PAST MASTERS 190

Theodore Dreiser
Arthur Conan Doyle
Beatrice Grimshaw
Henry Lawson
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and more

PAST MASTERS 190

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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Beatrice Grimshaw

1870-1953

Blue Book, Feb 1941

DARU, in the Far West of Papua, which lies in the Coral Sea above the loneliest side of Australia, which is at the end of the world— Daru never changes.

I would go back to Daru. I would see again the flaming woods of claret and gilt and amber croton trees, afire like a spilled sunset against the parrot-green of sago and mango. I would hear the black waves of the wicked Gulf of Papua, grave of noble men, hissing on dark sands below the two-three houses of the tiny town. I would feel the enormous loneliness of the place, the silent menace of its untamed hinterlands, press on me like a cloud; I would sip, dangerously, the burning ichor that is there distilled from utter freedom; from the sense that no one lives, no one knows, no one cares. For two steps beyond Daru, the wild begins; and after the wild, the unknown.

And Daru does not change. World troubles do not touch it. World news does not come to it. It sits alone.

January, in Papua, is the hot month of the year. Will Perry, the planter who had come down from the Fly Estuary to the little station of Daru, with a tail of native laborers to "sign off," was as well accustomed to the searing climate of New Guinea as any man might be who had lived there seven years without change. Stan Salter, the young patrol officer, member of a service as romantic and as famous as the Northwest Mounties or the Cape Police, was tough by nature and by training. But even they found themselves obliged to complain of this particular summer day.

In the store, where one bought tinned meats and fruits, tinned bacon and eggs, tinned cabbages,and puddings, they met, each man with his sleeves cut short and his shirt open to the waist, dashing the streams of perspiration from wet foreheads with the flat of dripping arms.

"Never knew it worse in January," tall Will Perry, worn too thin by fever and by heat, said, staring with sun-paled blue eyes at the hot waves bursting on the sand below the house. Salter, four and twenty to Perry's thirty, lately from Melbourne, sophisticated and educated and trained in the anthropological lore that Will despised, answered obliquely: "It takes a few hundred years of this environment to adapt oneself like the natives."

Will was drinking a bottle of beer out of the neck. It was not much cooler than hot tea, but beer is always beer.... He finished it before he replied, wiping his mouth: "There's where you new chums full of university rot are wrong. There's men who can live like natives. And like it. There was Cook— no relation

to James— who went up the Turama and stayed there for fifteen years. And brought a wife. And she had a baby and died, because she was what the natives call ' 'nother kind.' And anyhow the Turama's no place to have kids in. Cook was drowned in the river bore. And now there's Jan Cook."

"Never met him," Salter said, screwing the neck of a bottle. "A lump of ice would be just *it*," he regretfully told the storekeeper; and then, because a patrol officer must be hard, laughed and added: "One of the little things you learn not to want."

"*Her*," corrected Perry. "Man alive, if you weren't so new to the country, you'd know all about Jan. Even though she doesn't advertise— like Bobs."

"Who was Bobs?" carelessly inquired the younger man, and then without waiting for an answer: "Who's this?"

PERRY set down the emptied bottle, looked out for a moment into the fiery dazzle of the coral roadway, drew back his head and said: "January Cook."

"What did they call her that for?" Salter asked curiously. The girl who was swinging lightly, barefoot, toward the store, was handsome, he thought, rather than pretty; something strange and wild about her; face, hands and feet burned to darkish copper, hair black, thick, short and outstanding; eyes so definitely blue, and mouth so sharply cut, that you couldn't give her a drop of native blood; and yet— yet she did remind you, somehow, of the dark girls in the village at the other side of Daru; those slim, half-naked girls who dance on moonlight nights, dance with the very heart of passionate savagery in them. Queer... She was dressed in the sort of cotton frock that white women wear; she had no shoes, but every finger- and toe-nail was smoothed and tended; she came into the store, nodded to Perry, and asked the storekeeper, in perfect English and with a cultivated accent, for some tea.... Not a native by so much as one sixteenth; and yet—

Salter saw, suddenly, that Perry was staring hard at Jan. Why, he thought, the chap's in love with this young savage! He looked hard at January Cook again. And she seemed to him, now, more than handsome. It might be because he had sensed the passion for January of the other man; it might be because he saw the girl nearer. But she was on the moment, beautiful, desirable. And she did not care whether he was alive or dead. You could see that.

You didn't much like it— if you were a young patrol officer, with a good opinion of yourself.

The girl took her parcel away with her, passing so near to Perry as she went out that the starched folds of her short cotton frock brushed against him. Salter heard Perry catch his breath. But neither he nor January spoke.

WHEN the girl was gone, Salter demanded: "What's she called that for? Where does she come from? Why's she knocking about Daru by herself?"

"If it's any business of yours," the other told him, "she was called January by Cook because she was born in January, in the hottest weather, and it killed her mother, as I said; but she's always been a sort of hot-weather kid—loves it when the thermometer goes to a hundred with rain in the air, seems to sort of blossom out— it would finish her if you took her to Australia, but she's never been; when Cook was drowned by the Turama bore, and she was only three months old, the natives took her and nursed her; and when she was eleven, the Mission began making a fuss about it, and they took her over. She's twenty-one now, and her own mistress, but she lives more or less with a retired Mission Lady who looks after her— and you might as well set a white rabbit to look after a wildcat. Any more questions?"

"One more," the patrol officer coolly answered. "Are you going to marry her?"

THE elderly storekeeper leaned bare elbows on his counter, and grinned. This was pepper; this was fun. Two white men almost at each other's throats because of Jan Cook—a decent girl (there's never any doubt, pro or con, about that, in tropical houses, with walls almost open and native servants silently prowling night and day) but who was certainly— odd.

Who had a Papuan sorcerer for a fosterbrother, and used to go off to the bush with him, God-knows-what queer business— nothing scandalous, of course ; brothers were brothers, among the natives— but she'd be away half the night sometimes, and come back with her face all shut up, and not a word to throw to a dog, or a deserving trader. And she knew the drum-talk, which no white person, you might say, knows. And the old Mission Lady was worried about her—because, she said, she didn't see how Jan Cook was ever to get decently married; which the old Mission Lady, being an old maid herself, seemed to think a good deal more important than in the view of the (sometime married) trader, it was.

Perry, the thin, tall man with the sun-faded eyes, was in love with her, of course; but nobody knew what she thought about it; and here was the new patrol officer, asking him was he engaged to her! As like as not Perry would paste him one on the snoot— Government or no Government— for his trouble...

But there was to be no such lightening of the weight of the long island day for a deserving trader, after all. Because, into the very midst of that tense situation, into the dusky store with its clinking billy-cans and oily-smelling tobacco, and piles of calicoes and strings of beads, into the out-back solitude of

Daru where no one ever came, Thora Cummings erupted : Pencil-slim, perfectly clad, with the newest sandal and the newest eye-veil, the latest make-up and a mass of cleverly coiffed light curls, this epitome of civilization, and of Sydney, and of lands beyond the Coral Sea— Thora, poised, sophisticated, perfect, came in and took possession of Daru, A crackling fire of questions and answers put Perry abreast of the situation. Thora, the sister of the Assistant Resident Magistrate, had been expected in a month or so, on a visit to Daru station. She had changed her mind and come earlier. The schooner that brought her across from Thursday Island lay at the jetty; and the A.R.M., greeting her, had asked her to go on to his house and on the way, tell the storekeeper to hurry up certain goods.

That was that. The storekeeper became busy. Thora swept the bnilding and the men with one comprehensive smile, and said she'd be going. And Perry, who had hardly shut his astonished mouth since she came in, waked up and said he'd show her the way. Salter had meant to do it; Salter, with the swift decision that comes to men in girl-starved surroundings, had already told himself that this was his bit of skirt; that there wasn't another white man in the place outside of the storekeeper and the (married) "Customs" and the A.R.M. and Perry— that the coast was clear, and he was in luck.

And then Perry, that mad hatter from the back of beyond, Jan's admirer too, for what that might mean— Perry had jumped at her like a dog at a bone, and gone off down the blazing coral walk among the flaming croton trees, with this bit of Sydney in its white frock and its cobweb stockings. And they were out of sight; and in the store and beyond it, there was no sound save the creaming hiss of waves falling upon black sand.

Salter swung away from the store. Cripps, the storekeeper, left alone, looked after him and grinned. An old man, out of things and set away in the top gallery of life for the rest of his days, he might yet, he thought to himself, see something. entertaining on the stage below, before very long.

JAN, going home, passed like a splash of light thrown up from the sea; she had the native knack of moving as natural objects move, swiftly and almost unnoticed. But Cripps saw her; there was little he did not see. He shouted after her, "Hi, Jan, your fancy man's gone off with the other girl!" and watched for the result. There was none. The girl did not even turn her head. She went by with the sunlight playing in her hair, striking lights of red and amber into its dense black mass. Cripps took his eyes off her for a moment; in that moment she was gone. "Like the natives," he thought. "I'll lay she has their trick of runnin' backward when she likes!"

He wondered for a minute or so whether she really fancied Perry or not. Until the present moment, he had supposed it to be all the other way. But now—

"Well," he thought. "I might as well go down and tally my stuff ashore, as sit here chewin' the rag about people who don't know whether I'm dead or alive, and don't care."

There was a dance that night on the black-sand beach. Perry had seen it all a hundred times, but he wasn't tired of it; he liked, as ever, to stand by the sidelines and let the thrum-thrumming of the lizard-skin drums, the rhythmic bobbing and swaying of paradise headdresses under the flare of torches, the sensuous rapt faces of the dancers, invade him like a stupefying drink. You lost your personality, listening and looking; you shed your sense of place and time. You were sucked into something that led out beyond plain sensuality, never absent; you knew the influence of the nameless forces that lived in the Out Back, up the lonesome rivers and in the enormous forests where no man dwelt; where silence was a thing that did not merely exist; that was kept...

The girl from Sydney was beside the planter; she watched the dancers with complete incomprehension; she compared their steps, audibly, with the Black Bottom and the Big Apple, and said she could do better herself. Perry thought her a little fool, and longed at the same moment to kiss her till she couldn't think or speak.

He had stood within touch of January Cook, when the maddening native dance was going on; he had seen her bosom, under its muslin smock, heave with the desire to join in (and she could do it, he thought). No white man had ever seen the girl dancing; even as no white knew what she did, and where she went, when she disappeared for a day and a night into the wilds. But Perry knew that she'd understand the things he understood; that the wilderness had set its brand on her as on him. He had known for some while that she would make, for him, the ideal mate. And he had guessed that she wouldn't say no, when, in due time— there was never any hurry in Daru, Daru at the end of the world— he found voice to put the question.

BUT now the tempo of the outside world had suddenly invaded Daru, along with and surrounding the personality of Thora. She was full of hurry and curiosity; she wanted to see everything, to go everywhere. She had asked a thousand questions, many of which Perry found himself unable to answer, although he understood their subjects as a man understands his own face in the mirror. She was going to look on at the native dance; she was going out in canoes; she was going to see a dugong hunt; she wanted to watch turtles coming ashore to lay their eggs, and see them intercepted and turned by

native watchers on the beach. And she had already decided, it seemed, that Perry— tall slim Perry with the blue sun-faded eyes and sun-battered skin— was to be her cavalier for the time being; she had turned the full blaze of her charm upon him, and he had instantly gone down. He didn't approve of her one bit; he thought her silly and restless and conceited— and he was, all the same and suddenly, deep-drowned in love.

Under the Prussian-blue night sky that was beaded with sparkling stars, they stood together, fought mosquitoes, and watched the dancing. Perry wasn't drunk with the dance now; it was a headier draught that held him. Things were moving; he was wide awake. Already he was beginning to plan a journey south, and a parson.

SALTER, looking as romantic as he knew how, in his khaki bush outfit with cartridge-belt and service revolver, was posing not very far away. He was there more or less on duty; there had been times when these dances, growing too strenuous, had ended in the snatching of parked spears, stabbing and blood. But he wasn't thinking of that; he felt rather like something in a Western film; hoped he looked it, hoped Thora saw him.

He never saw what Cripps, who was lurking near him, saw. Jan Cook, tall and still now, not a strand of her heavy hair stirring, not a finger or a fold of her dress that wasn't stone-quiet. Jan, looking steadily at something out of the corners of her long gray eyes. Cripps didn't need to turn round in order to know what she was watching. The back of his neck prickled. He had been long in Daru.

He edged away, inconspicuously, to the spot where Salter was standing. "Bit lonely?" he asked the young man, not without spite.

Salter said: "Do you want anything?" He wasn't going to discuss his defeat.

The trader said: "Yes. What do you suppose Kalipa's doing here tonight? If you've any attention left over from that little piece of Sydney goods opposite."

"What? Kalipa? That handsome chap who's dancing so well? I reckon he came to show the others how to do it."

"Kalipa's the biggest sorcerer in the West— and Jan's foster-brother!"

"That so?" The young officer stared. He saw a Papuan man, splendidly made, all but naked, decked out in native jewelry of boar-tusks and dogs' teeth, with a necklace of human finger-bones about his throat. He saw that the man was dancing, as if by accident nearer and nearer to the spot where Perry and Thora stood; that the strange gray eyes of January Cook caught Kalipa's black eyes, every now and again. That the foster-brother and sister seemed, without words, to be communicating.

Salter immediately snapped into the character of Government officer. It was his by no means secret pride to belong to this famous, perilous service. And every man in the service knew that sorcery was mostly murder.

"If there's any nonsense going," he said sharply, "I'll be on the fellow."

"If there's any nonsense going," Cripps mockingly repeated, "you probably won't. Things will happen— as they happen. Just naturally."

Salter hadn't time to express his contempt for such a point of view, because January, whom he really admired when he wasn't looking at Thora, had started to slip away. Quite quietly, quite naturally. As if she were a little tired of the dance and wanted to go home to the Mission Lady's and have a cup of tea. Coolly, too— her face and arms and her bare ankles were dry as ivory, when everyone else, Salter included, was sweating like meat in the frying-pan. She was not natural, he thought, this girl born in the heat of the year; she was a salamander.... But the salamander, that fabled beast, didn't even feel flame. And January, unless her gray eyes lied, knew the scorch of one kind of flame, at least.

Before he knew what had happened to her, she was gone. And he remembered Cripps' odd saying— that Jan had all the native tricks, that she could disappear when you took your eye off her, like a snake. And—

Kalipa was gone too. But Salter, with the corner of his eye, had caught a glimpse of that departure. The sorcerer had danced lightly backward until he neared the tangle of surrounding croton bush; then he simply ran back like a reversing engine, and vanished.

"VERY well," thought Salter, detaching his interest from Thora and Perry. "Very well. I mayn't be able to do that, but I reckon I know where to find the Mission Lady's house. And I must find it, because this is business, This is a job."

Thunder, never far away in the wet season, bumbled and thumped above the black-sand beach as he turned away, A river of lightning poured. In its sudden sheen, you could see the white teeth, the glittering eyeballs of the dancers; then you could see almost nothing at all. Rubbing his eyes, the patrol officer walked away.

The Mission Lady's house, a small building of iron, stood among clustered palms. Wind was getting up now; the palm fronds thrashed upon the roof with angry hands, extinguishing the sound of Salter's footsteps on the coral walk. There wasn't much sound, in any case; the young man had done detective work "down South" in Sydney, and when he wasn't thinking of girls or grog or dinner, he could do an excellent Sherlock Holmes job yet.

