— to make me the common cheat which you are. You brought the cards with you; I took good care to see them before we began to play; and I was careful to see that you should have ample opportunity to make the necessary exchange. But I have not let you leave the room to get rid of those which you took. Now, will you give them up?"

"It is a lie," cried Clarice, as pale as death. "Mr. Maidstone, you won't hear me slandered in this way. Mr. Mellows, I appeal to you."

A deep sigh from Maidstone was his only response.

"This is very painful, but I cannot intervene," I said.

Mollie rang the bell.

"That is for a constable to be fetched," she said, and her face was as hard as steel.

Clarice held out until the servant came, and Mollie told her to fetch the police.

"There is no need. I— own up. I have the cards." And she took a small bag from her dress, and tossed it towards Mollie, who took out the cards and showed them to us; and then placed the marked ones in it and returned it to her.

"You are satisfied now, perhaps," she said, contemptuously to Maidstone, and threw open the door. Clarice hurried out at once; and Maidstone rose and paused, looking appealingly at Mollie.

"Can't you— forgive me?"

"Mollie!" I interjected, to stay the hot reply I could see was hovering on her tips. "Think before you answer; it all appeared—"

"Appeared!" she broke in, her lip curling as she glanced at him. "Do you think I would have believed it of him had the appearances been a thousand times as black? That is not how I trust or will be trusted. Good night, Mr. Maidstone," and she would not even touch his extended hand.

With a last despairing toss of the hands he went out.

When they had gone she went to the fireplace, leaning her elbow on the mantel, while I paced the room in genuine distress.

"I am so sorry," I said presently, stopping near her.

To my surprise she was smiling as she turned to me.

"I am not. I am glad, positively glad," she replied. "Would you marry a woman who believed you could be a cheat?"

"But without your explanation—"

"Would you?" she asked again, with an insistent stamp of the little foot on the fender rail.

"You should have made allowance for—"

"Come here"; and she held the lapel of my coat— a rather favorite trick of hers— and looked into my eyes.

"You did not need allowances to be made. You knew it was impossible. No: don't say anything yet, and don't try to wriggle away. I'm going to talk first. I give you my word of honor that I am more pleased that he couldn't trust me than I should have been if he had. We had been engaged three weeks, and in that time I had got to now him through and through. I thought he loved me and that I loved him. But he has very little love to spare for any one but himself. He is that kind of man; a hundred little things showed me that in the three weeks; and he thought a great deal more about my money than about me. I wished to break it off; and when I ay what that false little cat meant to do to-night I let her do it purposely. I meant to test him.

"I knew that if he believed me a cheat he wouldn't want to marry me. It would have been too great a drawback, even in a rich girl. Of course, if I had really cared for him I couldn't have done it; but, as it is, my heart is as joyous as sunlight to be free from him. Now do you understand?" and her smile was positively radiant.

"Yes, in that case, I can understand, think," I said slowly.

Her smile give place to a wistful look.

"I wonder if you do," she murmured, keeping her eyes fixed on me; and if you can forgive?"

"Forgive? Whom? And for what?"

"Me, of course," she said, a light of mischief in her eyes.

I shook my head. "I don't understand."

"But you said you did. And to-night on showed that you did. And you trusted me as I would have trusted you."

"Ah, that was nothing. I couldn't distrust you, if I tried."

"I know that. I was perfectly sure of you," and her manner was so caressing that had I been five years younger should have found it hard indeed to have

held back the love which filled my heart for her. As it was, it was difficult enough-

"You can always be sure of me," I said after a pause.

"I don't know. Do you forgive me?' he asked putting her face so close to mine that her hair swept my forehead.

"I could forgive you anything," I said earnestly.

She looked at me intently in silence a few seconds, and then giggled.

"Can't you understand that when I found out one thing I found out another?" she asked. Then she dropped her eyes, the color flushed in her checks, she laughed happily, and releasing me with a slight push, turned away to the fire again, and hid her face in her hands.

I was still at sea.

"What have I to forgive?" I murmured helplessly.

She replied without raising her face: "That I ever promised to marry—*him*," and her voice was broken and hesitating and all unsteady.

"Mollie! Mollie! Do you really mean it?" I cried, catching my breath as I seized her hand and pressed my lips to it.

She looked up then, her face aflame, and her eyes shining like twin stars as she half-shrank before the new light in mine.

"Do you think you understand now?" she flashed with a bright mischievous but all loving smile as she yielded to me and let me kiss her and draw her into my eager arms.

"How dense you were, Dick," she whispered presently "Why did you force me to cheat you into this after all?"

My answer— well, it is an easy guess

10: The Schoolboy's Story

Charles Dickens

1812-1870

Household Words Christmas 1853 (uncredited)

The Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News (Western Australia, 29 Jan 1858

BEING rather young at present— I am getting on in years, but still I am rather young— I have no particular adventures of my own to fall back upon. It wouldn't much interest anybody here, I suppose, to know what a screw the Reverend is, or what a griffin *she* is, or how they do stick it into parents— particularly hair-cutting, and medical attendance. One of our fellows was charged in his half's account twelve and sixpence for two pills— tolerably profitable at six and threepence a-piece, I should think— and he never took them either, but put them up the sleeve of his jacket.

As to the beef, it's shameful. It's *not* beef. Regular beef isn't veins. You can chew regular beef. Besides which, there's gravy to regular beef, and you never see a drop to ours. Another of our fellows went home ill, and heard the family doctor tell his father that he couldn't account for his complaint unless it was the beer. Of course it was the beer, and well it might be!

However, beef and Old Cheeseman are two different things. So is beer. It was Old Cheeseman I meant to tell about; not the manner in which our fellows get their constitutions destroyed for the sake of profit.

Why, look at the pie-crust alone. There's no flakiness in it. It's solid— like damp lead. Then our fellows get nightmares, and are bolstered for calling out and waking other fellows. Who can wonder!

Old Cheeseman one night walked in his sleep, put his hat on over his night-cap, got hold of a fishing-rod and a cricket-bat, and went down into the parlour, where they naturally thought from his appearance he was a Ghost. Why, he never would have done that if his meals had been wholesome. When we all begin to walk in our sleeps, I suppose they'll be sorry for it.

Old Cheeseman wasn't second Latin Master then; he was a fellow himself. He was first brought there, very small, in a post-chaise, by a woman who was always taking snuff and shaking him— and that was the most he remembered about it. He never went home for the holidays. His accounts (he never learnt any extras) were sent to a Bank, and the Bank paid them; and he had a brown suit twice a-year, and went into boots at twelve. They were always too big for him, too.

In the Midsummer holidays, some of our fellows who lived within walking distance, used to come back and climb the trees outside the playground wall, on purpose to look at Old Cheeseman reading there by himself. He was always as mild as the tea— and *that's* pretty mild, I should hope!— so when they whistled to him, he looked up and nodded; and when they said, "Halloa, Old Cheeseman,

what have you had for dinner?" he said, "Boiled mutton;" and when they said, "An't it solitary, Old Cheeseman?" he said, "It is a little dull sometimes:" and then they said, "Well good-bye, Old Cheeseman!" and climbed down again. Of course it was imposing on Old Cheeseman to give him nothing but boiled mutton through a whole Vacation, but that was just like the system. When they didn't give him boiled mutton, they gave him rice pudding, pretending it was a treat. And saved the butcher.

So Old Cheeseman went on. The holidays brought him into other trouble besides the loneliness; because when the fellows began to come back, not wanting to, he was always glad to see them; which was aggravating when they were not at all glad to see him, and so he got his head knocked against walls, and that was the way his nose bled. But he was a favourite in general. Once a subscription was raised for him; and, to keep up his spirits, he was presented before the holidays with two white mice, a rabbit, a pigeon, and a beautiful puppy. Old Cheeseman cried about it— especially soon afterwards, when they all ate one another.

Of course Old Cheeseman used to be called by the names of all sorts of cheeses— Double Glo'sterman, Family Cheshireman, Dutchman, North Wiltshireman, and all that. But he never minded it. And I don't mean to say he was old in point of years— because he wasn't— only he was called from the first, Old Cheeseman.

At last, Old Cheeseman was made second Latin Master. He was brought in one morning at the beginning of a new half, and presented to the school in that capacity as "Mr. Cheeseman." Then our fellows all agreed that Old Cheeseman was a spy, and a deserter, who had gone over to the enemy's camp, and sold himself for gold. It was no excuse for him that he had sold himself for very little gold— two pound ten a quarter and his washing, as was reported. It was decided by a Parliament which sat about it, that Old Cheeseman's mercenary motives could alone be taken into account, and that he had "coined our blood for drachmas." The Parliament took the expression out of the quarrel scene between Brutus and Cassius.

When it was settled in this strong way that Old Cheeseman was a tremendous traitor, who had wormed himself into our fellows' secrets on purpose to get himself into favour by giving up everything he knew, all courageous fellows were invited to come forward and enrol themselves in a Society for making a set against him. The President of the Society was First boy, named Bob Tarter. His father was in the West Indies, and he owned, himself, that his father was worth Millions. He had great power among our fellows, and he wrote a parody, beginning—

"Who made believe to be so meek
That we could hardly hear him speak,

Yet turned out an Informing Sneak?
—Old Cheeseman."

— and on in that way through more than a dozen verses, which he used to go and sing, every morning, close by the new master's desk. He trained one of the low boys, too, a rosy-cheeked little Brass who didn't care what he did, to go up to him with his Latin Grammar one morning, and say it so: *Nominativus pronominum*— Old Cheeseman, *raro exprimitur*— was never suspected, *nisi distinctionis*— of being an informer, *aut emphasis gratîa*— until he proved one. *Ut*— for instance, *Vos damnastis*— when he sold the boys. *Quasi*— as though, *dicat*— he should say, *Pretærea nemo*— I'm a Judas! All this produced a great effect on Old Cheeseman. He had never had much hair; but what he had, began to get thinner and thinner every day. He grew paler and more worn; and sometimes of an evening he was seen sitting at his desk with a precious long snuff to his candle, and his hands before his face, crying. But no member of the Society could pity him, even if he felt inclined, because the President said it was Old Cheeseman's conscience.

So Old Cheeseman went on, and didn't he lead a miserable life! Of course the Reverend turned up his nose at him, and of course *she* did— because both of them always do that at all the masters— but he suffered from the fellows most, and he suffered from them constantly. He never told about it, that the Society could find out; but he got no credit for that, because the President said it was Old Cheeseman's cowardice.

He had only one friend in the world, and that one was almost as powerless as he was, for it was only Jane. Jane was a sort of wardrobe woman to our fellows, and took care of the boxes. She had come at first, I believe, as a kind of apprentice— some of our fellows say from a Charity, but *I* don't know— and after her time was out, had stopped at so much a year. So little a year, perhaps I ought to say, for it is far more likely. However, she had put some pounds in the Savings' Bank, and she was a very nice young woman. She was not quite pretty; but she had a very frank, honest, bright face, and all our fellows were fond of her. She was uncommonly neat and cheerful, and uncommonly comfortable and kind. And if anything was the matter with a fellow's mother, he always went and showed the letter to Jane.

Jane was Old Cheeseman's friend. The more the Society went against him, the more Jane stood by him. She used to give him a good-humoured look out of her still-room window, sometimes, that seemed to set him up for the day. She used to pass out of the orchard and the kitchen garden (always kept locked, I believe you!) through the playground, when she might have gone the other way, only to give a turn of her head, as much as to say "Keep up your spirits!" to Old Cheeseman. His slip of a room was so fresh and orderly that it was well known who looked after it while he was at his desk; and when our fellows saw a smoking

hot dumpling on his plate at dinner, they knew with indignation who had sent it up.

Under these circumstances, the Society resolved, after a quantity of meeting and debating, that Jane should be requested to cut Old Cheeseman dead; and that if she refused, she must be sent to Coventry herself. So a deputation, headed by the President, was appointed to wait on Jane, and inform her of the vote the Society had been under the painful necessity of passing. She was very much respected for all her good qualities, and there was a story about her having once waylaid the Reverend in his own study, and got a fellow off from severe punishment, of her own kind comfortable heart. So the deputation didn't much like the job. However, they went up, and the President told Jane all about it. Upon which Jane turned very red, burst into tears, informed the President and the deputation, in a way not at all like her usual way, that they were a parcel of malicious young savages, and turned the whole respected body out of the room. Consequently it was entered in the Society's book (kept in astronomical cypher for fear of detection), that all communication with Jane was interdicted: and the President addressed the members on this convincing instance of Old Cheeseman's undermining.

But Jane was as true to Old Cheeseman as Old Cheeseman was false to our fellows— in their opinion, at all events— and steadily continued to be his only friend. It was a great exasperation to the Society, because Jane was as much a loss to them as she was a gain to him; and being more inveterate against him than ever, they treated him worse than ever. At last, one morning, his desk stood empty, his room was peeped into, and found to be vacant, and a whisper went about among the pale faces of our fellows that Old Cheeseman, unable to bear it any longer, had got up early and drowned himself.

The mysterious looks of the other masters after breakfast, and the evident fact that old Cheeseman was not expected, confirmed the Society in this opinion. Some began to discuss whether the President was liable to hanging or only transportation for life, and the President's face showed a great anxiety to know which. However, he said that a jury of his country should find him game; and that in his address he should put it to them to lay their hands upon their hearts and say whether they as Britons approved of informers, and how they thought they would like it themselves. Some of the Society considered that he had better run away until he found a forest where he might change clothes with a wood-cutter, and stain his face with blackberries; but the majority believed that if he stood his ground, his father— belonging as he did to the West Indies, and being worth millions— could buy him off.

All our fellows' hearts beat fast when the Reverend came in, and made a sort of a Roman, or a Field Marshal, of himself with the ruler; as he always did before delivering an address. But their fears were nothing to their astonishment when he came out with the story that Old Cheeseman, "so long our respected friend

and fellow-pilgrim in the pleasant plains of knowledge," he called him— O yes! I dare say! Much of that!— was the orphan child of a disinherited young lady who had married against her father's wish, and whose young husband had died, and who had died of sorrow herself, and whose unfortunate baby (Old Cheeseman) had been brought up at the cost of a grandfather who would never consent to see it, baby, boy, or man: which grandfather was now dead, and serve him right— that's my putting in— and which grandfather's large property, there being no will, was now, and all of a sudden and for ever, Old Cheeseman's! Our so long respected friend and fellow-pilgrim in the pleasant plains of knowledge, the Reverend wound up a lot of bothering quotations by saying, would "come among us once more" that day fortnight, when he desired to take leave of us himself, in a more particular manner. With these words, he stared severely round at our fellows, and went solemnly out.

There was precious consternation among the members of the Society, now. Lots of them wanted to resign, and lots more began to try to make out that they had never belonged to it. However, the President stuck up, and said that they must stand or fall together, and that if a breach was made it should be over his body— which was meant to encourage the Society: but it didn't. The President further said, he would consider the position in which they stood, and would give them his best opinion and advice in a few days. This was eagerly looked for, as he knew a good deal of the world on account of his father's being in the West Indies.

After days and days of hard thinking, and drawing armies all over his slate, the President called our fellows together, and made the matter clear. He said it was plain that when Old Cheeseman came on the appointed day, his first revenge would be to impeach the Society, and have it flogged all round. After witnessing with joy the torture of his enemies, and gloating over the cries which agony would extort from them, the probability was that he would invite the Reverend, on pretence of conversation, into a private room— say the parlour into which Parents were shown, where the two great globes were which were never used— and would there reproach him with the various frauds and oppressions he had endured at his hands. At the close of his observations he would make a signal to a Prizefighter concealed in the passage, who would then appear and pitch into the Reverend, till he was left insensible. Old Cheeseman would then make Jane a present of from five to ten pounds, and would leave the establishment in fiendish triumph.

The President explained that against the parlour part, or the Jane part, of these arrangements he had nothing to say; but, on the part of the Society, he counselled deadly resistance. With this view he recommended that all available desks should be filled with stones, and that the first word of the complaint should be the signal to every fellow to let fly at Old Cheeseman. The bold advice put the Society in better spirits, and was unanimously taken. A post about Old

Cheeseman's size was put up in the playground, and all our fellows practised at it till it was dinted all over.

When the day came, and Places were called, every fellow sat down in a tremble. There had been much discussing and disputing as to how Old Cheeseman would come; but it was the general opinion that he would appear in a sort of triumphal car drawn by four horses, with two livery servants in front, and the Prizefighter in disguise up behind. So, all our fellows sat listening for the sound of wheels. But no wheels were heard, for Old Cheeseman walked after all, and came into the school without any preparation. Pretty much as he used to be, only dressed in black.

"Gentlemen," said the Reverend, presenting him, "our so long respected friend and fellow-pilgrim in the pleasant plains of knowledge, is desirous to offer a word or two. Attention, gentlemen, one and all!"

Every fellow stole his hand into his desk and looked at the President. The President was all ready, and taking aim at old Cheeseman with his eyes.

What did Old Cheeseman then, but walk up to his old desk, look round him with a queer smile as if there was a tear in his eye, and begin in a quavering, mild voice, "My dear companions and old friends!"

Every fellow's hand came out of his desk, and the President suddenly began to cry.

"My dear companions and old friends," said Old Cheeseman, "you have heard of my good fortune. I have passed so many years under this roof— my entire life so far, I may say— that I hope you have been glad to hear of it for my sake. I could never enjoy it without exchanging congratulations with you. If we have ever misunderstood one another at all, pray, my dear boys, let us forgive and forget. I have a great tenderness for you, and I am sure you return it. I want in the fulness of a grateful heart to shake hands with you every one. I have come back to do it, if you please, my dear boys."

Since the President had begun to cry, several other fellows had broken out here and there: but now, when Old Cheeseman began with him as first boy, laid his left hand affectionately on his shoulder and gave him his right; and when the President said "Indeed, I don't deserve it, sir; upon my honour I don't;" there was sobbing and crying all over the school. Every other fellow said he didn't deserve it, much in the same way; but Old Cheeseman, not minding that a bit, went cheerfully round to every boy, and wound up with every master— finishing off the Reverend last.

Then a snivelling little chap in a corner, who was always under some punishment or other, set up a shrill cry of "Success to Old Cheeseman! Hooray!" The Reverend glared upon him, and said, "*Mr.* Cheeseman, sir." But, Old Cheeseman protesting that he liked his old name a great deal better than his new one, all our fellows took up the cry; and, for I don't know how many minutes,

there was such a thundering of feet and hands, and such a roaring of Old Cheeseman, as never was heard.

After that, there was a spread in the dining-room of the most magnificent kind. Fowls, tongues, preserves, fruits, confectionaries, jellies, neguses, barley-sugar temples, trifles, crackers— eat all you can and pocket what you like— all at Old Cheeseman's expense. After that, speeches, whole holiday, double and treble sets of all manners of things for all manners of games, donkeys, pony-chaises and drive yourself, dinner for all the masters at the Seven Bells (twenty pounds a-head our fellows estimated it at), an annual holiday and feast fixed for that day every year, and another on Old Cheeseman's birthday— Reverend bound down before the fellows to allow it, so that he could never back out— all at Old Cheeseman's expense.

And didn't our fellows go down in a body and cheer outside the Seven Bells? O no!

But there's something else besides. Don't look at the next story-teller, for there's more yet. Next day, it was resolved that the Society should make it up with Jane, and then be dissolved. What do you think of Jane being gone, though! "What? Gone for ever?" said our fellows, with long faces. "Yes, to be sure," was all the answer they could get. None of the people about the house would say anything more. At length, the first boy took upon himself to ask the Reverend whether our old friend Jane was really gone? The Reverend (he has got a daughter at home— turn-up nose, and red) replied severely, "Yes, sir, Miss Pitt is gone." The idea of calling Jane, Miss Pitt! Some said she had been sent away in disgrace for taking money from Old Cheeseman; others said she had gone into Old Cheeseman's service at a rise of ten pounds a year. All that our fellows knew, was, she was gone.

It was two or three months afterwards, when, one afternoon, an open carriage stopped at the cricket field, just outside bounds, with a lady and gentleman in it, who looked at the game a long time and stood up to see it played. Nobody thought much about them, until the same little snivelling chap came in, against all rules, from the post where he was Scout, and said, "It's Jane!" Both Elevens forgot the game directly, and ran crowding round the carriage. It *was* Jane! In such a bonnet! And if you'll believe me, Jane was married to Old Cheeseman.

It soon became quite a regular thing when our fellows were hard at it in the playground, to see a carriage at the low part of the wall where it joins the high part, and a lady and gentleman standing up in it, looking over. The gentleman was always Old Cheeseman, and the lady was always Jane.

The first time I ever saw them, I saw them in that way. There had been a good many changes among our fellows then, and it had turned out that Bob Tarter's father wasn't worth Millions! He wasn't worth anything. Bob had gone

for a soldier, and Old Cheeseman had purchased his discharge. But that's not the carriage. The carriage stopped, and all our fellows stopped as soon as it was seen.

"So you have never sent me to Coventry after all!" said the lady, laughing, as our fellows swarmed up the wall to shake hands with her. "Are you never going to do it?"

"Never! never! never!" on all sides.

I didn't understand what she meant then, but of course I do now. I was very much pleased with her face though, and with her good way, and I couldn't help looking at her— and at him too— with all our fellows clustering so joyfully about them.

They soon took notice of me as a new boy, so I thought I might as well swarm up the wall myself, and shake hands with them as the rest did. I was quite as glad to see them as the rest were, and was quite as familiar with them in a moment.

"Only a fortnight now," said Old Cheeseman, "to the holidays. Who stops? Anybody?"

A good many fingers pointed at me, and a good many voices cried "He does!" For it was the year when you were all away; and rather low I was about it, I can tell you.

"Oh!" said Old Cheeseman. "But it's solitary here in the holiday time. He had better come to us."

So I went to their delightful house, and was as happy as I could possibly be. They understand how to conduct themselves towards boys, *they* do. When they take a boy to the play, for instance, they *do* take him. They don't go in after it's begun, or come out before it's over. They know how to bring a boy up, too. Look at their own! Though he is very little as yet, what a capital boy he is! Why, my next favourite to Mrs. Cheeseman and Old Cheeseman, is young Cheeseman.

So, now I have told you all I know about Old Cheeseman. And it's not much after all, I am afraid. Is it?

11: The Philanthropist
Aidan de Gernon

fl. 1922
Daily Herald, London, date unknown
World (Hobart) 29 Dec 1922

In the Hobart "World" there was no title, so I invented one. The author is otherwise unknown.

SIR JOSIAH STUBBS had achieved success. His East-End clothing factory had grown from a ramshackle, top-floor affair in a back alley to one of the most aggressive of London's aesthetic monstrosities. During the war an avalanche of khaki contracts had caused his heart and bank balance to expand with equally patriotic emotion. Finally, the demand for a special honor to distinguish hard-faced patriots resulted in his receiving a K.B.E.

When the war ended and "homes for heroes'' became the cry, there only remained for him to transfer his business to a limited company and buy the largest country house that happened to be in the market.

Many men would have been content to have rested on the laurels of so meritorious a career. But Sir Josiah was at heart an inveterate philanthropist. Often in his East-End factory, after a West-End lunch, he had watched the long and ragged procession issuing from his gates, bending beneath the bulk of bags, filled, not with bullions, but with coats for buttonholing, vests for felling, and trousers for seaming. And a rich, post-prandial wave of satisfaction had swept over him as he reflected how all these men and women lived (or tried to live) on what he paid them— lived on him, in fact. He only wished that he could make them realise it. But broadcasting had not then been invented, and he did not happen to own a newspaper.

However, once provided with a country mansion, conscious of what he had done in the great war and what the great war had done for him, he started a cadet corp among the village youths. But such was the slump in rural patriotism, due, no doubt, to the insidious precepts of Bolshevism, that the corps soon resolved itself into the three sons of his only married gardener, who were finally disbanded owing to their constitutional, but none the less exasperating, inability to form fours.

Nor was Lady Stubbs more successful in her efforts to inculcate into the village girls the high moral principle and national duty of entering domestic service, although, an angel of the house, she had penetrated each cottage at all times of the day, especially during meals and when the children were being put to bed. But such was the unaccountable distastes for a life of honorable servility, due no doubt, to the pernicious influence of the local kinema, that the

village maidens acquired the habit of leaving by the back door when Lady Stubbs entered by the front.

But at last Sir Josiah saw his chance of taking an effective part in the lives of those over whom Providence had placed him. The schoolmaster, who had represented the village on the rural district council, died, and a cobbler, to whom Sir Josiah would not even entrust his shooting boots, had the impudence to offer himself as a candidate for the vacant seat. However, Sir Josiah intimated his intention of asserting his undoubted manorial rights, and offered himself to the suffrage of three score of free British voters, who, as he remarked in his election address, might be relied upon to stand true to King and Country, seeing (as he thought it hardly necessary to mention in his address) that they all happened to be his tenants.

As the result of counting the promises received after a personal canvass he discovered that his opponent would be left with just one vote— his own. Moreover, the fellow hadn't even taken the trouble to issue an election address— probably didn't know such things existed— and went on cobbling instead of canvassing.

Owing to the municipal offices (a two-roomed cottage) being at a village three miles away, the votes were counted there. But shortly after eight, Sir Josiah who had the only telephone in his own village, rang up. He then wrote a telegram and went out to the post office, knowing that the postmistress, though it was after hours, would be only too glad to oblige him by sending it.

Outside the village inn a little group of villagers were talking. Sir Josiah turned to an old countryman.

"I'm glad to see you kept your promise, Giles, and voted for me," he said.

"Zure, sir," replied the ancient, "an' glad I be to do so, zir." His gnarled hand might have been extended to feel for rain. It also might not.

"And you, Williams, too," said Sir Josiah, to the landlord of the inn.

"Always glad to oblige, sir," said the innkeeper. "And since you'll be sure to have won by now, sir, I daresay you'd like these lads to drink your health."

And he waited expectantly for an order for an unlimited liquid largesse.

"Sir Josiah," added the village draper, rubbing his hands in anticipation of further custom, "we all beg to offer our humble congratulations, seeing as we all voted for you."

"You're a liar," burst out Sir Josiah. "You're all a set of hanged liars. I only got one vote, and that was my own, and I'm sending off this telegram to the house-agents to tell them my place is to let immediately."

12: The Model Millionaire

Oscar Wilde

1854-1900

The World, 22 June 1887

Voice (Hobart) 21 March 1931

UNLESS one is wealthy there is no use in being a charming fellow. Romance is the privilege of the rich, not the profession of the unemployed. The poor should be practical and prosaic. It is better to have a permanent income than to be fascinating. These are the great truths of modern life which Hughie Erskine never realised.

Poor Hughie! Intellectually, we must admit, he was not of much importance. He never said a brilliant or even an ill-natured thing in his life. But then he was wonderfully good-looking, with his crisp brown hair, his clear-cut profile, and his grey eyes. He was as popular with men as he was with women, and he had every accomplishment except that of making money. His father had bequeathed him his cavalry sword and a *History of the Peninsular War* in fifteen volumes. Hughie hung the first over his looking-glass, put the second on a shelf between *Ruff's Guide* and *Bailey's Magazine* and lived on two hundred a year that an old aunt allowed him.

He had tried everything. He had gone on the Stock Exchange for six months; but what was a butterfly to do among bulls and bears? He had been a tea-merchant for a little longer, but had soon tired of pekoe and souchong. Then he had tried selling dry sherry. That did not answer; the sherry was a little too dry. Ultimately he became nothing, a delightful, ineffectual young man with a perfect profile and no profession.

To make matters worse, he was in love. The girl he loved was Laura Merton, the. daughter of a retired Colonel who had lost his temper and his digestion in India, and had never found them, again. Laura adored him, and he was ready to kiss her shoestrings. They were the handsomest couple in London, and had not a pennypiece between them.

The Colonel was very fond of Hughie, but would not hear of any engagement."

"Come to me, my boy, when you have got ten thousand pounds of your own, and we will see about it," he used to say; and Hughie looked very glum; in those days, and had to go to Laura for consolation.

One morning, as he was on his way to Holland Park, where the Mertons lived, he dropped in to see a great friend of his, Alan Trevor. Trevor was a painter. Indeed, few people escape that nowadays. But he was also an artist, and artists are rather rare.

Personally he was a strange rough fellow, with a freckled face, and a red ragged beard. However, When he took up the brush he was a real master, and his pictures were eagerly sought after. He had been very much attracted by Hughie at first, it must be acknowledged, entirety on account of his personal charm.

"The only people a painter should know," he used to say, "are people who are *bete* and beautiful, people who are an artistic, pleasure to look at and an intellectual repose to talk too. Men who are dandies and women who are darlings rule the world, at least, they should do so."

However, after he got to know Hughie better, he liked him quite, as much for his bright, buoyant, spirits and his generous, reckless nature, and had given him the permanent entree to his studio.

When Hughie came in he found Trevor putting the finishing touches to a wonderful life-size picture of a beggar man. The beggar himself was standing on a raised platform in a corner of a studio. He was a wizened old man, with a face like wrinkled parchment, and a most piteous expression. Over his shoulders was flung a coarse brown cloak, all tears and tatters; his thick boots were patched and cobbled, and with one hand he leant on a rough stick, while with the other he held out his battered hat for alms.

"What an amazing model!" whispered Hughie, as he shook hands with his friend.

"An amazing model?" shouted Trevor, at the top of his voice; "I should think so! Such, beggars as he are not to be met with every day. A *trouville*, *mon cher*; a living Velasquez! My stars! What an etching Rembrandt would have made of him!"

"Poor old chap!" said Hughie, "how miserable he looks! But I suppose to you painters, his face is his fortune?"

"Certainly," replied Trevor, "you don't want a beggar to look happy, do . you?"

"How much does a model get for sitting?" asked Hughie, as he found himself a comfortable seat on a divan.

"A shilling an hour."

"And how much do you get for your picture, Alan?"

"Oh, for this I get two thousand!"

"Pounds?"

"Guineas. Painters, poets, and physicians always get guineas."

"Well, I think the model should have a percentage," cried Hughie, laughing; "they work quite as hard as you do."

"Nonsense, nonsense! Why, look at the trouble of laying on the paint alone and standing all day long at one's easel! It's all very well, Hughie, for you to

talk, but I assure you that there are moments when Art almost attains to the dignity of manual labor. But you musn't chatter; I'm very busy. Smoke a cigarette, and keep quiet."