QUIETLY he circled the house. There was a veranda— nobody there; there was a lit bedroom window, modestly covered with thick calico; that would be the Mission Lady's. There was another window, curtained with the sort of gaudy colored stuff that looks opaque in the daytime, and by night proves itself, sometimes, to be nothing of the kind. To this window Salter turned his attention. He wanted to know, simply, whether Jan was in. The stuff was, as he had guessed, transparent. Light inside, turned low. No one there.

He drew aside into the clump of palms, and quite patiently waited. He waited two hours. It was nothing to the vigils he'd had down Sydney Harbor, on freezing August nights. He could wait all night, if necessary, in this heavy warmth.

There! The light had suddenly gone up. It was a hurricane-lamp; somebody had come in and turned up the wick. Salter waited a minute, slipped to the window—and almost immediately staggered back against the veranda wall, gasping. "I'm not mad," he said to himself. "I'm not drunk. I did see it."

His thick fair hair felt strange. Did hair ever really stand on end? He ran his fingers through it... The scalp was sweating, but the hair lay flat.

That reassured him, and he ventured to look again.

Yes. Jan was standing in the middle of her room, staring at a length of carved bamboo, which was actually bobbing and shuffling about on end, like the dancers who had been bobbing and shuffling down on the black-sand beach, hours ago. They were long since asleep in the village, but here was this infernal thing, the very sight of which his blood run cold, carrying on the dance as if it were alive. And Jan was looking at it, speaking to it. He couldn't catch what she said. Somehow, he didn't want to. He swallowed a great many times in a throat that had suddenly gone dry, and wondered what in the name of all the fiends he ought to do. There was nothing, the Regulations told him. If he jumped into the room, why, that hellish thing would assuredly be found lying on the floor, just a bit of bamboo a few feet long, and Jan would be wanting to know, in no very courteous terms, what on earth he meant by breaking into her bedroom.

He thought of spiritualistic tales he had read— about people who had gained power to make pencils stand on end, yards away. To order a tangle of muslin to untangle itself, and float free, without touching it. Things like that happened; and people said, when they did, that it was either fraud, or the Powers of Evil.

Well, it wasn't fraud here, unless he was crazy. And he didn't believe in Powers of Evil. And— there! He had made a slight noise—and the whole scene was changed. Jan was sitting on her bed pulling off her dress, and the bamboo was lying flat on the floor in a shadowy corner. Had he dreamed it all?

It was a considerably chastened patrol officer who slipped away from the Mission Lady's house, and silently went to bed in the quarters, taking his problem with him. He hadn't spoken to the R.M.— yet. It seemed a bit too personal.

THE hot weather continued; the flaming stillness of the days, torn at times by thunder and by furious rain; the purple breathless nights, men lying sleepless on stripped beds could hear, in the stillness, the moan of crocodiles and the deep sighing of dugongs, along the beach. In spite of the incredible thing that had occurred on the night of the dance, Salter found himself haunting Jan's footsteps as if he had been her dog; watching her for reasons quite other than those that still seemed to move him professionally. As a government employee and an ex-cub detective of Sydney, he was on the alert for possible mischief. As a man, he would have given up his very heart for that mythical dog of Jan's to eat, if she had asked for it.

On an afternoon when the distant tops of the mangrove forests lay like smokeblue clouds against the glass-blue sky, and the sea was cruel indigo, and the whole landscape, alive with coming storm, seemed to sneer at the feeble insects who ventured to call themselves masters of its colossal solitudes— Salter, tramping down the beach, met suddenly with Jan.

SHE was dressed in a smock of scarlet figured with daffodil, that exactly reproduced the flaming colors of the croton avenues behind her. She was, as usual, barefoot, and walking very quickly.

"Where are you going?" he asked her, He had had little converse with her lately; when he met her, she was either absent or hurried, and not inclined to talk. This time he was determined to get an answer out of her. What, was not he a patrol officer of the finest service in the world, and wasn't she a potential criminal under observation? That she, or Kalipa, meant a mischief either to Perry or Perry's love, he had never doubted since the evening of the dance, now nearly a week gone. It was his duty to observe her. He did it by quickening his pace, and walking beside her as she hurried on. He continued it by noticing the extraordinary blackness and thickness of her eyelashes, the way they stood about and shaded her gray eyes like rushes standing round a mountain tarn.

She said, in that deep curious voice of hers, a voice that somehow managed to suggest that its owner had all the time there was in the world to play with, that there was no hurry, never would be any hurry: "I'm not going anywhere."

"Where have you been, then?"

"For a walk."

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing." In her eyes, he caught a passing flicker of something like satisfaction. He had seen a beautiful snake, basking on warm stone, that flickered its forked tongue in and out— just like that— because it was happy.

The patrol officer clamped his hand about the girl's sun-coppered arm. "What have you been up to?" he demanded.

Now she met him, full, with her head carried high on its brown-marble neck (no woman brought up from babyhood among white folk had a neck, a carriage like January's), and her mouth curled into a scornful smile.

"Policeman," she said, again with that hint of scorn, "what business is it of yours?"

"I'm not a policeman," he hotly replied. "I'm a Government officer in con trol of native police, and the R.M. and I have to keep order. What have you been doing?"

"Nothing, Government officer."

"Are you telling me lies?"

"The Mission Lady," she told him, looking at him with eyes that said absolutely nothing, "taught me that the Good Book says all liars go to hell."

"So—" he said, suddenly remembering half-forgotten Sunday-school experiences, "So do dogs and— sorcerers."

"And whoremongers, and murderers," she calmly added. "I am January Cook. I'm not a dog or a sorcerer, and I'm good girl; certainly I have never murdered anyone."

"What about that foster-brother of yours? He's the whole lot, if I don't mistake. What does he teach you, when you go away with him into the big bush? I've heard he keeps a sort of sorcerers'university, out there. We'll get him some day, and give him five years' jail, when we catch him."

"*When* you catch him," she softly said. "Now, Government officer, I want to go home to my tea."

She said it so nicely— she was so well-behaved, so entirely girlish and ordinary— that Salter felt his head spinning round. Was this his potential criminal ?

One side of his mind coolly desired to prove that she was. The other side was burning up with love, irrational, unwilling to listen, ("Jan— Jan— is there a girl in all the world like you? There can't be.. There never will be again.")

She was gone, and he hadn't seen where she went. Home to tea? Maybe.

ALL the way to his house the two halves of Salter's nature squabbled. One side recalled Cripps' saying: "Things will happen— just naturally." The other side maintained that his nerves were tricking him. He believed the girl when

she said that she hadn't done any harm. How long would that be true? And how far some was he fitted to judge of the case, after what he thought he'd seen the other night? Had he been hypnotized? Temporarily mad? Witness of a conjuring trick? No! Whatever a piece of stick might be made to do in the hands of a clever conjurer, even a conjurer couldn't have made it get up and dance in the middle of the room all by itself. And why? Why?

He found himself thinking, oddly— that girl of Perry's had missed something; with her appetite for strange things, she'd have simply been thrilled. That is, if it ever happened.

But a storm was brewing, He had to hurry home.

AFTER the storm, the night was singularly calm. Stars hung like Christmas-tree fruit, glittering among the crotons and the mangoes and the palmtree tops, all now alike in undistinguished black. Stars made long silver stitches in the quiet sea. They didn't do that, south. Not large enough. So many things were different in this strange Papua; even the heavens were changed; even love was not the same. A mountain torrent, plunging furiously to its destined end was not the same as a full, smooth river. Better? Worse? Notelling. But no doubt which took you swiftest, held you strongest.

Salter, half asleep on his camp stretcher, was struck to wakefulness by a tap on the side of the bed.

"It's me," whispered the voice of Cripps. "Don't shoot."

The officer's hand stole back from the roughened grip of the .45 that lay beside his waist. He sat up under his mosquito net. "What's wrong, Cripps?"

"I don't know that anything is," the other whispered. "But January's just come back from the R.M.'s house— and he's away tonight."

"What!" Salter was up, and into his shoes; pajamas were clothing enough. He wanted to say what he thought of his superior officer for leaving a white girl— sister too!— alone in a native country. But loyalty held him back. "Are we all mad?" he thought, "It isn't like Cummings."

Cripps following, he ran, as silently as he could, toward the magistrate's house. On the way, taking a sudden turn, he collided violently with something that was soft and warm and scented with frangipanni flowers— January's favorite. He flung his arms about it. "Where've you been? What've you been up to? By God, January, if you've been in mischief, I'll clap the handcuffs on you, if it breaks my heart."

She stood quite still. She laughed.

"Thora," she said, in her low, lazy voice, "Thora will never marry him now, I think."

"Keep hold of the little hellion," he told Cripps, letting go. "Stay there." January wasn't little, and he didn't think her a hellion, but he was professional, in that moment. ... There was the house. There was the window of the spare room— the big spare room that he knew, with its handsome furniture and huge walnut bed. No light inside. No sound. Or was there? Didn't he hear something like the rolling out of pastry on a hard board; a queer, faintly rumbling noise that he couldn't at all account for? Thora was certainly there, and certainly not dead, whatever had happened; he could hear her breathing— and even in that moment, he was vaguely conscious of a pricking disappointment. Lord, how the girl snored!

Leaning through the window, he snapped on his torch. The rolling sound had stopped; had given way to a tapping noise, vaguely reminiscent. Where had he heard that before?

Thora was awake. Sitting up, in an extremely ornate sleeping-outfit, she stared at him— and made snorting pig-like noises. Surely he must be mad— or she!

Then he saw. And Thora saw. And screamed. And the pig-like noises continued through the scream.

He saw that the hellish bamboo was there, dancing in the middle of the floor. He made a wild leap into the room at it— whatever it was, he was going to know, this time! But he missed it—and came into sharp contact with a man's fair, ruffled head.... Perry's.

THE snoring had ceased; Perry was wide awake. He seized the bamboo in his hand, and pitched it out of the window. Someone outside, apparently did not dodge it. There was a smashing, cracking sound, and a yell.

Salter was out again through the window; first this time. The light of his torch fell on someone who, as he instantly, horrifiedly saw, would not long need either punishment or hell. Kalipa! Kalipa, fighting madly with a furious tiger snake that, wreathed with the fragments of the bamboo in which it had been imprisoned, was hanging with deadly fangs on to his neck.

They could see that he was wildly endeavoring to regain control of the creature, which no doubt had been one of his trained familiars— but even a trained snake will revolt, if its prison is violently smashed on someone's person. And the tiger snake was tame no more. Perry and Salter, together, struck at the writhing body, that shone tortoise-shell and amber and jetty black in the light of the torch. It fell to the ground, Kalipa still calling and addressing it, as if it could hear. Salter seized a stick and killed it. Perry, neglecting the snake, turned his attention to Kalipa, who had fallen on the ground, and was

panting for breath. In no more than a couple of minutes, his eyes turned up, he flung his arms out once and lay still.

"Got him in a vein; no chance," the planter said, letting the dead hand fall. "Thora, Thora darling, don't be frightened. It's all right."

Thora was not frightened. She was shocked. She leaned out of the window, ignoring both the corpse of the man and the body of the snake. The light of Salter's torch shone on her left hand. It bore a ring.

"I— I— we were married yesterday. My brother knew," she said explanatorily, holding her hand a little farther toward the light.

"Good night," said Salter, and left them, to summon a couple of constables and have the body carried away. Thora didn't know the chap was dead, he supposed. Or else she didn't care. A native was a native, to her.

But if Perry, bushman, quick mover, sturdy fellow, hadn't been there— if she had awakened in the pale dawn, and seen that mysterious carved bamboo rolling and dancing on the floor (simple enough when you understood it, wasn't it? As simple as time and death), why, she'd have picked it up, being what she was, avidly curious; she'd have opened it, and then— two yards of glittering fury, and a dead girl on the floor. There is no poison worse than that of the tiger snake, in the hot days and nights of the New Year.

Jan had dropped it in. Jan had had it in her own room— how long? She had got it, and the knowledge to use it, from her foster-brother, the sorcerer who lay dead. And as Cripps had told him, the thing would have happened just as things happen— naturally.

DAWN had begun to light the croton trees to flame when Salter reached the spot where Cripps was waiting with Jan— the girl's wrists and ankles tied up with bush rope. It might have been the faint chill that goes with coming day, or it might have been the sickness that overcame him when he thought of what Jan had done; but Salter was shivering a little as he loosed her bonds. Briefly he told Cripps what had occurred. "She'll come quietly," he said. "You go home." And Cripps went.

JAN was quiet. "What do you want me for?" she said. Her eyes looked straight into his, and for the first time— torture!— he saw in them that which he had desired to see.

"For attempted murder," was his curt reply.

Jan said, quietly, but stressing each word: "I shall not ever go to hell. I am not a liar. Ora sorcerer. Or a dog. Or a whoremonger— I do not know what that is, but I am not it. And not a murderer."

"Who is, then?"

"Kalipa. When I told him I could not do it, and gave him back the bamboo, he threw me away and cursed me. And he said: 'The girl has hurt you, my sister of the breast, and she shall pay; hurting you, she has hurt all my tribe.' He said that in our language, and he frightened me so that I couldn't move. But at last I ran, and ran, And then when I met Cripps, I said: 'She will not marry him'— because I thought I wouldn't be in time— but I was coming— to you."

"You were?"

"May the crocodiles tear my head from my body, if I was not."

He said: "I believe you. But I shall look at all the footsteps when it grows lighter, and then—"

"Then you'll believe me more."

"I couldn't," he said, and suddenly took her in his arms. Standing there, breathless, she yet found breath to say: "She has taken him. And me, I do not want another's bread. I'd rather starve."

"You sha'n't starve," he said— and he kissed her to silence...

A little while after, when Perry had sold his plantation, and sailed away south, and the Service had lost a good man in Salter, who had bought Perry's plantation, and gone up-river to live, Cripps, sitting in his doorway, remarked to his dog Nipper: "An upside-down place, and always was. But it takes a hold of you somehow, Nipper, doesn't it?

Nipper, who wanted his supper, faintly whined.

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One of a series under the heading "The Hobbies of Austin Porteous"

2: John Leslie's Burglar

Dy Edwardson

Edward Dyson, 1865–1931
Punch (Melbourne) 14 Aug 1913

DETECTIVE BRAIN looked troubled.

"I'd be awfully obliged, Porteus, if you could spare me a few moments," he said. "It may be something the same as the Harding case. Another mess like that, and I'd never hold up mv chin again. The bovs haven't done jollying me about .it yet."

Mr. Porteus reached for his hat, gave his spectacles a characteristic forward pull, balanced them right in the middle of his straight, short nose, knocked his white fleece into shape before a magic mirror from old Japan, and, "Why, certainly," he said.

"Dedrick is receiving every attention at the local lockup," Brain explained in the cab. "I'd like you to run a look over him. He's not a bit the usual type, and he won't talk. Seems quite resigned to his little lot, and its not the pleasantest going on the available evidence. This is how it stands. Leslie, the proprietor of the big white house back from Homan-road, a wealthy widower, with one child, declares that he "was awakened by hearing movements in a room at some little distance from his own. He stole along the passage, armed with a largo, ebonv ruler, and discovered a man at the open window in a room overlooking the side balcony. He stole upon this man, challenged him, and then knocked him senseless with the ruler before he could draw a weapon."

"Had he a weapon to draw, by the way?"

"In point of fact, he hadn't. Nothing was discovered on the young man that usually goes with the amiable housebreaker— not a single implement ; and he's the most guileless midnight marauder I've struck up to now."

"This Leslie sent for the police."

"He did. 'Phoned them up at the local lockup. and had done everything: so neatly and expeditiously that when the Hop arrived the rest of the household were still sleeping peacefully, and our worthy widower wias standing guard over the prostrate burglar, with the ruler ready, quite prepared to sock him another should he wink a lid. But Master Ernest Dedrick had taken all he wanted for the time being. He had a seam in his head like a large pipe, and if liis skull hadn't been extra hard-baked and as thick as a fish-plate it must have been a plain pine coffin and a clay bed for Ernest."