After some time the servant came in, and told Trevor that the frame-maker wanted to speak to him.

"Don't run away, Hughie," he said, as 'he went out, "I will be back in a moment."

The old beggar man took advantage of Trevor's absence to rest for a moment on a wooden bench that was behind him. He looked so forlorn and wretched that Hughie could not help pitying him, and felt in his pockets to see what money he had. All he could, find was a sovereign and some coppers.

"Poor old fellow," he thought to himself, "he wants it more than I do, but. it means no hansoms for a fortnight"; and he walked across the studio and slipped the sovereign into the beggar's hand.

The old man started, and a faint smile flitted across his withered lips.

"Thank you, sir;" he said, "thank you."

Then Trevor arrived, and Hughie took his leave, blushing a little at what he had done. He spent the day with Laura, got a charming scolding for his extravagance, and had to walk home.

THAT NIGHT he strolled into the Palette Club about eleven o'clock, and found Trevor sitting by himself in the smoking-room drinking hock and seltzer.

"Well, Alan, did you get the picture finished all right?" he said, as he lit . his cigarette.

"Finished and framed, my boy!" answered Trevor; "and, by the bye, you. have made a conquest. That old model you saw is quite devoted to you. I had to tell him all about you— who you are, where you live, what your income is, what prospects you have—"

"My dear Alan," cried Hughie, "I shall probably find him waiting for me when I go home. But, of course, you are only joking. Poor old wretch! I wish I could do something for him. I think it is dreadful that anyone should be so miserable. I have got heaps of old clothes at home— do you think he would care for any of them? Why, his rags were falling to bits."

"But he looks splendid in them," said Trevor. "I wouldn't paint him in a frock coat for anything. What you call rags I call romance. What seems poverty to you is picturesqueness to me. However I'll tell him of your offer."

"Alan," said Hughie seriously, "you painters are a heartless lot."

"An artist's heart is his head," replied Trevor; "and besides, our business is to realise the world as we see it, not to reform it as we know it. A *cacun son*

metier. And now tell me how Laura is. The old model was quite interested in her."

"You don't mean to say you talked to him about her?" said Hughie.

"Certainly I did. He knows all about the relentless colonel, the lovely Laura and the £10,000."

"You told that old beggar all my private affairs?" cried Hughie, looking very red and angry.

"My dear boy," said Trevor, smiling, "that old beggar, as you call him, is one of the richest men in Europe. He could buy all London to-morrow without overdrawing his account. He has a house in every capital, dines off gold plate, and can prevent Russia going to war when he chooses."

"What on earth do you mean?" exclaimed Hughie.

"What I say," said Trevor. "The old man you saw to-day in the studio was Baron Hausberg. He is a great friend, of mine, buys, all my pictures and that sort of thing, and gave me a commission a month ago to paint him as a beggar. *Que voulez-vous? La fantaisie d'un millionnaire*! And I must say he made a magnificent figure in his rags, or perhaps I should say in my rags; they are. an old suit I got in Spain."

"Baron Hausberg!" cried Hughie. "Good heavens! I gave him a sovereign!"

And he sank into an armchair the picture of dismay.

"Gave him a sovereign!" shouted Trevor, and he burst into a roar of laughter. "My dear boy, you'll never see it again. *Son affaire e'est l'argent des autres.*"

"I think you might have told me, Alan," said Hughie sulkily, "and not have let me make such a fool of myself."

"Well, to begin with, Hughie," said Trevor, "it never entered my mind that you went about distributing alms in that reckless way. I can understand you kissing a pretty model, but your giving a sovereign to an ugly one— by Jove, no! Besides, the fact is that I really was not at home to-day to any one; and when you came in I didn't know whether Hausberg would, like his name rnentioned. You know he wasn't in full-dress."

"What a duffer he must think me!" said Hughie.

"Not at all. He was in the highest spirits after you left; kept chuckling to himself and rubbing his old wrinkled hands together. I couldn't make out why he was so interested to know all about you; but I see it all now. He'll invest your sovereign for you, Hughie, pay you the interest every six months, and have a capital story to tell after dinner."

"I am an unlucky devil," growled. Hughie. "The best thing I can do is to go to bed; and my dear Alan, you mustn't tell anyone. I shouldn't dare show my face in the Row."

"Nonsense! It reflects the highest credit on your philanthropic spirit, Hughie. And don't run away. Have another cigarette, and you can talk about Laura as much as you like."

However, Hughie wouldn't stop, but walked home, feeling very unhappy, and leaving Alan Trevor in fits of laughter.

THE NEXT morning, as he was at breakfast, the servant brought him up a card on which was written,

Monsieur Gustave Naudin,
de la part M. le Baron Hausberg.

"I suppose he has come for an apology," said Hughie to himself; and he told the servant to show the visitor up.

An old gentleman with gold spectacles and grey hair came into the room, and said, in a slight French accent.

"Have I the honour of addressing Monsieur Erskine?" Hughie bowed.

"I have come from Baron Hausberg," he continued. "The Baron—"

"I beg, sir, that you will offer him my sincerest apologies," stammered Hughie.

"The Baron," said the old gentleman with a smile, "has commissioned me to bring you this letter"; and he extended a sealed envelope. On the outside was written: "A wedding present to Hugh Erskine and Laura Merton, from an old beggar," and inside was a cheque for £10,000.

WHEN they were married Alan Trevor was the best man, and the Baron made a speech at the wedding breakfast.

"Millionaire models," remarked Alan, "are rare enough; but, by Jove, model millionaires are rarer still!"

13: A Deal in Ostriches

H. G. Wells

1866-1946

Pall Mall Gazette, 20 Dec 1894

"TALKING of the prices of birds, I've seen an ostrich that cost three hundred pounds," said the Taxidermist, recalling his youth of travel. "Three hundred pounds!"

He looked at me over his spectacles.

"I've seen another that was refused at four."

"No," he said, "it wasn't any fancy points. They was just plain ostriches. A liitle off color, too — owing to dietary. And there wasn't any particular restriction of the demand either. You'd have thought five ostriches would have ruled cheap on an East Indiaman. But the point was, one of 'em had swallowed a diamond. The chap it got it off was Sir Mohini Padishah, a tremendous swell, a Piccadilly swell, you might say, up to the neck of him, and then an ugly black head and a whopping turban, with a diamond in it. The blessed bird pecked suddenly and had it, and when the chap made a fuss, it realised it had done wrong, I suppose, and went and mixed itself with the others to preserve its incog. It all happened in a minute. I was among the first to arrive, and there was this heathen going over his gods, and two sailors and the man who had charge of the birds, laughing fit to split. It was a rummy way of losing a jewel, come to think of it. The man in charge hadn't been about just at the moment, so that he didn't know which bird it was. Clean lost, you see. I didn't feel, half sorry, to tell you the truth. The beggar had been swaggering over liis blessed diamond ever since he came aboard.

"A thing like that goes from stem to stern of a ship in no time. Everyone was talking about it. Padishah went below to hide his feelings. At dinner— he pigged at a table by himself, him and two other Hindoos— the captain kind- of jeered at him about it, and he got very excited. He turned round and talked into my ear. He would not buy the birds; he would have his diamond. He demanded his rights as a British subject. His diamond must be found. He was firm upon it. He would appeal to the House of Lords. The man in charge of the birds was one of those wooden-headed chaps you can't get an idea into anyhow. He refused any proposal to interfere with the birds by way of medicine. His instructions were to feed them so-and-so and treat them so-and-so. Padishah had wanted a stomach-pump— though you can't do that to a bird, you know. This Padishah was full of bad law, like most of these blessed Bengalis, and talked of having a lien on the birds, and so forth. But an old boy, who said his son was a London barrister, argued that what a bird swallowed became *ipso facto* part of the bird, and that Padishah's only remedy lay in an

action for damages, and even then it might be possible to show contributory negligence. He hadn't any right of way about an ostrich that didn't belong to him. That upset Padishah extremely, the more so as most of us expressed an opinion that that was the reasonable view. There wasn't any lawyer aboard to settle the matter, so we all talked pretty free. At last, after Aden, it appears that he came round to the general opinion, and went privately to the man in charge and made an offer for all five ostriches.

"The next morning there was a fine shindy at breakfast. The man hadn't any authority to deal with the birds, and nothing on earth would induce him to sell; but it seems he told Padishah that a Eurasian named Potter had already made him an offer, and on that Padishah denounced Potter before us all. But I think the most of us thought it rather smart of Potter, and I know that when Potter said that he'd wired at Aden to London to buy the birds, and would have an answer at Suez, I cursed pretty richly at a lost opportunity.

"At Suez Padishah gave way to tears— actual wet tears— when Potter became the owner of the birds, and offered him two hundred and fifty right off for the five, being more than two hundred per cent, on what Potter had given. Potter said he'd. be hanged if he parted with a feather of them— that he meant to kill them off one by one and find the diamond; but afterwards, thinking it over, he relented a little. He was a gambling hound, was this Potter, a little queer at cards, and this kind of prize-packet business must have suited him down to the ground. Anyhow, he offered, for a lark, to sell the birds separately, to separtte people, by auction at a starting price of £80 for a bird. But one of them, he said, he meant to keep for luck.

"You must understand that this diamond was a valuable one— a little Jew chap, a diamond merchant, who was with us, had put it at three or four thousand when Padishah had shown it to him— and this idea of an ostrich gamble caught on. Now it happened that I'd been having a few talks on general subjects with the man who looked after these ostriches, and quite incidentally he'd said one of the birds was ailing, and he fancied it had indigestion. It had one feather in its tail almost all white, by which I knew it, and so when, next day, the auction started with it, I capped Padishah's eighty-five by ninety. I fancy I was a bit too sure and eager with my bid, and some of the others spotted the fact that I was in the know. And Padishah went for that particular bird like an irresponsible lunatic. At last the Jew diamond merchant got it for £175, and Padishah said £180 just after the hammer came down— so Potter declared. At any rate the Jew merchant secured it, and there and then he got a gun and shot it. Potter made a Hades of a fuss because he said it would injure the sale of the other three, and Padishah, of course, behaved like an idiot. I can

tell you I was precious glad when the dissection was over, and no diamond had turned up— precious glad. I'd gone to one-forty on that particular bird myself.

"The little Jew was like most Jews— he didn't make any great fuss over bad luck; but Potter declined to go on with the auction until it was understood that the goods could not be delivered until the sale was over. The little Jew wanted to argue that the case was exceptional, and as the discussion ran pretty even, the thing was postponed until the next morning. We had a lively dinner-table that evening, I can tell you, but in the end Potter got his way, since it would stand to reason he would be safer if he stuck to all the birds, and that we owed him some consideration for his sportsmanlike behaviour. And the old gentleman whose son was a lawyer said he'd been thinking the thing over, and tfiat it was very doubtful if, when a bird had been opened and a diamond recovered, it ought not to be handed back to the proper owner. I remember I suggested it came under the laws of treasure-trove— which was really the truth of the matter. There was a hot argument, and we settled it was certainly foolish to kill the bird on board the ship. Then the old gentleman, going at large through his legal talk, tried to make out the sale was a lottery and illegal, and appealed to the captain; but Potter said he sold the birds as ostriches. He didn't want to sell any diamonds, he said, and didn't offer that an an inducement. The three birds he put up, to the best of his knowledge and belief, did not contain a diamond. It was in the one he kept— so he hoped.

"Prices ruled high next day all the same. The fact that there were now four chances instead of five of course caused a rise. The blessed birds averaged £227, and, oddly enough, this Padishah didn't secure one of 'em— not one. He made too much shindy, and when he ought to have been bidding he was talking about liens, and, besides, Potter was a bit down on him. One fell to a quiet little officer chap, another to the little Jew, and the third was syndicated by the engineers. And then Potter seemed suddenly sorry for having sold them, and said he'd flung away a clear thousand pounds, and that very likely he'd drawn a blank and that he always had been a fool, but when I went and had a bit of a talk with him, with the idea of getting him to hedge on his last chance, I found he'd already sold the bird he'd reserved to a political chap that was on board, a chap who'd been studying Indian morals and social questions in his vacation. That last was the three hundred pounds bird. Well, they landed three of the wretched creatures at Brindisi— though the old gentleman said it was a breach of the customs regulations— and Potter and Padishah landed too. The Hindoo seemed half mad as he saw his precious diamond going this way and that, so to speak. He kept on saying he'd get an injunction— he had injunction on the brain— and giying his name and address to the chaps who'd brought the birds, so that they'd know where to send the diamond. None of

them wanted his name and address, and none of them would give their own. It was a fine row, I can tell you— on the platform. They all went off by different trains. I came on to Southampton, and there I saw the last of the birds, as I came ashore; it was the one the engineers brought, and was standing up near the bridge, in a kind of crate, and looking as leggy and silly a setting for a valuable diamond as ever you saw— if it was a setting for a valuable diamond.

"How did it end? Oh! like that. Well— perhaps. Yes, there's one more thing that may throw light on it. A week or so after landing, I was down Regent, Street doing a bit of shopping, and who should I see arm in arm and having a purple time of it but Padishah and Potter. If you come to think of it—

"Yes. I've thought that. Only, you see, there's no doubt the diamond was real. And Padishah was an eminent Hindoo. I've seen his name in the papers— often. But whether the bird swallowed the diamond certainly is another matter, as you say."

14: The Story the Doctor Told

Blanche Fullington

fl. 1915-1918

Snappy Stories (New York) 2 Dec 1915

The Lone Hand (Sydney) 1 April 1916

THEY had finished dinner and adjoined to the library— four old college chums, together for the first time in a dozen years. There was Chalmers, a Boston business-man, in whose handsome, Back Bay home they were dining; Hewitt, now a successful doctor in San Francisco; Wendal, a newspaper-man from New York; and a Canadian college professor named Raynor.

It was a stag affair. Mrs. Chalmers had gone out for the evening, leaving the men to themselves. The three guests were disappointed. They had heard she was a beauty, and they wanted to see her. They said so, emphatically, and Chalmers assumed an expression of nonchalance, through which his pride and affection shone beamingly.

"She'll be back by twelve o'clock," he said. "You fellows must stay till she comes. I want you to meet her."

It was autumn, but the day had been oppressively hot until mid-afternoon, when an east wind blew in from the sea, like the exhalation from a fleet of icebergs. Toward dark a thunder-shower came up, which lasted all evening. The lightning was extremely vivid, even at times throwing a pale glare through the close-drawn shades, into the lighted room. There was a fire in the grate, and the reflected flames danced in the glass doors of the bookcases lining the walls. It was the Doctor's turn to tell a story, but he seemed preoccupied, and roused himself to his duty with an effort.

"I think," he said slowly, "that I'll tell you about a woman I've seen just four times in my life. She has been in my mind all this evening— partly because all our meetings took place in New England; partly because I first saw her in just such a thunderstorm as this; and partly for a third reason that I'll give you later."

And this is the story the Doctor told; —

THIRTEEN YEARS AGO this summer I was camping in the Maine woods, up Moosehead way. Another chap and myself had rented a shack and were roughing it. We were alone on the island— in fact, there wasn't room for anyone else; you could throw a stone across it either way. It was fairly close to the mainland, where we had to go for all our supplies.

I was alone in camp one afternoon. My chum had taken the canoe and gone up to the head of the lake, fishing, I was tinkering at a rustic table I was building, when the sky blackened up all at once, and it began to rain. It was

one of those showers that rise so suddenly in the mountains. It rained in bucketfuls, the lightning was practically incessant, and you know how the thunder rolls and echoes through those hills. I made the doors and windows tight, and sat down on my bed-cot to watch the shower.

I was worrying a little about my chum, hoping he had gotten shelter somewhere. All at once the door was thrown violently open, with a wild burst of wind and rain, and across the cabin dashed a slender, dripping figure, which fell in a heap on the floor at my side.

It took me a minute or two to get my scattered wits together, and then I saw that my visitor was a young girl, not more than eighteen years old. She was clad in a boy's swimming-suit of dark blue— just a pair of trunks and a jersey. The clothing glued itself to her slim body, and left bare her pretty, youthful limbs, flushed from the cold and rain.

Her bathing-cap had fallen to the floor, and down her shoulders poured a mass of thick curling, gold-red hair. In the rain-soaked cabin it glowed and smouldered with a vitality of its own. Her face I had not as yet seen; it was hidden in her arms.

She was on the verge of hysteria, almost insane with terror; and for a moment I was too stunned by her tempestuous entrance to be conscious of any sensation save that of astonishment. We remained motionless, as if the lightning had petrified us, until, together with a blinding glare, there came a peal of thunder so overwhelming that the house shook.

It cracked like a fusilade of gunshots. The tin dishes tinkled against the walls, and bits of broken stone and plaster came rattling down the chimney. With a scream the girl sprang from the floor and flung herself, shuddering, into my arms.

Well, unless you've had a similar experience, you have no idea how I felt. I've often wondered how I kept my head at all. I was pretty young— my blood was hot— every sense was sharpened by the powerful electric currents abroad in the air. The conditions surrounding me were all abnormal: the unnatural darkness; the roar of the wind and the lash of the rain; and the isolation of the little cabin, as aloof as though it stood upon another planet. To be cut off by warring elements from all the rest of the world; then to have thrust upon one an armful of girl like that— sweet as a cluster of dewy lilacs, but warm and human and alive— what manner of man would have remained unstirred?

Her fragrant hair fell across my face; her warm breath fanned my throat. She clasped her bare, cool arms around my neck and buried her face in my shoulder. Her heart thundered violently, as if it would burst, and for a moment I laid my hand upon it with an instinctive effort to still its wild beating. The contact unnerved me. My breath quickened, and I felt the blood flame in my

cheeks. I tried to loosen her arms, but she only clung the tighter, so I set my teeth, striving to control my thoughts and to fight down the beast within me.

I tried to keep my eyes oft her, but I couldn't. She was too close, and far too lovely. In the work of my profession I often have the human form laid bare before me, and while it means no more to me than the unsound tooth means to the dentist, still it is there— and I am not blind. I have, moreover, seen many pictures of beautiful women. But never before have I beheld such perfect lines as were revealed in that slender girl. From the soft hollow of her throat, down over her firm, low bust, her slight waist and delicate thighs, to her slim ankles— every contour was exquisite. Her little feet were as fair as a baby's, each separate toe a pink rose-bud. Even her elbows— the final test in a woman— were as dimpled and smooth as her satiny shoulders.

Oh, it was not easy to play St. Anthony, I assure you!

The last deafening clap of thunder had presaged the end of the storm. Gradually the sky lighted; the wind and rain died away. The girl stopped crying, sat up, and opened her eyes.

As I looked into them, the evil in me died. It was as if she had laid her hands upon my clamoring pulses and stilled them. I was as cool and unmoved as I am this day when I sit at the bedside of a patient, watch in hand, my fingers on her wrist.

"Her eyes were deep purple, the hue of the Siberian amethyst; and they were as pure and innocent as a child's.

She stared at me in bewilderment, her white hands framing her face and holding back the tangle of her hair. Then came comprehension, and she leaped away, cowering against the wall.

"Oh," she muttered, in a faint, shocked voice, "what have I done?"

"Nothing you shouldn't," I said cheerfully. "You were frightened, and you came in here out of the storm."

I reached my old grey bath-robe down from its hook and gave it to her. She snatched it from me and gathered it about her with a single swift movement, holding it at the throat with shaking fingers.

"I've been playing big brother," I went on, moving around the room and purposely keeping my back to her. "I've held you on my knee and patted your back the way I would my baby sister at home."

Gradually she recovered from her embarrassment, although she still crouched in her corner, wide-eyed.

"Come here and sit down," I said quietly. "The storm is over. There isn't anything for you to be afraid of now." And there wasn't.

After a while she told me what had happened.

"I was swimming," she said, in a soft, hurried voice. "I am camping with some other girls over on the south shore. They went in, but I was trying to swim to the flat rock, so I kept on. ... I didn't notice a shower was coming—till it thundered.... Then I was so frightened! I thought I was swimming back toward camp, but when I came to the shore I found it was the island. I nearly lost my mind... I ran and ran... and then —I fell against your door." She sighed like a tired child.

She was shivering with nervousness and cold, and I knew she ought to get out of her wet bathing-suit. My chum had the canoe— the only craft we possessed— so I couldn't row or paddle her to the mainland.

Neither did I want her to start back alone.

"If you will sit here like a good girl," I said, "I'll go out in the tent and get into my bathing-suit, and swim back with you."

I was afraid she would run away while I was making the change, so I got her to promise, and she gave me her word of honor, like a nice, honest child.

I swam by her side to the mainland, admiring her clean, strong, sweeping strokes. When we struck the shelving shore and came to our feet, she paused and gave me her wet little hand. Then she stood, breast-deep in the lake, watching me with childish, gentle eyes as I struck out for the island. I never spoke of the adventure, even to my chum, and it was three years before I saw the girl again.

I had started to practise in the meantime, and had an office on Newbury Street. I had the usual struggle to gain a foothold, but was doing fairly well at last. I kept office hours from two to three every day. One afternoon, just on the stroke of three, as I was preparing to leave for the hospital where I had a clinic, a belated patient came hurrying in. She wore a heavy veil, but when she lifted it I knew her: she was the girl of the thunder-storm!

She was much changed. In fact, if it hadn't been for her red hair and amethyst eyes, I shouldn't have recognised her. She looked years older, was pale as a ghost and very thin. Her eyes told me her story: they held the same clear, steadfast regard, but innocence was gone. My water-nymph had become a woman.

I shall not repeat our conversation— the confidences of my office are as sacred to me as the secrets of the confessional. I will merely state the bare fact: the girl was going to be a mother!

She had been practically sure of it— had come to me as hundreds of women do, to have their certainty confirmed. Her call was exceedingly brief. She told me little about herself, and if she remembered me she gave no sign.

For days after that I couldn't get her out of my mind. There had been something pathetic in her appearance, perhaps because of her frailness and pallor, in such contrast to her bounding vitality of three years ago.

Our third meeting came a month later. It was in the fall. I was walking through the Common, and I remember the leaves had turned, and some of them had fallen and were being swept up in piles along the paths. There were forest fires down on the Cape. The smell of smoke was in the air, and a greyish haze covered the sky.

Some youngsters were playing by the Frog Pond, and I had stopped to watch them for a moment when I felt a touch on my arm. I glanced down. My storm-bird had blown across my path again!

She looked tired and ill and sad. She was dressed in black, with a big black hat that shadowed her face. She spoke with an odd directness of manner, as though we were continuing an interrupted conversation. Evidently she was laboring, under a stress of mind intense enough to swallow up all selfconsciousness. She was just a woman in trouble, appealing, out of the depths of her necessity, to a fellow-creature.

"Will you do something for me?" she asked. "You took care of me once, years ago, up there in the woods.... Do you remember?... Will you help me now?"

I suppose there is no one so inured to this question as the physician. The cry is always sounding in our ears— "Help me! Help me! Help me!" To respond is as natural as to breathe. That's what we're for. When we can't help people, we may as well quit. Of course I was glad to do anything I could for the girl. She had aroused my pity that day in the office— she seemed so forlorn. Probably she had a background of family and friends like the rest of us, but always when I had seen her she had been alone.

"I am wholly at your service," I said, and we walked along together.

"So you recognised me, after all— that day in my office?" I asked.

She nodded. "I've known about you all the time," she said. "That day, after the thunderstorm, when I explained to the girls where I had been, one of them told me who vou were. I was just a child, you know. It seemed like a romantic adventure to me, and you were my fairy prince. I've watched you ever since— from afar."

"I am glad you came to me," I said.

She dropped her lids. "I had to consult someone," she answered. I couldn't go to my own physician; and I couldn't talk to a stranger. I had thought you would not remember me, but I saw that you did, and I was very grateful to you for your silence.

"What is there I can do for you?" I asked. She hesitated, and the color came into her pale face. "It is a very peculiar thing," she said slowly. "I want you to refuse if you think it will involve you in any difficulties."

I laughed a little, trying to reassure her.

"A fairy prince can overcome any difficulties," I said. "He's used to them."

She refused to smile. "Of course," she began, with an effort, looking straight in front of her, "you know my condition. What you don't know is this: I am not married."

She brought out the last words with a gasp, then broke off, biting her lip. I slipped my hand under her elbow and gave it an encouraging squeeze.

"It's pretty bad, I know," I said; "but it isn't the worst thing in the world. Would it help you to tell me all about it?"

"No," she answered; "I'm never going to tell anyone. It's buried in my heart. But you musn't think I am ashamed. I'm not! I'm proud! I don't believe any girl in the world ever had such a wonderful love-story as mine, and, even though it's come out this way, it's been worth living— and suffering— for! Of course you won't understand."

Her voice dropped wistfully, but her lifted face wore a look of dauntless courage, a spiritual light that was almost joy. Whatever her experience had been, it was counting to her for glory, not disgrace.

She came down to earth after a moment, and told me about her plans. "I'm going away to a little country town," she said, "where nobody knows me, to stay— until my baby comes. I have plenty of money— oh, what do girls do who haven't? I am going to play a part: I have my costumes, and I have learned my role. I am to be a bride, suddenly become a widow, my mind slightly deranged by my trouble. That will give me an excuse to see no one. I have everything to carry out my scheme, except the wedding-ring. I have tried to walk into a store and buy one, but every time my feet have carried me past the door. Will you come with me? Will you pretend we are going to be married, and buy me a wedding-ring ?"

I can't say that the idea appealed to me but I couldn't refuse. We went into a jewellery-shop across the street. My companion moved a little closer to me, and smiled. She looked quite the part required, happy but embarrassed— seemed to feel every eye upon her and was self-conscious but proud. Her acting inspired me. After one guilty look around to see if there was anyone who knew me, I assumed the role of the pleased, prospective bridegroom. I walked up to the counter, and cleared my throat.

"We want to see plain band rings," said I.

The clerk, I suppose, waits on many just such fatuous fools as I was supposed to be. He was polite, but uninterested. We fitted the girl's finger to a slender gold circle.

"Wish it engraved?" asked the clerk indifferently. She flushed and hesitated.

"We will bring it back later," I said hastily. "We are going to use it to-day," and I gave my bride-to-be a fond look. I don t know whether the salesman saw it or not, but it was certainly lost on the girl. She had practically forgotten my existence.

I walked with her to the subway entrance, and gave her the ring. She thanked me very prettily, but with her mind evidently far away. Then she turned and went down the dark stairs and left me standing there, wondering if I should ever see her again.

Well, all this happened ten years ago. At the time of the earthquake I went to San Francisco, and this is my first trip back east. I told you I had a third reason for thinking about this woman to-night. It is this: I have seen her again.

It had begun to rain when I left my hotel to come here, and I stopped on the curbing to wait for a taxi. A motor-car drew up in front of me, delayed by a blockade ahead. It was a limousine, very big and luxurious, with an electric light burning inside, and orchids in a silver vase. There was a woman in it, alone, and as she leaned forward at the window our eyes met. She stared at me for a moment, and then fell back into the corner.

She knew me, as I knew her.

Her thick red hair was all twisted and wound about her head, with little loose curls lying against her forehead and neck. In the cross lights from the street and the bulb above her head, her eyes were like purple pansies.

She was gorgeously dressed. I caught a glimpse of white satin and fur, but her jewels struck me particularly— they were so beautiful and so unusual. There was a chain of diamonds on her neck, and diamond studs in her ears. Around her head was a filet of fine gold wire, and attached to this, so that seemed to be standing above her forehead, was a peacock of sapphires and emeralds. From the bird's bill swung an enormous, pure white diamond, which shook and glittered with every breath she drew. Well, that's all. I stared at her for a moment, then her car moved on. My storm-girl, become a Bird of Paradise at last, was gone."

THE DOCTOR lighted a fresh cigar and leaned back in his chair, and they fell to discussing the story. It was an interesting experience, the other men thought, but the Doctor seemed inclined to take a deeper, more psychological view of it.

"This last meeting has started a long train of thoughts in my mind," hesaid. "Shall I over see her again? Who is she? Is she married now? If so, is her husband the father of that child born some ten years ago? And, if he isn't, does he know as much about his wife as I do? Or has she kept her past a secret from him, and will she be able to all their lives?"

During the discussion, Chalmers had said little. He seemed to be listening to the rain outside, and once or twice he looked at his watch.

Presently there came the honk of a motor, A latch clicked, and the house door banged, Then high heels came ticking along the tessellated floor of the hall, with a sweep of a woman's skirts.

Chalmers rose hastily. "If you will excuse mo—" he murmured. "Evidently my wife has returned."

Before he could reach them, the portieres were parted by two small, white-gloved hands, and a woman stepped between them, holding them on either side— a dark frame for her beauty.

She was smiling softly. "Dear," she said, "may I come in?"

There was a moment of intense stillness.

The Doctor uttered an exclamation and half rose from his chair, then fell limply back again. The newspaper man blinked rapidly behind his glasses, and his nostrils worked like a nervous horse; while the Canadian became conscious that his jaw had dropped and his mouth was hanging open.

She made a dazzling picture— though it wasn't her beauty that had struck them dumb. She wore a gown of ivory satin, and over her arm was an evening wrap heavily bordered with fur! Her eyes were violet, and her hair was red! There were diamonds on her neck and in her ears! Above her brow was perched a jewelled peacock, blue and green, with a diamond like a raindrop in its bill!

Complete to the last detail, the Doctor's "Bird of Paradise" stood in the flesh before them!

The next few minutes passed like a bad dream to the unhappy guests. They managed to get to their feet and were duly presented to the lady. They said the proper things, though how they did it they hardly knew. Chalmers was perfectly self-possessed and unconscious, and so— strange to say— was his wife.

The three men talked all together, very rapidly, making their farewells. The Canadian tried to plead the lateness of the hour, while the newspaper-man began to say something about having another engagement. They said what a corking time they'd had, and what a fine dinner, and how good it seemed to get together once more. Somehow or other, they made their way out at last

and hailed a passing taxicab. The Doctor fell into a corner, took off his hat, and wiped his forehead. "My God!" he said solemnly.

"It was awful!" groaned the Canadian. "Simply awful!"

"Yes," the newspaper-man agreed; "it was. And still it was one of those cases where tragedy and comedy walk hand-in-hand. Do you know, I nearly laughed ! It was terrible, and still, some way, it just missed being a joke!"

"A joke?" cried the Doctor. "I'd like to know whom you think it's on!"

"Why— on the lady, I suppose— or her husband."

"No," said the Doctor bitterly; "you're wrong. The joke— such as it is— is on me. And somehow or other— God only knows how— l've got to square things."

"Oh, I don't agree with you," argued the newspaper-man. "You told the story in good faith. You had no way of knowing who the woman was, or that she had married Chalmers, It was a remarkable coincidence, that's all. In my opinion, the best thing you can do is— do nothing."

"That sounds all right," replied the Doctor, "only you haven't got the facts of the case. I let my imagination run away with me. Now I'm damned if I see how I'm going to fix matters up! The more I say, the worse it's going to make it, and yet I feel like a cad to leave things as they are."

He sighed.

"You see," he went on, "it's this way. I like to tell a story, and I like to tell a good one. While I have plenty of interesting experiences in my day's work, I never seem to be able to patch them up into a real yarn. So I make my tales up— sometimes out of whole cloth, sometimes based upon some actual fact. I catch a glimpse of a face in a crowd, and from that I concoct a whole life-drama for that individual. It has gotten to be a habit wfith me—a mental relaxation— takes my mind off myself and my worries.

"Well, that is how it was this evening. I did see this lady, who has turned out to be Chalmers wife, in her limousine, just as I described, although of course I had no idea who she was. The rest of my story was fiction— pure and simple! I give you my word of honor, gentlemen— I never laid eyes on that woman in my life until to-night!"

15: A Raid on Montmartre

Larosa Martel

fl. 1920s

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IT is a curious thing how few travelers— however cosmopolitan— ever really penetrate the surface of the countries they so assiduously visit year after year. Your American, perhaps, is the worst offender in this respect. He wears his Americanism as he would a pair of colored spectacles, and thus his outlook has a reassuring sameness wherever he goes.

He travels as he would go to the theater. He sees all sorts of things, as he might on the stage, things that are strange and bizarre, and, often, terrible; but he sees them with the detached interest of one who says: "Well, such things may happen, I suppose, but not in America and not to me."

And he is right. Such things don't happen to him— often. That is because the American tourist has made a well worn and circumspect path all over the Continent, and the native, except those who have something to sell, seldom crosses that path.

This is especially true of Paris where, every year, more good American dollars are turned into francs than you would think possible; where more broken English is spoken by all classes than in any other city on the Continent; where the tourist feels as safe as a baby in its cradle. And rightly so. An unmolested tourist is a rich source of revenue. He is everywhere protected by those whose purses he feeds.

But the most faultless machine is liable to accident. There are instances, within my memory, where the spectator of some European "show" being staged for his benefit, has been dragged behind the scenes, as it were. This is what happened to one James Adams— though that is not his name— who came from Chicago to Paris.

The memory of that whole affair is framed by the clamor of the bell on my front gate. I had been sleeping for a pair of good hours when it began to invade my dreams. The wall which separates my *petit jardin* from the Rue. Falguerie and the side of the house on which is my bedroom, are plumb with the pavement. It is a quiet street by night, though at dawn, when the farmers' carts start lumbering past from Vincennes, Ivry and Fontenay, one could not say so much for it.

But it was not yet two, and the street was deserted when my bell began to ring loud enough to wake the peaceful dead in the Montparnasse cemetery, which is not so far distant, and yet not loud enough to disturb the slumbers of my *bonne* upstairs.

At first I dreamed of bells, distant and tinkling like those on a goat's neck. Then the goat turned into the tower of Notre Dame and the tinkle became the great Bourdon warning me that my house was on fire.

By this time I was out of my bed, shaking with cold, for it was January — and fumbling with the heavy wooden shutters of my window. When I had thrown them open and stuck out my head, I saw the street beneath me silent and tranquil as a sleeping virgin, save for that hideous clamor at my gate which had never ceased.

Though the night was black, the feeble light from the nearest street lamp showed me a tall man without a hat pumping at the bell on my gate as though the safety of the entire city depended upon his never leaving off. I decided that he was drunk, and raised my voice:

"*Assez*! Be off, *soûlard*, before you see the inside of a jail."

He dropped the bell handle, and in two strides was beneath my window.

"Let me in, will you? I want to see Mme. Martel! *Je demande madame— toute de suite*! Get me? *Comprenez vous*?"

I smiled, though my teeth were chattering. An American or I had never met one!

"My friend, I do not receive callers at this hour—"

"Oh! You're Mme. Martel! But you'll have to see me— I mean, it's urgent."

"To-morrow, then!"

"Good Heaven, no! I tell you I'm in trouble."

I jerked down my blinds and picked up my *robe de chambre* and cursed in two languages as I went down the stairs and pulled the cord that releases the latch on the gate. He came through the door like the north wind, puffing and blowing, and I took him into the salon where there was no fire, and turned on the light.

"You must think me crazy— acting like this— and I am nearly crazy with anxiety! I've been to the police, but I might as well have taken a walk in the park for all the good that did me. Albert Cortot told me I'd better come to you. I called him up— my wife's been arrested, and I've got to get her, but I don't even know where they've taken her!"

His hair stood up like the fur on the back of an angry cat. He was a big, handsome creature, though his face was haggard with worry and exasperation.

"Come," I said, "you must begin at the beginning if I am to help you. Your wife, you say, has been arrested and taken to jail. How did it happen. What did she do, then?"

"Do? My Lord! You don't think she did anything! We were in a café on Montmartre and the place was raided. The landlord, or whatever you call him, warned us, and the lights went out, and we all made for the back door. I had

hold of my wife, or thought I did until we got into the street, then I saw it was some one else. We searched the whole neighborhood—"

"Whom do you mean by 'we'?"

"Some other Americans who were there, too. I never saw them before. They decided she must have been pulled in."

"Were others 'pulled in' as you say, also?"

"I don't know. I shouldn't think so. We all scrambled out in double quick time."

"Then what did you do?"

"Got a taxi and told him to drive like hell to the nearest gendarmerie. He took me somewhere— I don't know where. There wasn't a man in the place who spoke a word of English—"

"What do you expect a Frenchman to speak?"

"I know. You must think me an idiot. Well, anyway, they didn't know what I was talking about, so I called up Albert Cortot— we were at Yale together. He advised me to come to you."

"Where is this café, and what is the name of it?" I asked him, and reached for the telephone.

"Somewhere on Montmartre, and the name has something to do with a bird— *oiseau*—"

"Was it the *Café de l'Oiseau Chanteur*?"

"That's it! Singing Bird, isn't it?"

I called for the number of a certain magistrate of my acquaintance and talked to my young American while I waited.

"There will be some formalities, you understand. The main thing you desire, I expect, is to locate your wife. You will be asked to go bail for her—"

"I only want to get her out. Think of her— in a filthy jail! Damn their hides! I beg your pardon— but some one, I assure you, is going to pay for this! It's an outrage."

"You will be the one to pay, my friend," I told him. "You should have thought twice before taking your wife to a place of that type— exposing her to arrest."

"I never dreamed there was any danger. The place seemed decent enough. Nothing the matter with it except that it was dark— and dirty. The old boy who calls himself Pére Oiseau sang some songs and played the banjo. I suppose the songs were smutty, but I knew Sally couldn't understand them."

"How did you happen to go there?"

"We went for the lark of it. Some friends of ours told us about it. They said it was risqué, and that it had been raided once or twice—"

"Then you knew you were running that risk."

"I never dreamed they'd arrest an American."

I got the number I had asked for, at last, but it was some time before I could get the information I needed. While I talked my visitor paced the floor, dropping cigarette ashes on the rugs as though they

had been laid for that purpose. When I rose he said:

"Well, found her all right? I've got a cab waiting outside. Will you come with me? Oh, my poor darling."

I knew he referred to his wife, but I was halfway up the stairs.

"I shall go with you, my friend, no fear of that," I told him.

I am a heavy woman, and not so quick as I was twenty years ago, but I was dressed to my hat and cloak in three minutes and speaking to the sleepy *cocher* of the chugging taxi in another.

"To the Oiseau Chanteur, and fifty francs above your fare if you make it under ten minutes!"

"Say! Where is he—you told him to go back to the café, didn't you?"

"Get in, my friend— and quick!" I tumbled him in, muttering and protesting, and we shot down the Rue Falguerie with such speed that we both landed asprawl on the seat. Then I said, when I had got my breath: "Americans are noted for their courage and good sense. You are going to need both these qualities, *monsieur.*"

"You mean we're going to have trouble? Did they say they wouldn't—"

"I mean that your wife is not in the hands of the police, as you believed. They made no raid on Papa Oiseau's place. Come, now, I told you that you should need your courage. A clear head is almost as important. Has it occurred to you that your wife might have gone back to her hotel after she missed you? We might stop there."

There is an element of surprise in Americans that lends a fillip to one's intercourse with them. This young man, who acted like a maniac when he thought his wife might have to spend a few hours in a French jail, was so stonily silent when real danger threatened her that I thought for a moment the shock might have rendered him unconscious. Then he spoke, and I knew he had used that moment to good advantage.

"I dropped off at the hotel on my way to you. What— what do you think may have—"

"A detective doesn't 'think' on a matter like this, my friend. I mean by that he indulges in no conjectures until he has something to build them on. I am as mystified at present as yourself, and with more reason. This Papa Oiseau has made his fortune on Americans— which means that you should be as secure there as a child at its mother's breast. Tell me, your wife was young— and pretty, perhaps?"

"Ah! Yes— she is— beautiful."

"How long ago did this raid take place?"

"It must have been an hour ago— nearly that."

"Has she any friends in Paris to whom she might have gone?"

"None at present."

With the promise of that fat *pourboire* hanging before the *cocher* like a bag of oats before an ass's nose, I thanked God that the streets were empty. We had to cross the city, and we took our direction as the crow flies, skirting the boulevards and cutting down the narrower and ill-lighted streets that lead direct to the Pont Neuf. The whir of our engine and the honk of our horn made conversation almost impossible. I hoped they had the same stultifying effect on my young man's thoughts, but once he said:

"Perhaps she's up there— at the café— waiting for me to come and get her."

"Perhaps," I agreed.

"Nothing could— could happen to her. Nobody'd dare—"

A lurch of the cab cut him short. I was glad for that colossal assurance of his, though I wondered at it, too. It seemed to me there was little reassurance for him in the scenes flying past our windows.

Paris at night, once you leave the Grand Boulevards behind, is still the Paris of the Louis' and the bloody *débâcle* that disposed of them. When night settles on the city, it seems to blot out all traces of the last civilizing century and old Paris once more triumphs over the new.

So it was to-night. The narrow, twisting streets with their cobbled roads, were the same streets through which Frangois Villon once led his merry band of cutthroats. The barricaded shop fronts and closely shuttered windows, were a heritage of that day when heads were carried about like parasols. The towers of St. Sulpice, the grim bulwark of the Conciergerie, the shadowy outline of the Palais walls, the obelisk standing guard over Place de la Concorde— all these are milestones along a gory highway. Scarcely a street we traversed that did not have its own memory of bloodshed and lawlessness, yet my American could say— Nobody'd dare—"

I was relieved when we began to climb the slopes of Montmartre. Here there were lights and crowds and laughter, too, of a sərt. The throngs around the loterie wheels on the Boulevard Rochechouart were wrangling noisily. A chef de gaufre on the corner could not make the hot, waferlike waffles quickly enough to satisfy his buyers. A group of students out for a lark, swung down the street, their voices raised in song —"*Ah! Quelle cohue, ma tête est perdue*—"

"Merciful Heaven, can't he hurry?"

"You see the crowds, my friend! Besides, we have not been more than seven minutes."

We left the Boulevard and began panting up the incline toward Sacré-Cœur, and now the streets became steep and tortuous. Many of them so narrow that the pavement was little more than a foot wide and the old houses hung over them inquisitively like slovenly, idle women. There were lights and music here, too, but mostly they seeped through the warped doors of cafés no larger than a *salle de bain*. Once a strain of American jazz struck us as we rounded a corner.

In the Place Tertres two *poilus* were wrestling in a ring of excited spectators to the tune of raucous bravos and obscene jokes. A woman with the light of desperation in her eyes and the drag of hunger at her mouth, stood in the shadow of the Church de St. Pierre patiently stalking her prey.

The Café of the Singing Bird sets off by itself at the top of a steep *impasse*, an ancient stone cottage with a primitive lantern crooked like a beckoning finger above its front door. The place is a favorite with the knowing tourist, partly because of its antiquity, partly because its shrewd host early learned to gauge the desires of his guests and has made no concessions to modernity.

It looks down through the blear eyes of a pair of unwashed windows on a swarm of dirtier Janes and hunchbacked roofs. Its own roof and the weedy strip of yard at the back make a handy asylum for the broken bottles and outused *utensils de cuisine* of the houses on the higher slope behind it. The dark back room which is the café, with its sanded stone floor and its nicked benches and tables and its feeble gaslight, is the same as it was half a century ago when more than one neat *illegalitié* was laid and hatched over *un petit verre*.

We left our taxi at the foot of the *impasse* and hurried up its cobbled length. Save for the lantern over the door, the place was dark, but the faint twang of banjo strings hung over it like a haunt. The door gave on a narrow bar and we had no sooner let ourselves in than a buxom barmaid greeted us rapturously:

"*Bonjour, monsieur et madame*! You are welcome—"

"I would see Père Oiseau— and quickly," I told her, and laid my hand on the American's arm as he would have pushed past me. "No, my friend, you will do better to remain near me."

"But she may be in there."

"Not so. Can't you hear? The café is full."

"But, *ma chère*," the girl at the bar was protesting sweetly, "Papa Oiseau sings to his guests at this moment—"

"He will sing to the gendarmerie if he does not show me his face within the moment! Tell him the Martel is waiting."

Perhaps the name meant something to her, for she went quickly enough. The American was breathing hard and his hands moving like pump handles.

"Why— the place is going again— in full swing."

It was going, there was no doubt of that. From behind the length of burlap that separated the café from the bar we could hear the "singing bird's" voice raised in dissonant melody. The sharp tinkle of glasses, the laughter of his guests, the fumes from half a hundred cigarettes seeped through the curtain before it parted and our host appeared with his back to us, making his apologies to his guests.

"But for a moment I leave you, *mes petites*! I shall return— never fear! Antoine! Son of a cabbage! Sing to my guests— if they will permit!"

Then he dropped the burlap and hurried toward us, a ludicrous figure, shaped like one of his own wine skins, with his corduroy trousers bagging down over his shoes, a dirty mouchoir looped about his fat neck, ragged white hair cascading over his faded blue eyes. This was Papa Oiseau, the fad of Montmartre whose unkempt and unwashed person was as much his stock in trade as the inferior wine in his cellar. There was fear in his eyes as he greeted me, but none in his manner,

"Ah, *madame*! I am overcome! This is an honor—"

"Ask him about her. Hurry!" begged my companion,

Half a dozen words were enough to convince me that my poor young man's hopes were as vain as I had feared. Papa Oiseau's face went as white as it could under its crust of dirt and a moment later we were closeted in an unswept and unaired little room off the bar. When the door was safely closed he faced us, spreading his arms tragically.

"*Sacré Dieu*! You ask me this! By all the precious saints in heaven, I know nothing of this young man's wife—"

"What does he say? For God's sake—"

"Patience, my friend," I begged, for the American's eyes were burning. Then to the trembling landlord: "It is a pity if you speak the truth, for she has disappeared and from your café. Perhaps you know nothing of the raid which took place here less than two hours ago."

"Ah-h! *mon Dieu*! The raid, you say?"

"You heard me. There was a raid, then!"

"Ah, to be sure! Have I denied it? But this raid, it was of no consequence. Mine is a respectable place— a nursing mother might safely rear her young here. My clientéle is large— too large. That is the reason for the raid, you

understand, but may I roast for eternity in purgatory if it is more than an innocent matter of business. As to the gentleman's wife—"

"Do you mean that you were not raided by the police?"

"But naturally not, madame. Have I not told you that my place is above reproach? My conscience would not have it otherwise! I engage no wicked cocotte to dance for my patrons; no *chanteur* to sing my songs! I depend upon my own resources—"

"The raid, fool! Speak!"

"*Voyons*! Am I not then?" He was fairly leaping up and down with terror and excitement. "It is a simple matter of business, this raid. Must I not please my guests? And my guests are intrigued by the thought that they come to a place naughty enough to be frowned upon by the police. And if I cannot afford these attractions which would bring me into disfavor, am I to be criticized for raiding myself if it pleases my guests?"

"Raid your own café!"

"What harm is there? Besides, they stay too long! They will sit for half a dozen hours together and listen to my entire repertoire, while others come for whom there are no tables. To-night this thing happened, and when Antoine had collected for all the drinks I whispered that the police were coming and turned off the lights. This pleases them, and they will come again. But as to this man's wife, I know no more of her than himself, or may I never sing again— which is to say, may I starve, madame!"

That he spoke the truth I did not doubt for a moment. He is too fond of his own mottled skin to risk it in so mad a venture as the abduction of a grown woman— no matter what the profits. His teeth were chattering with fright as he protested his innocence,

"Stili, you are responsible for her safety," I told him. "It was during this mock raid of yours that she disappeared. Come! Your guests were mostly tourists tonight?"

"Entirely, madame! Americans— and a few English, I think."

"No. French?"

"None, madame."

"*Monsieur*, think again— and remember that the magistrate will not question you so amiably. You have more than one friend who could draw the inside of a jail. Were none of these present to-night?"

He laid his dirty hand upon a dirtier shirt above his heart and his mouth worked for a moment before the words would come forth.

"*Madame*, I speak to you as I would to my confessor. It is true they do not come— often. My place is too virtuous for their tastes. But occasionally I persuade them—"

"Persuade!"

"To lend my place a touch of color, as it were, *madame*. It is understood that when they are in need they may come here and drink for nothing, provided they sit where they may be easily seen by my guests."

"And to-night?"

"Madame, I am being honest with you! To-night there were three!"

It was another five minutes before I had their names— three names as famous in the sinister history of the underworld as any three lauded heroes in our own.

"They were here when you sounded your alarm for the 'raid'?"

"But yes, madame, and drinking *vin rouge* until I thought they should drown in it."

"Monsieur, you are not to leave the Oiseau to-night, and if this man's bride is not in his arms before dawn you will know the cost of a mock raid."

A moment later I had my man outside and we were tumbling down the impasse to the tune of his frantic words:

"What did he say? For God's sake, tell me! Where are you taking me? I shall lose my mind—"

"But not your courage. Come! Get into the cab, my friend."

Our *cocher* was dozing, but I hung another fifty francs before his nose and gave him an address. We lurched forward before I had time to close the door, and I cut off the frantic harangue of the American. "Patience! Would you have me waste time in words when minutes are, so precious?"

"But can't you see— this suspense— my wife! Did he tell you—"

"He had nothing to tell. He would give an arm if he had. As for your wife, we know no more than before. It may be that I have a clew— but it is a slight one. However slight, we must follow it since we have nothing more tangible."

"A clew! Then you think— you must tell me what you think."

I grabbed the strap to keep from pitching forward.

"Exactly. Well, then, I am afraid that your wife— or her jewels, perhaps— if she wore jewels—"

"Her engagement ring— a necklace, I believe. I don't quite remember—"

"... has taken the fancy of some one who collects his treasures without the formality of making any effort of paying for them."

"Oh, no. God— they wouldn't dare! Then are we going to the police? You mean to say they'd— they'd carry her off bodily!" He gave a hoarse guffaw. "Why, this is the twentieth century!"

"This is Paris, monsieur," I reminded him none too gently. "Look out there, if you think otherwise. As for the police, naturally we shall ask their help— in the morning— if that is necessary. If we should go to them now we should lose

one hour— perhaps two, before their first step could be taken. Like all big machines, it gets under way slowly. Moreover, when it begins to move, its creak penetrates into every obscure courtyard and den in the city. Our underworld has its own wireless system, remember."

His face was like a distorted mask in the light that seeped in through the cab window.

"Then— then what are you going to do? Where are we going now?"

"We are going to the Taverne Diderot on the Boulevard Clichy. We should be there in another pair of minutes."

"To a tavern? When—"

"You will remember, please, that I told you we have nothing tangible to follow. We have no time to expound theories and hunt footprints. I tell you frankly this is an unusual case. It has the mark of a desperate impulse. The apache generally plans his work more carefully."

"Apache!"

"Ah, you thought he was a fiction character, no doubt. Naturally you would. But I have worked for thirty years among them and have never lacked employment, my friend. To go back to this one— who is still a figment of my brain, you understand— if he was desperate enough to carry your wife off bodily and almost under your nose, he will have no scruples in disposing of her to suit his convenience. No, wait! I am not trying to frighten you. I may be wrong, but we have no time to consider that possibility. There were three men at Père Oiseau's to-night, any one of whom is capable of doing this very thing if he were desperate enough. To see that each of these three is accounted for is what we must do within the next hour."

"But how— you know them, then— where they live?"

"I know them, yes— but not so well, perhaps, as they know me. As to where they live, they do not live. They are nomads. They exist everywhere and nowhere. They have as many retreats as the Sultan has wives. To hunt for an apache with the blood of a fresh crime upon his head is to hunt for a pea in the Seine. But I have, as you say, a friend at court, a boy who was— is still, perhaps— one of them and knows their ways. He is indebted to me, for I saved his neck not so long ago by proving him innocent of a crime for which he was to die.

"Have you a five-franc note? Come, you should control your hands, my friend! They may have to use a pistol before the night is done!"

I took the note and tore a triangle from the corner.

"You see, we are nearly there. His name is Jules, and he plays the violin for what the patrons of the Taverne Diderot will give him. I shall stay in the cab, for my face is no recommendation on Montmartre. You will get out and place

this note in his hat. Then you will walk down the street and he will follow, and I shall pick you both up before you have gone a block."

He was admirable. There was little else for him to be, I fear. I ached with pity for him, for when he got out of the cab before the Taverne Diderot he moved like one in a dream— and doubtless that was the way he felt about it by now— as if it were a bad dream.

The sidewalk tables were full, for four coke brasiers were sending out blasts of red heat. Students, dandies, *cocottes*, ancient *roués*, down-at-heel actors, American tourists, and sallow-skinned Occidentals were lounging before their glasses of beer or wine or huge cups of steaming chocolate in which they soaked their brioche. The wail of Jules's violin wove their voices together in a polyglot medley.

I could see him standing just inside the door, his head drooping forward on his beloved fiddle, his tattered coat and broad collar with its flowing tie, picturesque in the glare of the red brasiers.

I watched my American make his way through the tables and carelessly drop the five-franc note in the hat at the player's feet. Then he turned and strolled away. Jules bobbed his head and picked the note out of his hat. Still playing, he came out and threaded his way between the tables, but he kept his eye on the American and presently tucked his violin beneath his arm and walked casually after him.

Two minutes later they were both in the cab with me, and we were parked beside the curb in a dim side street. There was no polite preamble.

"Jules, what do you know of André Feroud?"

"I gave him five sous not half an hour ago to buy a cup of coffee for his sweetheart."

"Was she with him?"

"Yes."

"And Henri—the 'white rabbit.' Have you seen him to-night?"

"No; but André had it that he was lying under a cabbage stand at the Halle in a drunken sleep. He is but two days out of prison, as you know, perhaps, and celebrates in bis own fashion."

"And Jean Duval— the *grand amoureux*. Do you know anything of him?"

"Nothing more than that his *affaires d'amour* are becoming troublesome. It is said— though I do not know it for the truth— that he can seek refuge in none of his favorite haunts because in each there is a sweetheart awaiting him. It is not wise to be so popular."

"Then you have not seen him to-night?"

"No, madame."

"Do you know if he is in need?"

"I should not suppose so with so many to look after him."

The American was becoming troublesome, since he could not understand a word that passed between Jules and myself. I silenced him as best I could.

My thoughts were crowding like small devils into my mind even as I talked. Of the trio who had drunk at Père Oiseau's expense that night there was but one on whom suspicion might now rest. This was the biggest and handsomest; the most foolhardy and fearless outlaw in all Paris— Jean Duval. Because of his popularity among his own coterie of devotees, he had served only two or three terms in prison for outrages covering a lifetime. And the loyalty of his male comrades became adoration in every woman he deigned to notice. Of all three, Jean Duval would be most likely to commit an act as unorthodox and daring as abducting an adult woman under the very nose of her husband. All this was in my mind at the moment when I spoke to Jules.

"My friend, you told me half a year ago that you owed me your life—"

"I repeat it, madame!"

"You are willing to risk it for my sake?"

"When I recognized your signal a moment ago, did I not come at once hoping that I might be of service?"

"And you shall be. You must take us to Jean Duval— wherever he may be. You know his haunts and if you know me at all, you know me for just. You will betray him in the name of justice if he is guilty. No harm shall come to him through me, if he is not. We must find him within the hour."

"Madame, it is the same as done— though I give my neck for it. But within the hour, that I cannot promise. Jean Duval has as many hiding places as he has had sweethearts. It would take more than an hour to visit them all, but—"

"Wait!" I took hold of his shoulder. "You spoke of his sweethearts. He has one now— yes, yes, I understand what you would say, that he has many— but he must also have a favorite as every wise gallant has. Use your brains, my friend. Give me the name of the woman to whom he goes upon his release from prison; the one who adores him and hates him and sees that he does not go hungry— quick!"

"There is Marcella Drouet. He has, it is said, treated her badly, yet she has done all these things for him—"

"Where is she?"

"She dances at the Café Cercle which is on—"

"Would she be there now?"

"She will be there as long as there are customers for her to entertain."

"Then direct the cocher and let us pray that it is a good night at the Cercle."

Though we had not been at the curb for three minutes, it was a comfort to be moving again, even though we had no more reasons for going than a vague

intuition and an unfounded suspicion. The American had been quivering as though his body housed an infernal machine— which I expect it did by this time, and I knew that he, too, would find relief in motion. When we had started once more, Jules said respectfully:

"But, madame, if it is Jean Duval you would find, why waste time on this Marcella? I have told you that I should do my best—"

"And she will do better if we are fortunate enough to find her at the café. *Attendez*! Every man, no matter how strong, has a vulnerable spot if it can be located. When he is vanquished, it is because the enemy has found that spot. With our friend Jean, it is women. Eventually he will hang because of this weakness."

"Still I fail to see—"

"Marcella will take us to him, once you have whispered to her that her lover has succumbed to a new amoureuse. You see now, where you may still be of service. She will not mistrust you and you must be convincing. Where you know of a dozen places that might harbor Jean Duval, she will know of one—or two. Come, have I made myself clear, monsieur?"

It was arranged that we should dismiss the taxi a block below the café and this we did, leaving our *cocher* blessing the dazed American for his generosity as we walked away.

If there had been a moon, it had set, and now the stars were beginning to pale. We hurried along the Rue St. Eleuthere and on our left loomed the great dome of Sacré Cœur so big and pale and so much a part of the January mist that it seemed the phantom of some extravagant dream. On our right the steep Butte Montmartre fell away and beyond it lay the city, her peaks and spires, her virtues and her vices, blanketed by the same impartial night.

The Cercle is built on the edge of the Butte close to the cable tramway and the railed steps that mount the steep slope. It is a round building stuck like a burr above the city, with its rear entrance giving on a paved court fifty feet below the front. The café, which is on a level with the Rue St. Eleuthere, is necklaced with small windows. These were alight as we approached and, with my final warning in his ears, Jules hurried forward, while the American and I kept in the shadows and moved stealthily toward one of the windows at the side.

The tables formed a ring about a small, cleared space in the middle of the floor. A couple of musicians on a raised platform near the bar, were smoking between numbers. The place wore the stale and sleepy look a restaurant has just before the closing hour; not more than a score of persons were scattered about at the tables.

At one of these, occupied by a trio of heavy-eyed young men, stood a girl; a buxom creature with the high cheek bones and muscular red arms of the peasant. The scanty black dress she wore scarcely covered her knees and clung to her body like a glistening sable skin. One could hardly guess at her features, so buried in makeup were they, but her mouth was wide and her full lips painted like a bloody gash across her face.

We saw Jules saunter in and seat himself lazily on a table near the door and pat back a yawn with his violin bow. The girl threw him a greeting and then strolled over to him, her hands on her hips.

For a moment they chatted easily enough, then I saw the girl make a threatening gesture while Jules shrugged his shoulders and made a kissing sound with his lips. The color came up her bare throat and shone through the thick coating of powder on her cheeks and I knew, with a thrill of relief, that I had not counted in vain on a jealous woman's passion; Jules was hinting at her lover's perfidy and she was defending him with her lips, while her heart told her that he was guilty.

At last, with a sharp cry of rage, she brought her palm against the young fiddler's cheek with a resounding smack. Then she was running furiously across the room to a door beside the musicians' platform, while those patrons who had witnessed the encounter, guffawed with mirth.

A moment later Jules was beside us, his hand pressed against his cheek.

"Quick! She will leave by the rear door. Take the steps. They pass the court— whatever you do, don't let her see you!"

Hand in hand the American and I flew down the steps that crawl up the slope of the Butte. When we were on a level with the back door of the Cercle, we flattened ourselves against the building until we heard the slam of a door and the click of the girl's heels on the stones.

She went past us like a gust of smoke blown from a chimney, holding a cape together with both hands at her throat. She was on her way to verify Jules's report of her susceptible knight. If she had known there were three of us, instead of one, she would have led us anywhere but to him, even though she killed him later herself. But the fury that lent wings to her heels burned every other thought from her mind.

It was no simple matter to keep her in sight, for she led us almost at once into that maze of crooked lanes and streets that still cling like old scars to the slopes of Montmartre. With the American's hand beneath my elbow, we followed her and in two minutes we had left the new century behind for a network of twisting, sinister alleys lined with moldering houses and paved with loose cobblestones that slipped perilously beneath our feet.

Here and there a sagging gas lantern above some door sent a feeble ray of yellow light through its unwashed glass to show us an area of chipped and sweaty wall, or point the way to the barricated door of some underground gambling den. Once or twice a lurking figure detached itself from the darkness ahead of us, only to dissolve again into the security of a doorway at sight of my tall, hatless companion.

At times we were panting up a passage so narrow that a reach of arms would have spanned it and so dark that there was nothing but the click of the girl's heels to guide us. Again we were stumbling through a crumbling archway to find ourselves in an open, unpaved court with a decaying cypress rearing itself in the center of a ring of squalid, sooty old houses. Once the night rang with the sound of a woman's laughter and the walls that caught and echoed it and tossed it back and forth kept the hideous sound in our ears for a hundred yards.