"Bless my soul! Poor boy. But, as vou have him safely gaoled, and the details so clear, whv am I invited to intervene?"

"We have Ernest, but we want Ernest's partner in guilt. When the police arrived old Leslie ran a sudden survey over his goods and chattels, and reported all well; but Ernest was no sooner comfortably housed in the guests' chamber at the Pell-street lockup than in wings a message from Leslie to the effect that a desk in his library had been broken open, and cash to the value of £230 lifted, and removed from his ken and guardianship."

"Tut, tut, tut!" Mr. Porteus clicked his tongue as if quite distressed at such wickedness, and glowed pleasantly at the detective through his absurd spectacles, which were horn-rimmed, and should have had a conspicuous place in his stock of antiques.

"And had the poor young man the money about him?"

"Not a bean of it. He possessed a scarce supply of small silver, but the quids are not discoverable, nor to be accounted for, excepting on John Thomas Leslie's theory that Ernest had passed them to an accomplice in the garden below. I want that accomplice, and this is where you come in, if you'll be so good. I can't find a trace of the man who passed into the darkness and the void with Leslie's two-thirty. There are Dedrick's tracks in the garden below, but no hint of Dedrick's pal. Leslie explains that when he first saw Dedrick the fellow was apparently in the act of passing something from the window."

Mr. Austin Porteus was introduced to Ernest Dedrick in the privacy of Ernest's cell. Young Mr. Dedrick sat on his bunk, a slightly-built, fair youth of perhaps twenty-six, dressed in a dark tweed suit, well cut, but damaged by service. His boots, too, though carefully kept, were almost through at the sole, and Porteus registered the fact as implying a motive for the crime. He had observed that men, naturally honest, are often betrayed into misdeeds when their feet come into contact with the pavement.

Dedrick's broken head was done in a professional binding of white linen, his pale face peering out of the neat folds betrayed none of the characteristics of the hardened villain. In point of fact, it suggested an absurdly chaste idea to Austin Porteus, reminding him of a nun.

Ernest Dedrick would not talk. Beyond saying he had nothing to say he was mute. To any questions put to him he merely shook his head and smiled, and when, the business grew wearisome he coolly extended himself on the bunk, turned his face to the wall, and fell asleep.

"An extraordinary young man," said Austin Porteus. "Bless my soul, a most extraordinary man! His silence is edifying— and instructive."

"Instructive?" smiled Brain.

"Instructive ' Yes, with the sort of instruction Shakespeare got from stones."

Mr. Porteus onlv smiled his benevolent, cherubic smile.

"Let us call on Mr. John Thomas Leslie," said he.

AUSTIN PORTEUS examined the fine home of Mr Leslie from the hansom.

"A beautiful place," he said, "and a high wall; but our—" He drew up sharply, and blinked at the house, a series of twenty quick blinks. "Bless my soul," he said. "Bless my soul!"

"What is it?" asked Brain sharply. Mr. Porteus sat back and beamed at the white house.

"I was going to say our young friend would negotiate the wall easily enough. No, no, Brain, let the cabman remain where he is for a moment. I like the appearance of the house, I do, indeed. It is Greek in its fine simplicity. Leslie is a man of taste."

For quite five minutes Austin Porteus stared at the house through his ridiculous spectacles Then said he, with a little, fat chuckle:

"Do you know, Brain, I believe that balcony suggests the solution of our problem?"

"The balcony?" answered Detective Brain in surprise. "Of course: Dedrick climbed that balcony; but how ths deuce can it offer a solution?"

"Only if you have imagination, my friend— the right kind of imagination. My idea is almost entirely imaginative and sentiments but then in dealing with criminal riddles my theories are almost invariably imaginative. I imagine the plot, so to speak, after some preliminary investigation, and then work up to it I leave it to you to say I have been fairly successful. To be correct in such circumstances calls for a knowledge of human nature, human motives, and human impulses and actions that is almost an instinct. Mv good Brain, if I am right in this case, the fact will illustrate I have been telling you most effectually."

"Well, I don't know how the deuce you do it Austin; but it's a picture palace to a peanut you'll be right."

MR. JOHN THOMAS LESLIE did not offer Austin Porteus and Detective Brain an exuberant welcome. He was a testy man, probably close on seventy, lean, big boned, Scotch, rust-coloured, and tough, with a mouth that dropped suddenly to his chin at the corners.

"Eh, eh, eh!" he snorted. What's this? More dommed detectives? It is no sufficient to be robbed in one's own house, but ye must come, one and anither o' ye, mackin' a, dommed nuisance o' it, too?"

"The matter has to be cleared up, Mr. Leslie, said Brain in a conciliatory tone, "and the sooner the better for all of us. If it can he cleared up, Mr. Porteus is the man for the job.

Mr. Porteus, not in the least disconcerted by the householder's outburst, was smiling gently and plucking; with caressing forefinger and thumb at his soft side-whiskers as his gaze wheeled round the apartment.

"Bless my soul!" he said. "And this is the room? Dear me! And that is the window? Well, well well, well! The window from which you saw the money thrown? Bless my soul!"

He walked to the window, and looked out over the small, quaint verandah into the garden below. Then he looked at the window sash.

"You locked the windows. Mr. Leslie, my friend Brain tells me?" said Mr. Porteus.

"I did. Before ganging t' my bed, I mack a point o' seem' all secure."

"There is no mark of a housebreaking tool at all on the sashes."

"Mebee, no. I'm thinkin' the rascal thrust a knife between the sashes an' sprung the catch."

Mr. Porteus examined the catch as if it were a matter of great importance.

"It, could be done, I dare say," he chatted. "Yes, yes, I have no doubt it could be done."

Mr. Porteus wandered about, the room in an aimless, drifting way, drifted into the passage beyond, and looked up and down, with John Thomas Leslie at his heels.

"This room?" he inquired, tapping a door opposite.

" 'Tis to a spare bedroom that's no often occupied."

"This door?" He tapped on the next one.

"The door o' me daughter's bedroom, sir," said Leslie sharply, "an' I make no sense o' these inquiries, I may tell you."

"Bless my sou! I Yon have a daughter ?"

"I have, sir, 'an why no'?"

Mr. Porteus held up an apologetic palm. "There's no reason why not—none in the world, Mr, Leslie. Doubtless she is a very charming young lady. May I ask if she has been questioned in this matter?"

"No, she has not, and I will no have her questioned, mind ye that." Mr. Leslie was very angry. "She is verra much upset, naturally, bein' of a nervous, sensible disposition; an' she has no left her ain room since the miserable affair."

"Poor young lady," said Mr. Porteus sweetly. "Most natural, I'm sure. This room?"

He did not wait for the host's reply, but walked into the long library.

"I should like," he said, "to see the desk from which the money was abstracted."

Leslie's dour expression deepened. He rang a bell, and when a manservant appeared he growled: "Aleck, ye micht show these gentlemen over the hoose. Deny them nathing. Show them everything, Aleck, no matter how dommed impertinent they may appear, and then, Aleck, ye may show them the door."

Mr. Leslie was striding from the room, but Mr. Porteus barred the way. smiling gild kindly.

"Before you go, sir, a word as to the money. You said two hundred and thirty pounds?"

"I said twa hoonderd and theerty poond."

"Bound with a red rubber band, you said?"

"Nathin' o' the kind, sir. It was no bound at all."

"Two hundred and thirty single pound notes loose?"

"No, sir, not all single pound notes; tens maistly, an' two fivers."

Leslie slammed the door after him, and smiling and unperturbed Austin Porteus turned his attention to the desk. This he examined with great care. There was the mark of a tool that had been used to prize the baize-covered flap of the desk from its brass fastenings, and this mark Mr. Porteus peered at from every possible angle for a space of twenty minutes, using Brain's magnifying glass, and deriving great seeming gratification from the work When satisfied he turned to the man-servant.

"I should like to look into your master's bedroom," he said.

"Yes, sir, certainly. This way, sir."

Aleck led the way into Leslie's large bedroom furnished with heavy old blackwood furniture, and Austin Porteus, with Brain at his elbow, went only as far as the bedside, then turned abruptly and left the room, without making any investigation whatever. It would appear that nothing but vulgar curiosity had led him to peer into the host's sleeping apartment.

In the library Mr. Porteus stood at the desk pursing his lips and thinking hard then he said: "Aleck—Aleck is your name, I believe?"

"Yessir."

"Will you be so kind as to ask vour master to rejoin us? And, Aleck—"
"Yessir."

"You might tell him it is rather important I have made a discovery of some interest. It is really necessary that lie should see us "

Mr. Leslie came back with the man, grimmer than ever.

"Well," he said, "when I'm robbed again I'll have the gude sense t' bear it in silence, I'm thinkin."

"Mr. Leslie," said Austin, "we might all sit down I think, excepting Aleck. Aleck can go "

"And has it come t' this—that ye give orders in my ain hoose?"

"Will you please ask the man to go, Mr. Leslie. I am sure you would rather not have him hear the whole details of the coming inter view."

"You can go," growled Mr. Leslie.

"Now," said Austin comfortably, when Aleck had gone, "I want to know if you have the numbers of the missing notes, Mr. Leslie'"

"I have not."

"Well, well, perhaps it does not matter, after all."

"Doesn't matter ? Maybe yi'll be tellin' me it's no matter me havin' my house broke and my property stolen ?"

"Your house was not broken, Mr. Leslie your property was not stolen. Sit down if you please, and let us be friendly and confidential. In the first place, the window in the next room was not forced from the outside. A knife used to push the catch aside must have made some impression on the soft brass. There is none. In the second place, no money was thrown from the window. You will remember Brain, what kind of a night last night was. You, Mr. Leslie cannot have forgotten that it was decidedly boisterous. Had a loose roll of notes been thrown from the window they would have blown all over your spacious garden, sir, and some of them must have been recovered this morning."

Mr. Leslie sat in a large, oaken arm chair, and stared blankly at Austin Porteus. Austin Porteus peered back at him with the amiable interest of a nice old gentleman, who was settling a family trouble in the pleasantest way possible.

"This desk was not broken open by the young man Dedrick; it was broken open by you, and you used the flat blade of a curious pair or very old brass candle snuffers. They are now in that delightful old candlestick by vour bedside. No, no, sir, don't stir. They are there. I assure you. I know the snuffers well. I have the same brass set in my stock, and prize them highly. If you will look at the impression in the smooth wood of the desk with Brain's glass you-will actually find a vivid impression of the embossed brand from the snuffers. I recognised that brand at once. That being there, a faint trace of verdigris is not necessary to substantiate my theory.

"You admit the so-called burglar was not in your room; you say you had been awake for an hour. You admitted lighting this very candle when you were disturbed by the sounds in the balcony room. Breaking open the desk was an afterthought on your part. You desired to do young Dedrick as much mischief as possible, so you faked this theft, relying on the young man's chivalry to keep him silent even under such a grim iniustice. He is silent for the young lady's sake."

Austin Porteus was now standing. John Thomas Leslie was cowering, in his chair, speechless.

"If you will take my advice, Mr. Leslie," said Austin Porteus in the friendliest way, "you will let the young people marry. This Dedrick seems to be a gentleman, if a poor one. As for the lady, I assume she loves him, or she would not have unlocked the window to admit him to the house at such an hour without her father's knowledge. Good day, sir."

Outside, in the cab again, Brain said, "Well, I'm jiggered! This licks Gehenna! But how did that balcony suggest a solution?"

Austin Porteus sighed with quite a touch of sentiment. "It reminded me of Romeo and Juliet," he said.

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3: John Huxford's Hiatus

Arthur Conan Doyle

1859-1930

The Cornhill Magazine June 1888

STRANGE IT IS and wonderful to mark how upon this planet of ours the smallest and most insignificant of events set a train of consequences in motion which act and react until their final results are portentous and incalculable. Set a force rolling, however small; and who can say where it shall end, or what it may lead to! Trifles develop into tragedies, and the bagatelle of one day ripens into the catastrophe of the next. An oyster throws out a secretion to surround a grain of sand, and so a pearl comes into being; a pearl diver fishes it up, a merchant buys it and sells it to a jeweller, who disposes of it to a customer. The customer is robbed of it by two scoundrels who quarrel over the booty. One slays the other, and perishes himself upon the scaffold. Here is a direct chain of events with a sick mollusc for its first link, and a gallows for its last one. Had that grain of sand not chanced to wash in between the shells of the bivalve, two living breathing beings with all their potentialities for good and for evil would not have been blotted out from among their fellows. Who shall undertake to judge what is really small and what is great?

Thus when in the year 1821 Don Diego Salvador bethought him that if it paid the heretics in England to import the bark of his cork oaks, it would pay him also to found a factory by which the corks might be cut and sent out ready made, surely at first sight no very vital human interests would appear to be affected. Yet there were poor folk who would suffer, and suffer acutely—women who would weep, and men who would become sallow and hungry-looking and dangerous in places of which the Don had never heard, and all on account of that one idea which had flashed across him as he strutted, cigarettiferous, beneath the grateful shadow of his limes. So crowded is this old globe of ours, and so interlaced our interests, that one cannot think a new thought without some poor devil being the better or the worse for it.

Don Diego Salvador was a capitalist, and the abstract thought soon took the concrete form of a great square plastered building wherein a couple of hundred of his swarthy countrymen worked with deft nimble fingers at a rate of pay which no English artisan could have accepted. Within a few months the result of this new competition was an abrupt fall of prices in the trade, which was serious for the largest firms and disastrous for the smaller ones. A few old-established houses held on as they were, others reduced their establishments and cut down their expenses, while one or two put up their shutters and confessed themselves beaten. In this last unfortunate category was the ancient and respected firm of Fairbairn Brothers of Brisport.

Several causes had led up to this disaster, though Don Diego's debut as a corkcutter had brought matters to a head. When a couple of generations back the original Fairbairn had founded the business, Brisport was a little fishing town with no outlet or occupation for her superfluous population. Men were glad to have safe and continuous work upon any terms. All this was altered now, for the town was expanding into the centre of a large district in the west, and the demand for labour and its remuneration had proportionately increased. Again, in the old days, when carriage was ruinous and communication slow, the vintners of Exeter and of Barnstaple were glad to buy their corks from their neighbour of Brisport; but now the large London houses sent down their travellers, who competed with each other to gain the local custom, until profits were cut down to the vanishing point. For a long time the firm had been in a precarious position, but this further drop in prices settled the matter, and compelled Mr. Charles Fairbairn, the acting manager, to close his establishment.

It was a murky, foggy Saturday afternoon in November when the hands were paid for the last time, and the old building was to be finally abandoned. Mr. Fairbairn, an anxious-faced, sorrow-worn man, stood on a raised dais by the cashier while he handed the little pile of hardly-earned shillings and coppers to each successive workman as the long procession filed past his table. It was usual with the employees to clatter away the instant that they had been paid, like so many children let out of school; but to-day they waited, forming little groups over the great dreary room, and discussing in subdued voices the misfortune which had come upon their employers, and the future which awaited themselves. When the last pile of coins had been handed across the table, and the last name checked by the cashier, the whole throng faced silently round to the man who had been their master, and waited expectantly for any words which he might have to say to them.

Mr. Charles Fairbairn had not expected this, and it embarrassed him. He had waited as a matter of routine duty until the wages were paid, but he was a taciturn, slow-witted man, and he had not foreseen this sudden call upon his oratorical powers. He stroked his thin cheek nervously with his long white fingers, and looked down with weak watery eyes at the mosaic of upturned serious faces.