Though it seemed to me that we had been running for hours, it was not more than twenty minutes after she had left the café that the girl turned into an impasse and swung through the door of an ancient brick house. As we started after her, I thrust my pistol into the American's hand.

Straight up a flight of stone stairs the girl had gone, and we could hear her labored breathing as she climbed. She paused for an instant on the first landing before she started up the second flight, and now we were forced to go slower for the steps were so worn that it was difficult to get a foothold. Thus it happened that when we reached the second and top landing, she had eluded us. We stood for a moment peering through the darkness before we saw the open window and the narrow bridge suspended from it.

There are many of these hanging *passerelles* still in the older sections of Paris; precarious affairs of wood, sometimes stone or tile, linking one house to another like an abnormally developed ligament. Perhaps their original mission was innocent enough, but they have aided the escape of countless criminals and robbed the police of more than one triumph. This one was less than a yard wide with waist-high railings of rotting wood, and I breathed a prayer as I: followed the American across, for beneath us yawned a black chasm, God knows how deep.

That chasm was no darker than the house into which we stepped now. There was a musty odor of onion soup and stale cheese and dust in our nostrils as we felt our way along. I began to fear that we had indeed lost the girl, when a heavy thump as of a falling body came from directly in front of us, and now I saw a faint streak of light that might show beneath the crack of a door.

"Level your pistol, my friend," I whispered, and laid my hand on the knob just as the sound of a woman's scream came to us.

Whether or not our dancing girl and the American's wife were behind that closed door, a pistol would not come amiss, judging by the sounds that were sweeping through it. Just as the girl, in her frenzied jealousy, had failed to look behind her once during that chase from the café, so she had neglected now to lock the door, and it gave readily enough to my somewhat feeble touch.

It was no sooner open than I heard the American gasp and warned him sharply:

"Steady, monsieur, and shoot if necessary!"

But there was small need for that advice. The room we had come into was not ten feet square and the grime and dust of ages clung to its plaster walls and lay heaped in the corners. There was a table in the center with a pack of greasy cards upon it and some tall wine bottles, one of which was empty and had a candle stuck in its neck. There were a couple of wooden chairs with broken rungs and a stack of chipped and broken dishes heaped in an iron sink that was situated in the corner of the room.

Sprawled on the floor was the huge, limp body of Jean Duval with a knife beside him, and a stream of blood trickling through his shirt near the shoulder. He was groaning miserably and the girl we had followed was standing over him with her doubled fists raised and cursing as only a Parisian *cocotte* can curse. On a dirty, tumbled bed at the opposite side of the room, with her hands at her throat and her light dress soiled and crumpled, was the American's wife.

We had entered without sound, and it was the wild scream of the young woman as she recognized her husband that cut short the vile torrent of the dancer's epithets and the groans of her vanquished lover. I rescued the pistol just as the young wife threw herself upon my companion, and drew an arc with it between that sprawling figure on the floor and Marcella. They knew me, as I saw, but there the girl remained defiant, Jean Duval's eyes stared up into mine with the malignity that one would see in a cornered rat.

I doubted if he were badly hurt. In an encounter of this sort with his women, an apache generally makes it a point to go down with the first blow as a sure protection against a second. It was the American who spoke first:

"Sally, are you hurt! Tell me has he— has he hurt you?"

"No! No— not at all much— but, oh, Jim!"

"Yes— it's all over now— all over—"

"Is it possible," I snapped over my shoulder, "that you have been in the company of Jean Duval for two hours or more and are unhurt?"

"He tore my dress— he gagged me—"

"What about your jewels, are they safe?"

"My jewels— yes!"'

"It was you he wanted instead of your jewels!"

"Oh! I don't know! It was terrible. I kicked him— I scratched him. Look at his face. I nearly tore his eyes out— he had to set me down— and I screamed and nobody paid any attention!"

"Screams are as natural in this neighborhood as silence in a graveyard, madame," I told her. "Outside of gagging you and spoiling your frock, he did not harm you much—"

"Fiends of hell! Let me—"

"Wait, *monsieur*! You can do no more than kick him in his present position, and your wife has seen enough violence." Then I spoke to the man on the floor in French. "Come, get up. The wound is nothing to what you may expect."

"Ah-h! Good!" shrieked the French girl. "Son of a dissolute pig! *Canaille*, would I had killed you!"

He got slowly to his feet, and though he did not shrink from the glare of the American's eyes nor from my leveled pistol, he did shrink from the maniac fury of his erstwhile sweetheart. It was to her that he addressed the first and last words we had from him until he was safely ensconced in a cachot de detention.

"She smiled at me," he announced sullenly.

The dancer received the words with a sudden, wild sweep of her arms and a rattle in her throat that became a terrible curse.

"So-o! The white-faced *salope*! It is true! I might have known— I would have plucked out her heart! And thou, *mon amour*—"

She fell upon him, tearing his shirt from the red wound she had inflicted, dabbing at the blood with her handkerchief, muttering a thousand endearments. I heard the American behind me:

"Ugh! Let's get out of this!"

"We are ready, monsieur," I told him. "There is a poste de police not far distant. I shall ask you to carry the pistol. If he makes any move to escape, you had better shoot, though I don't think he will. He will probably welcome the attentions of the prison doctor. These fellows are fond of blood, perhaps, but not on themselves."

IT WAS not yet sunrise when we stood again in the street, the three of us. The gray sky was slashed through with pale light and the dome of Sacré Cœur was faintly haloed with the coming dawn. The pretty face of the American's wife was wan and white. Something of her husband's assurance had fallen from him during those strenuous hours. A cab was at the curb before the poste de police, where we had left our cavalier and his sweetheart, who had been so riotously contrite that she had been given a cell herself for the rest of the night.

"Madame Martel, I can't thank you. If you will let me come to see you to-morrow, perhaps I shall find words—"

"But none of thanks, if you please. You may congratulate me on having a useful friend among my coterie and thank the girl for guiding us so surely."

"What an awful night," his wife said, and shuddered against her husband's arm. "But somehow it never seemed quite real— it was like something out of a book. That girl— first she stabbed him and then—"

"And then she forgave him, yes?"

"But why should she change all of a sudden?"

"That would be hard to explain— to you," I told her. "For myself, at first I couldn't understand how even Jean Duval should risk a mad venture like that. Now, however, I do." Their faces were puzzled. "May I ask, my dear— did you smile at this man when we were at Père Oiseaus's café, perhaps?"

"Smile at him? Why— yes, I shouldn't wonder if I did. I thought him rather striking looking and it all seemed so informal and he smiled at me so, well— yes, I did."

"Ah! You see, that explains much—his daring and his sweetheart's forgiveness. They have their creeds as well as you and I. Your smiling at him exonerates him, in a way."

"You mean," snorted the American furiously, "that if a woman smiles at a man it entitles him to abduct her bodily—"

"Perhaps not quite that, but in his world— and you have seen something of his world to-night— it does mean that he may at least try his charms. Doubtless Jean believed that your wife had conceived a sudden fondness for him. If he had said as much to the girl at first, she, instead of Jean, would have felt the knife thrust."

Their shocked faces stared at me. But I realized that even now they did not know what they had escaped. They were safe— they had seen, but they did not believe. As the wife had said, it had been like something in a book. The American cried:

"But that's monstrous— barbarous!"

"My friend," I said gently, "it is Montmartre— and Montmartre is in Paris."

16: The Voice of the Torrent

H. de Vere Stacpoole

1863-1951

Popular Magazine, 20 Oct 1924

YOU can smell Motuaro miles away across the sea.

At sea, before dawn for choice, and after the rains, the great island hails you with a perfume of cassi, of frangipane, dew-wet foliage, and earth, before which all the old shipboard smells go over the side or hide themselves, while the stars snuff out and the east parts as if at the pull of a ripping cord, disclosing Motuaro. Motuaro, with the sun blaze on it or the sun behind it, according to how you lie, but always perfumed, lovely, mysterious and seeming new-stepped to the doors of the blue sea.

Coming up from southward you can see amid the greenery of the southern slope a vertical white line broken in the middle. The glass resolves it into a torrent; a waterfall, whose spray forms a mist and a rainbow, and whose voice haunts the woods like a spirit.

Before the traders came to Motuaro, and when Matei was a tiny child, the torrent that had been singing and making rainbows for a thousand years put its spell upon him. There was no magic in the business, or only the magic that the woods and mountains can exert on people born under their influences; and just as the hill folk and wood folk become interpenetrated by their environment, the falling water and its movement and sound became part of Matei's environment and after a while part of himself.

His father, Sipi, the basket maker, with whom he lived, was also part of his environment, but never became part of himself, for Sipi was always changing, owing maybe to a Melanesian taint, now drunk with kava, now morose, now gay; whereas the torrent was changeless: louder in the rains, yet the same in spirit.

When Matei was sixteen years of age, Sipi moved down to the beach, deserting his house on the little plateau where the great datura trumpets blew beside the waterfall, and building a shack amid the palms near the house of Penhill the trader.

Penhill had only just come to Motuaro. He was a hard-shelled Yankee, but to Sipi he was a god, for in the new-built storehouse amid the palms were stored bolts of cotton cloth, boxes of stick tobacco, cases of canned salmon, knives, old muskets that would never hit anything, but would, all the same, go off with a bang, percussion caps, fishing lines and hooks— things to dream of and to be obtained in exchange for coconuts, that is to say, copra.

There was no tribal chief to make bother; the nuts were free to all; it was only a question of labor, and Matei was young and strong.

"You will work for me till I am dead," said Sipi, boring two holes in a can of salmon and sucking the juice as one sucks a nut, "and then you will work for yourself, and my ghost will not trouble you; for yourself and for your wife if you choose to take one, and for your children should you beget them." He finished the salmon, giving Matei the tin to lick out, and then he fell asleep on his stomach, while the boy sat listening to the rainy patter of the palm leaves in the wind, the sound of the sea on the broken reefs, and the voice of the torrent like a thread through all.

As he sat like this he saw Penhill going along the beach edge toward the western cliffs. Penhill was a very big man, he had a scar across his right cheek and two fingers of his left hand were missing; he had a loud voice, a fiery eye, and he was inevitable with a revolver. Matei had seen him shoot a flying sea gull with the gun that could speak like a woman without ceasing, and he feared him and hated him.

Life upon the plateau where the datura trumpets blew had been easy-going and without effort. The coming of Penhill had altered all that.

Penhill required an incredible number of nuts for one tin of salmon, and Sipi required not only salmon, but tobacco— two-cent sticks of tobacco— clay pipes, tandstick or matches, and he had set his heart on a bead necklace.

Matei did not hate Sipi for requiring all these things, and for working him like a slave to get them; his hatred was directed entirely against Penhill the capitalist, the newcomer who had brought the disease of labor to Motuaro.

ii

ONE DAY, or, rather, one evening, the whole pattern of Matei's life changed as the pattern in a kaleidoscope changes when shaken.

It was toward sundown and he was out on the western reef armed with a fish spear and hunting for what he could find; the gulls were clanging on the wind, and the low-tide sea lay like moving frosted gold, and against the golden sea stood the figure of a girl.

It was Atuma, the daughter of Miti, a girl who had come recently from the eastern side of the island with her father, attracted by Penhill and his trade goods. She worked at the drying of the copra. Matei had spoken to her several times, but now as he approached her it seemed to him that he had never seen her before.

Atuma was carrying an empty haliotis shell which she had picked up; her eyes were like the reef pools in twilight, and her teeth showed like pearls as she smiled at his approach.

Matei was carrying a crab which had been trapped by the outgoing tide; he had bound seaweed round its claws, and as he drew close to her he held up the crab with his right hand, leaning on the spear with his left.

"It is for you," said Matei.

It was just as though some one else had spoken, using his voice; a moment before the idea of parting with his treasure had not occurred to him, but a moment before he had been a different person.

It had come like that all in a flash, quick as the stroke of fate that came to Timu when he tumbled out of the tree and broke his back. One moment a well and whole man, the next a different person altogether.

Atuma laughed, a little, sharp laugh like the thud of a stabbing spear; she looked at the crab with her head tilted to one side, then she looked at Matei full in the eyes, full and long with a gaze that twisted his soul about in him and took the power from his legs, and made the sweat start in beads on his breastbone. Then she gave him the shell to carry as well as the crab, and, turning, wandered along with him back toward where the reef joined the western shore.

They said nothing, pausing here and there, while Atuma gazed into a pool to see if anything might have been left by the tide; the sea spoke and the gulls cried on the wind, and gulls and wind and waves were to Matei like one voice crying, "Atuma, Atuma, Atuma!"

They reached the shore as the darkness was rising like a tide over the woods, and coming along by the groves bordering the sand, stopped before reaching the first houses of the beach village. They could hear the wind in the trees, and through the wind the voice of the torrent came to Matei, vague, insistent, ceaseless, old as the hills, yet singing something new.

"Atuma, Atuma, Atuma," sang the torrent, replying to the wind, the far surf on the reefs, and the voice in the soul of Matei.

Then all at once he found himself touching her. He cast the shell and the crab on the ground at her feet, and as she stooped to pick them up, and rose again, he seized her in his arms, and then— she was gone.

ii

HE CAME along by the grove edge, past the trader's house, to the shack where Sipi was asleep, drunk with kava, and snoring.

Matei did not mind, did not even hear the old man as he tossed and snorted, turning from his right to his left side, and crying out "*Ai te mutai*!" "You have got it!"

Sipi was dreaming of war. He had been a great fighter in the days before a stray missionary, the predecessor of Penhill, had landed, bringing Bibles and smallpox to Motuaro. He had also helped to eat the missionary, and he had slain two of the mission-ship men with his own hand with the obsidian-headed spear that hung on the wall just above his sleeping mat.

Obsidian is a mineral just like black glass, as clear and as brittle; it can be sharpened to a razor edge, and as a spearhead it is unrivaled in wickedness, for, give the thing a twist, and the glasslike head snaps off and remains in the wound.

But Matei knew nothing of the dreams of Sipi, nor of their connection with the spear lying above him; he cast himself down on a mat, and lying on his chest with his chin on his arms, gazed into the darkness where the fireflies were pulsating, moving like drifting stars through the gloom beneath the wind-stirred foliage.

His soul was filled with distress. He had held Atuma in his arms, and yet had let her slip away from him.

He was a coward in love, and some instinct told him that the moment let slip would not come again. She was his for the having, yet he had let her go.

From the sea where Penhill's schooner, the *Araya*, was anchored by the reef, Matei, as he brooded, could hear the songs of the sailors who were carousing on deck. The *Araya* was due out at dawn, and Matei, as he listened, could hear now the shore boat putting off with the captain, and Penhill's voice shouting good-by from the beach; his doglike sense of hearing could separate one from the other— voices, sound of oars, waves, wind, and through all the sound of the torrent, minute from here, yet distinct and ceaseless.

Yes, he had been a fool. He had been a fool, but it was not too late to retrieve what he had lost.

He rose up and stood for a moment, as if undecided, listening to the snoring of Sipi, who had ceased fighting in his dreams, and whose body lay stiff and stirless as the obsidian-headed spear above it on the wall.

Then coming to a sudden decision he stepped into the dark.

Great leaves greeted him, clasping at his body like cold, clammy hands, lianas caught him, and orchids kissed him, while the first beams of the now risen moon showed in a pale-green glow above, spreading, stealing down the palm pillars, turning the tendril-hung orchids to birds and moths in flight through emerald air.

Matei had not gone a dozen yards when the woods, burning green around him, showed him his way, though instinct would have taken him in almost a direct line through the dark.

He passed the backs of Penhill's storehouse and the houses of the village, till he reached the last house, which was the house of Miti.

The door was open to the night, and the interior 'vas lit, not only by the open doorway, but by the interstices of the cane-built walls and the holes in the palmetto thatch.

On the floor on mats Miti was asleep with his wife beside him, but of Atuma there was no sign.

The heart of Matei stood still in him as he looked.

The mat which formed the girl's bed was there close to Miti; on a rail near by was hung a string of colored beads, on the mat lay a comb of celluloid from Penhill's store. Where, then, was Atuma?

He listened, and in the stillness he heard the sea and the wind and the torrent; no sound from the village where the people had gone to sleep, and no sound from the schooner where the hands had gone below.

Then, turning his back on the house of Miti, Matei made his way home, but not through the trees. He took the beach by the wood edge, scarcely knowing what he did or where he went, and reaching at last the house of Penhill, whose door was open to the warm night.

In the lamplight interior Matei saw Penhill and Atuma. Penhill was seated at the table, with a bottle and glass beside him, and Atuma was seated on his knee, her arm about his neck, her head against his.

She was laughing, and Matei saw her right hand go under Penhill's chin and raise his face to hers. Then she kissed him, upside down, and Matei passed on.

Passed on as though it were no affair of his, passed on without turning his head again; making straight for home, where Sipi still lay snoring, though it seemed a thousand years since Matei had left him.

He lay down on his mat close to the old man, and turning on his stomach hid his face on his arms.

Atuma was Penhill's!

Matei, as he lay visualizing again the picture of the girl on the trader's knee, saw himself— Matei— rushing into the lamplight room, seizing the gun in the corner and killing Penhill and the girl, He saw that quite distinctly as the thing he ought to have done, but did not do.

It was the same stupidity over again. The stupidity that had made him let her slip away when he had her in his arms. Matei was not one of the people who can rise to a supreme occasion; he could see afterward what he ought to have done, just as a person can remember afterward what they ought to have said, and as he lay now brooding the visualized image of Penhill down on the floor with a gunshot wound in his chest tormented him.

"This is what you ought to have done," said the image.

"Yes," said a voice from nowhere, "and the noise of the speak stick, what about that? Would not the village have come running? The ship is still here, and the sailors. Would not they have come running, too?"

Matei, as he lay listening to this second voice, felt exactly as he had felt that day when lying on his chest he had looked over the five-hundred foot precipice on the north of Motuaro.

Had he yielded to the impulse to rush in and kill Penhill with the gun he would have assuredly been caught and hanged, just as Toti had been hanged by the white men for the killing of Mudross, the missionaries' black boy.

Matei had quite put Atuma out of his mind; he could only think of one thing at a time, and he was thinking of Penhill.

Then suddenly, craftily, as though some one were watching him, he raised his head and his eyes stole up to the obsidian-headed spear on the wall above Sipi.

iv

THE MELANESIAN in the soul of Matei had awakened, and passion balked had turned to the lust to kill. To kill Penhill, to kill Atuma, or even, failing these, to kill some one.

He lay watching the spear, whose glassy head, touched by a moonbeam, showed bright. Then rising and leaning across Sipi he seized it, loosed it from its attachments, and left the house holding it in his right hand.

The night had fallen silent. Not a breath of wind stirred, and the only sounds in all the vast moonlit world were the far voices of the reefs speaking to the sea and the distant pouring of the torrent as it fell, ringed with a moonbow, from cliff to cliff.

The house of the trader was in darkness, and out on the moonlit sea, anchored inside the reefs, lay the Araya ready to put out with the dawn wind and the ebb.

Matei glanced from the house to the schooner. When he had finished his business he would swim out and slip on board her and hide. The Kanakas in the fo'c's'le were his friends; they would give him shelter. He would sail away with her and see distant places and return no more to Motuaro. He was done forever with Motuaro as men are done with a place when they die.

As he stood resting on the spear and thinking this, the reefs spoke louder to a heavier lift of the swell and then fell silent, revealing, as through a lifted curtain of sound, the voice of the waterfall, far, insistent, vague, like a voice in a dream.

Yes, nevermore would he see Motuaro; nevermore work at the copra gathering; nevermore hear Sipi, drunk with kava, shouting old songs of the past.

He turned to the house. The door was open, and inside in the moon gloaming he could see Penhill stretched on a mat, alone, asleep and lying on his back.

A thrust of the spear through the heart and all would be over with Penhill; yet as Matei stood before the helpless victim he could neither raise his foot to cross the threshold nor raise his arm to stab with the spear.

Penhill was a white man, also he was Penhill; also, and revealed at the supreme psychological moment, he was not the per-son to be killed. The demon directing Matei took him by the shoulders and turned him away from the door, leading him along by the trees toward the house of Miti.

And there she was. Atuma lying on her mat by the door asleep, her breast exposed to the moonlight, and with the kisses of Penhill on her lips; farther in, Miti and his wife lay sleeping the sleep of tired Kanakas, which is deeper than the sleep of dogs.

Then Matei, with the cold precision of an executioner, raised the spear till the butt nearly touched the roof, and with a movement swift as light drove the point through the heart of Atuma.

Her body heaved up, a little sharp cry broke the silence of the night, and she fell back like a sleeper who has been roused and who falls asleep again.

The glass head had broken off. He cast the spear shaft beside her, and turning, ran for the sea edge.

Swimming like an otter he reached the *Araya*, scrambled on board, and passing the sleeping anchor watch, made for the fo'c's'le.

Two hours later, with the dawn wind, the schooner put out.

V

NOW the life of Matei on board the *Araya* after he had shown himself as a stowaway may be divided into two parts. During the first his mind was exceedingly troubled, not by remorse, but by the fear that somehow the *Araya* might put back to Motuaro. Freed of the blood lust that had destroyed not only Atuma, but any feeling he ever had for her, his mind had become normal again— the mind of a child. A child who has done wrong and dreads punishment.

What he dreaded in reality was Penhill. Penhill, he knew, would kill him just as he, Matei, had killed Atuma, and Matei did not want to be killed. He was greatly afraid. The timorous part of his nature that had made him frail when he

released Atuma, that had made him walk on without a word when he had seen her on Penhill's knee, that had helped to save Penhill's life when he lay asleep and defenseless, was alive now and trembling.

The Melanesian devil in his heart had withdrawn or hidden itself, and no lamb could be milder now than Matei as he helped to pull on the ropes or sat of an evening in the fo'c's'le listening to Timu playing on the mouth organ.

Then as days passed and strange islands showed themselves and faded away into the boundless blue, fear began to fade from his heart. All that seemed years and years ago, wiped out, done with forever. When they reached San Francisco he was a new man, moving in a new world, and leaving the *Araya* with a few dollars in his pocket, and a suit from the slop chest on his back, the streets and their wonder took him.

He could have gazed at the trolley cars forever, at the things behind the plate-glass windows of the shops, at the people.

He spent his money on rubbish and starved, listened to street orators proclaiming the rights of man, slept in the open, and fell at last into the hands of a society that found him work as a boot boy in a boarding house in Palk Street.

Here he grew fat on pork and beans; went to the pictures, then in their earliest infancy; learned how to play fan-tan from some Chinese boys, and attended a Sunday school, whose bait was a tea picnic on the bay once a year.

For four months Matei was completely happy, or almost so. Then one night a voice came to him some time after midnight, and, waking in his attic, he heard the sound of water cascading and whispering, the voice of the torrent of Motuaro that he had heard first in earliest infancy.

It was in reality only the pouring of rain water due to a stopped drainpipe, but that fact altered nothing; the waterfall that had been his earliest companion had spoken, and around its voice as he listened Motuaro began to build itself, and the datura trumpets to bloom and blow.

He saw the rainbow, and he heard the sound of Sipi pounding kava, the voice of the reefs, the patter of the palm leaves in the wind. He desired none of these things individually, yet collectively, and like a team led by the torrent, they pulled his heart, yet could not move his body. Homesickness had seized him.

To the homesick schoolboy it is the old common things that appeal, things he cared almost nothing for when at home, and to Matei, as he lay wide-eyed in the dark, the voice of the torrent became not only the voices of all the common things he suddenly longed to see again, but a command.

A hypnotic influence desiring his return.

Next day in the midst of his duties he almost forgot his experience of the night, but the voice of the torrent was there, part of him as it always had been part of him, and insistent as Fate.

He did his work badly, and the day after, leaving the boots to clean themselves, he bolted, walked off down to the docks, and joined a schooner, the *Dancing Wave*, bound for Honolulu.

He did not know where he was going, and did not care, he was moving; moving on the sea where somewhere Motuaro was. His fear of Penhill had passed. Years seemed to have gone by since that night when he had swam to the schooner; Penhill would have gone by this time, or would certainly have forgotten.

Penhill was an almost indistinguishable figure behind a great curtain woven with trolley cars, crowded streets, strange faces, and extraordinary conditions; the whole of Matei's life at Motuaro seemed equally vague, but the place was not vague, nor the call of it expressed in the voice of the calling water.

From Honolulu the *Dancing Wave* took a cargo to Palmyra, and from Palmyra the winds of trade drove them to Samoa. At Samoa, Matei, urged by the instinct to move, left her and joined the Howland, a brig that had business in the Solomons.

And now began a journey, the most extraordinary ever undertaken by man. Doing his work on shipboard, taking his pleasure with the other Kanakas, yet always driven by an underlying purpose, Matei moved from ship to ship and place to place, zigzagging across the Pacific for five long years. From Guam to Yap, from Yap to Wole, down to Jaluit, across to Nukuhiva, south to Rapa, north to Wake Island, trade and chance took Matei like a lost dog who changes from train to train, from road to road, and somehow arrives home at last.

The voice of the falling water may not have led him, but it had kept him moving; as water keeps a flower alive it had kept the vision of Motuaro fresh in his mind, and the desire to reach it. For five years it had neither loudened nor lessened in its call, and then, one morning when he was on the lookout the vision turned to reality, and Matei beheld the great island far ahead, sunlit, with the torrent standing against the green, unstable as water; yet eternal as a pillar of marble.

The schooner, entering the western reef break, dropped anchor in the blue lagoon dividing the reef from the shore, and Matei, by the fo'c's'le, saw the beach, the trees, the houses— all just as he had left them so many years ago.

Atuma, Penhill, Sipi were nothing, figures in his primitive mind belonging to a past so remote that they seemed less than shadows.

Having fed full from the feast of rich things before him, from the breadfruit line on the hills to the sands of the beach, he began dreamily to recall the

shadows. Sipi, Penhill, Atuma, Miti, all the people he had known, the girl he had killed in what seemed a dream, and the father he had worked for. Then, as he leaned on the rail, he knew that his journey was over, that having fed his eyes again on the place of his desire he must depart. He did not want to land.

Not only that, he knew that he must not land. Deep down in his heart something told him that he must not touch that beach again with his foot.

The killing of Atuma stirred vaguely in him; a ghost that had been laid to rest for years, and which was the fear of consequences, rose to being again and confronted him dimly.

He turned from the rail to the fo'c's'le, and was stepping down the ladder when the voice of the bos'n hailed him, ordering him into the shore boat which had been dropped.

Matei paused, dread suddenly possessed him, yet he could not move or resist. The something which was perhaps cowardice and that had already served him badly in a supreme crisis, paralyzed his initiative; then, at the second call of the bos'n, unresistingly and with apparent good will he dropped into the boat.

He was bow oar, and as they approached the beach, glancing over his shoulder he saw a crowd, natives come down to greet the ship, and among them, towering, a white man.

It was Penhill!

Penhill looking not a day older; Penhill with a cigar in his mouth; Penhill thinking of nothing but trade and with no eyes at all for anything but the captain of the schooner seated in the stern sheets of the oncoming boat. Then, as the big trader shook hands with the captain and stood for a moment talking before turning toward the house he noticed one of the boat Kanakas who was staring at him. Staring with fixed eyes as though hypnotized. Penhill's brow suddenly became cleft with the frown of thought. Then the terrible white man's memory which forgets nothing, brought together the face of Matei, the face of Atuma, the spear of Sipi, which had been found by the body of the girl, and the flight of Matei.

"My God!" said Penhill. Then he stepped forward and clapped Matei on the shoulder.

THEY HANGED him decently, and after due trial and on his own confession. He did not say that he had killed the girl, his words were as nearly as possible that he "remembered having speared her," as though he were speaking of something he had done involuntarily or in a dream or at the dictate of some spirit.

They hanged him on the great tree that stands where the waterfall dashes down from its fast leap over two hundred feet of basalt, and they buried him under the full voice of the torrent, the voice that like an elastic cord had held him wherever he went, always drawing him toward his fate and materializing at last into fifty feet of signal-halyard line.

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17: The Daughter of Lilith

Anatole France

Anatole-François Thibault, 1844-1924
Tr. Mrs. John Lane, 1856-1927
In: *Balthasar And Other Tales*, 1909

I HAD LEFT PARIS late in the evening, and I spent a long, silent and snowy night in the corner of the railway carriage. I waited six mortal hours at X—, and the next afternoon I found nothing better than a farm-waggon to take me to Artigues. The plain whose furrows rose and fell by turns on either side of the road, and which I had seen long ago lying radiant in the sunshine, was now covered with a heavy veil of snow over which straggled the black stems of the vines. My driver gently urged on his old horse, and we proceeded through an infinite silence broken only at intervals by the plaintive cry of a bird, sad even unto death. I murmured this prayer in my heart: "My God, God of Mercy, save me from despair and after so many transgressions, let me not commit the one sin Thou dost not forgive." Then I saw the sun, red and rayless, blood-hued, descending on the horizon, as it were, the sacred Host, and remembering the divine Sacrifice of Calvary, I felt hope enter into my soul. For some time longer the wheels crunched the snow. At last the driver pointed with the end of his whip to the spire of Artigues as it rose like a shadow against the dull red haze.

"I say," said the man, "are you going to stop at the presbytery? You know the curé?"

"I have known him ever since I was a child. He was my master when I was a student."

"Is he learned in books?"

"My friend, M. Safrac, is as learned as he is good."

"So they say. But they also say other things."

"What do they say, my friend?"

"They say what they please, and I let them talk."

"What more do they say?"

"Well, there are those who say he is a sorcerer, and that he can tell fortunes."

"What nonsense!"

"For my part I keep a still tongue! But if M. Safrac is not a sorcerer and fortune-teller, why does he spend his time reading books?"

The waggon stopped in front of the presbytery.

I left the idiot, and followed the curé's servant, who conducted me to her master in a room where the table was already laid. I found M. Safrac greatly changed in the three years since I had last seen him. His tall figure was bent. He was excessively emaciated. Two piercing eyes glowed in his thin face. His

nose, which seemed to have grown longer, descended over his shrunken lips. I fell into his arms.

"My father, my father," I cried, sobbing, "I have come to you because I have sinned. My father, my dear old master, whose profound and mysterious knowledge overawed my mind, and who yet reassured it with a revelation of maternal tenderness, save your child from the brink of a precipice. O my only friend, save me; enlighten me, you my only beacon!"

He embraced me, and smiled on me with that exquisite kindness of which he had given so many proofs during my childhood, and then he stepped back, as if to see me better.

"Well, adieu!" he said, greeting me according to the custom of his country, for M. Safrac was born on the banks of the Garonne, in the home of those famous wines which seemed the symbol of his own generous and fragrant soul.

After having taught philosophy with great distinction in Bordeaux, Poitiers and Paris, he asked as his only reward the gift of a poor cure in the country where he had been born and where he wished to die. He had now been priest at Artigues for six years, and in this obscure village he practised the most humble piety and the most enlightened sciences.

"Well, adieu! my child," he repeated. "You wrote me a letter to announce your coming which has moved me deeply. It is true, then, that you have not forgotten your old master?"

I tried to throw myself at his feet.

"Save me! save me!" I stammered.

But he stopped me with a gesture at once imperious and gentle.

"You shall tell me to-morrow, Ary, what you have to tell. First, warm yourself. Then we will have supper, for you must be very hungry and very thirsty."

The servant placed on the table the soup-tureen out of which rose a fragrant column of steam. She was an old woman, her hair hidden under a black kerchief, and in her wrinkled face were strongly mingled the beauty of race and the ugliness of decay. I was in profound distress, and yet the peace of this saintly dwelling, the gaiety of the wood fire, the white table-cloth, the wine and the steaming dishes entered, little by little, into my soul. Whilst I ate I nearly forgot that I had come to the fireside of this priest to exchange the sereness of remorse for the fertilising dew of repentance. Monsieur Safrac reminded me of the hours, already long since past, which we had spent together in the college when he had taught philosophy.

"You, Ary," he said to me, "were my best pupil. Your quick intelligence was always in advance of the thought of the teacher. For that reason I at once

became attached to you. I like a Christian to be daring. Faith should not be timid when unbelief shows an indomitable audacity. The Church nowadays has lambs only; and it needs lions. Who will give us back those learned fathers and doctors whose erudition embraced all sciences? Truth is like the sun; it requires the eye of an eagle to contemplate it."

"Ah, M. Safrac, you brought to bear on all questions that daring vision which nothing dazzles. I remember that your opinions sometimes even startled those of your colleagues whom the holiness of your life filled with admiration. You did not fear new ideas. Thus, for instance, you were inclined to admit the plurality of inhabited worlds."

His eyes kindled.

"What will the cowards say when they read my book? I have meditated, and I have worked under this beautiful sky, in this land which God has created with a special love. You know that I have some knowledge of Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, and certain of the Indian dialects. You also know that I have brought here a library rich in ancient manuscripts. I have plunged profoundly into the knowledge of the tongues and traditions of the primitive East. This great work, by the help of God, will not have been in vain. I have nearly finished my book on 'Origins,' which re-establishes and upholds that Biblical exegesis of which an imperious science already foresaw the imminent overthrow. God in His mercy has at last permitted science and faith to be reconciled. To effect this reconciliation I have started with the following premises:

"The Bible, inspired by the Holy Ghost, tells only the truth, but it does not tell all the truth. And how could it, seeing that its only object is to inform us of what is needful for our eternal salvation? Apart from this great purpose it has no other. Its design is as simple as it is infinite. It includes the fall and the redemption; it is the sacred history of man; it is complete and restricted. Nothing has been admitted to satisfy profane curiosity. A godless science must not be permitted to triumph any longer over the silence of God. It is time to say, 'No, the Bible has not lied, because it has not revealed all.' That is the truth which I proclaim. By the help of geology, prehistoric archaeology, the Oriental cosmogonies, Hittite and Sumerian monuments, Chaldean and Babylonian traditions preserved in the Talmud, I assert the existence of the pre-Adamites, of whom the inspired writer of Genesis does not speak, for the only reason that their existence did not bear upon the eternal salvation of the children of Adam. Furthermore, a minute study of the first chapters of Genesis has proved to me the existence of two successive creations separated by untold ages, of which the second is only, so to speak, the adaptation of a corner of the earth to the needs of Adam and his posterity."

He paused, then he continued in a low voice and with a solemnity truly religious:

"I, Martial Safrac, unworthy priest, doctor of theology, submissive as an obedient child to the authority of our Holy Mother the Church, I assert with absolute certainty— yielding all due submission to our holy father the Pole and the Councils— that Adam, who was created in the image of God, had two wives, of whom Eve was the second."

These singular words drew me little by little out of myself and filled me with a curious interest. I therefore felt something of disappointment when M. Safrac, planting his elbows on the table, said to me:

"Enough on that subject. Some day, perhaps, you will read my book, which will enlighten you on this point. I was obliged, in obedience to strict duty, to submit the work to Monseigneur, and to beg his Grace's approval. The manuscript is at present in the archbishop's hands, and any minute I may expect a reply which I have every reason to believe will be favourable. My dear child, try those mushrooms out of our own woods, and this native wine of ours, and acknowledge that this is the second promised land, of which the first was only the image and the forecast."

From this time on our conversation, grown more familiar, ranged over our common recollections.

"Yes, my child," said M. Safrac, "you were my favourite pupil, and God permits preferences if they are founded on impartial judgment. So I decided at once that there was in you the making of a man and a Christian. Not that great imperfections were not in evidence. You were irresolute, uncertain, and easily disconcerted. Passions, so far latent, smouldered in your soul. I loved you because of your great restlessness, as I did another of my pupils for quite opposite qualities. I loved Paul d'Ervy for his unswerving steadfastness of mind and heart."

At this name I blushed and turned pale and with difficulty suppressed a cry, and when I tried to answer I found it impossible to speak. M. Safrac appeared not to notice my distress.

"If I remember aright, he was your best friend," he added. "You have remained intimate ever since, have you not? I know he has started on a diplomatic career, and a great future is predicted for him. I hope that in happier times than the present he may be entrusted with office at the Holy See. In him you have a faithful and devoted friend."

"My father," I replied, with a great effort, "to-morrow I will speak to you of Paul d'Ervy and of another person."

M. Safrac pressed my hand. We separated, and I went to the room which had been prepared for me. In my bed, fragrant with lavender, I dreamed that I

was once again a child, and that as I knelt in the college chapel I was admiring the blonde and ecstatic women with which the gallery was filled, when suddenly out of a cloud over my head I seemed to hear a voice say:

"Ary, you believe that you love them in God, but it is God you love in them."

The next morning when I woke I found M. Safrac standing at the side of my bed.

"Come, Ary, and hear the Mass which I am about to celebrate for your intention. After the Holy Sacrifice I shall be ready to listen to what you have to say."

The Church of Artigues was a little sanctuary in the Norman style which still flourished in Aquitaine in the twelfth century. Restored some twenty years ago, it had received the addition of a bell-tower which had not been contemplated in the original plan. At any rate, poverty had safeguarded its pure bareness. I tried to join in the prayers of the celebrant as much as my thoughts would permit, and then I returned with him to the presbytery. Here we breakfasted on a little bread and milk, after which we went to M. Safrac's room.

He drew a chair to the fireplace, over which hung a crucifix, and invited me to be seated, and seating himself beside me he signed to me to speak. Outside the snow fell. I began as follows:

"My father, it is ten years ago since I left your care and entered the world. I have preserved my faith, but, alas, not my purity. But it is unnecessary to remind you of my life; you know it, you my spiritual guide, the only keeper of my conscience. Moreover, I am in haste to arrive at the event which has convulsed my being. Last year my family had decided that I must marry, and I myself had willingly consented. The young girl destined for me united all the advantages of which parents are usually in search. More than that, she was pretty; she pleased me to such a degree that instead of a marriage of convenience I was about to make a marriage of affection. My offer was accepted, and we were betrothed. The happiness and peace of my life seemed assured when I received a letter from Paul d'Ervy who had returned from Constantinople and announced his arrival in Paris. He expressed a great desire to see me. I hurried to him and announced my marriage. He congratulated me heartily.

"'My dear old boy,' he said, 'I rejoice in your happiness.'

"I told him that I counted on him to be my witness and he willingly consented. The date of my wedding was fixed for May 15, and he was not obliged to return to his post until the beginning of June.

"'How lucky that is,' I said to him. 'And you?'

"'Oh, I,' he replied, with a smile which expressed in turn joy and sorrow, 'I— what a change! I am mad— a woman— Ary. I am either very fortunate or very unfortunate! What name can one give to a happiness gained by an evil action? I have betrayed, I have broken the heart of a good friend…I carried off— yonder— in Constantinople—"

M. Safrac interrupted me:

"My son, leave out of your narrative the faults of others and name no one."

I promised to obey, and continued as follows:

"Paul had hardly ceased speaking when a woman entered the room. Evidently it was she; dressed in a long blue peignoir, she seemed to be at home. I will describe to you in one word the terrible impression she produced on me: she did not seem natural. I realise how vague is this expression and how inadequately it explains my meaning. But perhaps it will become more intelligible in the course of my story. But, indeed, in the expression of her golden eyes, that seemed at times to throw out sparks of light, in the curve of her enigmatical mouth, in the substance of her skin, at once brown and yet luminous, in the play of the angular and yet harmonious lines of her body, in the ethereal lightness of her footsteps, even in her bare arms, to which invisible wings seemed attached, and, finally, in her ardent and magnetic personality, I felt an indescribable something foreign to the nature of humanity; an indescribable something inferior and yet superior to the woman God has created in his formidable goodness, so that she should be our companion in this earthly exile. From the moment I saw her one feeling alone overmastered my soul and pervaded it; I felt a profound revulsion from everything that was not this woman.

"Seeing her enter, Paul frowned slightly, but changing his mind, he made an effort to smile.

"'Leila, I wish to present to you my best friend.'

"Leila replied:

"'I know M. Ary.'

"These words could not but seem strange as we had certainly never seen each other before; but the voice with which they were uttered was stranger still.

"If crystal could utter thought, so it would speak.

"'My friend Ary,' continued Paul, 'is to be married in six weeks.'

"At these words Leila looked at me and I saw distinctly that her golden eyes said 'No!'

"I went away greatly disturbed, nor did my friend show the slightest desire to detain me. All that day I wandered aimlessly through the streets, my heart empty and desolate; then, towards night, finding myself in front of a florist's

shop, I remembered my fiancée, and went in to get her a spray of white lilac. I had hardly taken hold of the flowers when a little hand tore them out of my grasp, and I saw Leila, who turned away laughing. She wore a short grey dress and a jacket of the same colour and a small round hat. I must confess that this costume of a Parisian dressed for walking was most unbecoming to her fairy-like beauty and seemed a kind of disguise. And yet, seeing her so, I felt that I loved her with an undying love. I tried to rejoin her, but I lost her among the crowd and the carriages.

"From this time on I seemed to cease to live. I called several times at Paul's without seeing Leila again. He always received me in a friendly manner, but he never spoke of her. We had nothing to say to each other, and I was sad when we parted. At last, one day, the footman said that his master was out. He added 'Perhaps you would like to see Madame?' I replied 'Yes.' O, my father, what tears of blood can ever atone for this little word! I entered. I found her in the drawing-room, half reclining on a couch, in a dress as yellow as gold, under which she had drawn her little feet. I saw her— but, no, I saw nothing. My throat was suddenly parched, I could not utter a word. A fragrance of myrrh and aromatic perfumes which emanated from her seemed to intoxicate me with languor and longing, as if at once all the odours of the mystic East had penetrated my quivering nostrils. No, this was certainly not a natural woman, for nothing human seemed to emanate from her. Her face expressed no emotion, either good or bad, beyond a voluptuousness at once sensual and divine. She doubtless noticed my suffering, for she asked with a voice as clear as the ripple of a mountain brook:

"'What ails you?'

"I threw myself in tears at her feet and cried, 'I love you madly!'

"She opened her arms; then enfolding me with a lingering glance of her candid and voluptuous eyes:

"'Why have you not told me this before?'

"Indescribable moment! I held Leila in my arms. It seemed as if we two together had been transported to Heaven and filled all its spaces. I felt myself become the equal of God, and my breast seemed to enfold all the beauty of earth and the harmonies of nature— the stars and the flowers, the forests that sing, the rivers and the deep sea. I had enfolded the infinite in a kiss…"

At these words Monsieur Safrac, who had listened to me for some moments with growing impatience rose, and standing before the fireplace, lifted his cassock to his knees to warm his legs and said with a severity which came near being disdain:

"You are a wretched blasphemer, and instead of despising your crimes, you only confess them because of your pride and delight in them. I will listen no more."

At these words I burst into tears and begged his forgiveness. Recognising that my humility was sincere, he desired me to continue my confession on condition that I realised my own self-abasement.

I continued my story as follows, determined to make it as brief as possible:

"My father, I was torn by remorse when I left Leila. But, from the following day on, she came to me, and then began a life which tortured me with joy and anguish. I was jealous of Paul, whom I had betrayed, and I suffered cruelly.

"I do not believe that there is a more debasing evil than jealousy, nor one which fills the soul with more degrading thoughts. Even to console me Leila scorned to lie. Besides, her conduct was incomprehensible. I do not forget to whom I am speaking, and I shall be careful not to offend the ears of the most revered of priests. I can only say that Leila seemed ignorant of the love she permitted. But she had enveloped my whole being in the poison of sensuality. I could not exist without her, and I trembled at the thought of losing her.

"Leila seemed absolutely devoid of what we call moral sense. You must not, however, think that she was either wicked or cruel. On the contrary, she was gentle and compassionate. Nor was she without intelligence, but her intelligence was not of the same nature as ours. She said little, and she refused to reply to any questions that were asked her about her past. She was ignorant of all that we know. On the other hand, she knew many things of which we are ignorant.

"Educated in the East, she was familiar with all sorts of Hindoo and Persian legends, which she would repeat with a certain monotonous cadence and with an infinite grace. Listening to her as she described the charming dawn of the world, one would have said she had lived in the youth of creation. This I once said to her.

"'It is true, I am old,'" she answered, smiling.

M. Safrac, still standing in front of the fireplace, had for some time bent towards me in an attitude of keen attention.

"Continue," he said.

"Often, my father, I questioned Leila about her religion. She replied that she had none, and that she had no need of one; that her mother and sisters were the daughters of God, but that they were not bound to Him by any creed. She wore a medallion about her neck filled with a little red earth which she said she had piously gathered because of her love for her mother."

Hardly had I uttered these words when M. Safrac, pale and trembling, sprang forward, and, seizing my arm, shouted:

"She told the truth! I know now. I know who this creature was, Ary! Your instinct did not deceive you. It was not a woman. Continue, continue, I implore."

"My father, I have nearly finished. Alas, for Leila's love, I had broken my solemn plighted troth, I had betrayed my best friend. I had affronted God. Paul, having heard of Leila's faithlessness, became mad with grief. He threatened her with death, but she replied gently:

"'Kill me, my friend; I long to die, but I cannot.'

"For six months she gave herself to me; then one morning she said that she was about to return to Persia, and that she would never see me again. I wept, I moaned, I raved: 'You have never loved me!'

"'No, my friend,' she replied gently. 'And yet how many women who have loved you no better have denied you what you received from me! You still owe me some gratitude. Farewell.'

"For two days I was plunged in alternate fury and apathy. Then remembering the salvation of my soul, I hurried to you, my father. Here I am. Purify me, uplift me, strengthen my heart, for I love her still."

I ceased. M. Safrac, his hand raised to his forehead, remained lost in thought. He was the first to break the silence.

"My son, this confirms my great discovery. What you tell me will confound the vainglory of our modern sceptics. Listen to me. We live to-day in the midst of miracles as did the first-born of men. Listen, listen! Adam, as I have already told you, had a first wife whom the Bible does not make mention of, but of whom the Talmud speaks. Her name was Lilith. Created, not out of one of his ribs, but from this same red earth out of which he himself had been kneaded, she was not flesh of his flesh. She voluntarily separated from him. He was still living in innocence when she left him to go to those regions where long years afterwards the Persians settled, but which at this time were inhabited by the pre-Adamites, more intelligent and more beautiful than the sons of men. She therefore had no part in the transgression of our first father, and was unsullied by that original sin. Because of this she also escaped from the curse pronounced against Eve and her descendants. She is exempt from sorrow and death; having no soul to be saved, she is incapable of virtue or vice. Whatever she does, she accomplishes neither good nor evil. The daughters that were born to her of some mysterious wedlock are immortal as she is, and free as she is both in their deeds and thoughts, seeing that they can neither gain nor lose in the sight of God. Now, my son, I recognise by indisputable signs that the creature who caused your downfall, this Leila, was a daughter of Lilith. Compose yourself to prayer. To-morrow I will hear you in confession."

He remained silent for a moment, then drawing a paper out of his pocket, he continued:

"Late last night, after having wished you good night, the postman, who had been delayed by the snow, brought me a very distressing letter. The senior vicaire informs me that my book has been a source of grief to Monseigneur, and has already overshadowed the spiritual joy with which he looked forward to the festival of our Lady of Mount Carmel. The work, he adds, is full of foolhardy doctrines and opinions which have already been condemned by the authorities. His Grace could not approve of such unwholesome lucubrations. This, then, is what they write to me. But I will relate your story to Monseigneur. It will prove to him that Lilith exists and that I do not dream."

I implored Monsieur Safrac to listen to me a moment more.

"When she went away, my father, Leila left me a leaf of cypress on which certain characters which I cannot decipher had been traced with the point of a style. It seems to be a kind of amulet."

Monsieur Safrac took the light film which I held out to him and examined it carefully.

"This," he said, "is written in Persian of the best period and can be easily translated thus:

"The Prayer of Leila, Daughter of Lilith
"My God, promise me death, so that I may taste of life.
My God, give me remorse, so that I may at last find happiness.
My God, make me the equal of the daughters of Eve."

18: The Odic Touch

Hume Nisbet

1849-1921

Phil May's Annual, Winter 1893

I HAD BEEN working hard— too hard, to keep up with the fierce competition of modern times, striving to advance in my art, do something better than my last effort, and keep at bay the many enemies which a man unconsciously makes who is climbing up the hill of life, and I felt wearied with the struggle, and almost inclined to sit down and let who liked reach the summit before me, when I received an invitation to spend Christmas with my old friend, Dr. Grignor, at his place in North Wales.

Dr. Grignor had, twenty years before, introduced himself to me in rather a peculiar fashion, and since then, although we had not met often, we had kept up a pretty constant communication, in which, as far as the obligations of friendship are concerned, I was entirely his debtor, for as he began by serving, so he continued to help, advise, and warn me whenever I required either of those services the most without ever giving me an opportunity of repaying one of those favours; but this I did not mind, because ours was the kind of friendship which sometimes exists between the strong and the weak, and which is of too fraternal a character to count favours received as a burden, for it is only when we begin to consider equivalents that our affection has become a limited emotion.

It was in Auckland, New Zealand, that we first met. I had landed there some weeks before almost penniless, and without much of an aim in life, when one night, as I was sitting on the wharf, looking broodingly upon the moonlit waves, and wondering for what purposes fate had driven me here, suddenly I felt a light touch on my knee, and on looking to that side saw a grave-looking man of about thirty-five, who had placed himself close to me with his hand resting lightly, and as if accidentally, on my knee.

In my morose state of mind I might have resented this liberty from anyone else, only as the delicate hand touched me I seemed to have found the clue I had been so long and vainly in search of. Auckland disappeared with its troubles, and I was tracing a probable future out of the silver ripples which danced before me; I also seemed to see the folly of my past and present life with the unreality of those friendships which had led me astray. It was as if my soul had woke up for the first time, and was looking out of windows which had hitherto been closely blinded.

A momentary panorama swept before me of the past, present, and future, while that hand rested on my knee; then it was withdrawn, while I came back

to my normal condition, with a purpose added to my experience, and began to study my stranger companion with a sudden interest.

He was a thin sallow-faced man with black eyes and clean shaven, and when he spoke his voice sounded gentle and soft.

"Yes, you have been wasting your time here, for although Nature is bountiful to all men, it is only the workers who can enjoy her gifts. You must leave tomorrow."

"I don't know you, sir," I replied, thinking about the impossibility of leaving New Zealand, without a cent to pay my passage anywhere.

"My name is Grignor, Dr. Grignor, and your friend, if you will permit me to be so, John Gray; or rather I am your friend already. Go on board that vessel tonight, which is loaded and ready to sail for England; you are expected on board as a passenger."

"But I have no money, and only the clothes I sit in, Dr. Grignor."

"You will find all that you require when you get on board. Mention your name and the steward will show you your cabin and trunks."

It was like a page out of the "Arabian Nights" to me, the homeless, penniless, and almost starving outcast, to hear that my desires had been accomplished without an effort on my part, and in a dazed way I looked toward the ship which he pointed out, forgetting to utter a word of thanks or inquiry as to how he knew me, and his reasons for helping me in this extremity.

It was a fine clipper, moored alongside the wharf, and a little way from me, and after taking in her proportions I turned once more to my new friend, to discover the place vacant. He had left me silently while my gaze had been concentrated on the vessel; and although the wharf was a long one, and at this hour almost deserted, I was astonished that he could have disappeared so quickly, and rose with an eerie feeling, as if I had been conversing with a spirit.

It was not without a tremor of doubt that I crossed the gangway and made my way toward the cabin, at the companion of which I saw a figure smoking a cigar. It seemed ridiculous for me to be there, and I paused to think how I would announce myself, when the smoker, who turned out to be the steward, saved me the trouble by addressing me instead:

"Are you our passenger, Mr. Gray, sir?"

"Yes," I replied, my doubts beginning to give way to amazement.

"The Captain is expecting you tonight, as we start early in the morning; you will find him below."

"And my luggage?" I stammered.

"Is all in your berth," answered the steward.

"Thanks."

I found the Captain enjoying a late supper along with his mates and one or two friends who had come to wish him *bon voyage*. My seat had been kept empty for me, and they welcomed me with respect, for I was the only passenger he had on this homeward passage.

Seeing my name on a card by the side of my plate, I did not trouble myself with any uncomfortable surmises, but murmuring a private prayer of thanks to God and my unknown benefactor, I fell to with the appetite of a starving young man who had not encountered such a supper for many days.

Upon retiring that night the steward handed to me a sealed parcel which had been left for me by my beneficent friend, Dr. Grignor, which, when I opened, I found to contain a purse with fifty sovereigns and a bunch of keys, the keys of the three travelling trunks which were ranged out for my inspection, and the receipt for my passage to London, so that I had no further need to bother my head about the position I was to hold on board ship, or the first months after I landed.

Perhaps it would have been better had this friend not acted Kind Providence quite so completely— better for my independence I mean— yet I had done so little with my past freedom that the change was a decidedly pleasant one to what my former uncertainty had been.

We had a fairly good voyage, take it all in all, with the tempests, doldrums, and calms, and at last I found myself with three well-stocked trunks in the great city where men come to carve their fortunes, which holds everything that a man can desire, which seems everything to him at the distance, and which swallows and wipes out so many hopes and visions.

With the fifty pounds which I possessed I fancied that nothing was impossible to me, and therefore I plunged recklessly into the battle recklessly, and with as much wisdom as a child might possess who has been left on a doorstep by his unfeeling or desperate mother.

I was once more alone, or fancied that I was, and with my own fate in my hands the fifty pounds did not last long, although I was wonderfully penurious over the spending of it, yet it melted away while I tried to open door after door without success, until I came once again to the position that I had been in New Zealand, with the river Thames to sit and watch instead of Auckland Bay. I was a failure.

One day I was in the National Gallery trying to comfort myself with the glories of Turner in lieu of breakfast and dinner, when I felt once more the odic touch on my arm, and on looking round I encountered the deep earnest eyes of my friend, Dr. Grignor.

"You require me once more, John Gray; therefore I have come to you."

"What is the use of it, Ur. Grignor?" I replied. "I have tried and failed."

"Not so, my friend, you have only begun; you have mastered a little of life, but you do not know your own powers yet; that will come in time."

As he spoke, the blinds were once more lifted from the windows behind which sat my soul, so that I saw where I had gone wrong. I had been frantically pushing and crushing behind a crowd, all eager as I was to get into a narrow space, as we may see any day on Westminster or Blackfriars bridges the masses striving to get into a halfpenny omnibus, forty people seeking to get into the place which can only hold ten, and not one with the wisdom to stand aside and wait his chance or walk on. It was my selfishness and imitation that had made my efforts failures.

"Yes, the best way over the bridge is the way you make for yourself, without crushing over your neighbour. It looks the longest and most laborious, yet it is your own; take that and you will reach the other side in plenty of time."

That was nearly twenty years before the day of my invitation, but I tried to follow the track which was then pointed out by my friend, and wait patiently while I worked steadily in the profession that I had chosen.

I never knew Dr. Grignor more intimately than on our first and second interview. He came to me without warning at a serious crisis of my life and set me right, after I had tried my own methods without success, until at last I grew to expect the quiet presence, and perhaps owned his supremacy by praying or unconsciously wishing for him at the desperate moment. I had experienced his wonderful gifts and beneficent mind so often that at last I grew to depend entirely upon his help at the critical pause, and went forward with the boldness of a blind man under the guidance of one who sees ahead for him, without questioning why the guide is taking all the trouble for one so incapable.

Slowly and through innumerable difficulties I had made my way, hopelessly stumbling on under the impression that I was doing nothing all these long and weary years, that the world knew me not, and only at the occasional times when my friend came to me, and with his touch made me see for a brief second the real progress which I had made.

At last my hour had come, and the world that did not know anything about these many years of gnawing disappointments and delays, said that John Gray had risen with startling rapidity. My work was recognised at last, while it needed no lifting of the blinds to see the future now. I was a lucky fellow, people remarked, and friends gathered round me in shoals with smiling lips and congratulatory words, yet with eyes which looked watchfully and strangely upon me, and at this point my friend came to me once more.

"You have reached the most dangerous period of your life, John Gray— the time when you must take your choice, either to sit down contented with your prison walls and shaded windows, or else sit on the ruins and see all round you. Which will you have— contented illusion or relentless vision?"

"Which is the best for me, my friend?"

"Reality is always the best, although it does not give content."

"Then let me have reality," I answered promptly.

Dr. Grignor was a man of vast learning and occult power, and I could not but regard myself as entirely his creation. He had watched over me for long years, enveloping me with his influence. Without attempting to bias me in any way, he left me free to follow my own bent, and only pointed out a fresh direction after the path which I had pursued had become hopelessly blocked up.

Time appeared to be no object to him as far as I was concerned, and he was always ready to congratulate me upon my failures; indeed he seemed to be better pleased with these results than with the evanescent successes which seemed to flatter my vanity and cloud my vision.

I had no knowledge of the amount of his fortune or from where he detained his money; it was only when the lack of money meant annihilation to my hopes that he came to my rescue, and he never gave me more than just enough to cross the gap which yawned before me, for all the rest I was left to my own exertions; also, until this Christmas which I speak about, he had not told me where or how he lived.

He left me after this conversation, pleased I think, at my resolve to grasp knowledge rather than slavish entertainment, and I went on with my work, satisfied that when I was ready he would fulfil his promise.

Men said I was lucky, and I felt myself to be so, not because I was beginning to be recognised, but because I had one so powerful at my back. True, my talents were my own, but it was the proud consciousness of this secret power and supporter that imparted to me the patience which was so needful to ultimate success.

It might have been the fruit of long experience or some strange force which passed from my friend to me, but as I moved about nothing escaped my observation, and my instinct was almost infallible when I trusted to it alone. At this stage I could read the envy of those watchful eyes, and the hatred of those smiling lips which greeted me at every turn; I had only to touch the arms of the ones who were protesting, and they at once began to tell me their real intentions towards me; my rivals and enemies revealed their plots against me and told me what misfortunes had overtaken them since they began to work me evil. I was now walking through a world where men and women were

ranged about me with crystal bodies through which I could read their motives at a glance.

I had this power as long as I remained inactive and uninterested toward them, but with my passionate inclinations I had also the power of making this crystal opaque, so that I could not penetrate past the surface of those I flung my friendship over; and as I could not live without affection, I found myself continually trying to crush my instinct and glean comfort from the affectations, also continually being betrayed and frustrated and misunderstood, I would not look at the man whom I had made up my mind to like until I had drawn over him the cloak of my affection; and, therefore, when he betrayed me I was enraged, whereas I need not have been; but it felt so lonely to be always reading minds and recoiling from them, that I preferred the after agony for the hour or two of comfort.

It was at the hour of my deepest dejection that the invitation came from my one friend Dr. Grignor. I had been clinging long to one of these opaqued crystals, a man who had a winning manner and a truthful looking mask, but who every hour unconsciously bared his falseness for my inspection. All round me I saw his accomplices and tools as transparent as I could have wished, and while counteracting their conspiracies, which originated from him, I persisted in my affection and trust for him, making all sorts of excuses and going out of my way to change the semblance of affection into reality.

In vain I tried, out of pity, when I had no longer trust, to warm up the ice of that opaque crystal; and when at last I had to abandon him to the curse of his malice— for I had drawn from him by my contact all his power of hurting me— I felt overcome with the struggle and isolation. He was doomed, I knew, as others had been before him, who had pitted themselves against me with this supernatural influence which had been about me since that night in Auckland. I had only to abandon him to his fate, and disaster would overtake him which neither of us could stop after the fiat had gone forth.

A profound sorrow for the fate of this doomed man crushed upon me, as I took my place in the train bound for Wales, something akin to the grief which burdened the days of the wandering Jew when he left his unwilling curse behind him— a gloom of desolation in my heart which was in harmony with the wintry day outside.

Through a landscape, beautiful in summer time, but now veiled by the swirling snow storm, we swept as fast as steam could drive us, with the carriages shaking and swaying as the wild blasts, flake-laden, dashed against the windows and covered them up with that white density.

Two men and one woman occupied the same carriage, and as I looked at the shivering objects through that obscurity, their actual features disappeared

and I could see their spirits sitting nude before me while they told me all their intentions and past actions.

The woman was going home to comfort the hearts of her aged parents and dazzle their eyes with her rich costumes and lady-like appearance, gained at such a fearful sacrifice. She had left her native village a servant girl, and was going back like a duchess, with a pack of lies which would send them to their graves happy and proud that they had such a daughter. As I looked at this poor, wicked soul, preparing itself for the ordeal of deceit, it appeared to grow luminous with the brightness of its motives, and to warm with its unselfish affection that chill atmosphere.