"I am sorry that we have to part, my men," he said at last in a crackling voice. "It's a bad day for all of us, and for Brisport too. For three years we have been losing money over the works. We held on in the hope of a change coming, but matters are going from bad to worse. There's nothing for it but to give it up before the balance of our fortune is swallowed up. I hope you may all

be able to get work of some sort before very long. Good-bye, and God bless you!"

"God bless you, sir! God bless you!" cried a chorus of rough voices. "Three cheers for Mr. Charles Fairbairn!" shouted a bright-eyed, smart young fellow, springing up upon a bench and waving his peaked cap in the air. The crowd responded to the call, but their huzzas wanted the true ring which only a joyous heart can give. Then they began to flock out into the sunlight, looking back as they went at the long deal tables and the cork-strewn floor— above all at the sad-faced, solitary man, whose cheeks were flecked with colour at the rough cordiality of their farewell.

"Huxford," said the cashier, touching on the shoulder the young fellow who had led the cheering; "the governor wants to speak to you."

The workman turned back and stood swinging his cap awkwardly in front of his ex-employer, while the crowd pushed on until the doorway was clear, and the heavy fog-wreaths rolled unchecked into the deserted factory.

"Ah, John!" said Mr. Fairbairn, coming suddenly out of his reverie and taking up a letter from the table. "You have been in my service since you were a boy, and you have shown that you merited the trust which I have placed in you. From what I have heard I think I am right in saying that this sudden want of work will affect your plans more than it will many of my other hands."

"I was to be married at Shrovetide," the man answered, tracing a pattern upon the table with his horny forefinger. "I'll have to find work first."

"And work, my poor fellow, is by no means easy to find. You see you have been in this groove all your life, and are unfit for anything else. It's true you've been my foreman, but even that won't help you, for the factories all over England are discharging hands, and there's not a vacancy to be had. It's a bad outlook for you and such as you."

"What would you advise, then, sir?" asked John Huxford.

"That's what I was coming to. I have a letter here from Sheridan and Moore, of Montreal, asking for a good hand to take charge of a workroom. If you think it will suit you, you can go out by the next boat. The wages are far in excess of anything which I have been able to give you."

"Why, sir, this is real kind of you," the young workman said earnestly. "She— my girl— Mary, will be as grateful to you as I am. I know what you say is right, and that if I had to look for work I should be likely to spend the little that I have laid by towards housekeeping before I found it. But, sir, with your leave I'd like to speak to her about it before I made up my mind. Could you leave it open for a few hours?"

"The mail goes out to-morrow," Mr. Fairbairn answered. "If you decide to accept you can write tonight. Here is their letter, which will give you their address."

John Huxford took the precious paper with a grateful heart. An hour ago his future had been all black, but now this rift of light had broken in the west, giving promise of better things. He would have liked to have said something expressive of his feelings to his employer, but the English nature is not effusive, and he could not get beyond a few choking awkward words which were as awkwardly received by his benefactor. With a scrape and a bow, he turned on his heel, and plunged out into the foggy street.

So thick was the vapour that the houses over the way were only a vague loom, but the foreman hurried on with springy steps through side streets and winding lanes, past walls where the fishermen's nets were drying, and over cobble-stoned alleys redolent of herring, until he reached a modest line of whitewashed cottages fronting the sea. At the door of one of these the young man tapped, and then without waiting for a response, pressed down the latch and walked in.

An old silvery-haired woman and a young girl hardly out of her teens were sitting on either side of the fire, and the latter sprang to her feet as he entered.

"You've got some good news, John," she cried, putting her hands upon his shoulders, and looking into his eyes. "I can tell it from your step. Mr. Fairbairn is going to carry on after all."

"No, dear, not so good as that," John Huxford answered, smoothing back her rich brown hair; "but I have an offer of a place in Canada, with good money, and if you think as I do, I shall go out to it, and you can follow with the granny whenever I have made all straight for you at the other side. What say you to that, my lass?"

"Why, surely, John, what you think is right must be for the best," said the girl quietly, with trust and confidence in her pale plain face and loving hazel eyes. "But poor granny, how is she to cross the seas?"

"Oh, never mind about me," the old woman broke in cheerfully. "I'll be no drag on you. If you want granny, granny's not too old to travel; and if you don't want her, why she can look after the cottage, and have an English home ready for you whenever you turn back to the old country."

"Of course we shall need you, granny," John Huxford said, with a cheery laugh. "Fancy leaving granny behind! That would never do! Mary! But if you both come out, and if we are married all snug and proper at Montreal, we'll look through the whole city until we find a house something like this one, and we'll have creepers on the outside just the same, and when the doors are shut and we sit round the fire on the winter's nights, I'm hanged if we'll be able to

tell that we're not at home. Besides, Mary, it's the same speech out there, and the same king and the same flag; it's not like a foreign country."

"No, of course not," Mary answered with conviction. She was an orphan with no living relation save her old grandmother, and no thought in life but to make a helpful and worthy wife to the man she loved. Where these two were she could not fail to find happiness. If John went to Canada, then Canada became home to her, for what had Brisport to offer when he was gone?

"I'm to write to-night then and accept?" the young man asked. "I knew you would both be of the same mind as myself, but of course I couldn't close with the offer until we had talked it over. I can get started in a week or two, and then in a couple of months I'll have all ready for you on the other side."

"It will be a weary, weary time until we hear from you, dear John," said Mary, clasping his hand; "but it's God's will, and we must be patient. Here's pen and ink. You can sit at the table and write the letter which is to take the three of us across the Atlantic." Strange how Don Diego's thoughts were moulding human lives in the little Devon village.

The acceptance was duly despatched, and John Huxford began immediately to prepare for his departure, for the Montreal firm had intimated that the vacancy was a certainty, and that the chosen man might come out without delay to take over his duties. In a very few days his scanty outfit was completed, and he started off in a coasting vessel for Liverpool, where he was to catch the passenger ship for Quebec.

"Remember, John," Mary whispered, as he pressed her to his heart upon the Brisport quay, "the cottage is our own, and come what may, we have always that to fall back upon. If things should chance to turn out badly over there, we have always a roof to cover us. There you will find me until you send word to us to come."

"And that will be very soon, my lass," he answered cheerfully, with a last embrace. "Good-bye, granny, good-bye. "The ship was a mile and more from the land before he lost sight of the figures of the straight slim girl and her old companion, who stood watching and waving to him from the end of the grey stone quay. It was with a sinking heart and a vague feeling of impending disaster that he saw them at last as minute specks in the distance, walking townward and disappearing amid the crowd who lined the beach.

From Liverpool the old woman and her grand-daughter received a letter from John announcing that he was just starting in the barque *St. Lawrence*, and six weeks afterwards a second longer epistle informed them of his safe arrival at Quebec, and gave them his first impressions of the country. After that a long unbroken silence set in. Week after week and month after month passed by, and never a word came from across the seas. A year went over their heads,

and yet another, but no news of the absentee. Sheridan and Moore were written to, and replied that though John Huxford's letter had reached them, he had never presented himself, and they had been forced to fill up the vacancy as best they could. Still Mary and her grandmother hoped against hope, and looked out for the letter-carrier every morning with such eagerness, that the kind-hearted man would often make a detour rather than pass the two pale anxious faces which peered at him from the cottage window. At last, three years after the young foreman's disappearance, old granny died, and Mary was left alone, a broken sorrowful woman, living as best she might on a small annuity which had descended to her, and eating her heart out as she brooded over the mystery which hung over the fate of her lover.

Among the shrewd west-country neighbours there had long, however, ceased to be any mystery in the matter. Huxford arrived safely in Canada— so much was proved by his letter. Had he met with his end in any sudden way during the journey between Quebec and Montreal, there must have been some official inquiry, and his luggage would have sufficed to have established his identity. Yet the Canadian police had been communicated with, and had returned a positive answer that no inquest had been held, or any body found, which could by any possibility be that of the young Englishman. The only alternative appeared to be that he had taken the first opportunity to break all the old ties, and had slipped away to the backwoods or to the States to commence life anew under an altered name. Why he should do this no one professed to know, but that he had done it appeared only too probable from the facts. Hence many a deep growl of righteous anger rose from the brawny smacksmen when Mary with her pale face and sorrow-sunken head passed along the quays on her way to her daily marketing; and it is more than likely that if the missing man had turned up in Brisport he might have met with some rough words or rougher usage, unless he could give some very good reason for his strange conduct. This popular view of the case never, however, occurred to the simple trusting heart of the lonely girl, and as the years rolled by her grief and her suspense were never for an instant tinged with a doubt as to the good faith of the missing man. From youth she grew into middle age, and from that into the autumn of her life, patient, long-suffering, and faithful, doing good as far as lay in her power, and waiting humbly until fate should restore either in this world or the next that which it had so mysteriously deprived her of.

In the meantime neither the opinion held by the minority that John Huxford was dead, nor that of the majority, which pronounced him to be faithless, represented the true state of the case. Still alive, and of stainless honour, he had yet been singled out by fortune as her victim in one of those strange freaks which are of such rare occurrence, and so beyond the general

experience, that they might be put by as incredible, had we not the most trustworthy evidence of their occasional possibility.

Landing at Quebec, with his heart full of hope and courage, John selected a dingy room in a back street, where the terms were less exorbitant than elsewhere, and conveyed thither the two boxes which contained his worldly goods. After taking up his quarters there he had half a mind to change again, for the landlady and the fellow-lodgers were by no means to his taste; but the Montreal coach started within a day or two, and he consoled himself by the thought that the discomfort would only last for that short time. Having written home to Mary to announce his safe arrival, he employed himself in seeing as much of the town as was possible, walking about all day, and only returning to his room at night.

It happened, however, that the house on which the unfortunate youth had pitched was one which was notorious for the character of its inmates. He had been directed to it by a pimp, who found regular employment in hanging about the docks and decoying new-comers to this den. The fellow's specious manner and proffered civility had led the simple-hearted west-countryman into the toils, and though his instinct told him that he was in unsafe company, he refrained, unfortunately, from at once making his escape. He contented himself with staying out all day, and associating as little as possible with the other inmates. From the few words which he did let drop, however, the landlady gathered that he was a stranger without a single friend in the country to inquire after him should misfortune overtake him.

The house had an evil reputation for the hocussing of sailors, which was done not only for the purpose of plundering them, but also to supply outgoing ships with crews, the men being carried on board insensible, and not coming to until the ship was well down the St. Lawrence. This trade caused the wretches who followed it to be experts in the use of stupefying drugs, and they determined to practise their arts upon their friendless lodger, so as to have an opportunity of ransacking his effects, and of seeing what it might be worth their while to purloin. During the day he invariably locked his door and carried off the key in his pocket, but if they could render him insensible for the night they could examine his boxes at their leisure, and deny afterwards that he had ever brought with him the articles which he missed. It happened, therefore, upon the eve of Huxford's departure from Quebec, that he found, upon returning to his lodgings, that his landlady and her two ill-favoured sons, who assisted her in her trade, were waiting up for him over a bowl of punch, which they cordially invited him to share. It was a bitterly cold night, and the fragrant steam overpowered any suspicions which the young Englishman may have entertained, so he drained off a bumper, and then, retiring to his bedroom,

threw himself upon his bed without undressing, and fell straight into a dreamless slumber, in which he still lay when the three conspirators crept into his chamber, and, having opened his boxes, began to investigate his effects.

It may have been that the speedy action of the drug caused its effect to be evanescent, or, perhaps, that the strong constitution of the victim threw it off with unusual rapidity. Whatever the cause, it is certain that John Huxford suddenly came to himself, and found the foul trio squatted round their booty, which they were dividing into the two categories of what was of value and should be taken, and what was valueless and might therefore be left. With a bound he sprang out of bed, and seizing the fellow nearest him by the collar, he slung him through the open doorway. His brother rushed at him, but the young Devonshire man met him with such a facer that he dropped in a heap upon the ground. Unfortunately, the violence of the blow caused him to overbalance himself, and, tripping over his prostrate antagonist, he came down heavily upon his face. Before he could rise, the old hag sprang upon his back and clung to him, shrieking to her son to bring the poker. John managed to shake himself clear of them both, but before he could stand on his guard he was felled from behind by a crashing blow from an iron bar, which stretched him senseless upon the floor.

"You've hit too hard, Joe," said the old woman, looking down at the prostrate figure. "I heard the bone go."

"If I hadn't fetched him down he'd ha' been too many for us," said the young villain sulkily.

"Still, you might ha' done it without killing him, clumsy," said his mother. She had had a large experience of such scenes, and knew the difference between a stunning blow and a fatal one.

"He's still breathing," the other said, examining him; "the back o' his head's like a bag o' dice though. The skull's all splintered. He can't last. What are we to do?"

"He'll never come to himself again," the other brother remarked. "Sarve him right. Look at my face! Let's see, mother; who's in the house?"

"Only four drunk sailors."

"They wouldn't turn out for any noise. It's all quiet in the street. Let's carry him down a bit, Joe, and leave him there. He can die there, and no one think the worse of us."

"Take all the papers out of his pocket, then," the mother suggested; "they might help the police to trace him. His watch, too, and his money— three pound odd; better than nothing. Now carry him softly and don't slip."

Kicking off their shoes, the two brothers carried the dying man down stairs and along the deserted street for a couple of hundred yards. There they laid

him among the snow, where he was found by the night patrol, who carried him on a shutter to the hospital. He was duly examined by the resident surgeon, who bound up the wounded head, but gave it as his opinion that the man could not possibly live for more than twelve hours.

Twelve hours passed, however, and yet another twelve, but John Huxford still struggled hard for his life. When at the end of three days he was found to be still breathing, the interest of the doctors became aroused at his extraordinary vitality, and they bled him, as the fashion was in those days, and surrounded his shattered head with icebags. It may have been on account of these measures, or it may have been in spite of them, but at the end of a week's deep trance the nurse in charge was astonished to hear a gabbling noise, and to find the stranger sitting up upon the couch and staring about him with wistful, wondering eyes. The surgeons were summoned to behold the phenomenon, and warmly congratulated each other upon the success of their treatment.

"You have been on the brink of the grave, my man," said one of them, pressing the bandaged head back on to the pillow; "you must not excite yourself. What is your name?"

No answer, save a wild stare.

"Where do you come from?"

Again no answer.

"He is mad," one suggested. "Or a foreigner," said another. "There were no papers on him when he came in. His linen is marked 'J. H.' Let us try him in French and German."

They tested him with as many tongues as they could muster among them, but were compelled at last to give the matter over and to leave their silent patient, still staring up wild-eyed at the whitewashed hospital ceiling.

For many weeks John lay in the hospital, and for many weeks efforts were made to gain some clue as to his antecedents, but in vain. He showed, as the time rolled by, not only by his demeanour, but also by the intelligence with which he began to pick up fragments of sentences, like a clever child learning to talk, that his mind was strong enough in the present, though it was a complete blank as to the past. The man's memory of his whole life before the fatal blow was entirely and absolutely erased. He neither knew his name, his language, his home, his business, nor anything else. The doctors held learned consultations upon him, and discoursed upon the centre of memory and depressed tables, deranged nerve-cells and cerebral congestions, but all their polysyllables began and ended at the fact that the man's memory was gone, and that it was beyond the power of science to restore it. During the weary months of his convalescence he picked up reading and writing, but with the

return of his strength came no return of his former life. England, Devonshire, Brisport, Mary, Granny— the words brought no recollection to his mind. All was absolute darkness. At last he was discharged, a friendless, tradeless, penniless man, without a past, and with very little to look to in the future. His very name was altered, for it had been necessary to invent one. John Huxford had passed away, and John Hardy took his place among mankind. Here was a strange outcome of a Spanish gentleman's tobacco-inspired meditations.