One of the men was young, and had appeared good-looking at the first glance at his features, but as they disappeared I saw the spirit sitting within him old and shrivelled, he also was bent on a mission of deceit to his home circle, but there was no brightness about him.

The other was a sailor coming home from a long voyage, his spirit was that of a child without a care, I bent my head before the woman, and turned from the young old man, to play with the soul of the sailor.

At the station my friend met me with a dog-cart, and together we drove through a wild country with the tempest of snow flakes dancing round like white elves. His house was a lonely one, perched half way up the side of a mountain with the windows all to the front, while the back portions had been excavated into the hill, it was a long house of one store}', and stood alone in the midst of a forest of pine and birch trees, just the kind of site which I would suppose a man like Dr. Grignor would fix upon as a retreat.

We were received by an Indian when we arrived, and after my friend had seen to the horse's comfort, we sat down to supper, still waited upon by the same dark-hued servant, who appeared to be the only other inhabitant of this singular household.

I knew that my friend had brought me for a special purpose to this place, and therefore I waited anxiously to learn what he would say and do, thinking little about my surroundings or what we were partaking. As soon as I had finished eating, he said as he rose:

"Now come with me, my friend, to my study."

I followed him passively to a room at the back of the house, that was rounded like a cave, with no windows. Over the doorway which we entered fell a thick carpet of oriental stuff, while in the centre stood a brazier containing live charcoal.

"Sit there, my friend," said Dr. Grignor, pointing to a stone chair near the brazier.

I sat down as he desired me, while he stood in front of me, as the Indian, who had followed us, threw something into the brazier which flamed up with a rosy light and filled the room or cave with a strange perfume.

"I have given you the gift of seeing things as they are, my friend, also the power to influence the lives of those who come in contact with you for good or evil. Hitherto it has been good to those who have befriended you, and evil to those who have wronged you; this is the natural plane of humanity, but you have now come to a point where you can control these destinies as you may desire at a sacrifice to yourself. Look at both sides of the picture and decide for yourself which gift you shall take— the gift of power or the gift of sacrifice."

As the doctor spoke, the Indian threw some fresh powder on the fire, and as I watched the flames rising and the perfumed smoke curling round like a silver frame, I saw a picture of my false friend destitute and in rags, with his starving children around him, while I sat crowned with success and surrounded with wealth.

"That is power and revenge," whispered my friend, while a thrill of triumph shot through me at the pleasant prospect, tempered with a feeling of commiseration for my overthrown enemy.

The Indian flung another powder into the flames and another picture rose up inside the silver-smoke-frame; my false friend, surrounded by luxury, and myself in rags watching his exalted state from the outside.

"That is sacrifice and abnegation," whispered my guide as the picture vanished. "Take your choice, John Gray."

Was it his presence that saved me, with the touch of his hand as it clasped mine after a moment of hesitation on my part— while my passions surged up and ambition with anger gripped at my heart like the talons of a vulture, or had my twenty years of struggle prepared me for this test-moment? As I made my choice, the features of Dr. Grignor grew luminous with a divine light ere he disappeared in that silver mist.

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19: The Man in the Green Hat

Melville Davisson Post

1869-1930

The Saturday Evening Post, 27 Feb 1915

Best known for his "Uncle Abner" detective stories set in pre-Civil War Virginia, Post also wrote a modest series featuring Sir Henry Marquis, Chief Commissioner at Scotland Yard, seldom reprinted.

"ALAS, MONSIEUR, in spite of our fine courtesies, the conception of justice by one race must always seem outlandish to another!"

It was on the terrace of Sir Henry Marquis' villa at Cannes. The members of the little party were in conversation over their tobacco— the Englishman, with his brier-root pipe; the American Justice, with a Havana cigar; and the aged Italian, with his cigarette. The last was speaking.

He was a very old man, but he gave one the impression of incredible, preposterous age. He was bald; he had neither eyebrows nor eyelashes. A wiry mustache, yellow with nicotine, alone remained. Great wrinkles lay below the eyes and along the jaw, under a skin stretched like parchment over the bony protuberances of the face.

These things established the aspect of old age; but it was the man's expression and manner that gave one the sense of incalculable antiquity. The eyes seemed to look out from a window, where the man behind them had sat watching the human race from the beginning. And his manners had the completion of one whose experience of life is comprehensive and finished.

"It seems strange to you, monsieur"— he was addressing, in French, the American Justice— "that we should put our prisoners into an iron cage, as beasts are exhibited in a circus. You are shocked at that. It strikes you as the crudity of a race not quite civilized.

"You inquire about it with perfect courtesy; but, monsieur, you inquire as one inquires about a custom that his sense of justice rejects."

He paused.

"Your pardon, monsieur; but there are some conceptions of justice in the law of your admirable country that seem equally strange to me."

The men about the Count on the exquisite terrace, looking down over Cannes into the arc of the sea, felt that the great age of this man gave him a right of frankness, a privilege of direct expression, they could not resent. Somehow, at the extremity of life, he seemed beyond pretenses; and he had the right to omit the digressions by which younger men are accustomed to approach the truth.

"What is this strange thing in our law, Count?" said the American.

The old man made a vague gesture, as one who puts away an inquiry until the answer appears.

"Many years ago," he continued, "I read a story about the red Indians by your author, Cooper. It was named 'The Oak Openings,' and was included, I think, in a volume entitled *Stories of the Prairie*. I believe I have the names quite right, since the author impressed me as an inferior comer with an abundance of gold about him. In the story Corporal Flint was captured by the Indians under the leadership of Bough of Oak, a cruel and bloodthirsty savage.

"This hideous beast determined to put his prisoner to the torture of the saplings, a barbarity rivaling the crucifixion of the Romans. Two small trees standing near each other were selected, the tops lopped off and the branches removed; they were bent and the tops were lashed together. One of the victim's wrists was bound to the top of each of the young trees; then the saplings were released and the victim, his arms wrenched and dislocated, hung suspended in excruciating agony, like a man nailed to a cross.

"It was fearful torture. The strain on the limbs was hideous, yet the victim might live for days. Nothing short of crucifixion— that beauty of the Roman law— ever equaled it."

He paused and flicked the ashes from his cigarette.

"Corporal Flint, who seemed to have a knowledge of the Indian character, had endeavored so to anger the Indians by taunt and invective that some brave would put an arrow into his heart, or dash his brains out with a stone ax.

"In this he failed. Bough of Oak controlled his braves and Corporal Flint was lashed to the saplings. But, as the trees sprang apart, wrenching the man's arms out of their sockets, a friendly Indian, Pigeonwing, concealed in a neighboring thicket, unable to rescue his friend and wishing to save him from the long hours of awful torture, shot Corporal Flint through the forehead.

"Now," continued the Count, "if there was no question about these facts, and Bough of Oak stood for trial before any civilized tribunal on this earth, do you think the laws of any country would acquit him of the murder of Corporal Flint?"

The whole company laughed.

"I am entirely serious," continued the Count. "What do you think? There are three great nations represented here."

"The exigencies of war," said Sir Henry Marquis, "might differentiate a barbarity from a crime."

"But let us assume," replied the Count, "that no state of war existed; that it was a time of peace; that Corporal Flint was innocent of wrong; and that Bough of Oak was acting entirely from a depraved instinct bent on murder. In

other words, suppose this thing had occurred yesterday in one of the Middle States of the American Republic?"

The American felt that this question was directed primarily to himself. He put down his cigar and indicated the Englishman by a gesture.

"Your great jurist, Sir James Stephen," he began, "constantly reminds us that the criminal law is a machine so rough and dangerous that we can use it only with every safety device attached.

"And so, Count," he continued, to the Italian, "the administration of the criminal law in our country may seem to you subject to delays and indirections that are not justified. These abuses could be generally corrected by an intelligent presiding judge; but, in part, they are incidental to a fair and full investigation of the charge against the prisoner. I think, however, that our conception of justice does not differ from that of other nations."

The old Count shrugged his shoulders at the digression.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I do not refer to the mere administration of the criminal law in your country; though, monsieur, we have been interested in observing its peculiarities in such notable examples as the Thaw trials in New York, and the Anarchist cases in Chicago some years ago. I believe the judge in the latter trial gave about one hundred instructions on the subject of reasonable doubt— quite intelligible, I dare say, to an American jury; but, I must confess, somewhat beyond me in their metaphysical refinements.

"I should understand reasonable doubt if I were uninstructed, but I do not think I could explain it. I should be, concerning it, somewhat as Saint Augustine was with a certain doctrine of the Church when he said: 'I do not know if you ask me; but if you do not ask me I know very well.'"

He paused and blew a tiny ring or smoke out over the terrace toward the sea.

"There was a certain poetic justice finally in that case," he added.

"The prisoners were properly convicted of the Haymarket murders," said the American Justice.

"Ah, no doubt," returned the Count; "but I was not thinking of that. Following a custom of your courts, I believe, the judge at the end of the trial put the formal inquiry as to whether the prisoners had anything to say. Whereupon they rose and addressed him for six days!"

He bowed.

"After that, monsieur, I am glad to add, they were all very properly hanged.

"But, monsieur, permit me to return to my question: Do you think any intelligent tribunal on this earth would acquit Bough of Oak of the murder of Corporal Flint under the conditions I have indicated?"

"No," said the American. "It would be a cold-blooded murder; and in the end the creature would be executed."

The old Count turned suddenly in his chair.

"Yes," he said, "in a Continental court, it is certain; but in America, monsieur, under your admirable law, founded on the common law of England?"

"I am sure we should hang him," replied the American.

"Monsieur," cried the old Count, "you have me profoundly puzzled."

It seemed to the little group on the terrace that they, and not the Count, were indicated by that remark. He had stated a case about which there could be no two opinions under any civilized conception of justice. Sir Henry Marquis had pointed out the only element— a state of war— which could distinguish the case from plain premeditated murder in its highest degree. They looked to him for an explanation; but it did not immediately arrive.

The Count noticed it and offered a word of apology.

"Presently— presently," he said. "We have these two words in Italian— *sparate*! and *aspetate*! Monsieur."

He turned to the American:

"You do not know our language, I believe. Suppose I should suddenly call out one of these words and afterward it should prove that a life hung on your being able to say which word it was I uttered. Do you think, monsieur, you could be certain?

"No, monsieur; and so courts are wise to require a full explanation of every extraordinary fact. George Goykovich, an Austrian, having no knowledge of the Italian language, swore in the court of an American state that he heard a prisoner use the Italian word *sparate*! and that he could not be mistaken.

"I would not believe him, monsieur, on that statement; but he explained that he was a coal miner, that the mines were worked by Italians, and that this word was called out when the coal was about to be shot down with powder.

"Ah, monsieur, the explanation is complete. George Goykovich must know this word; it was a danger signal. I would believe now his extraordinary statement."

The Count stopped a moment and lighted another cigarette.

"Pardon me if I seem to proceed obliquely. The incident is related to the case I approach; and it makes clear, monsieur, why the courts of France, for example, permit every variety of explanation in a criminal trial, while your country and the great English nation limit explanations.

"You do not permit hearsay evidence to save a man's life; with a fine distinction you permit it to save only his character!"

"The rule," replied the American justice, "everywhere among English-speaking people is that the best evidence of which the subject is capable shall be produced. We permit a witness to testify only to what he actually knows. That is the rule. It is true there are exceptions to it. In some instances he may testify as to what he has heard."

"Ah, yes," replied the Count; "you will not permit such evidence to take away a man's horse, but you will permit it to take away a woman's reputation! I shall never be able to understand these delicate refinements of the English law!"

"But, Count," suggested Sir Henry Marquis, "reputation is precisely that what the neighborhood says about one."

"Pardon, monsieur," returned the Count. "I do not criticize your customs. They are doubtless excellent in every variety of way. I deplore only my inability to comprehend them. For example, monsieur, why should you hold a citizen responsible in all other cases only for what he does, but in the case of his own character turn about and try him for what people say he does?

"Thus, monsieur, as I understand it, the men of an English village could not take away my pig by merely proving that everybody said it was stolen; but they could brand me as a liar by merely proving what the villagers said! It seems incredible that men should put such value on a pig."

Sir Henry Marquis laughed.

"It is not entirely a question of values, Count."

"I beg you to pardon me, monsieur," the Italian went on. "Doubtless, on this subject I do nothing more than reveal an intelligence lamentably inefficient; but I had the idea that English people were accustomed to regard property of greater importance than life."

"I have never heard," replied the Englishman, smiling, "that our courts gave more attention to pigs than to murder."

"Why, yes, monsieur," said the Count— "that is precisely what they have been accustomed to do. It is only, I believe, within recent years that one convicted of murder in England could take an appeal to a higher court; though a controversy over pigs— or, at any rate, the pasture on which they gathered acorns— could always be carried up."

The great age of the Count— he seemed to be the representative in the world of some vanished empire— gave his irony a certain indirection. Everybody laughed. And he added: "Even your word 'murder,' I believe, was originally the name of a fine imposed by the Danes on a village unless it could be proved that the person found dead was an Englishman!

"I wonder when, precisely, the world began to regard it as a crime to kill an Englishman?"

The parchment on the bones of his face wrinkled into a sort of smile. His greatest friend on the Riviera was this pipe-smoking Briton.

Then suddenly, with a nimble gesture that one would not believe possible in the aged, he stripped back his sleeve and exhibited a long, curiously twisted scar, as though a bullet had plowed along the arm.

"Alas, monsieur," he said, "I myself live in the most primitive condition of society! I pay a tribute for life.... Ah! no, monsieur; it is not to the Camorra that I pay. It is quite unromantic. I think my secretary carries it in his books as a pension to an indigent relative."

He turned to the American

"Believe me, monsieur, my estates in Salerno are not what they were; the olive trees are old and all drains on my income are a burden— even this gratuity. I thought I should be rid of it; but, alas, the extraordinary conception of justice in your country!"

He broke the cigarette in his fingers, and flung the pieces over the terrace.

"In the great range of mountains," he began, "slashing across the American states and beautifully named the Alleghanies, there is a vast measure of coal beds. It is thither that the emigrants from Southern Europe journey. They mine out the coal, sometimes descending into the earth through pits, or what in your language are called shafts, and sometimes following the stratum of the coal bed into the hill.

"This underworld, monsieur— this, sunless world, built underneath the mountains, is a section of Europe slipped under the American Republic. The language spoken there is not English. The men laboring in those buried communities cry out sparate when they are about to shoot down the coal with powder. It is Italy under there. There is a river called the Monongahela in those mountains. It is an Indian name."

He paused.

"And so, monsieur, what happened along it doubtless reminded me of Cooper's story— Bough of Oak and the case of Corporal Flint."

He took another cigarette out of a box on the table, but he did not light it.

"In one of the little mining villages along this river with the enchanting name there was a man physically like the people of the Iliad; and with that, monsieur, he had a certain cast of mind not unHellenic. He was tall, weighed two hundred and forty pounds, lean as a gladiator, and in the vigor of golden youth.

"There were no wars to journey after and no adventures; but there was danger and adventure here. This land was full of cockle, winnowed out of Italy, Austria and the whole south of Europe. It took courage and the iron hand of the state to keep the peace. Here was a life of danger; and this Ionian— big,

powerful, muscled like the heroes of the Circus Maximus— entered this perilous service.

"Monsieur, I have said his mind was Hellenic, like his big, wonderful body. Mark you how of heroic antiquity it was! It was his boast, among the perils that constantly beset him, that no criminal should ever take his life; that, if ever he should receive a mortal wound from the hand of the assassins about him, he would not wait to die in agony by it. He himself would sever the damaged thread of life and go out like a man!

"Observe, monsieur, how like the great heroes of legend— like the wounded Saul when he ordered his armor-bearer to kill him; like Brutus when he fell on his sword!"

He looked intently at the American.

"Doubtless, monsieur," he went on, "those near this man along the Monongahela did not appreciate his attitude of grandeur; but to us, in the distance, it seemed great and noble."

He looked out over the Mediterranean, where the great adventurers who cherished these lofty pagan ideals once beat along in the morning of the world.

"On an afternoon of summer," he continued like one who begins a saga, "this man, alone and fearless, followed a violator of the law and arrested him in a house of the village. As he led the man away he noticed that an Italian followed. He was a little degenerate, wearing a green hat, and bearing now one name and now another. They traversed the village toward the municipal prison; and this creature, featured like a Parisian Apache, skulked behind.

"As they went along, two Austrians seated on the porch of a house heard the little man speak to the prisoner. He used the word sparate. They did not know what he meant, for he spoke in Italian; but they recognized the word, for it was the word used in the mines before the coal was shot down. The prisoner made his reply in Italian, which the Austrians did not understand.

"It seemed that this man who had made the arrest did not know Italian, for he stopped and asked the one behind him whether the prisoner was his brother. The man replied in the negative."

The Count paused, as though for an explanation. "What the Apache said was: 'Shall I shoot him here or wait until we reach the ravine?' And the prisoner replied: 'Wait until we come to the ravine.'

"They went on. Presently they reached a sort of hollow, where the reeds grew along the road densely and to the height of a man's head. Here the Italian Apache, the degenerate with the green hat, following some three steps behind, suddenly drew a revolver from his pocket and shot the man twice in the back. It was a weapon carrying a lead bullet as large as the tip of one's little finger. The officer fell. The Apache and the prisoner fled.

"The wounded man got up. He spread out his arms; and he shouted, with a great voice, like the heroes of the Iliad. The two wounds were mortal; they were hideous, ghastly wounds, ripping up the vital organs in the man's body and severing the great arteries. The splendid pagan knew he had received his death wounds; and, true to his atavistic ideal, the ideal of the Greek, the Hebrew and the Roman, the ideal of the great pagan world to which he in spirit belonged, and of which the poets sing, he put his own weapon to his head and blew his brains out."

The old Count, his chin up, his withered, yellow face vitalized, lifted his hands like one before something elevated and noble. After some moments had passed he continued:

"On the following day the assassin was captured in a neighboring village. Feeling ran so high that it was with difficulty that the officers of the law saved him from being lynched. He was taken about from one prison to another. Finally he was put on trial for murder.

"There was never a clearer case before any tribunal in this world.

"Many witnesses identified the assassin— not merely English-speaking men, who might have been mistaken or prejudiced, but Austrians, Poles, Italians— the men of the mines who knew him; who had heard him cry out the fatal Italian word; who saw him following in the road behind his victim on that Sunday afternoon of summer; who knew his many names and every feature of his cruel, degenerate face. There was no doubt anywhere in the trial. Learned surgeons showed that the two wounds in the dead man's back from the big-calibered weapon were deadly, fatal wounds that no man could have survived.

"There was nothing incomplete in that trial.

"Everything was so certain that the assassin did not even undertake to contradict; not one statement, not one word of the evidence against him did he deny. It was a plain case of willful, deliberate and premeditated murder. The judge presiding at the trial instructed the jury that a man is presumed to intend that which he does; that whoever kills a human being with malice aforethought is guilty of murder; that murder which is perpetrated by any kind of willful, deliberate and premeditated killing is murder in the first degree. The jury found the assassin guilty and the judge sentenced him to be hanged."

The Count paused and looked at his companions about him on the terrace.

"Messieurs," he said, "do you think that conviction was just?"

There was a common assent. Some one said: "It was a cruel murder if ever there was one." And another: "It was wholly just; the creature deserved to hang."

The old Count bowed, putting out his hands.

"And so I hoped he would."

"What happened?" said the American.

The Count regarded him with a queer, ironical smile.

"Unlike the great British people, monsieur," he replied, "your courts have never given the pig, or the pasture on which he gathers his acorns, a consideration above the human family. The case was taken to your Court of Appeals of that province."

He stopped and lighted his cigarette deliberately, with a match scratched slowly on the table.

"Monsieur," he said, "I do not criticize your elevated court. It is composed of learned men— wise and patriotic, I have no doubt. They cannot make the laws, monsieur; they cannot coin a conception of justice for your people. They must enforce the precise rules of law that the conception of justice in your country has established.

"Nevertheless, monsieur"— and his thin yellow lips curled— "for the sake of my depleted revenues I could have wished that the decision of this court had been other than it was."

"And what did it decide?" asked the American.

"It decided, monsieur," replied the Count, "that my estates in Salerno must continue to be charged with the gratuity to the indigent relative.

"That is to say, monsieur, it decided, because the great pagan did not wait to die in agony, did not wait for the mortal wounds inflicted by the would-be assassin to kill him, that interesting person— the man in the green hat— was not guilty of murder in the first degree and could not be hanged!"

Note— See State versus Angelina; 80 Southeastern Reporter, 141: "The intervening responsible agent who wrongfully accelerates death is guilty of the murder, and not the one who inflicted the first injury, though in itself mortal."

20: Warm and Dry

Edgar Wallace

1875-1932

Blackmailers I Have Foiled and other stories, 1929

I WENT down to see Superintendent Minter just before the election began. He heard that I was going to participate in the fray with a visible sneer on his homely face.

"Politics!" he said. "Good Lord! At your time of life! Well, well, well! I've known a lot of fellows who took up that game, but nobody that ever made it pay, except Nippy the Nose, who used to travel the country and burgle the candidates' rooms when they were out addressing meetings.

"You know a lot about the hooks and the getabits of life, and you know that they're all specialists. If a man's a lob crawler—"

"What's a lob crawler? I've forgotten."

The Superintendent shook his dead sadly. "You're forgetting everything," he said. "I suppose it's these politics. A lob crawler's a man who goes into a little shop on his hands and knees, passes round the counter and pinches the till. There's not much of it nowadays, and anyway in these bad times there's nothing in the till to pinch. But once a lob crawler, always a lob crawler. If you go on the whizz— and I don't suppose you want me to tell you that whizzing is pocket-picking— you spend your life on the whizz. If you're a burglar, you're always a burglar. I've never yet met a burglar who was also a con man. That's the criminal's trouble he's got no originality, and thank the Lord for it! If they didn't catch themselves we'd never catch 'em. Nippy was an exception. He'd try everything once. If you went into the Record Office at Scotland Yard and turned up his M.O. card, which means—"

"I know what a modus operandi card is," I said.

The Superintendent nodded his head approvingly. "That's right. Don't let these politics put business out of your mind. As I say, if you turned up his M.O. card you'd have a shock. He's been convicted of larceny, burglary, obtaining money by a trick, pocket-picking. luggage- pinching— everything except blackmail. It's a funny thing that none of the regulars will ever admit they've committed blackmail, and there's not one of them that wouldn't if he had the chance and the intelligence.

"I used to know Nippy; in fact I got two of his convictions. Nothing upsets a police officer more than these general practitioners, because we are always looking for specialists. We know there are about six classes of burglars. There's a class that never attempts to break into a live shop, by which I mean a shop where people are living in the rooms upstairs; and there's a class that never goes into a dead joint, which, you will remember, is a lockup shop with nobody

on the premises. And naturally, when we get a burglary with any peculiar features, we go through the M.O. cards and pick out a dozen men who are likely to have done the job, and after we've sorted 'em out and found which of 'em were in stir and which of 'em are out of the neighbourhood, we'll pull in the remainder one by one and give them the once over.

"So that when there was a real big bust in Brockley, and we went over the M.O. cards, we never dreamt of looking for Nippy, because he hadn't done that sort of thing before; and we wouldn't have found him, but we got the office from a fence in Islington that Nippy had tried to sell him a diamond brooch. When you get a squeak from a fence its because he has offered too low a price for stolen property, and the thief has taken it elsewhere. "Nippy got a stretch, and the next time he came into our hands it was for something altogether different— trying to persuade a Manchester cotton man to buy a tenth share in a Mexican oilfield. Nippy would have got away with the loot, but unfortunately he knew nothing about geography, and when he said that Mexico was in South Africa the cotton man was a little suspicious and looked up the map.

"Nippy was a nice fellow, always affable, generally well-dressed. and a great favourite with the ladies. When I say 'ladies' I mean anybody that wore silk stockings and used lipstick.

"Nippy used to do a bit of nosing, too, but I didn't know he was making a regular business of it. Now, a nose is a very useful fellow. Without a nose the police wouldn't be able to find half the criminals that come through their hands. I suppose I'm being vulgar and ought to call them police informers, but 'nose' has always been good enough for me, because, naturally, I'm a man without any refinement.

"I happened to be walking down Piccadilly towards Hyde Park Corner when I saw Nippy. He tipped his hat and was going on when I claimed him. 'Good morning, Sooper,' he said. 'I'm just on me way to the office. I'm going straight now; I'm an agent, and everything's warm and dry. I've opened a little business in Wardour Street,' he said.

"Nippy had opened lots of businesses, mostly with a chisel and a three-piece jemmy, but I gathered that he had opened this one by paying the rent in advance. All criminals tell you they're going straight. Usually they're going straight from one prison to another. There are exceptions, but I've never heard of 'em,

"We had a few minutes' conversation. He told me where his office was, and I promised to look him up. He was so happy about me calling that I thought he was lying, but when I dropped in a few days afterwards I found that he had a room on the third floor. I expected to find that he was the managing director

of the Mountains in the Moon Exploration Company, or else the secretary of a new invention for getting gold out of the sea. It was a bit surprising to find his real name, Norman Ignatius Percival Young, on the glass panel. It was now that I found what he was agent for. He was standing in with the very fence who had given him away on his last conviction, and I suspected he was doing the same job. Anyway, he was full of information about various people, and he gave me a tip that afternoon to prove his— what's the word? Yes, bona fides— that's French, isn't it? I made a pretty good capture— a man called Juggy Jones, who did a lot of motor-car pinching, and was in with a big crowd up at Shadwell, who took the cars, repaired them and shipped them off to India. There's many a grand family car running round Madras, loaded to the water-line with little Eurasians.

"Anyway. Juggy was a very sensible man, and if ever a thief could be described as intelligent that man was Juggy. He didn't talk much. He was a big fellow, about six feet two, with a face as cheerful as the ace of spades. But if he didn't say much he did a lot of thinking. I took him out of a cafe, where he was having dinner with a lady friend, and we walked down to the station together and I charged him. He said nothing, but when he came up before the magistrate and heard the evidence and was committed for trial, he asked me to see him in his cell.

" 'I shouldn't be at all surprised, Sooper,' he said, 'if I know the name of the man who shopped me.'

" 'And I shouldn't be surprised either, Juggy,' I said, 'because you've known me for years.'

"But he shook his head and said nothing else. Somebody got at the witnesses for the Crown, and when they went into the box at the Old Bailey they gave the sort of evidence that wouldn't bring about a conviction, and it looked as if he was going to get an acquittal and something out of the poor box to compensate him for his wounded feelings, when the prosecuting counsel took a pretty strong line with one witness, who, after he had changed his evidence three times, said just enough to convict Juggy on one count. He went down for a carpet. Am I being vulgar? Let me say he went down for six months; a very lucky man. If we could have convicted him on the other indictments he'd have taken a dose of penal servitude. Naturally Nippy didn't appear in court. I wondered what he was getting out of it. It was a long time afterwards that I found out that there was a quarrel between the two rings as to who the stuff should be shipped to, and Nippy had been put in to make the killing. He gave us one or two bits of information which were useful, but you could see that he was just acting for the fence. I made a few inquiries up Islington way, and I found out that whenever the police went to him to find out about stolen

property he referred them to the gentleman in Wardour Street who'd be able to tell them something.

"Now a thief who's earning a regular living has never got enough money, and I was pretty certain that Nippy was doing something on the side. because he began to have his old prosperous look and attend the races. As a matter of fact, though I didn't know it, he was working up a connection with a gang of luggage thieves. I found this out when he came on to my manor—into my division, I mean. I found him at a railway station acting in a suspicious manner, and I could have pinched him, but, being naturally very kind-hearted with all criminals if I haven't enough evidence to get a conviction, I just warned him. Nippy was very hurt.

" 'Why, Sooper,' he said. 'I've got a good job. I'm warm and dry up in Wardour Street. Why should I lower myself to go back to my old and sinful life? I haven't had a drink for three months, and I never pass the Old Bailey without taking, off me hat to it.'

" 'There are two ways of being warm and dry, Nippy,' I said. 'One is to be honest, and the other is to get to Dartmoor, where I understand there is a fine system of central heating.'

"While this was going on, Juggy Jones came out of stir and reported to me. He'd got out with his usual remissions and I had a little chat with him.

" 'It's all right, Sooper,' he said. 'I'm going straight. I've had enough of the other game. How's Nippy— warm and dry?'

" 'Do you know him?' I asked.

"He thought a long time. 'I've heard about him,' he said.

"I should imagine he'd been doing a lot of thinking while he was in prison, and when I heard that he and Nippy had been seen together having a drink in the long bar, I thought it advisable to see Nippy and give him a few words of fatherly advice. But you couldn't tell anything to Nippy. He knew it all, and a lot more. He just smiled. 'Thank you, Sooper,' he said, 'but Juggy and I have always been good pals, and you couldn't wish to meet a nicer man.'

"According to his story, they had met by accident in the Haymarket. They had had a drink together. I think Nippy was a bit jealous of him, because he was one of the few crooks I have met who saved money. He had enough money, anyway, when he was at the Old Bailey to engage a good mouthpiece, and he'd got a little flat in Maida Vale. One of my men shadowed Nippy and found he was in the habit of calling there, so I knew if Nippy disappeared and his right ear was found on the Thames Embankment, where the rest of the body would be. Not that crooks are that kind: they never commit murder.

"I only heard the rest of the story in scraps and pieces. But so far as I can make out, Nippy had been trying to get the man into the luggage crowd, which

was silly, because. as I have said before, a man who knocks oft motor-cars doesn't knock off anything else. Jaggy said he would like to try the business, and he must have looked it over pretty, thoroughly and taken an interest in it, because one day he sent for Nippy to come to his flat in Maida Vale, and put him on an easy job that came off and brought him about £150. It's a simple trick. You have a motor-car outside the station, and in it a little hand stamp and a case of type. You hang about the cloak room till you see a man coming along carrying a bag in and taking his ticket. You've got a little bag of your own, containing a few well-worn bricks wrapped up in your favourite newspaper. You edge up behind him, and when he takes a ticket you put in your bag and you receive a ticket. Now, suppose you receive No. 431; you know the ticket that went before was 430. You go outside to your little car. You have got a lot of blank tickets of all colours— they sometimes change the colour— and you just make up the stamp to 430 and you stamp it. About three or four hours later along comes a gentlemanly looking person, hands in the ticket and claims the bag, and that's the end of it.