John's case had aroused some discussion and curiosity in Quebec, so that he was not suffered to drift into utter helplessness upon emerging from the hospital. A Scotch manufacturer named M'Kinlay found him a post as porter in his establishment, and for a long time he worked at seven dollars a week at the loading and unloading of vans. In the course of years it was noticed, however, that his memory, however defective as to the past, was extremely reliable and accurate when concerned with anything which had occurred since his accident. From the factory he was promoted into the counting-house, and the year 1835 found him a junior clerk at a salary of £120 a year. Steadily and surely John Hardy fought his way upward from post to post, with his whole heart and mind devoted to the business. In 1840 he was third clerk, in 1845 he was second, and in 1852 he became manager of the whole vast establishment, and second only to Mr. M'Kinlay himself.

There were few who grudged John this rapid advancement, for it was obviously due to neither chance nor favouritism, but entirely to his marvellous powers of application and industry. From early morning until late in the night he laboured hard in the service of his employer, checking, overlooking, superintending, setting an example to all of cheerful devotion to duty. As he rose from one post to another his salary increased, but it caused no alteration in his mode of living, save that it enabled him to be more open-handed to the poor. He signalised his promotion to the managership by a donation of 1000 l. to the hospital in which he had been treated a quarter of a century before. The remainder of his earnings he allowed to accumulate in the business, drawing a small sum quarterly for his sustenance, and still residing in the humble dwelling which he had occupied when he was a warehouse porter. In spite of his success he was a sad, silent, morose man, solitary in his habits, and possessed always of a vague undefined yearning, a dull feeling of dissatisfaction and of craving which never abandoned him. Often he would strive with his poor crippled brain to pierce the curtain which divided him from the past, and to solve the enigma of his youthful existence, but though he sat many a time by the fire until his head throbbed with his efforts, John Hardy could never recall the least glimpse of John Huxford's history.

On one occasion he had, in the interests of the firm, to journey to Quebec, and to visit the very cork factory which had tempted him to leave England. Strolling through the workroom with the foreman, John automatically, and without knowing what he was doing, picked up a square piece of the bark, and fashioned it with two or three deft cuts of his penknife into a smooth tapering cork. His companion picked it out of his hand and examined it with the eye of an expert.

"This is not the first cork which you have cut by many a hundred, Mr. Hardy," he remarked.

"Indeed you are wrong," John answered, smiling; "I never cut one before in my life."

"Impossible!" cried the foreman. "Here's another bit of cork. Try again."

John did his best to repeat the performance, but the brains of the manager interfered with the trained muscles of the corkcutter. The latter had not forgotten their cunning, but they needed to be left to themselves, and not directed by a mind which knew nothing of the matter. Instead of the smooth graceful shape, he could produce nothing but rough-hewn clumsy cylinders.

"It must have been chance," said the foreman, "but I could have sworn that it was the work of an old hand!"

As the years passed John's smooth English skin had warped and crinkled until he was as brown and as seamed as a walnut. His hair, too, after many years of iron-grey, had finally become as white as the winters of his adopted country. Yet he was a hale and upright old man, and when he at last retired from the manager-ship of the firm with which he had been so long connected, he bore the weight of his seventy years lightly and bravely. He was in the peculiar position himself of not knowing his own age, as it was impossible for him to do more than guess at how old he was at the time of his accident.

The Franco-German War came round, and while the two great rivals were destroying each other, their more peaceful neighbours were quietly ousting them out of their markets and their commerce. Many English ports benefited by this condition of things, but none more than Brisport. It had long ceased to be a fishing village, but was now a large and prosperous town, with a great breakwater in place of the quay on which Mary had stood, and a frontage of terraces and grand hotels where all the grandees of the west country came when they were in need of a change. All these extensions had made Brisport the centre of a busy trade, and her ships found their way into every harbour in the world. Hence it was no wonder, especially in that very busy year of 1870, that several Brisport vessels were lying in the river and alongside the wharves of Quebec.

One day John Hardy, who found time hang a little on his hands since his retirement from business, strolled along by the water's edge listening to the clanking of the steam winches, and watching the great barrels and cases as they were swung ashore and piled upon the wharf. He had observed the coming in of a great ocean steamer, and having waited until she was safely moored, he was turning away, when a few words fell upon his ear uttered by some one on board a little weather-beaten barque close by him. It was only some commonplace order that was bawled out, but the sound fell upon the old man's ears with a strange mixture of disuse and familiarity. He stood by the vessel and heard the seamen at their work, all speaking with the same broad, pleasant jingling accent. Why did it send such a thrill through his nerves to listen to it? He sat down upon a coil of rope and pressed his hands to his temples, drinking in the long-forgotten dialect, and trying to piece together in his mind the thousand half-formed nebulous recollections which were surging up in it. Then he rose, and walking along to the stern he read the name of the ship, *The Sunlight*, Brisport. Brisport! Again that flush and tingle through every nerve. Why was that word and the men's speech so familiar to him? He walked moodily home, and all night he lay tossing and sleepless, pursuing a shadowy something which was ever within his reach, and yet which ever evaded him.

Early next morning he was up and down on the wharf listening to the talk of the west-country sailors. Every word they spoke seemed to him to revive his memory and bring him nearer to the light. From time to time they paused in their work, and seeing the white-haired stranger sitting so silently and attentively, they laughed at him and broke little jests upon him. And even these jests had a familiar sound to the exile, as they very well might, seeing that they were the same which he had heard in his youth, for no one ever makes a new joke in England. So he sat through the long day, bathing himself in the west-country speech, and waiting for the light to break.

And it happened that when the sailors broke off for their mid-day meal, one of them, either out of curiosity or good nature, came over to the old watcher and greeted him. So John asked him to be seated on a log by his side, and began to put many questions to him about the country from which he came, and the town. All which the man answered glibly enough, for there is nothing in the world that a sailor loves to talk of so much as of his native place, for it pleases him to show that he is no mere wanderer, but that he has a home to receive him whenever he shall choose to settle down to a quiet life. So the seaman prattled away about the Town Hall and the Martello Tower, and the Esplanade, and Pitt Street and the High Street, until his companion suddenly shot out a long eager arm and caught him by the wrist.

"Look here, man," he said, in a low quick whisper. "Answer me truly as you hope for mercy. Are not the streets that run out of the High Street, Fox Street, Caroline Street, and George Street, in the order named?"

"They are," the sailor answered, shrinking away from the wild flashing eyes. And at that moment John's memory came back to him, and he saw clear and distinct his life as it had been and as it should have been, with every minutest detail traced as in letters of fire. Too stricken to cry out, too stricken to weep, he could only hurry away homewards wildly and aimlessly; hurry as fast as his aged limbs would carry him, as if, poor soul! there were some chance yet of catching up the fifty years which had gone by. Staggering and tremulous he hastened on until a film seemed to gather over his eyes, and throwing his arms into the air with a great cry, "Oh, Mary, Mary! Oh, my lost, lost life!" he fell senseless upon the pavement.

The storm of emotion which had passed through him, and the mental shock which he had undergone, would have sent many a man into a raging fever, but John was too strong-willed and too practical to allow his strength to be wasted at the very time when he needed it most. Within a few days he realised a portion of his property, and starting for New York, caught the first mail steamer to England. Day and night, night and day, he trod the quarter-deck, until the hardy sailors watched the old man with astonishment, and marvelled how any human being could do so much upon so little sleep. It was only by this unceasing exercise, by wearing down his vitality until fatigue brought lethargy, that he could prevent himself from falling into a very frenzy of despair. He hardly dared ask himself what was the object of this wild journey? What did he expect? Would Mary be still alive? She must be a very old woman. If he could but see her and mingle his tears with hers he would be content. Let her only know that it had been no fault of his, and that they had both been victims to the same cruel fate. The cottage was her own, and she had said that she would wait for him there until she heard from him. Poor lass, she had never reckoned on such a wait as this.

At last the Irish lights were sighted and passed, Land's End lay like a blue fog upon the water, and the great steamer ploughed its way along the bold Cornish coast until it dropped its anchor in Plymouth Bay. John hurried to the railway station, and within a few hours he found himself back once more in his native town, which he had quitted a poor corkcutter, half a century before.

But was it the same town? Were it not for the name engraved all over the station and on the hotels, John might have found a difficulty in believing it. The broad, well-paved streets, with the tram lines laid down the centre, were very different from the narrow winding lanes which he could remember. The spot upon which the station had been built was now the very centre of the town,

but in the old days it would have been far out in the fields. In every direction, lines of luxurious villas branched away in streets and crescents bearing names which were new to the exile. Great warehouses, and long rows of shops with glittering fronts, showed him how enormously Brisport had increased in wealth as well as in dimensions. It was only when he came upon the old High Street that John began to feel at home. It was much altered, but still it was recognisable, and some few of the buildings were just as he had left them. There was the place where Fairbairn's cork works had been. It was now occupied by a great brand-new hotel. And there was the old grey Town Hall. The wanderer turned down beside it, and made his way with eager steps but a sinking heart in the direction of the line of cottages which he used to know so well.

It was not difficult for him to find where they had been. The sea at least was as of old, and from it he could tell where the cottages had stood. But alas, where were they now! In their place an imposing crescent of high stone houses reared their tall front to the beach. John walked wearily down past their palatial entrances, feeling heart-sore and despairing, when suddenly a thrill shot through him, followed by a warm glow of excitement and of hope, for, standing a little back from the line, and looking as much out of place as a bumpkin in a ballroom, was an old whitewashed cottage, with wooden porch and walls bright with creeping plants. He rubbed his eyes and stared again, but there it stood with its diamond-paned windows and white muslin curtains, the very same down to the smallest details, as it had been on the day when he last saw it. Brown hair had become white, and fishing hamlets had changed into cities, but busy hands and a faithful heart had kept granny's cottage unchanged and ready for the wanderer.

And now, when he had reached his very haven of rest, John Huxford's mind became more filled with apprehension than ever, and he came over so deadly sick, that he had to sit down upon one of the beach benches which faced the cottage. An old fisherman was perched at one end of it, smoking his black clay pipe, and he remarked upon the wan face and sad eyes of the stranger.

"You have overtired yourself," he said. "It doesn't do for old chaps like you and me to forget our years."

"I'm better now, thank you," John answered. "Can you tell me, friend, how that one cottage came among all those fine houses?"

"Why," said the old fellow, thumping his crutch energetically upon the ground, "that cottage belongs to the most obstinate woman in all England. That woman, if you'll believe me, has been offered the price of the cottage ten times over, and yet she won't part with it. They have even promised to remove it stone by stone, and put it up on some more convenient place, and pay her a

good round sum into the bargain, but, God bless you! she wouldn't so much as hear of it."

"And why was that?" asked John.

"Well, that's just the funny part of it. It's all on account of a mistake. You see her spark went away when I was a youngster, and she's got it into her head that he may come back some day, and that he won't know where to go unless the cottage is there. Why, if the fellow were alive he would be as old as you, but I've no doubt he's dead long ago. She's well quit of him, for he must have been a scamp to abandon her as he did."

"Oh, he abandoned her, did he?"

"Yes— went off to the States, and never so much as sent a word to bid her good-bye. It was a cruel shame, it was, for the girl has been a-waiting and a-pining for him ever since. It's my belief that it's fifty years' weeping that blinded her."

"She is blind!" cried John, half rising to his feet.

"Worse than that," said the fisherman. "She's mortal ill, and not expected to live. Why, look ye, there's the doctor's carriage a-waiting at her door."

At this evil tidings old John sprang up and hurried over to the cottage, where he met the physician returning to his brougham.

"How is your patient, doctor?" he asked in a trembling voice.

"Very bad, very bad," said the man of medicine pompously. "If she continues to sink she will be in great danger; but if, on the other hand, she takes a turn, it is possible that she may recover," with which oracular answer he drove away in a cloud of dust.

John Huxford was still hesitating at the doorway, not knowing how to announce himself, or how far a shock might be dangerous to the sufferer, when a gentleman in black came bustling up.

"Can you tell me, my man, if this is where the sick woman is?" he asked.

John nodded, and the clergyman passed in, leaving the door half open. The wanderer waited until he had gone into the inner room, and then slipped into the front parlour, where he had spent so many happy hours. All was the same as ever, down to the smallest ornaments, for Mary had been in the habit whenever anything was broken of replacing it with a duplicate, so that there might be no change in the room. He stood irresolute, looking about him, until he heard a woman's voice from the inner chamber, and stealing to the door he peeped in.

The invalid was reclining upon a couch, propped up with pillows, and her face was turned full towards John as he looked round the door. He could have cried out as his eyes rested upon it, for there were Mary's pale, plain, sweet homely features as smooth and as unchanged as though she were still the half

child, half woman, whom he had pressed to his heart on the Brisport quay. Her calm, eventless, unselfish life had left none of those rude traces upon her countenance which are the outward emblems of internal conflict and an unquiet soul. A chaste melancholy had refined and softened her expression, and her loss of sight had been compensated for by that placidity which comes upon the faces of the blind. With her silvery hair peeping out beneath her snow-white cap, and a bright smile upon her sympathetic face, she was the old Mary improved and developed, with something ethereal and angelic superadded.

"You will keep a tenant in the cottage," she was saying to the clergyman, who sat with his back turned to the observer. "Choose some poor deserving folk in the parish who will be glad of a home free. And when he comes you will tell him that I have waited for him until I have been forced to go on, but that he will find me on the other side still faithful and true. There's a little money too— only a few pounds— but I should like him to have it when he comes, for he may need it, and then you will tell the folk you put in to be kind to him, for he will be grieved, poor lad, and to tell him that I was cheerful and happy up to the end. Don't let him know that I ever fretted, or he may fret too."

Now John listened quietly to all this from behind the door, and more than once he had to put his hand to his throat, but when she had finished, and when he thought of her long, blameless, innocent life, and saw the dear face looking straight at him, and yet unable to see him, it became too much for his manhood, and he burst out into an irrepressible choking sob which shook his very frame. And then occurred a strange thing, for though he had spoken no word, the old woman stretched out her arms to him, and cried, "Oh, Johnny, Johnny! Oh dear, dear Johnny, you have come back to me again," and before the parson could at all understand what had happened, those two faithful lovers were in each other's arms, weeping over each other, and patting each other's silvery heads, with their hearts so full of joy that it almost compensated for all that weary fifty years of waiting.

It is hard to say how long they rejoiced together. It seemed a very short time to them and a very long one to the reverend gentleman, who was thinking at last of stealing away, when Mary recollected his presence and the courtesy which was due to him. "My heart is full of joy, sir," she said; "it is God's will that I should not see my Johnny, but I can call his image up as clear as if I had my eyes. Now stand up, John, and I will let the gentleman see how well I remember you. He is as tall, sir, as the second shelf, as straight as an arrow, his face brown, and his eyes bright and clear. His hair is well- nigh black, and his moustache the same— I shouldn't wonder if he had whiskers as well by this time. Now, sir, don't you think I can do without my sight?"

The clergyman listened to her description, and looking at the battered, white-haired man before him, he hardly knew whether to laugh or to cry.

But it all proved to be a laughing matter in the end, for, whether it was that her illness had taken some natural turn, or that John's return had startled it away, it is certain that from that day Mary steadily improved until she was as well as ever.

"No special license for me," John had said sturdily. "It looks as if we were ashamed of what we are doing, as though we hadn't the best right to be married of any two folk in the parish.

So the banns were put up accordingly, and three times it was announced that John Huxford, bachelor, was going to be united to Mary Howden, spinster, after which, no one objecting, they were duly married accordingly.