"One night, just as Nippy was going to bed, Juggy rang him up and asked him to come round to see him. When he got to the flat he told Nippy a grand story. It was about a man who travelled in jewellery and who was in the habit of taking one over the eight, and sometimes two. This fellow, according to Juggy, when he felt the inebriation, if you'll excuse the word, overtaking him, used to go to the nearest cloak room and deposit all his samples in a bag which was kept in a safe that you could open with a blunt knife.

"According to Juggy, this fellow was coming to London from Birmingham, and the two arranged to shadow him. They picked him up at a railway station— a large, fat man, who was slightly oiled. You may not have heard the expression before, but it means a man who has been lubricating— which is also a foreign expression, but you must go with the times. They tailed him till he went into a restaurant and met another man. He carried a bag, and he took out of this bag, and showed to the world, a large leather roll which he opened on the table. There were more diamonds in that roll than Nippy had ever heard of. When he saw it he began to breathe heavily through his nose.

"When they got outside the restaurant he said to Juggy: 'Can't we get him in a quiet place and convert him to free trade? It's warm and dry.'

"But Juggy wouldn't have it. He said that this man, because he was in the habit of getting soused— which is another expression you may not have heard before, but it means the same thing— was always followed by a detective to watch him. Apparently, he wasn't an ordinary traveller; he was the head of the firm. They followed him for a bit. He went into a bar and when he came out he couldn't have driven a car without having his licence suspended for ten years.

Sure enough he made for a railway station in the Euston Road, handed over the stock, and they watched it being locked in the safe.

" 'He'll do that every day this week,' said Juggy, 'but no time's like the present. You're a peter-man, I'm not.'

"And then he told Nippy his plan. It was to put him in a packing case and deposit him in the cloak room. 'It's Saturday night. They close the office at twelve, and all you've got to do is to get out in the night, open the safe, claim the stuff, and I'll be down to collect you in the morning.'

"Nippy wasn't what I might describe as keen on the job, but he'd seen the diamonds and he couldn't keep his mind off them. Juggy took him down to a little garage off the Waterloo Bridge Road and showed him the case he'd had made.

" 'If you don't like to do it, I can get one of my lads who'll do the job for a pony and be glad of the chance. It's going to be easy to get, and we'll share fifty-fifty.'

"Nippy was still a bit uncertain. 'Suppose they put me upside down?'

" 'Don't be silly,' said Juggy. I'll put a label on it: *This side up— glass*.'

"Nippy had a look at the case. It was all lined; there was a nice seat, and although it was going to be a little uncomfortable, there was a neat little pocket inside, with a flask of whisky and a little tin of sandwiches.

" 'You won't be able to smoke, of course, but you won't be there more than seven hours. I'll notify the left-luggage people that I'm bringing the case in, and slip the fellow a dollar and tell him not to put anything on top. All you've got to do is open the side of the case and step out. It'll be like falling off a log.'

"Nippy had a good look at the case. The side opened like a door. It didn't look hard at all. The only danger was that when they came in the morning to the cloakroom they'd find out that the safe had been opened.

" 'That's all right.' said Juggy. 'You needn't bust it. I've got a squeeze of the key.' He took it out of his pocket.

" 'That's all right.' said Nippy. 'It's an easy job. We'll be warm and dry on this.'

"About seven o'clock that night Nippy got inside the case and tried it out. The air holes all worked; everything was as the heart could desire. He bolted the door on the inside, and then he heard somebody putting in screws on the outside.

" 'Hi!' said Nippy, 'what's the idea?'

" 'It's all right.' said Juggy. 'They're only fakes; they come out the moment you push'

"I don't know what happened to Nippy in the night, and I can't describe his feelings, because I'm not a novel writer. He heard cranes going and people

shouting, felt himself lifted up in the air, heard somebody say 'Lower away!' and he went down farther than he thought it was possible to go. And then Nippy began to realize that something had to be done.

"It was two hours before anybody heard him shout, and at last the stevedores broke open the case and got him out. He was in the hold of a ship, and the packing case was labelled on the top: 'Bombay. Stow away from boilers. Keep warm and dry.'

"It broke Nippy's nerve. He's in Parkhurst now, recuperating."

21: The Boarding House

James Joyce

1882-1941

In: *The Dubliners*, London, Cape, 1914

MRS. MOONEY was a butcher's daughter. She was a woman who was quite able to keep things to herself: a determined woman. She had married her father's foreman and opened a butcher's shop near Spring Gardens. But as soon as his father-in-law was dead Mr. Mooney began to go to the devil. He drank, plundered the till, ran headlong into debt. It was no use making him take the pledge: he was sure to break out again a few days after. By fighting his wife in the presence of customers and by buying bad meat he ruined his business. One night he went for his wife with the cleaver and she had to sleep a neighbour's house.

After that they lived apart. She went to the priest and got a separation from him with care of the children. She would give him neither money nor food nor house-room; and so he was obliged to enlist himself as a sheriff's man. He was a shabby stooped little drunkard with a white face and a white moustache white eyebrows, pencilled above his little eyes, which were veined and raw; and all day long he sat in the bailiff's room, waiting to be put on a job. Mrs. Mooney, who had taken what remained of her money out of the butcher business and set up a boarding house in Hardwicke Street, was a big imposing woman. Her house had a floating population made up of tourists from Liverpool and the Isle of Man and, occasionally, artistes from the music halls. Its resident population was made up of clerks from the city. She governed the house cunningly and firmly, knew when to give credit, when to be stern and when to let things pass. All the resident young men spoke of her as The Madam.

Mrs. Mooney's young men paid fifteen shillings a week for board and lodgings (beer or stout at dinner excluded). They shared in common tastes and occupations and for this reason they were very chummy with one another. They discussed with one another the chances of favourites and outsiders. Jack Mooney, the Madam's son, who was clerk to a commission agent in Fleet Street, had the reputation of being a hard case. He was fond of using soldiers' obscenities: usually he came home in the small hours. When he met his friends he had always a good one to tell them and he was always sure to be on to a good thing-that is to say, a likely horse or a likely artiste. He was also handy with the mits and sang comic songs. On Sunday nights there would often be a reunion in Mrs. Mooney's front drawing-room. The music-hall artistes would

oblige; and Sheridan played waltzes and polkas and vamped accompaniments. Polly Mooney, the Madam's daughter, would also sing. She sang:

I'm a … naughty girl.
You needn't sham:
You know I am.

Polly was a slim girl of nineteen; she had light soft hair and a small full mouth. Her eyes, which were grey with a shade of green through them, had a habit of glancing upwards when she spoke with anyone, which made her look like a little perverse madonna. Mrs. Mooney had first sent her daughter to be a typist in a corn-factor's office but, as a disreputable sheriff's man used to come every other day to the office, asking to be allowed to say a word to his daughter, she had taken her daughter home again and set her to do housework. As Polly was very lively the intention was to give her the run of the young men. Besides, young men like to feel that there is a young woman not very far away. Polly, of course, flirted with the young men but Mrs. Mooney, who was a shrewd judge, knew that the young men were only passing the time away: none of them meant business. Things went on so for a long time and Mrs. Mooney began to think of sending Polly back to typewriting when she noticed that something was going on between Polly and one of the young men. She watched the pair and kept her own counsel.

Polly knew that she was being watched, but still her mother's persistent silence could not be misunderstood. There had been no open complicity between mother and daughter, no open understanding but, though people in the house began to talk of the affair, still Mrs. Mooney did not intervene. Polly began to grow a little strange in her manner and the young man was evidently perturbed. At last, when she judged it to be the right moment, Mrs. Mooney intervened. She dealt with moral problems as a cleaver deals with meat: and in this case she had made up her mind.

It was a bright Sunday morning of early summer, promising heat, but with a fresh breeze blowing. All the windows of the boarding house were open and the lace curtains ballooned gently towards the street beneath the raised sashes. The belfry of George's Church sent out constant peals and worshippers, singly or in groups, traversed the little circus before the church, revealing their purpose by their self-contained demeanour no less than by the little volumes in their gloved hands. Breakfast was over in the boarding house and the table of the breakfast-room was covered with plates on which lay yellow streaks of eggs with morsels of bacon-fat and bacon-rind. Mrs. Mooney sat in the straw arm-chair and watched the servant Mary remove the breakfast things. She

made Mary collect the crusts and pieces of broken bread to help to make Tuesday's bread-pudding. When the table was cleared, the broken bread collected, the sugar and butter safe under lock and key, she began to reconstruct the interview which she had had the night before with Polly. Things were as she had suspected: she had been frank in her questions and Polly had been frank in her answers. Both had been somewhat awkward, of course. She had been made awkward by her not wishing to receive the news in too cavalier a fashion or to seem to have connived and Polly had been made awkward not merely because allusions of that kind always made her awkward but also because she did not wish it to be thought that in her wise innocence she had divined the intention behind her mother's tolerance.

Mrs. Mooney glanced instinctively at the little gilt clock on the mantelpiece as soon as she had become aware through her reverie that the bells of George's Church had stopped ringing. It was seventeen minutes past eleven: she would have lots of time to have the matter out with Mr. Doran and then catch short twelve at Marlborough Street. She was sure she would win. To begin with, she had all the weight of social opinion on her side: she was an outraged mother. She had allowed him to live beneath her roof, assuming that he was a man of honour and he had simply abused her hospitality. He was thirty-four or thirty-five years of age, so that youth could not be pleaded as his excuse; nor could ignorance be his excuse since he was a man who had seen something of the world. He had simply taken advantage of Polly's youth and inexperience: that was evident. The question was: What reparation would he make?

There must be reparation made in such case. It is all very well for the man: he can go his ways as if nothing had happened, having had his moment of pleasure, but the girl has to bear the brunt. Some mothers would be content to patch up such an affair for a sum of money; she had known cases of it. But she would not do so. For her only one reparation could make up for the loss of her daughter's honour: marriage.

She counted all her cards again before sending Mary up to Doran's room to say that she wished to speak with him. She felt sure she would win. He was a serious young man, not rakish or loud-voiced like the others. If it had been Mr. Sheridan or Mr. Meade or Bantam Lyons her task would have been much harder. She did not think he would face publicity. All the lodgers in the house knew something of the affair; details had been invented by some. Besides, he had been employed for thirteen years in a great Catholic wine-merchant's office and publicity would mean for him, perhaps, the loss of his job. Whereas if he agreed all might be well. She knew he had a good screw for one thing and she suspected he had a bit of stuff put by.

Nearly the half-hour! She stood up and surveyed herself in the pier-glass. The decisive expression of her great florid face satisfied her and she thought of some mothers she knew who could not get their daughters off their hands.

Mr. Doran was very anxious indeed this Sunday morning. He had made two attempts to shave but his hand had been so unsteady that he had been obliged to desist. Three days' reddish beard fringed his jaws and every two or three minutes a mist gathered on his glasses so that he had to take them off and polish them with his pocket-handkerchief. The recollection of his confession of the night before was a cause of acute pain to him; the priest had drawn out every ridiculous detail of the affair and in the end had so magnified his sin that he was almost thankful at being afforded a loophole of reparation. The harm was done. What could he do now but marry her or run away? He could not brazen it out. The affair would be sure to be talked of and his employer would be certain to hear of it. Dublin is such a small city: everyone knows everyone else's business. He felt his heart leap warmly in his throat as he heard in his excited imagination old Mr. Leonard calling out in his rasping voice: 'Send Mr. Doran here, please.'

All his long years of service gone for nothing! All his industry and diligence thrown away! As a young man he had sown his wild oats, of course; he had boasted of his free-thinking and denied the existence of God to his companions in public-houses. But that was all passed and done with… nearly. He still bought a copy of *Reynolds's Newspaper* every week but he attended to his religious duties and for nine-tenths of the year lived a regular life. He had money enough to settle down on; it was not that. But the family would look down on her. First of all there was her disreputable father and then her mother's boarding house was beginning to get a certain fame. He had a notion that he was being had. He could imagine his friends talking of the affair and laughing. She was a little vulgar; some times she said 'I seen' and 'If I had've known.' But what would grammar matter if he really loved her? He could not make up his mind whether to like her or despise her for what she had done. Of course he had done it too. His instinct urged him to remain free, not to marry. Once you are married you are done for, it said.

While he was sitting helplessly on the side of the bed in shirt and trousers she tapped lightly at his door and entered. She told him all, that she had made a clean breast of it to her mother and that her mother would speak with him that morning. She cried and threw her arms round his neck, saying:

'O Bob! Bob! What am I to do? What am I to do at all?'

She would put an end to herself, she said.

He comforted her feebly, telling her not to cry, that it would be all right, never fear. He felt against his shirt the agitation of her bosom.

It was not altogether his fault that it had happened. He remembered well, with the curious patient memory of the celibate, the first casual caresses her dress, her breath, her fingers had given him. Then late one night as he was undressing for she had tapped at his door, timidly. She wanted to relight her candle at his for hers had been blown out by a gust. It was her bath night. She wore a loose open combing-jacket of printed flannel. Her white instep shone in the opening of her furry slippers and the blood glowed warmly behind her perfumed skin. From her hands and wrists too as she lit and steadied her candle a faint perfume arose.

On nights when he came in very late it was she who warmed up his dinner. He scarcely knew what he was eating feeling her beside him alone, at night, in the sleeping house. And her thoughtfulness! If the night was anyway cold or wet or windy there was sure to be a little tumbler of punch ready for him. Perhaps they could be happy together…

They used to go upstairs together on tiptoe, each with a candle, and on the third landing exchange reluctant goodnights. They used to kiss. He remembered well her eyes, the touch of her hand and his delirium…

But delirium passes. He echoed her phrase, applying it to himself: 'What am I to do?' The instinct of the celibate warned him to hold back. But the sin was there; even his sense of honour told him that reparation must be made for such a sin.

While he was sitting with her on the side of the bed Mary came to the door and said that the missus wanted to see him in the parlour. He stood up to put on his coat and waistcoat, more helpless than ever. When he was dressed he went over to her to comfort her. It would be all right, never fear. He left her crying on the bed and moaning softly: 'O my God!'

Going down the stairs his glasses became so dimmed with moisture that he had to take them off and polish them. He longed to ascend through the roof and fly away to another country where he would never hear again of his trouble, and yet a force pushed him downstairs step by step. The implacable faces of his employer and of the Madam stared upon his discomfiture. On the last flight of stairs he passed Jack Mooney who was coming up from the pantry nursing two bottles of Bass. They saluted coldly; and the lover's eyes rested for a second or two on a thick bulldog face and a pair of thick short arms. When he reached the foot of the staircase he glanced up and saw Jack regarding him from the door of the return-room.

Suddenly he remembered the night when one of the music-hall artistes, a little blond Londoner, had made a rather free allusion to Polly. The reunion had been almost broken up on account of Jack's violence. Everyone tried to quiet him. The music-hall artiste, a little paler than usual, kept smiling and saying

that there was no harm meant: but Jack kept shouting at him that if any fellow tried that sort of a game on with his sister he'd bloody well put his teeth down his throat, so he would.

Polly sat for a little time on the side of the bed, crying. Then she dried her eyes and went over to the looking-glass. She dipped the end of the towel in the water-jug and refreshed her eyes with the cool water. She looked at herself in profile and readjusted a hairpin above her ear. Then she went back to the bed again and sat at the foot. She regarded the pillows for a long time and the sight of them awakened in her mind secret, amiable memories. She rested the nape of her neck against the cool iron bed-rail and fell into a reverie. There was no longer any perturbation visible on her face.

She waited on patiently, almost cheerfully, without alarm, her memories gradually giving place to hopes and visions of the future. Her hopes and visions were so intricate that she no longer saw the white pillows on which her gaze was fixed or remembered that she was waiting for anything.

At last she heard her mother calling. She started to her feet and ran to the banisters.

'Polly! Polly!'

'Yes, mamma?'

'Come down, dear. Mr. Doran wants to speak to you.'

Then she remembered what she had been waiting for.

22: The Camel's Back

F Scott Fitzgerald

1896-1940

The Saturday Evening Post, 24 April 1920

THE GLAZED eye of the tired reader resting for a second on the above title will presume it to be merely metaphorical. Stories about the cup and the lip and the bad penny and the new broom rarely have anything, to do with cups or lips or pennies or brooms. This story Is the exception. It has to do with a material, visible and large-as-life camel's back.

Starting from the neck we shall work toward the tail. I want you to meet Mr. Perry Parkhurst, twenty-eight, lawyer, native of Toledo. Perry has nice teeth, a Harvard diploma, parts his hair in the middle. You have met him before— in Cleveland, Portland, St. Paul, Indianapolis, Kansas City, and so forth. Baker Brothers, New York, pause on their semi-annual trip through the West to clothe him; Montmorency & Co. dispatch a young man post-haste every three months to see that he has the correct number of little punctures on his shoes. He has a domestic roadster now, will have a French roadster if he lives long enough, and doubtless a Chinese tank if it comes into fashion. He looks like the advertisement of the young man rubbing his sunset-colored chest with liniment and goes East every other year to his class reunion.

I want you to meet his Love. Her name is Betty Medill, and she would take well in the movies. Her father gives her three hundred a month to dress on, and she has tawny eyes and hair and feather fans of five colors. I shall also introduce her father, Cyrus Medill. Though he is to all appearances flesh and blood, he is, strange to say, commonly known in Toledo as the Aluminum Man. But when he sits in his club window with two or three Iron Men, and the White Pine Man, and the Brass Man, they look very much as you and I do, only more so, if you know what I mean.

Now during the Christmas holidays of 1919 there took place in Toledo, counting only the people with the italicized the, forty-one dinner parties, sixteen dances, six luncheons, male and female, twelve teas, four stag dinners, two weddings, and thirteen bridge parties. It was the cumulative effect of all this that moved Perry Parkhurst on the twenty-ninth day of December to a decision.

This Medill girl would marry him and she wouldn't marry him. She was having such a good time that she hated to take such a definite step. Meanwhile, their secret engagement had got so long that it seemed as if any day it might break off of its own weight. A little man named Warburton, who knew it all, persuaded Perry to superman her, to get a marriage license and go up to the Medill house and tell her she'd have to marry him at once or call it

off forever. So he presented himself, his heart, his license, and his ultimatum, and within five minutes they were in the midst of a violent quarrel, a burst of sporadic open fighting such as occurs near the end of all long wars and engagements. It brought about one of those ghastly lapses in which two people who are in love pull up sharp, look at each other coolly and think it's all been a mistake. Afterward they usually kiss wholesomely and assure the other person it was all their fault. Say it all was my fault! Say it was! I want to hear you say it!

But while reconciliation was trembling in the air, while each was, in a measure, stalling it off, so that they might the more voluptuously and sentimentally enjoy it when it came, they were permanently interrupted by a twenty-minute phone call for Betty from a garrulous aunt. At the end of eighteen minutes Perry Parkhurst, urged on by pride and suspicion and injured dignity, put on his long fur coat, picked up his light brown soft hat, and stalked out the door.

"It's all over," he muttered brokenly as he tried to jam his car into first. "It's all over— if I have to choke you for an hour, damn you!". The last to the car, which had been standing some time and was quite cold.

He drove downtown— that is, he got into a snow rut that led him downtown. He sat slouched down very low in his seat, much too dispirited to care where he went.

In front of the Clarendon Hotel he was hailed from the sidewalk by a bad man named Baily, who had big teeth and lived at the hotel and had never been in love.

"Perry," said the bad man softly when the roadster drew up beside him at the curb, "I've got six quarts of the doggonedest still champagne you ever tasted. A third of it's yours, Perry, if you'll come up-stairs and help Martin Macy and me drink it."

"Baily," said Perry tensely, "I'll drink your champagne. I'll drink every drop of it, I don't care if it kills me."

"Shut up, you nut!" said the bad man gently. "They don't put wood alcohol in champagne. This is the stuff that proves the world is more than six thousand years old. It's so ancient that the cork is petrified. You have to pull it with a stone drill."

"Take me up-stairs," said Perry moodily. "If that cork sees my heart it'll fall out from pure mortification."

The room up-stairs was full of those innocent hotel pictures of little girls eating apples and sitting in swings and talking to dogs. The other decorations were neckties and a pink man reading a pink paper devoted to ladies in pink tights.

"When you have to go into the highways and byways—" said the pink man, looking reproachfully at Baily and Perry.

"Hello, Martin Macy," said Perry shortly, "where's this stone-age champagne?"

"What's the rush? This isn't an operation, understand. This is a party."

Perry sat down dully and looked disapprovingly at all the neckties.

Baily leisurely opened the door of a wardrobe and brought out six handsome bottles.

"Take off that darn fur coat!" said Martin Macy to Perry. "Or maybe you'd like to have us open all the windows."

"Give me champagne," said Perry.

"Going to the Townsends' circus ball to-night?"

"Am not!"

"'Vited?"

"Uh-huh."

"Why not go?"

"Oh, I'm sick of parties," exclaimed Perry. "I'm sick of 'em. I've been to so many that I'm sick of 'em."

"Maybe you're going to the Howard Tates' party?"

"No, I tell you; I'm sick of 'em."

"Well," said Macy consolingly, "the Tates' is just for college kids anyways."

"I tell you—"

"I thought you'd be going to one of 'em anyways. I see by the papers you haven't missed a one this Christmas."

"Hm," grunted Perry morosely.

He would never go to any more parties. Classical phrases played in his mind— that side of his life was closed, closed. Now when a man says "closed, closed" like that, you can be pretty sure that some woman has double-closed him, so to speak. Perry was also thinking that other classical thought, about how cowardly suicide is. A noble thought that one— warm and inspiring. Think of all the fine men we should lose if suicide were not so cowardly!

An hour later was six o'clock, and Perry had lost all resemblance to the young man in the liniment advertisement. He looked like a rough draft for a riotous cartoon. They were singing— an impromptu song of Baily's improvisation:

"One Lump Perry, the parlor snake, Famous through the city for the way he drinks his tea; Plays with it, toys with it Makes no noise with it, Balanced on a napkin on his well-trained knee—"

"Trouble is," said Perry, who had just banged his hair with Baily's comb and was tying an orange tie round it to get the effect of Julius Caesar, "that you

fellas can't sing worth a damn. Soon's I leave the air and start singing tenor you start singin' tenor too."

"'M a natural tenor," said Macy gravely. "Voice lacks cultivation, tha's all. Gotta natural voice, m'aunt used say. Naturally good singer."

"Singers, singers, all good singers," remarked Baily, who was at the telephone. "No, not the cabaret; I want night egg. I mean some dog-gone clerk 'at's got food— food! I want—"

"Julius Caesar," announced Perry, turning round from the mirror. "Man of iron will and stern 'termination."

"Shut up!" yelled Baily. "Say, iss Mr. Baily Sen' up enormous supper. Use y'own judgment. Right away."

He connected the receiver and the hook with some difficulty, and then with his lips closed and an expression of solemn intensity in his eyes went to the lower drawer of his dresser and pulled it open.

"Lookit!" he commanded. In his hands he held a truncated garment of pink gingham.

"Pants," he exclaimed gravely. "Lookit!"

This was a pink blouse, a red tie, and a Buster Brown collar.

"Lookit!" he repeated. "Costume for the Townsends' circus ball. I'm li'l' boy carries water for the elephants."

Perry was impressed in spite of himself.

"I'm going to be Julius Caesar," he announced after a moment of concentration.

"Thought you weren't going!" said Macy.

"Me? Sure I'm goin', Never miss a party. Good for the nerves— like celery."

"Caesar!" scoffed Baily. "Can't be Caesar! He is not about a circus. Caesar's Shakespeare. Go as a clown."

Perry shook his head.

"Nope; Caesar,"

"Caesar?"

"Sure. Chariot."

Light dawned on Baily.

"That's right. Good idea."

Perry looked round the room searchingly.

"You lend me a bathrobe and this tie," he said finally. Baily considered.

"No good."

"Sure, tha's all I need. Caesar was a savage. They can't kick if I come as Caesar, if he was a savage."

"No," said Baily, shaking his head slowly. "Get a costume over at a costumer's. Over at Nolak's."

"Closed up."

"Find out."

After a puzzling five minutes at the phone a small, weary voice managed to convince Perry that it was Mr. Nolak speaking, and that they would remain open until eight because of the Townsends' ball. Thus assured, Perry ate a great amount of filet mignon and drank his third of the last bottle of champagne. At eight-fifteen the man in the tall hat who stands in front of the Clarendon found him trying to start his roadster.

"Froze up," said Perry wisely. "The cold froze it. The cold air."

"Froze, eh?"

"Yes. Cold air froze it."

"Can't start it?"

"Nope. Let it stand here till summer. One those hot ole August days'll thaw it out awright."

"Goin' let it stand?"

"Sure. Let 'er stand. Take a hot thief to steal it. Gemme taxi."

The man in the tall hat summoned a taxi.

"Where to, mister?"

"Go to Nolak's— costume fella."

ii

MRS. NOLAK was short and ineffectual looking, and on the cessation of the world war had belonged for a while to one of the new nationalities. Owing to unsettled European conditions she had never since been quite sure what she was. The shop in which she and her husband performed their daily stint was dim and ghostly, and peopled with suits of armor and Chinese mandarins, and enormous papier-mâché birds suspended from the ceiling. In a vague background many rows of masks glared eyelessly at the visitor, and there were glass cases full of crowns and scepters, and jewels and enormous stomachers, and paints, and crape hair, and wigs of all colors.

When Perry ambled into the shop Mrs. Nolak was folding up the last troubles of a strenuous day, so she thought, in a drawer full of pink silk stockings.

"Something for you?" she queried pessimistically. "Want costume of Julius Hur, the charioteer."

Mrs. Nolak was sorry, but every stitch of charioteer had been rented long ago. Was it for the Townsends' circus ball?

It was.

"Sorry," she said, "but I don't think there's anything left that's really circus."

This was an obstacle.

"Hm," said Perry. An idea struck him suddenly. "If you've got a piece of canvas I could go's a tent."

"Sorry, but we haven't anything like that. A hardware store is where you'd have to go to. We have some very nice Confederate soldiers."

"No. No soldiers."

"And I have a very handsome king."

He shook his head.

"Several of the gentlemen" she continued hopefully, "are wearing stovepipe hats and swallow-tail coats and going as ringmasters— but we're all out of tall hats. I can let you have some crape hair for a mustache."

"Want somep'n 'stinctive."

"Something— let's see. Well, we have a lion's head, and a goose, and a camel— "

"Camel?" The idea seized Perry's imagination, gripped it fiercely.

"Yes, but It needs two people."

"Camel, That's the idea. Lemme see it."

The camel was produced from his resting place on a top shelf. At first glance he appeared to consist entirely of a very gaunt, cadaverous head and a sizable hump, but on being spread out he was found to possess a dark brown, unwholesome-looking body made of thick, cottony cloth.

"You see it takes two people," explained Mrs. Nolak, holding the camel in frank admiration. "If you have a friend he could be part of it. You see there's sorta pants for two people. One pair is for the fella in front, and the other pair for the fella in back. The fella in front does the lookin' out through these here eyes, an' the fella in back he's just gotta stoop over an' folla the front fella round."

"Put it on," commanded Perry.

Obediently Mrs. Nolak put her tabby-cat face inside the camel's head and turned it from side to side ferociously.

Perry was fascinated.

"What noise does a camel make?"

"What?" asked Mrs. Nolak as her face emerged, somewhat smudgy. "Oh, what noise? Why, he sorta brays."

"Lemme see it in a mirror."

Before a wide mirror Perry tried on the head and turned from side to side appraisingly. In the dim light the effect was distinctly pleasing. The camel's face was a study in pessimism, decorated with numerous abrasions, and it must be admitted that his coat was in that state of general negligence peculiar to camels— in fact, he needed to be cleaned and pressed— but distinctive he

certainly was. He was majestic. He would have attracted attention in any gathering, if only by his melancholy cast of feature and the look of hunger lurking round his shadowy eyes.

"You see you have to have two people," said Mrs. Nolak again.

Perry tentatively gathered up the body and legs and wrapped them about him, tying the hind legs as a girdle round his waist. The effect on the whole was bad. It was even irreverent— like one of those mediaeval pictures of a monk changed into a beast by the ministrations of Satan. At the very best the ensemble resembled a humpbacked cow sitting on her haunches among blankets.

"Don't look like anything at all," objected Perry gloomily.

"No," said Mrs. Nolak; "you see you got to have two people."

A solution flashed upon Perry.

"You got a date to-night?"

"Oh, I couldn't possibly—"

"Oh, come on," said Perry encouragingly. "Sure you can! Here! Be good sport, and climb into these hind legs."

With difficulty he located them, and extended their yawning depths ingratiatingly. But Mrs. Nolak seemed loath. She backed perversely away.

"Oh, no—"

"C'mon! You can be the front if you want to. Or we'll flip a coin."

"Make it worth your while."

Mrs. Nolak set her lips firmly together.

"Now you just stop!" she said with no coyness implied. "None of the gentlemen ever acted up this way before. My husband—"

"You got a husband?" demanded Perry. "Where is he?"

"He's home."

"Wha's telephone number?"

After considerable parley he obtained the telephone number pertaining to the Nolak penates and got into communication with that small, weary voice he had heard once before that day. But Mr. Nolak, though taken off his guard and somewhat confused by Perry's brilliant flow of logic, stuck staunchly to his point. He refused firmly, but with dignity, to help out Mr. Parkhurst in the capacity of back part of a camel.

Having rung off, or rather having been rung off on, Perry sat down on a three-legged stool to think it over. He named over to himself those friends on whom he might call, and then his mind paused as Betty Medill's name hazily and sorrowfully occurred to him. He had a sentimental thought. He would ask her. Their love affair was over, but she could not refuse this last request. Surely it was not much to ask— to help him keep up his end of social obligation for

one short night. And if she insisted, she could be the front part of the camel and he would go as the back. His magnanimity pleased him. His mind even turned to rosy-colored dreams of a tender reconciliation inside the camel— there hidden away from all the world....

"Now you'd better decide right off."

The bourgeois voice of Mrs. Nolak broke in upon his mellow fancies and roused him to action. He went to the phone and called up the Medill house. Miss Betty was out; had gone out to dinner.