"We may not have very long in this world," said old John, "but at least we shall start fair and square in the next."

John's share in the Quebec business was sold out, and gave rise to a very interesting legal question as to whether, knowing that his name was Huxford, he could still sign that of Hardy, as was necessary for the completion of the business. It was decided, however, that on his producing two trustworthy witnesses to his identity all would be right, so the property was duly realised and produced a very handsome fortune. Part of this John devoted to building a pretty villa just outside Brisport, and the heart of the proprietor of Beach Terrace leaped within him when he learned that the cottage was at last to be abandoned, and that it would no longer break the symmetry and impair the effect of his row of aristocratic mansions.

And there in their snug new home, sitting out on the lawn in the summertime, and on either side of the fire in the winter, that worthy old couple continued for many years to live as innocently and as happily as two children. Those who knew them well say that there was never a shadow between them, and that the love which burned in their aged hearts was as high and as holy as that of any young couple who ever went to the altar. And through all the country round, if ever man or woman were in distress and fighting against hard times, they had only to go up to the villa to receive help, and that sympathy which is more precious than help. So when at last John and Mary fell asleep in their ripe old age, within a few hours of each other, they had all the poor and the needy and the friendless of the parish among their mourners, and in talking over the troubles which these two had faced so bravely, they learned that their own miseries also were but passing things, and that faith and truth can never miscarry, either in this existence or the next.

4: Moxon's Master

Ambrose Bierce

1842-1914?

San Francisco Examiner, 16 April 1899, as "*A Night at Moxon's*"

"ARE YOU serious?— do you really believe that a machine thinks?"

I got no immediate reply; Moxon was apparently intent upon the coals in the grate, touching them deftly here and there with the fire-poker till they signified a sense of his attention by a brighter glow. For several weeks I had been observing in him a growing habit of delay in answering even the most trivial of commonplace questions. His air, however, was that of preoccupation rather than deliberation: one might have said that he had "something on his mind."

Presently he said:

"What is a 'machine'? The word has been variously defined. Here is one definition from a popular dictionary: 'Any instrument or organization by which power is applied and made effective, or a desired effect produced.' Well, then, is not a man a machine? And you will admit that he thinks— or thinks he thinks."

"If you do not wish to answer my question," I said, rather testily, "why not say so?— all that you say is mere evasion. You know well enough that when I say 'machine' I do not mean a man, but something that man has made and controls."

"When it does not control him," he said, rising abruptly and looking out of a window, whence nothing was visible in the blackness of a stormy night. A moment later he turned about and with a smile said: "I beg your pardon; I had no thought of evasion. I considered the dictionary man's unconscious testimony suggestive and worth something in the discussion. I can give your question a direct answer easily enough: I do believe that a machine thinks about the work that it is doing."

That was direct enough, certainly. It was not altogether pleasing, for it tended to confirm a sad suspicion that Moxon's devotion to study and work in his machine-shop had not been good for him. I knew, for one thing, that he suffered from insomnia, and that is no light affliction. Had it affected his mind? His reply to my question seemed to me then evidence that it had; perhaps I should think differently about it now. I was younger then, and among the blessings that are not denied to youth is ignorance. Incited by that great stimulant to controversy, I said:

"And what, pray, does it think with— in the absence of a brain?"

The reply, coming with less than his customary delay, took his favorite form of counter-interrogation:

"With what does a plant think— in the absence of a brain?"

"Ah, plants also belong to the philosopher class! I should be pleased to know some of their conclusions; you may omit the premises."

"Perhaps," he replied, apparently unaffected by my foolish irony, "you may be able to infer their convictions from their acts. I will spare you the familiar examples of the sensitive mimosa, the several insectivorous flowers and those whose stamens bend down and shake their pollen upon the entering bee in order that he may fertilize their distant mates. But observe this. In an open spot in my garden I planted a climbing vine. When it was barely above the surface I set a stake into the soil a yard away. The vine at once made for it, but as it was about to reach it after several days I removed it a few feet. The vine at once altered its course, making an acute angle, and again made for the stake. This manoeuvre was repeated several times, but finally, as if discouraged, the vine abandoned the pursuit and ignoring further attempts to divert it traveled to a small tree, further away, which it climbed.

"Roots of the eucalyptus will prolong themselves incredibly in search of moisture. A well-known horticulturist relates that one entered an old drain pipe and followed it until it came to a break, where a section of the pipe had been removed to make way for a stone wall that had been built across its course. The root left the drain and followed the wall until it found an opening where a stone had fallen out. It crept through and following the other side of the wall back to the drain, entered the unexplored part and resumed its journey."

"And all this?"

"Can you miss the significance of it? It shows the consciousness of plants. It proves that they think."

"Even if it did— what then? We were speaking, not of plants, but of machines. They may be composed partly of wood— wood that has no longer vitality— or wholly of metal. Is thought an attribute also of the mineral kingdom?"

"How else do you explain the phenomena, for example, of crystallization?"

"I do not explain them."

"Because you cannot without affirming what you wish to deny, namely, intelligent cooperation among the constituent elements of the crystals. When soldiers form lines, or hollow squares, you call it reason. When wild geese in flight take the form of a letter V you say instinct. When the homogeneous atoms of a mineral, moving freely in solution, arrange themselves into shapes mathematically perfect, or particles of frozen moisture into the symmetrical and beautiful forms of snowflakes, you have nothing to say. You have not even invented a name to conceal your heroic unreason."

Moxon was speaking with unusual animation and earnestness. As he paused I heard in an adjoining room known to me as his "machine-shop," which no one but himself was permitted to enter, a singular thumping sound, as of some one pounding upon a table with an open hand. Moxon heard it at the same moment and, visibly agitated, rose and hurriedly passed into the room whence it came. I thought it odd that any one else should be in there, and my interest in my friend— with doubtless a touch of unwarrantable curiosity— led me to listen intently, though, I am happy to say, not at the keyhole. There were confused sounds, as of a struggle or scuffle; the floor shook. I distinctly heard hard breathing and a hoarse whisper which said "Damn you!" Then all was silent, and presently Moxon reappeared and said, with a rather sorry smile:

"Pardon me for leaving you so abruptly. I have a machine in there that lost its temper and cut up rough."

Fixing my eyes steadily upon his left cheek, which was traversed by four parallel excoriations showing blood, I said:

"How would it do to trim its nails?"

I could have spared myself the jest; he gave it no attention, but seated himself in the chair that he had left and resumed the interrupted monologue as if nothing had occurred:

"Doubtless you do not hold with those (I need not name them to a man of your reading) who have taught that all matter is sentient, that every atom is a living, feeling, conscious being. *I* do. There is no such thing as dead, inert matter: it is all alive; all instinct with force, actual and potential; all sensitive to the same forces in its environment and susceptible to the contagion of higher and subtler ones residing in such superior organisms as it may be brought into relation with, as those of man when he is fashioning it into an instrument of his will. It absorbs something of his intelligence and purpose— more of them in proportion to the complexity of the resulting machine and that of its work.

"Do you happen to recall Herbert Spencer's definition of 'Life'? I read it thirty years ago. He may have altered it afterward, for anything I know, but in all that time I have been unable to think of a single word that could profitably be changed or added or removed. It seems to me not only the best definition, but the only possible one.

"'Life,' he says, 'is a definite combination of heterogeneous changes, both simultaneous and successive, in correspondence with external coexistences and sequences.'"

"That defines the phenomenon," I said, "but gives no hint of its cause."

"That," he replied, "is all that any definition can do. As Mill points out, we know nothing of cause except as an antecedent— nothing of effect except as a

consequent. Of certain phenomena, one never occurs without another, which is dissimilar: the first in point of time we call cause, the second, effect. One who had many times seen a rabbit pursued by a dog, and had never seen rabbits and dogs otherwise, would think the rabbit the cause of the dog.

"But I fear," he added, laughing naturally enough, "that my rabbit is leading me a long way from the track of my legitimate quarry: I'm indulging in the pleasure of the chase for its own sake. What I want you to observe is that in Herbert Spencer's definition of 'life' the activity of a machine is included—there is nothing in the definition that is not applicable to it. According to this sharpest of observers and deepest of thinkers, if a man during his period of activity is alive, so is a machine when in operation. As an inventor and constructor of machines I know that to be true."

Moxon was silent for a long time, gazing absently into the fire. It was growing late and I thought it time to be going, but somehow I did not like the notion of leaving him in that isolated house, all alone except for the presence of some person of whose nature my conjectures could go no further than that it was unfriendly, perhaps malign. Leaning toward him and looking earnestly into his eyes while making a motion with my hand through the door of his workshop, I said:

"Moxon, whom have you in there?"

Somewhat to my surprise he laughed lightly and answered without hesitation:

"Nobody; the incident that you have in mind was caused by my folly in leaving a machine in action with nothing to act upon, while I undertook the interminable task of enlightening your understanding. Do you happen to know that Consciousness is the creature of Rhythm?"

"O bother them both!" I replied, rising and laying hold of my overcoat. "I'm going to wish you good night; and I'll add the hope that the machine which you inadvertently left in action will have her gloves on the next time you think it needful to stop her."

Without waiting to observe the effect of my shot I left the house.

Rain was falling, and the darkness was intense. In the sky beyond the crest of a hill toward which I groped my way along precarious plank sidewalks and across miry, unpaved streets I could see the faint glow of the city's lights, but behind me nothing was visible but a single window of Moxon's house. It glowed with what seemed to me a mysterious and fateful meaning. I knew it was an uncurtained aperture in my friend's "machine-shop," and I had little doubt that he had resumed the studies interrupted by his duties as my instructor in mechanical consciousness and the fatherhood of Rhythm. Odd, and in some degree humorous, as his convictions seemed to me at that time, I

could not wholly divest myself of the feeling that they had some tragic relation to his life and character— perhaps to his destiny— although I no longer entertained the notion that they were the vagaries of a disordered mind. Whatever might be thought of his views, his exposition of them was too logical for that. Over and over, his last words came back to me: "Consciousness is the creature of Rhythm." Bald and terse as the statement was, I now found it infinitely alluring. At each recurrence it broadened in meaning and deepened in suggestion. Why, here, (I thought) is something upon which to found a philosophy. If consciousness is the product of rhythm all things ARE conscious, for all have motion, and all motion is rhythmic. I wondered if Moxon knew the significance and breadth of his thought— the scope of this momentous generalization; or had he arrived at his philosophic faith by the tortuous and uncertain road of observation?

That faith was then new to me, and all Moxon's expounding had failed to make me a convert; but now it seemed as if a great light shone about me, like that which fell upon Saul of Tarsus; and out there in the storm and darkness and solitude I experienced what Lewes calls "The endless variety and excitement of philosophic thought." I exulted in a new sense of knowledge, a new pride of reason. My feet seemed hardly to touch the earth; it was as if I were uplifted and borne through the air by invisible wings.

Yielding to an impulse to seek further light from him whom I now recognized as my master and guide, I had unconsciously turned about, and almost before I was aware of having done so found myself again at Moxon's door. I was drenched with rain, but felt no discomfort. Unable in my excitement to find the doorbell I instinctively tried the knob. It turned and, entering, I mounted the stairs to the room that I had so recently left. All was dark and silent; Moxon, as I had supposed, was in the adjoining room— the "machine-shop." Groping along the wall until I found the communicating door I knocked loudly several times, but got no response, which I attributed to the uproar outside, for the wind was blowing a gale and dashing the rain against the thin walls in sheets. The drumming upon the shingle roof spanning the unceiled room was loud and incessant.

I had never been invited into the machine-shop— had, indeed, been denied admittance, as had all others, with one exception, a skilled metal worker, of whom no one knew anything except that his name was Haley and his habit silence. But in my spiritual exaltation, discretion and civility were alike forgotten and I opened the door. What I saw took all philosophical speculation out of me in short order.

Moxon sat facing me at the farther side of a small table upon which a single candle made all the light that was in the room. Opposite him, his back toward

me, sat another person. On the table between the two was a chessboard; the men were playing. I knew little of chess, but as only a few pieces were on the board it was obvious that the game was near its close. Moxon was intensely interested— not so much, it seemed to me, in the game as in his antagonist, upon whom he had fixed so intent a look that, standing though I did directly in the line of his vision, I was altogether unobserved. His face was ghastly white, and his eyes glittered like diamonds. Of his antagonist I had only a back view, but that was sufficient; I should not have cared to see his face.

He was apparently not more than five feet in height, with proportions suggesting those of a gorilla— a tremendous breadth of shoulders, thick, short neck and broad, squat head, which had a tangled growth of black hair and was topped with a crimson fez. A tunic of the same color, belted tightly to the waist, reached the seat— apparently a box— upon which he sat; his legs and feet were not seen. His left forearm appeared to rest in his lap; he moved his pieces with his right hand, which seemed disproportionately long.

I had shrunk back and now stood a little to one side of the doorway and in shadow. If Moxon had looked farther than the face of his opponent he could have observed nothing now, except that the door was open. Something forbade me either to enter or to retire, a feeling— I know not how it came— that I was in the presence of an imminent tragedy and might serve my friend by remaining. With a scarcely conscious rebellion against the indelicacy of the act I remained.

The play was rapid. Moxon hardly glanced at the board before making his moves, and to my unskilled eye seemed to move the piece most convenient to his hand, his motions in doing so being quick, nervous and lacking in precision. The response of his antagonist, while equally prompt in the inception, was made with a slow, uniform, mechanical and, I thought, somewhat theatrical movement of the arm, that was a sore trial to my patience. There was something unearthly about it all, and I caught myself shuddering. But I was wet and cold.

Two or three times after moving a piece the stranger slightly inclined his head, and each time I observed that Moxon shifted his king. All at once the thought came to me that the man was dumb. And then that he was a machine— an automaton chess-player! Then I remembered that Moxon had once spoken to me of having invented such a piece of mechanism, though I did not understand that it had actually been constructed. Was all his talk about the consciousness and intelligence of machines merely a prelude to eventual exhibition of this device— only a trick to intensify the effect of its mechanical action upon me in my ignorance of its secret?

A fine end, this, of all my intellectual transports— my "endless variety and excitement of philosophic thought!" I was about to retire in disgust when something occurred to hold my curiosity. I observed a shrug of the thing's great shoulders, as if it were irritated: and so natural was this— so entirely human— that in my new view of the matter it startled me. Nor was that all, for a moment later it struck the table sharply with its clenched hand. At that gesture Moxon seemed even more startled than I: he pushed his chair a little backward, as in alarm.

Presently Moxon, whose play it was, raised his hand high above the board, pounced upon one of his pieces like a sparrow-hawk and with the exclamation "checkmate!" rose quickly to his feet and stepped behind his chair. The automaton sat motionless.

The wind had now gone down, but I heard, at lessening intervals and progressively louder, the rumble and roll of thunder. In the pauses between I now became conscious of a low humming or buzzing which, like the thunder, grew momentarily louder and more distinct. It seemed to come from the body of the automaton, and was unmistakably a whirring of wheels. It gave me the impression of a disordered mechanism which had escaped the repressive and regulating action of some controlling part— an effect such as might be expected if a pawl should be jostled from the teeth of a ratchet-wheel. But before I had time for much conjecture as to its nature my attention was taken by the strange motions of the automaton itself. A slight but continuous convulsion appeared to have possession of it. In body and head it shook like a man with palsy or an ague chill, and the motion augmented every moment until the entire figure was in violent agitation. Suddenly it sprang to its feet and with a movement almost too quick for the eye to follow shot forward across table and chair, with both arms thrust forth to their full length— the posture and lunge of a diver. Moxon tried to throw himself backward out of reach, but he was too late: I saw the horrible thing's hands close upon his throat, his own clutch its wrists. Then the table was overturned, the candle thrown to the floor and extinguished, and all was black dark. But the noise of the struggle was dreadfully distinct, and most terrible of all were the raucous, squawking sounds made by the strangled man's efforts to breathe. Guided by the infernal hubbub, I sprang to the rescue of my friend, but had hardly taken a stride in the darkness when the whole room blazed with a blinding white light that burned into my brain and heart and memory a vivid picture of the combatants on the floor, Moxon underneath, his throat still in the clutch of those iron hands, his head forced backward, his eyes protruding, his mouth wide open and his tongue thrust out; and— horrible contrast!— upon the painted face of

his assassin an expression of tranquil and profound thought, as in the solution of a problem in chess! This I observed, then all was blackness and silence.

THREE DAYS later I recovered consciousness in a hospital. As the memory of that tragic night slowly evolved in my ailing brain recognized in my attendant Moxon's confidential workman, Haley. Responding to a look he approached, smiling.

"Tell me about it," I managed to say, faintly— "all about it."

"Certainly," he said; "you were carried unconscious from a burning house— Moxon's. Nobody knows how you came to be there. You may have to do a little explaining. The origin of the fire is a bit mysterious, too. My own notion is that the house was struck by lightning."

"And Moxon?"

"Buried yesterday— what was left of him."

Apparently this reticent person could unfold himself on occasion. When imparting shocking intelligence to the sick he was affable enough. After some moments of the keenest mental suffering I ventured to ask another question:

"Who rescued me?"

"Well, if that interests you— I did."

"Thank you, Mr. Haley, and may God bless you for it. Did you rescue, also, that charming product of your skill, the automaton chess-player that murdered its inventor?"

The man was silent a long time, looking away from me. Presently he turned and gravely said:

"Do you know that?"

"I do," I replied; "I saw it done."

That was many years ago. If asked to-day I should answer less confidently.

———————————

5: Smile

D. H. Lawrence

1885-1930

In: *The Woman Who Rode Away* and other stories, 1928

HE HAD DECIDED to sit up all night, as a kind of penance. The telegram had simply said: "Ophelia's condition critical." He felt, under the circumstances, that to go to bed in the *wagon-lit* would be frivolous. So he sat wearily in the first-class compartment as night fell over France.

He ought, of course, to be sitting by Ophelia's bedside. But Ophelia didn't want him. So he sat up in the train.

Deep inside him was a black and ponderous weight: like some tumour filled with sheer gloom, weighing down his vitals. He had always taken life seriously. Seriousness now overwhelmed him. His dark, handsome, clean-shaven face would have done for Christ on the Cross, with the thick black eyebrows tilted in the dazed agony.

The night in the train was like an inferno: nothing was real. Two elderly Englishwomen opposite him had died long ago, perhaps even before he had. Because, of course, he was dead himself.

Slow, grey dawn came in the mountains of the frontier, and he watched it with unseeing eyes. But his mind repeated:

"And when the dawn came, dim and sad
And chill with early showers,
Her quiet eyelids closed: she had
Another morn than ours."

And his monk's changeless, tormented face showed no trace of the contempt he felt, even self-contempt, for this bathos, as his critical mind judged it.

He was in Italy: he looked at the country with faint aversion. Not capable of much feeling any more, he had only a tinge of aversion as he saw the olives and the sea. A sort of poetic swindle.

It was night again when he reached the home of the Blue Sisters, where Ophelia had chosen to retreat. He was ushered into the Mother Superior's room, in the palace. She rose and bowed to him in silence, looking at him along her nose. Then she said in French:

"It pains me to tell you. She died this afternoon."

He stood stupefied, not feeling much, anyhow, but gazing at nothingness from his handsome, strong-featured monk's face.

The Mother Superior softly put her white, handsome hand on his arm and gazed up into his face, leaning to him.

"Courage!" she said softly. "Courage, no?"

He stepped back. He was always scared when a woman leaned at him like that. In her voluminous skirts, the Mother Superior was very womanly.

"Quite!" he replied in English. "Can I see her?"

The Mother Superior rang a bell, and a young sister appeared. She was rather pale, but there was something naïve and mischievous in her hazel eyes. The elder woman murmured an introduction, the young woman demurely made a slight reverence. But Matthew held out his hand, like a man reaching for the last straw. The young nun unfolded her white hands and shyly slid one into his, passive as a sleeping bird.

And out of the fathomless Hades of his gloom he thought: "What a nice hand!"

They went along a handsome but cold corridor, and tapped at a door. Matthew, walking in far-off Hades, still was aware of the soft, fine voluminousness of the women's black skirts, moving with soft, fluttered haste in front of him.

He was terrified when the door opened, and he saw the candles burning round the white bed, in the lofty, noble room. A sister sat beside the candles, her face dark and primitive, in the white coif, as she looked up from her breviary. Then she rose, a sturdy woman, and made a little bow, and Matthew was aware of creamy-dusky hands twisting a black rosary, against the rich, blue silk of her bosom.

The three sisters flocked silent, yet fluttered and very feminine, in their volumes of silky black skirts, to the bedhead. The Mother Superior leaned, and with utmost delicacy lifted the veil of white lawn from the dead face.

Matthew saw the dead, beautiful composure of his wife's face, and instantly, something leaped like laughter in the depths of him, he gave a little grunt, and an extraordinary smile came over his face.

The three nuns, in the candle glow that quivered warm and quick like a Christmas tree, were looking at him with heavily compassionate eyes, from under their coif-bands. They were like a mirror. Six eyes suddenly started with a little fear, then changed, puzzled, into wonder. And over the three nuns' faces, helplessly facing him in the candle-glow, a strange, involuntary smile began to come. In the three faces, the same smile growing so differently, like three subtle flowers opening. In the pale young nun, it was almost pain, with a touch of mischievous ecstasy. But the dark Ligurian face of the watching sister, a mature, level-browed woman, curled with a pagan smile, slow, infinitely

subtle in its archaic humour. It was the Etruscan smile, subtle and unabashed, and unanswerable.

The Mother Superior, who had a large-featured face something like Matthew's own, tried hard not to smile. But he kept his humorous, malevolent chin uplifted at her, and she lowered her face as the smile grew, grew and grew over her face.

The young, pale sister suddenly covered her face with her sleeve, her body shaking. The Mother Superior put her arm over the girl's shoulder, murmuring with Italian emotion: "Poor little thing! Weep, then, poor little thing!" But the chuckle was still there, under the emotion. The sturdy dark sister stood unchanging, clutching the black beads, but the noiseless smile immovable.

Matthew suddenly turned to the bed, to see if his dead wife had observed him. It was a movement of fear.

Ophelia lay so pretty and so touching, with her peaked, dead little nose sticking up, and her face of an obstinate child fixed in the final obstinacy. The smile went away from Matthew, and the look of super-martyrdom took its place. He did not weep: he just gazed without meaning. Only, on his face deepened the look: I knew this martyrdom was in store for me!

She was so pretty, so childlike, so clever, so obstinate, so worn— and so dead! He felt so blank about it all.

They had been married ten years. He himself had not been perfect— no, no, not by any means! But Ophelia had always wanted her own will. She had loved him, and grown obstinate, and left him, and grown wistful, or contemptuous, or angry, a dozen times, and a dozen times come back to him.

They had no children. And he, sentimentally, had always wanted children. He felt very largely sad.

Now she would never come back to him. This was the thirteenth time, and she was gone for ever.

But was she? Even as he thought it, he felt her nudging him somewhere in the ribs, to make him smile. He writhed a little, and an angry frown came on his brow. He was not *going* to smile! He set his square, naked jaw, and bared his big teeth, as he looked down at the infinitely provoking dead woman. "At it again!"— he wanted to say to her, like the man in Dickens.

He himself had not been perfect. He was going to dwell on his own imperfections.

He turned suddenly to the three women, who had faded backwards beyond the candles, and now hovered, in the white frames of their coifs, between him and nowhere. His eyes glared, and he bared his teeth.

"*Mea culpa! Mea culpa!* " he snarled.

"*Macchè!* " exclaimed the daunted Mother Superior, and her two hands flew apart, then together again, in the density of the sleeves, like birds nesting in couples.

Matthew ducked his head and peered round, prepared to bolt. The Mother Superior, in the background, softly intoned a Pater Noster, and her beads dangled. The pale young sister faded farther back. But the black eyes of the sturdy, black-avised sister twinkled like eternally humorous stars upon him, and he felt the smile digging him in the ribs again.

"Look here!" he said to the women, in expostulation, "I'm awfully upset. I'd better go."

They hovered in fascinating bewilderment. He ducked for the door. But even as he went, the smile began to come on his face, caught by the tail of the sturdy sister's black eye, with its everlasting twink. And, he was secretly thinking, he wished he could hold both her creamy-dusky hands, that were folded like mating birds, voluptuously.

But he insisted on dwelling upon his own imperfections. *Mea culpa!* he howled at himself. And even as he howled it, he felt something nudge him in the ribs, saying to him: *Smile!*

The three women left behind in the lofty room looked at one another, and their hands flew up for a moment, like six birds flying suddenly out of the foliage, then settling again.

"Poor thing!" said the Mother Superior, compassionately.

"Yes! Yes! Poor thing!" cried the young sister, with naïve, shrill impulsiveness.

"Già!" said the dark-avised sister.

The Mother Superior noiselessly moved to the bed, and leaned over the dead face.

"She seems to know, poor soul!" she murmured. "Don't you think so?"

The three coifed heads leaned together. And for the first time they saw the faint ironical curl at the corners of Ophelia's mouth. They looked in fluttering wonder.

"She has seen him!" whispered the thrilling young sister.

The Mother Superior delicately laid the fine-worked veil over the cold face. Then they murmured a prayer for the anima, fingering their beads. Then the Mother Superior set two of the candles straight upon their spikes, clenching the thick candle with firm, soft grip, and pressing it down.

The dark-faced, sturdy sister sat down again with her little holy book. The other two rustled softly to the door, and out into the great white corridor. There softly, noiselessly sailing in all their dark drapery, like dark swans down a river, they suddenly hesitated. Together they had seen a forlorn man's figure,

in a melancholy overcoat, loitering in the cold distance at the corridor's end. The Mother Superior suddenly pressed her pace into an appearance of speed.

Matthew saw them bearing down on him, these voluminous figures with framed faces and lost hands. The young sister trailed a little behind.

"*Pardon, ma Mère* !" he said, as if in the street. "I left my hat somewhere...."

He made a desperate, moving sweep with his arm, and never was man more utterly smileless.

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6: An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street

Sheridan Le Fanu

1814-1873

Dublin University Magazine, Jan. 1851

It is not worth telling, this story of mine— at least, not worth writing. Told, indeed, as I have sometimes been called upon to tell it, to a circle of intelligent and eager faces, lighted up by a good after-dinner fire on a winter's evening, with a cold wind rising and wailing outside, and all snug and cosy within, it has gone off— though I say it, who should not— indifferent well. But it is a venture to do as you would have me. Pen, ink, and paper are cold vehicles for the marvellous, and a "reader" decidedly a more critical animal than a "listener". If, however, you can induce your friends to read it after nightfall, and when the fireside talk has run for a while on thrilling tales of shapeless terror; in short, if you will secure me the *mollia tempora fandi*, I will go to my work, and say my say, with better heart. Well, then, these conditions presupposed, I shall waste no more words, but tell you simply how it all happened.

My cousin (Tom Ludlow) and I studied medicine together. I think he would have succeeded, had he stuck to the profession; but he preferred the Church, poor fellow, and died early, a sacrifice to contagion, contracted in the noble discharge of his duties. For my present purpose, I say enough of his character when I mention that he was of a sedate but frank and cheerful nature; very exact in his observance of truth, and not by any means like myself— of an excitable or nervous temperament.

My Uncle Ludlow— Tom's father— while we were attending lectures, purchased three or four old houses in Aungier Street, one of which was unoccupied. *He* resided in the country, and Tom proposed that we should take up our abode in the untenanted house, so long as it should continue unlet; a move which would accomplish the double end of settling us nearer alike to our lecture-rooms and to our amusements, and of relieving us from the weekly charge of rent for our lodgings.

Our furniture was very scant— our whole equipage remarkably modest and primitive; and, in short, our arrangements pretty nearly as simple as those of a bivouac. Our new plan was, therefore, executed almost as soon as conceived. The front drawing-room was our sitting-room. I had the bedroom over it, and Tom the back bedroom on the same floor, which nothing could have induced me to occupy.

The house, to begin with, was a very old one. It had been, I believe, newly fronted about fifty years before; but with this exception, it had nothing modern about it. The agent who bought it and looked into the titles for my uncle, told me that it was sold, along with much other forfeited property, at

Chichester House, I think, in 1702; and had belonged to Sir Thomas Hacket, who was Lord Mayor of Dublin in James II.'s time. How old it was *then*, I can't say; but, at all events, it had seen years and changes enough to have contracted all that mysterious and saddened air, at once exciting and depressing, which belongs to most old mansions.

There had been very little done in the way of modernising details; and, perhaps, it was better so; for there was something queer and bygone in the very walls and ceilings— in the shape of doors and windows— in the odd diagonal site of the chimney-pieces— in the beams and ponderous cornices— not to mention the singular solidity of all the woodwork, from the bannisters to the window-frames, which hopelessly defied disguise, and would have emphatically proclaimed their antiquity through any conceivable amount of modern finery and varnish.

An effort had, indeed, been made, to the extent of papering the drawing-rooms; but somehow, the paper looked raw and out of keeping; and the old woman, who kept a little dirt-pie of a shop in the lane, and whose daughter— a girl of two and fifty— was our solitary handmaid, coming in at sunrise, and chastely receding again as soon as she had made all ready for tea in our state apartment;— this woman, I say, remembered it, when old Judge Horrocks (who, having earned the reputation of a particularly "hanging judge," ended by hanging himself, as the coroner's jury found, under an impulse of "temporary insanity," with a child's skipping-rope, over the massive old bannisters) resided there, entertaining good company, with fine venison and rare old port. In those halcyon days, the drawing-rooms were hung with gilded leather, and, I dare say, cut a good figure, for they were really spacious rooms.

The bedrooms were wainscoted, but the front one was not gloomy; and in it the cosiness of antiquity quite overcame its sombre associations. But the back bedroom, with its two queerly-placed melancholy windows, staring vacantly at the foot of the bed, and with the shadowy recess to be found in most old houses in Dublin, like a large ghostly closet, which, from congeniality of temperament, had amalgamated with the bedchamber, and dissolved the partition. At night-time, this "alcove"— as our "maid" was wont to call it— had, in my eyes, a specially sinister and suggestive character. Tom's distant and solitary candle glimmered vainly into its darkness. *There* it was always overlooking him— always itself impenetrable. But this was only part of the effect. The whole room was, I can't tell how, repulsive to me. There was, I suppose, in its proportions and features, a latent discord— a certain mysterious and indescribable relation, which jarred indistinctly upon some secret sense of the fitting and the safe, and raised indefinable suspicions and

apprehensions of the imagination. On the whole, as I began by saying, nothing could have induced me to pass a night alone in it.

I had never pretended to conceal from poor Tom my superstitious weakness; and he, on the other hand, most unaffectedly ridiculed my tremors. The sceptic was, however, destined to receive a lesson, as you shall hear.