Then, when all seemed lost, the camel's back wandered curiously into the store. He was a dilapidated individual with a cold in his head and a general trend about him of downwardness. His cap was pulled down low on his head, and his chin was pulled down low on his chest, his coat hung down to his shoes, he looked run-down, down at the heels, and— Salvation Army to the contrary— down and out. He said that he was the taxicab-driver that the gentleman had hired at the Clarendon Hotel. He had been instructed to wait outside, but he had waited some time, and a suspicion had grown upon him that the gentleman had gone out the back way with purpose to defraud him— gentlemen sometimes did— so he had come in. He sank down onto the three-legged stool.

"Wanta go to a party?" demanded Perry sternly.

"I gotta work," answered the taxi-driver lugubriously. "I gotta keep my job."

"It's a very good party."

"'S a very good job."

"Come on!" urged Perry. "Be a good fella. See— it's pretty!" He held the camel up and the taxi-driver looked at it cynically.

"Huh!"

Perry searched feverishly among the folds of the cloth.

"See!" he cried enthusiastically, holding up a selection of folds. "This is your part. You don't even have to talk. All you have to do is to walk— and sit down occasionally. You do all the sitting down. Think of it. I'm on my feet all the time and you can sit down some of the time. The only time I can sit down is when we're lying down, and you can sit down when— oh, any time. See?"

"What's 'at thing?" demanded the individual dubiously. "A shroud?"

"Not at all," said Perry indignantly. "It's a camel."

"Huh?"

Then Perry mentioned a sum of money, and the conversation left the land of grunts and assumed a practical tinge. Perry and the taxi-driver tried on the camel in front of the mirror.

"You can't see it," explained Perry, peering anxiously out through the eyeholes, "but honestly, ole man, you look sim'ly great! Honestly!"

A grunt from the hump acknowledged this somewhat dubious compliment.

"Honestly, you look great!" repeated Perry enthusiastically. "Move round a little."

The hind legs moved forward, giving the effect of a huge cat-camel hunching his back preparatory to a spring.

"No; move sideways."

The camel's hips went neatly out of joint; a hula dancer would have writhed in envy.

"Good, isn't it?" demanded Perry, turning to Mrs. Nolak for approval.

"It looks lovely," agreed Mrs. Nolak.

"We'll take it," said Perry.

The bundle was stowed under Perry's arm and they left the shop.

"Go to the party!" he commanded as he took his seat in the back.

"What party?"

"Fanzy-dress party."

"Where'bouts is it?"

This presented a new problem. Perry tried to remember, but the names of all those who had given parties during the holidays danced confusedly before his eyes. He could ask Mrs. Nolak, but on looking out the window he saw that the shop was dark. Mrs. Nolak had already faded out, a little black smudge far down the snowy street.

"Drive uptown," directed Perry with fine confidence. "If you see a party, stop. Otherwise I'll tell you when we get there."

He fell into a hazy daydream and his thoughts wandered again to Betty—he imagined vaguely that they had had a disagreement because she refused to go to the party as the back part of the camel. He was just slipping off into a chilly doze when he was wakened by the taxi-driver opening the door and shaking him by the arm.

"Here we are, maybe."

Perry looked out sleepily. A striped awning led from the curb up to a spreading gray stone house, from which issued the low drummy whine of expensive jazz. He recognized the Howard Tate house.

"Sure," he said emphatically; "'at's it! Tate's party to-night. Sure, everybody's goin'."

"Say," said the individual anxiously after another look at the awning, "you sure these people ain't gonna romp on me for comin' here?"

Perry drew himself up with dignity.

" 'F anybody says anything to you, just tell 'em you're part of my costume."

The visualization of himself as a thing rather than a person seemed to reassure the individual.

"All right," he said reluctantly.

Perry stepped out under the shelter of the awning and began unrolling the camel.

"Let's go," he commanded.

Several minutes later a melancholy, hungry-looking camel, emitting clouds of smoke from his mouth and from the tip of his noble hump, might have been seen crossing the threshold of the Howard Tate residence, passing a startled footman without so much as a snort, and heading directly for the main stairs that led up to the ballroom. The beast walked with a peculiar gait which varied between an uncertain lockstep and a stampede— but can best be described by the word "halting." The camel had a halting gait— and as he walked he alternately elongated and contracted like a gigantic concertina.

iii

THE HOWARD Tates are, as every one who lives in Toledo knows, the most formidable people in town. Mrs. Howard Tate was a Chicago Todd before she became a Toledo Tate, and the family generally affect that conscious simplicity which has begun to be the earmark of American aristocracy. The Tates have reached the stage where they talk about pigs and farms and look at you icy-eyed if you are not amused. They have begun to prefer retainers rather than friends as dinner guests, spend a lot of money in a quiet way, and, having lost all sense of competition, are in process of growing quite dull.

The dance this evening was for little Millicent Tate, and though all ages were represented, the dancers were mostly from school and college— the younger married crowd was at the Townsends' circus ball up at the Tallyho Club. Mrs. Tate was standing just inside tie ballroom, following Millicent round with her eyes, and beaming whenever she caught her bye. Beside her were two middle-aged sycophants, who were saying what a perfectly exquisite child Millicent was. It was at this moment that Mrs. Tate was grasped firmly by the skirt and her youngest daughter, Emily, aged eleven, hurled herself with an "Oof!" into her mother's arms.

"Why, Emily, what's the trouble?"

"Mamma," said Emily, wild-eyed but voluble, "there's something out on the stairs."

"What?"

"There's a thing out on the stairs, mamma. I think it's a big dog, mamma, but it doesn't look like a dog."

"What do you mean, Emily?"

The sycophants waved their heads sympathetically.

"Mamma, it looks like a— like a camel."

Mrs. Tate laughed.

"You saw a mean old shadow, dear, that's all."

"No, I didn't. No, it was some kind of thing, mamma— big. I was going down-stairs to see if there were any more people, and this dog or something, he was coming up-stairs. Kinda funny, mamma, like he was lame. And then he saw me and gave a sort of growl, and then he slipped at the top of the landing, and I ran."

Mrs. Tate's laugh faded.

"The child must have seen something," she said.

The sycophants agreed that the child must have seen something— and suddenly all three women took an instinctive step away from the door as the sounds of muffled steps were audible just outside.

And then three startled gasps rang out as a dark brown form rounded the corner, and they saw what was apparently a huge beast looking down at them hungrily.

"Oof!" cried Mrs. Tate.

"O-o-oh!" cried the ladies in a chorus.

The camel suddenly humped his back, and the gasps turned to shrieks.

"Oh— look!"

"What is it?"

The dancing stopped, bat the dancers hurrying over got quite a different impression of the invader; in fact, the young people immediately suspected that it was a stunt, a hired entertainer come to amuse the party. The boys in long trousers looked at it rather disdainfully, and sauntered over with their hands in their pockets, feeling that their intelligence was being insulted. But the girls uttered little shouts of glee.

"It's a camel!"

"Well, if he isn't the funniest!"

The camel stood there uncertainly, swaying slightly from side to aide, and seeming to take in the room in a careful, appraising glance; then as if he had come to an abrupt decision, he turned and ambled swiftly out the door.

Mr. Howard Tate had just come out of the library on the lower floor, and was standing chatting with a young man in the hall. Suddenly they heard the noise of shouting up-stairs, and almost immediately a succession of bumping sounds, followed by the precipitous appearance at the foot of the stairway of a large brown beast that seemed to be going somewhere in a great hurry.

"Now what the devil!" said Mr. Tate, starting.

The beast picked itself up not without dignity and, affecting an air of extreme nonchalance, as if he had just remembered an important

engagement, started at a mixed gait toward the front door. In fact, his front legs began casually to run.

"See here now," said Mr. Tate sternly. "Here! Grab it, Butterfield! Grab it!"

The young man enveloped the rear of the camel in a pair of compelling arms, and, realizing that further locomotion was impossible, the front end submitted to capture and stood resignedly in a state of some agitation. By this time a flood of young people was pouring down-stairs, and Mr. Tate, suspecting everything from an ingenious burglar to an escaped lunatic, gave crisp directions to the young man:

"Hold him! Lead him in here; we'll soon see."

The camel consented to be led into the library, and Mr. Tate, after locking the door, took a revolver from a table drawer and instructed the young man to take the thing's head off. Then he gasped and returned the revolver to its hiding-place.

"Well, Perry Parkhurst!" he exclaimed in amazement.

"Got the wrong party, Mr. Tate," said Perry sheepishly. "Hope I didn't scare you."

"Well— you gave us a thrill, Perry." Realization dawned on him. "You're bound for the Townsends' circus ball."

"That's the general idea."

"Let me introduce Mr. Butterfield, Mr. Parkhurst." Then turning to Perry; "Butterfield is staying with us for a few days."

"I got a little mixed up," mumbled Perry. "I'm very sorry."

"Perfectly all right; most natural mistake in the world. I've got a clown rig and I'm going down there myself after a while." He turned to Butterfield. "Better change your mind and come down with us."

The young man demurred. He was going to bed.

"Have a drink, Perry?" suggested Mr. Tate.

"Thanks, I will."

"And, say," continued Tate quickly, "I'd forgotten all about your— friend here." He indicated the rear part of the camel. "I didn't mean to seem discourteous. Is it any one I know? Bring him out."

"It's not a friend," explained Perry hurriedly. "I just rented him."

"Does he drink?"

"Do you?" demanded Perry, twisting himself tortuously round.

There was a faint sound of assent.

"Sure he does!" said Mr. Tate heartily. "A really efficient camel ought to be able to drink enough so it'd last him three days."

"Tell you," said Perry anxiously, "he isn't exactly dressed up enough to come out. If you give me the bottle I can hand it back to him and he can take his inside."

From under the cloth was audible the enthusiastic smacking sound inspired by this suggestion. When a butler had appeared with bottles, glasses, and siphon one of the bottles was handed back; thereafter the silent partner could be heard imbibing long potations at frequent intervals.

Thus passed a benign hour. At ten o'clock Mr. Tate decided that they'd better be starting. He donned his clown's costume; Perry replaced the camel's head, arid side by side they traversed on foot the single block between the Tate house and the Tallyho Club.

The circus ball was in full swing. A great tent fly had been put up inside the ballroom and round the walls had been built rows of booths representing the various attractions of a circus side show, but these were now vacated and over the floor swarmed a shouting, laughing medley of youth and color— downs, bearded ladies, acrobats, bareback riders, ringmasters, tattooed men, and charioteers. The Townsends had determined to assure their party of success, so a great quantity of liquor had been surreptitiously brought over from their house and was now flowing freely. A green ribbon ran along the wall completely round the ballroom, with pointing arrows alongside and signs which instructed the uninitiated to "Follow the green line!" The green line led down to the bar, where waited pure punch and wicked punch and plain dark-green bottles.

On the wall above the bar was another arrow, red and very wavy, and under it the slogan: "Now follow this!"

But even amid the luxury of costume and high spirits represented, there, the entrance of the camel created something of a stir, and Perry was immediately surrounded by a curious, laughing crowd attempting to penetrate the identity of this beast that stood by the wide doorway eying the dancers with his hungry, melancholy gaze.

And then Perry saw Betty standing in front of a booth, talking to a comic policeman. She was dressed in the costume of an Egyptian snake-charmer: her tawny hair was braided and drawn through brass rings, the effect crowned with a glittering Oriental tiara. Her fair face was stained to a warm olive glow and on her arms and the half moon of her back writhed painted serpents with single eyes of venomous green. Her feet were in sandals and her skirt was slit to the knees, so that when she walked one caught a glimpse of other slim serpents painted just above her bare ankles. Wound about her neck was a glittering cobra. Altogether a charming costume— one that caused the more nervous among the older women to shrink away from her when she passed,

and the more troublesome ones to make great talk about "shouldn't be allowed" and "perfectly disgraceful."

But Perry, peering through the uncertain eyes of the camel, saw only her face, radiant, animated, and glowing with excitement, and her arms and shoulders, whose mobile, expressive gestures made her always the outstanding figure in any group. He was fascinated and his fascination exercised a sobering effect on him. With a growing clarity the events of the day came back— rage rose within him, and with a half-formed intention of taking her away from the crowd he started toward her— or rather he elongated slightly, for he had neglected to issue the preparatory command necessary to locomotion.

But at this point fickle Kismet, who for a day had played with him bitterly and sardonically, decided to reward him in full for the amusement he had afforded her. Kismet turned the tawny eyes of the snake-charmer to the camel. Kismet led her to lean toward the man beside her and say, "Who's that? That camel?"

"Darned if I know."

But a little man named Warburton, who knew it all, found it necessary to hazard an opinion:

"It came in with Mr. Tate. I think part of it's probably Warren Butterfield, the architect from New York, who's visiting the Tates."

Something stirred in Betty Medill— that age-old interest of the provincial girl in the visiting man.

"Oh," she said casually after a slight pause.

At the end of the next dance Betty and her partner finished up within a few feet of the camel. With the informal audacity that was the key-note of the evening she reached out and gently rubbed the camel's nose.

"Hello, old camel."

The camel stirred uneasily.

"You 'fraid of me?" said Betty, lifting her eyebrows in reproof. "Don't be. You see I'm a snake-charmer, but I'm pretty good at camels too."

The camel bowed very low and some one made the obvious remark about beauty and the beast.

Mrs. Townsend approached the group.

"Well, Mr. Butterfield," she said helpfully, "I wouldn't have recognised you."

Perry bowed again and smiled gleefully behind his mask.

"And who is this with you?" she inquired.

"Oh," said Perry, his voice muffled by the thick cloth and quite unrecognizable, "he isn't a fellow, Mrs. Townsend. He's just part of my costume."

Mrs. Townsend laughed and moved away. Perry turned again to Betty,

"So," he thought, "this is how much she cares! On the very day of our final rupture she starts a flirtation with another man— an absolute stranger."

On an impulse he gave her a soft nudge with his shoulder and waved his head suggestively toward the hall, making it clear that he desired her to leave her partner and accompany him.

"By-by, Rus," she called to her partner. "This old camel's got me. Where we going, Prince of Beasts?"

The noble animal made no rejoinder, but stalked gravely along in the direction of a secluded nook on the side stairs.

There she seated herself, and the camel, after some seconds of confusion which included gruff orders and sounds of a heated dispute going on in his interior, placed himself beside her— his hind legs stretching out uncomfortably across two steps.

"Well, old egg," said Betty cheerfully, "how do you like our happy party?"

The old egg indicated that he liked it by rolling his head ecstatically and executing a gleeful kick with his hoofs.

"This is the first time that I ever had a tête-à-tête with a man's valet 'round"— she pointed to the hind legs— "or whatever that is."

"Oh," mumbled Perry, "he's deaf and blind."

"I should think you'd feel rather handicapped— you can't very well toddle, even if you want to."

The camel hang his head lugubriously.

"I wish you'd say something," continued Betty sweetly. "Say you like me, camel. Say you think I'm beautiful. Say you'd like to belong to a pretty snake-charmer."

The camel would.

"Will you dance with me, camel?"

The camel would try.

Betty devoted half an hour to the camel. She devoted at least half an hour to all visiting men. It was usually sufficient. When she approached a new man the current débutantes were accustomed to scatter right and left like a close column deploying before a machine-gun. And so to Perry Parkhurst was awarded the unique privilege of seeing his love as others saw her. He was flirted with violently!

iv

THIS PARADISE of frail foundation was broken into by the sounds of a general ingress to the ballroom; the cotillion was beginning. Betty and the camel joined the crowd, her brown hand resting lightly on his shoulder, defiantly symbolizing her complete adoption of him.

When they entered the couples were already seating themselves at tables round the walls, and Mrs. Townsend, resplendent as a super bareback rider with rather too rotund calves, was standing in the centre with the ringmaster in charge of arrangements. At a signal to the band every one rose and began to dance.

"Isn't it just slick!" sighed Betty. "Do you think you can possibly dance?"

Perry nodded enthusiastically. He felt suddenly exuberant. After all, he was here incognito talking to his love— he could wink patronizingly at the world.

So Perry danced the cotillion. I say danced, but that is stretching the word far beyond the wildest dreams of the jazziest terpsichorean. He suffered his partner to put her hands on his helpless shoulders and pull him here and there over the floor while he hung his huge head docilely over her shoulder and made futile dummy motions with his feet. His hind legs danced in a manner all their own, chiefly by hopping first on one foot and then on the other. Never being sure whether dancing was going on or not, the hind legs played safe by going through a series of steps whenever the music started playing. So the spectacle was frequently presented of the front part of the camel standing at ease and the rear keeping up a constant energetic motion calculated to rouse a sympathetic perspiration in any soft-hearted observer.

He was frequently favored. He danced first with a tall lady covered with straw who announced jovially that she was a bale of hay and coyly begged him not to eat her.

"I'd like to; you're so sweet," said the camel gallantly.

Each time the ringmaster shouted his call of "Men up!" he lumbered ferociously for Betty with the cardboard wienerwurst or the photograph of the bearded lady or whatever the favor chanced to be. Sometimes he reached her first, but usually his rushes were unsuccessful and resulted in intense interior arguments.

"For Heaven's sake," Perry would snarl, fiercely between his clenched teeth, "get a little pep! I could have gotten her that time if you'd picked your feet up."

"Well, gimme a little warnin'!"

"I did, darn you."

"I can't see a dog-gone thing in here."

"All you have to do is follow me. It's just like dragging a load of sand round to walk with you."

"Maybe you wanta try back hare."

"You shut up! If these people found you in this room they'd give you the worst beating you ever had. They'd take your taxi license away from you!"

Perry surprised himself by the ease with which he made this monstrous threat, but it seemed to have a soporific influence on his companion, for he gave out an "aw gwan" and subsided into abashed silence.

The ringmaster mounted to the top of the piano and waved his hand for silence.

"Prizes!" he cried. "Gather round!"

"Yea! Prizes!"

Self-consciously the circle swayed forward. The rather pretty girl who had mustered the nerve to come as a bearded lady trembled with excitement, thinking to be rewarded for an evening's hideousness. The man who had spent the afternoon having tattoo marks painted on him skulked on the edge of the crowd, blushing furiously when any one told him he was sure to get it.

"Lady and gent performers of this circus," announced the ringmaster jovially, "I am sure we will all agree that a good time has been had by all. We will now bestow honor where honor is due by bestowing the prizes. Mrs. Townsend has asked me to bestow the prices. Now, fellow performers, the first prize is for that lady who has displayed this evening the most striking, becoming"— at this point the bearded lady sighed resignedly— "and original costume." Here the bale of hay pricked up her ears. "Now I am sure that the decision which has been agreed upon will be unanimous with all here present. The first prize goes to Miss Betty Medill, the charming Egyptian snake-charmer." There was a burst of applause, chiefly masculine, and Miss Betty Medill, blushing beautifully through her olive paint, was passed up to receive her award. With a tender glance the ringmaster handed down to her a huge bouquet of orchids.

"And now," he continued, looking round him, "the other prize is for that man who has the most amusing and original costume. This prize goes without dispute to a guest in our midst, a gentleman who is visiting here but whose stay we all hope will be long and merry— in short, to the noble camel who has entertained us all by his hungry look and his brilliant dancing throughout the evening."

He ceased and there was a violent clapping, and yeaing, for it was a popular choice. The prize, a large box of cigars, was put aside for the camel, as he was anatomically unable to accept it in person.

"And now," continued the ringmaster, "we will wind up the cotillion with the marriage of Mirth to Folly!

"Form for the grand wedding march, the beautiful snake-charmer and the noble camel in front!"

Betty skipped forward cheerily and wound an olive arm round the camel's neck. Behind them formed the procession of little boys, little girls, country jakes, fat ladies, thin men, sword-swallowers, wild men of Borneo, and armless wonders, many of them well in their cups, all of them excited and happy and dazzled by the flow of light and color round them, and by the familiar faces, strangely unfamiliar under bizarre wigs and barbaric paint. The voluptuous chords of the wedding march done in blasphemous syncopation issued in a delirious blend from the trombones and saxophones— and the march began.

"Aren't you glad, camel?" demanded Betty sweetly as they stepped off. "Aren't you glad we're going to be married and you're going to belong to the nice snake-charmer ever afterward?"

The camel's front legs pranced, expressing excessive joy.

"Minister! Minister! Where's the minister?" cried voices out of the revel. "Who's going to be the clergyman?"

The head of Jumbo, obese negro, waiter at the Tally-ho Club for many years, appeared rashly through a half-opened pantry door.

"Oh, Jumbo!"

"Get old Jumbo. He's the fella!"

"Come on, Jumbo. How 'bout marrying us a couple?"

"Yea!"

Jumbo was seized by four comedians, stripped of his apron, and escorted to a raised daïs at the head of the ball. There his collar was removed and replaced back side forward with ecclesiastical effect. The parade separated into two lines, leaving an aisle for the bride and groom.

"Lawdy, man," roared Jumbo, "Ah got ole Bible 'n' ev'ythin', sho nuff."

He produced a battered Bible from an interior pocket.

"Yea! Jumbo's got a Bible!"

"Razor, too, I'll bet!"

Together the snake-charmer and the camel ascended the cheering aisle and stopped in front of Jumbo.

"Where's yo license, camel?"

A man near by prodded Perry.

"Give him a piece of paper. Anything'll do."

Perry fumbled confusedly in his pocket, found a folded paper, and pushed it out through the camel's mouth. Holding it upside down Jumbo pretended to scan it earnestly.

"Dis yeah's a special camel's license," he said. "Get you ring ready, camel."

Inside the camel Perry turned round and addressed his worse half.

"Gimme a ring, for Heaven's sake!"

"I ain't got none," protested a weary voice.

"You have. I saw it."

"I ain't goin' to take it offen my hand."

"If you don't I'll kill you."

There was a gasp and Perry felt a huge affair of rhinestone and brass inserted into his hand.

Again he was nudged from the outside.

"Speak up!"

"I do!" cried Perry quickly.

He heard Betty's responses given in a debonair tone, and even in this burlesque the sound thrilled him.

Then he had pushed the rhinestone through a tear in the camel's coat and was slipping it on her finger, muttering ancient and historic words after Jumbo. He didn't want any one to know about this ever. His one idea was to slip away without having to disclose his identity, for Mr. Tate had so far kept his secret well. A dignified young man, Perry— and this might injure his infant law practice.

"Embrace the bride!"

"Unmask, camel, and kiss her!"

Instinctively his heart beat high as Betty turned to him laughingly and began to strike the card-board muzzle. He felt his self-control giving way, he longed to surround her with his arms and declare his identity and kiss those lips that smiled only a foot away— when suddenly the laughter and applause round them died off and a curious hush fell over the hall. Perry and Betty looked up in surprise. Jumbo had given vent to a huge "Hello!" in such a startled voice that all eyes were bent on him.

"Hello!" he said again. He had turned round the camel's marriage license, which he had been holding upside down, produced spectacles, and was studying it agonizingly.

"Why," he exclaimed, and in the pervading silence his words were heard plainly by every one in the room, "this yeah's a sho-nuff marriage permit."

"What?"

"Huh?"

"Say it again, Jumbo!"

"Sure you can read?"

Jumbo waved them to silence and Perry's blood burned to fire in his veins as he realized the break he had made.

"Yassuh!" repeated Jumbo. "This yeah's a sho-nuff license, and the pa'ties concerned one of 'em is dis yeah young lady, Miz Betty Medill, and th' other's Mistah Perry Pa'khurst."

There was a general gasp, and a low rumble broke out as all eyes fell on the camel. Betty shrank away from him quickly, her tawny eyes giving out sparks of fury.

"Is you Mistah Pa'khurst, you camel?"

Perry made no answer. The crowd pressed up closer and stared at him. He stood frozen rigid with embarrassment, his cardboard face still hungry and sardonic as he regarded the ominous Jumbo.

"Y'all bettah speak up!" said Jumbo slowly, "this yeah's a mighty serious mattah. Outside mah duties at this club ah happens to be a sho-nuff minister in the Firs' Cullud Baptis' Church. It done look to me as though y'all is gone an' got married."

v

THE SCENE that followed will go down forever in the annals of the Tallyho Club. Stout matrons fainted, one hundred per cent Americans swore, wild-eyed débutantes babbled in lightning groups instantly formed and instantly dissolved, and a great buzz of chatter, virulent yet oddly subdued, hummed through the chaotic ballroom. Feverish youths swore they would kill Perry or Jumbo or themselves or some one, and the Baptis' preacheh was besieged by a tempestuous covey of clamorous amateur lawyers, asking questions, making threats, demanding precedents, ordering the bonds annulled, and especially trying to ferret out any hint of prearrangement in what had occurred.

In the corner Mrs. Townsend was crying softly on the shoulder of Mr. Howard Tate, who was trying vainly to comfort her; they were exchanging "all my fault's" volubly and voluminously. Outside on a snow-covered walk Mr. Cyrus Medill, the Aluminum Man, was being paced slowly up and down between two brawny charioteers, giving vent now to a string of unrepeatables, now to wild pleadings that they'd just let him get at Jumbo. He was facetiously attired for the evening as a wild man of Borneo, and the most exacting stage-manager would have acknowledged any improvement in casting the part to be quite impossible.

Meanwhile the two principals held the real centre of the stage. Betty Medill— or was it Betty Parkhurst?— storming furiously, was surrounded by the plainer girls— the prettier ones were too busy talking about her to pay much attention to her— and over on the other side of the hall stood the camel, still intact except for his headpiece, which dangled pathetically on his chest.

Perry was earnestly engaged in making protestations of his innocence to a ring of angry, puzzled men. Every few minutes, just as he had apparently proved his case, some one would mention the marriage certificate, and the inquisition would begin again.

A girl named Marion Cloud, considered the second best belle of Toledo, changed the gist of the situation by a remark she made to Betty.

"Well," she said maliciously, "it'll all blow over, dear. The courts will annul it without question."

Betty's angry tears dried miraculously in her eyes, her lips shut tight together, and she looked stonily at Marion. Then she rose and, scattering her sympathizers right and left, walked directly across the room to Perry, who stared at her in terror. Again silence crept down upon the room.

"Will you have the decency to grant me five minutes' conversation— or wasn't that included in your plans?"

He nodded, his mouth unable to form words.

Indicating coldly that he was to follow her she walked out into the hall with her chin uptilted and headed for the privacy of one of the little card-rooms.

Perry started after her, but was brought to a jerky halt by the failure of his hind legs to function.

"You stay here!" he commanded savagely.

"I can't," whined a voice from the hump, "unless you get out first and let me get out."

Perry hesitated, but unable any longer to tolerate the eyes of the curious crowd he muttered a command and the camel moved carefully from the room on its four legs.

Betty was waiting for him.

"Well," she began furiously, "you see what you've done! You and that crazy license! I told you you shouldn't have gotten it!"

"My dear girl, I— "

"Don't say 'dear girl' to me! Save that for your real wife if you ever get one after this disgraceful performance. And don't try to pretend it wasn't all arranged. You know you gave that colored waiter money! You know you did! Do you mean to say you didn't try to marry me?"

"No— of course— "

"Yes, you'd better admit it! You tried it, and now what are you going to do? Do you know my father's nearly crazy? It'll serve you right if he tries to kill you. He'll take his gun and put some cold steel in you. Even if this wed—
this thing can be annulled it'll hang over me all the rest of my life!"

Perry could not resist quoting softly: "'Oh, camel, wouldn't you like to belong to the pretty snake-charmer for all your— "

"Shut-up!" cried Betty.

There was a pause.

"Betty," said Perry finally, "there's only one thing to do that will really get us out clear. That's for you to marry me."

"Marry you!"

"Yes. Really it's the only— "

"You shut up! I wouldn't marry you if— if— "

"I know. If I were the last man on earth. But if you care anything about your reputation— "

"Reputation!" she cried. "You're a nice one to think about my reputation now. Why didn't you think about my reputation before you hired that horrible Jumbo to— to— "

Perry tossed up his hands hopelessly.

"Very well. I'll do anything you want. Lord knows I renounce all claims!"

"But," said a new voice, "I don't."

Perry and Betty started, and she put her hand to her heart.

"For Heaven's sake, what was that?"

"It's me," said the camel's back.

In a minute Perry had whipped off the camel's skin, and a lax, limp object, his clothes hanging on him damply, his hand clenched tightly on an almost empty bottle, stood defiantly before them.

"Oh," cried Betty, "you brought that object in here to frighten me! You told me he was deaf— that awful person!"

The camel's back sat down on a chair with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Don't talk 'at way about me, lady. I ain't no person. I'm your husband."

"Husband!"

The cry was wrung simultaneously from Betty and Perry.

"Why, sure. I'm as much your husband as that gink is. The smoke didn't marry you to the camel's front. He married you to the whole camel. Why, that's my ring you got on your finger!"

With a little yelp she snatched the ring from her finger and flung it passionately at the floor.

"What's all this?" demanded Perry dazedly.

"Jes' that you better fix me an' fix me right. If you don't I'm a-gonna have the same claim you got to bein' married to her!"

"That's bigamy," said Perry, turning gravely to Betty.

Then came the supreme moment of Perry's evening, the ultimate chance on which he risked his fortunes. He rose and looked first at Betty, where she sat weakly, aghast at this new complication, and then at the individual who swayed from side to side on his chair, uncertainly, menacingly.

"Very well," said Perry slowly to the individual, "you can have her. Betty, I'm going to prove to you that as far as I'm concerned our marriage was entirely accidental. I'm going to renounce utterly my rights to have you as my wife, and give you to— to the man whose ring you wear— your lawful husband."

There was a pause and four horror-stricken eyes were turned on him,

"Good-by, Betty," he said brokenly. "Don't forget me in your new-found happiness. I'm going to leave for the Far West on the morning train. Think of me kindly, Betty."

With a last glance at them he turned and his head rested on his chest as his hand touched the door-knob.

"Good-by," he repeated. He turned the door-knob.

But at this sound the snakes and silk and tawny hair precipitated themselves violently toward him.

"Oh, Perry, don't leave me! Perry, Perry, take me with you!"

Her tears flowed damply on his neck. Calmly he folded his arms about her.

"I don't care," she cried. "I love you and if you can wake up a minister at this hour and have it done over again I'll go West with you."

Over her shoulder the front part of the camel looked at the back part of the camel— and they exchanged a particularly subtle, esoteric sort of wink that only true camels can understand.

End