We had not been very long in occupation of our respective dormitories, when I began to complain of uneasy nights and disturbed sleep. I was, I suppose, the more impatient under this annoyance, as I was usually a sound sleeper, and by no means prone to nightmares. It was now, however, my destiny, instead of enjoying my customary repose, every night to "sup full of horrors". After a preliminary course of disagreeable and frightful dreams, my troubles took a definite form, and the same vision, without an appreciable variation in a single detail, visited me at least (on an average) every second night in the week.

Now, this dream, nightmare, or infernal illusion— which you please— of which I was the miserable sport, was on this wise:

I saw, or thought I saw, with the most abominable distinctness, although at the time in profound darkness, every article of furniture and accidental arrangement of the chamber in which I lay. This, as you know, is incidental to ordinary nightmare. Well, while in this clairvoyant condition, which seemed but the lighting up of the theatre in which was to be exhibited the monotonous tableau of horror, which made my nights insupportable, my attention invariably became, I know not why, fixed upon the windows opposite the foot of my bed; and, uniformly with the same effect, a sense of dreadful anticipation always took slow but sure possession of me. I became somehow conscious of a sort of horrid but undefined preparation going forward in some unknown quarter, and by some unknown agency, for my torment; and, after an interval, which always seemed to me of the same length, a picture suddenly flew up to the window, where it remained fixed, as if by an electrical attraction, and my discipline of horror then commenced, to last perhaps for hours. The picture thus mysteriously glued to the windowpanes, was the portrait of an old man, in a crimson flowered silk dressing-gown, the folds of which I could now describe, with a countenance embodying a strange mixture of intellect, sensuality, and power, but withal sinister and full of malignant omen. His nose was hooked, like the beak of a vulture; his eyes large, grey, and prominent, and lighted up with a more than mortal cruelty and coldness. These features were surmounted by a crimson velvet cap, the hair that peeped from under which was white with age, while the eyebrows retained their original blackness. Well I remember every line, hue, and shadow of that stony countenance, and well I may! The gaze of this hellish visage was fixed upon

me, and mine returned it with the inexplicable fascination of nightmare, for what appeared to me to be hours of agony. At last—

"The cock he crew,
away then flew"

the fiend who had enslaved me through the awful watches of the night; and, harassed and nervous, I rose to the duties of the day.

I had— I can't say exactly why, but it may have been from the exquisite anguish and profound impressions of unearthly horror, with which this strange phantasmagoria was associated— an insurmountable antipathy to describing the exact nature of my nightly troubles to my friend and comrade. Generally, however, I told him that I was haunted by abominable dreams; and, true to the imputed materialism of medicine, we put our heads together to dispel my horrors, not by exorcism, but by a tonic.

I will do this tonic justice, and frankly admit that the accursed portrait began to intermit its visits under its influence. What of that? Was this singular apparition— as full of character as of terror— therefore the creature of my fancy, or the invention of my poor stomach? Was it, in short, *subjective* (to borrow the technical slang of the day) and not the palpable aggression and intrusion of an external agent? That, good friend, as we will both admit, by no means follows. The evil spirit, who enthralled my senses in the shape of that portrait, may have been just as near me, just as energetic, just as malignant, though I saw him not. What means the whole moral code of revealed religion regarding the due keeping of our own bodies, soberness, temperance, etc.? here is an obvious connection between the material and the invisible; the healthy tone of the system, and its unimpaired energy may, for aught we can tell, guard us against influences which would otherwise render life itself terrific. The mesmerist and the electro-biologist will fail upon an average with nine patients out of ten— so may the evil spirit. Special conditions of the corporeal system are indispensable to the production of certain spiritual phenomena. The operation succeeds sometimes— sometimes fails— that is all.

I found afterwards that my would-be sceptical companion had his troubles too. But of these I knew nothing yet. One night, for a wonder, I was sleeping soundly, when I was roused by a step on the lobby outside my room, followed by the loud clang of what turned out to be a large brass candlestick, flung with all his force by poor Tom Ludlow over the banisters, and rattling with a rebound down the second flight of stairs; and almost concurrently with this, Tom burst open my door, and bounced into my room backwards, in a state of extraordinary agitation.

I had jumped out of bed and clutched him by the arm before I had any distinct idea of my own whereabouts. There we were— in our shirts— standing before the open door— staring through the great old banister opposite, at the lobby window, through which the sickly light of a clouded moon was gleaming.

"What's the matter, Tom? What's the matter with you? What the devil's the matter with you, Tom?" I demanded shaking him with nervous impatience.

He took a long breath before he answered me, and then it was not very coherently.

"It's nothing, nothing at all— did I speak?— what did I say?— where's the candle, Richard? It's dark; I— I had a candle!"

"Yes, dark enough," I said; "but what's the matter?— what *is* it?— why don't you speak, Tom?— have you lost your wits?— what is the matter?"

"The matter?— oh, it is all over. It must have been a dream— nothing at all but a dream— don't you think so? It could not be anything more than a dream."

"Of *course*," said I, feeling uncommonly nervous, "it *was* a dream."

"I thought," he said, "there was a man in my room, and— and I jumped out of bed; and— and— where's the candle?"

"In your room, most likely," I said, "shall I go and bring it?"

"No; stay here— don't go; it's no matter— don't, I tell you; it was all a dream. Bolt the door, Dick; I'll stay here with you— I feel nervous. So, Dick, like a good fellow, light your candle and open the window— I am in a *shocking state*."

I did as he asked me, and robing himself like Granuaile in one of my blankets, he seated himself close beside my bed.

Everybody knows how contagious is fear of all sorts, but more especially that particular kind of fear under which poor Tom was at that moment labouring. I would not have heard, nor I believe would he have recapitulated, just at that moment, for half the world, the details of the hideous vision which had so unmanned him.

"Don't mind telling me anything about your nonsensical dream, Tom," said I, affecting contempt, really in a panic; "let us talk about something else; but it is quite plain that this dirty old house disagrees with us both, and hang me if I stay here any longer, to be pestered with indigestion and— and— bad nights, so we may as well look out for lodgings— don't you think so?— at once."

Tom agreed, and, after an interval, said—

"I have been thinking, Richard, that it is a long time since I saw my father, and I have made up my mind to go down tomorrow and return in a day or two, and you can take rooms for us in the meantime."

I fancied that this resolution, obviously the result of the vision which had so profoundly scared him, would probably vanish next morning with the damps and shadows of night. But I was mistaken. Off went Tom at peep of day to the country, having agreed that so soon as I had secured suitable lodgings, I was to recall him by letter from his visit to my Uncle Ludlow.

Now, anxious as I was to change my quarters, it so happened, owing to a series of petty procrastinations and accidents, that nearly a week elapsed before my bargain was made and my letter of recall on the wing to Tom; and, in the meantime, a trifling adventure or two had occurred to your humble servant, which, absurd as they now appear, diminished by distance, did certainly at the time serve to whet my appetite for change considerably.

A night or two after the departure of my comrade, I was sitting by my bedroom fire, the door locked, and the ingredients of a tumbler of hot whisky-punch upon the crazy spider-table; for, as the best mode of keeping the

"Black spirits and white,
Blue spirits and grey,"

with which I was environed, at bay, I had adopted the practice recommended by the wisdom of my ancestors, and "kept my spirits up by pouring spirits down." I had thrown aside my volume of Anatomy, and was treating myself by way of a tonic, preparatory to my punch and bed, to half-a-dozen pages of the *Spectator*, when I heard a step on the flight of stairs descending from the attics. It was two o'clock, and the streets were as silent as a churchyard— the sounds were, therefore, perfectly distinct. There was a slow, heavy tread, characterised by the emphasis and deliberation of age, descending by the narrow staircase from above; and, what made the sound more singular, it was plain that the feet which produced it were perfectly bare, measuring the descent with something between a pound and a flop, very ugly to hear.

I knew quite well that my attendant had gone away many hours before, and that nobody but myself had any business in the house. It was quite plain also that the person who was coming down stairs had no intention whatever of concealing his movements; but, on the contrary, appeared disposed to make even more noise, and proceed more deliberately, than was at all necessary. When the step reached the foot of the stairs outside my room, it seemed to stop; and I expected every moment to see my door open spontaneously, and give admission to the original of my detested portrait. I was, however, relieved in a few seconds by hearing the descent renewed, just in the same manner, upon the staircase leading down to the drawing-rooms, and thence, after

another pause, down the next flight, and so on to the hall, whence I heard no more.

Now, by the time the sound had ceased, I was wound up, as they say, to a very unpleasant pitch of excitement. I listened, but there was not a stir. I screwed up my courage to a decisive experiment— opened my door, and in a stentorian voice bawled over the banisters, "Who's there?" There was no answer but the ringing of my own voice through the empty old house— no renewal of the movement; nothing, in short, to give my unpleasant sensations a definite direction. There is, I think, something most disagreeably disenchanting in the sound of one's own voice under such circumstances, exerted in solitude, and in vain. It redoubled my sense of isolation, and my misgivings increased on perceiving that the door, which I certainly thought I had left open, was closed behind me; in a vague alarm, lest my retreat should be cut off, I got again into my room as quickly as I could, where I remained in a state of imaginary blockade, and very uncomfortable indeed, till morning.

Next night brought no return of my barefooted fellow-lodger; but the night following, being in my bed, and in the dark— somewhere, I suppose, about the same hour as before, I distinctly heard the old fellow again descending from the garrets.

This time I had had my punch, and the *morale* of the garrison was consequently excellent. I jumped out of bed, clutched the poker as I passed the expiring fire, and in a moment was upon the lobby. The sound had ceased by this time— the dark and chill were discouraging; and, guess my horror, when I saw, or thought I saw, a black monster, whether in the shape of a man or a bear I could not say, standing, with its back to the wall, on the lobby, facing me, with a pair of great greenish eyes shining dimly out. Now, I must be frank, and confess that the cupboard which displayed our plates and cups stood just there, though at the moment I did not recollect it. At the same time I must honestly say, that making every allowance for an excited imagination, I never could satisfy myself that I was made the dupe of my own fancy in this matter; for this apparition, after one or two shiftings of shape, as if in the act of incipient transformation, began, as it seemed on second thoughts, to advance upon me in its original form. From an instinct of terror rather than of courage, I hurled the poker, with all my force, at its head; and to the music of a horrid crash made my way into my room, and double-locked the door. Then, in a minute more, I heard the horrid bare feet walk down the stairs, till the sound ceased in the hall, as on the former occasion.

If the apparition of the night before was an ocular delusion of my fancy sporting with the dark outlines of our cupboard, and if its horrid eyes were nothing but a pair of inverted teacups, I had, at all events, the satisfaction of

having launched the poker with admirable effect, and in true "fancy" phrase, "knocked its two daylights into one," as the commingled fragments of my tea-service testified. I did my best to gather comfort and courage from these evidences; but it would not do. And then what could I say of those horrid bare feet, and the regular tramp, tramp, tramp, which measured the distance of the entire staircase through the solitude of my haunted dwelling, and at an hour when no good influence was stirring? Confound it!— the whole affair was abominable. I was out of spirits, and dreaded the approach of night.

It came, ushered ominously in with a thunderstorm and dull torrents of depressing rain. Earlier than usual the streets grew silent; and by twelve o'clock nothing but the comfortless pattering of the rain was to be heard.

I made myself as snug as I could. I lighted *two* candles instead of one. I forswore bed, and held myself in readiness for a sally, candle in hand; for, *coute qui coute*, I was resolved to *see* the being, if visible at all, who troubled the nightly stillness of my mansion. I was fidgetty and nervous and, tried in vain to interest myself with my books. I walked up and down my room, whistling in turn martial and hilarious music, and listening ever and anon for the dreaded noise. I sat down and stared at the square label on the solemn and reserved-looking black bottle, until "Flanagan & Co.'s Best Old Malt Whisky" grew into a sort of subdued accompaniment to all the fantastic and horrible speculations which chased one another through my brain.

Silence, meanwhile, grew more silent, and darkness darker. I listened in vain for the rumble of a vehicle, or the dull clamour of a distant row. There was nothing but the sound of a rising wind, which had succeeded the thunderstorm that had travelled over the Dublin mountains quite out of hearing. In the middle of this great city I began to feel myself alone with nature, and Heaven knows what beside. My courage was ebbing. Punch, however, which makes beasts of so many, made a man of me again— just in time to hear with tolerable nerve and firmness the lumpy, flabby, naked feet deliberately descending the stairs again.

I took a candle, not without a tremor. As I crossed the floor I tried to extemporise a prayer, but stopped short to listen, and never finished it. The steps continued. I confess I hesitated for some seconds at the door before I took heart of grace and opened it. When I peeped out the lobby was perfectly empty— there was no monster standing on the staircase; and as the detested sound ceased, I was reassured enough to venture forward nearly to the banisters. Horror of horrors! within a stair or two beneath the spot where I stood the unearthly tread smote the floor. My eye caught something in motion; it was about the size of Goliah's foot— it was grey, heavy, and flapped

with a dead weight from one step to another. As I am alive, it was the most monstrous grey rat I ever beheld or imagined.

Shakespeare says— "Some men there are cannot abide a gaping pig, and some that are mad if they behold a cat." I went well-nigh out of my wits when I beheld this *rat*; for, laugh at me as you may, it fixed upon me, I thought, a perfectly human expression of malice; and, as it shuffled about and looked up into my face almost from between my feet, I saw, I could swear it— I felt it then, and know it now, the infernal gaze and the accursed countenance of my old friend in the portrait, transfused into the visage of the bloated vermin before me.

I bounced into my room again with a feeling of loathing and horror I cannot describe, and locked and bolted my door as if a lion had been at the other side. Damn him or *it*; curse the portrait and its original! I felt in my soul that the rat— yes, the *rat*, the RAT I had just seen, was that evil being in masquerade, and rambling through the house upon some infernal night lark.

Next morning I was early trudging through the miry streets; and, among other transactions, posted a peremptory note recalling Tom. On my return, however, I found a note from my absent "chum," announcing his intended return next day. I was doubly rejoiced at this, because I had succeeded in getting rooms; and because the change of scene and return of my comrade were rendered specially pleasant by the last night's half ridiculous half horrible adventure.

I slept extemporaneously in my new quarters in Digges' Street that night, and next morning returned for breakfast to the haunted mansion, where I was certain Tom would call immediately on his arrival.

I was quite right— he came; and almost his first question referred to the primary object of our change of residence.

"Thank God," he said with genuine fervour, on hearing that all was arranged. "On *your* account I am delighted. As to myself, I assure you that no earthly consideration could have induced me ever again to pass a night in this disastrous old house."

"Confound the house!" I ejaculated, with a genuine mixture of fear and detestation, "we have not had a pleasant hour since we came to live here"; and so I went on, and related incidentally my adventure with the plethoric old rat.

"Well, if that were *all*," said my cousin, affecting to make light of the matter, "I don't think I should have minded it very much."

"Aye, but its eye— its countenance, my dear Tom," urged I; "if you had seen *that*, you would have felt it might be *anything* but what it seemed."

"I inclined to think the best conjuror in such a case would be an able-bodied cat," he said, with a provoking chuckle.

"But let us hear your own adventure," I said tartly.

At this challenge he looked uneasily round him. I had poked up a very unpleasant recollection.

"You shall hear it, Dick; I'll tell it to you," he said. "Begad, sir, I should feel quite queer, though, telling it *here*, though we are too strong a body for ghosts to meddle with just now."

Though he spoke this like a joke, I think it was serious calculation. Our Hebe was in a corner of the room, packing our cracked delft tea and dinner-services in a basket. She soon suspended operations, and with mouth and eyes wide open became an absorbed listener. Tom's experiences were told nearly in these words:

I SAW IT three times, Dick— three distinct times; and I am perfectly certain it meant me some infernal harm. I was, I say, in danger— in *extreme* danger; for, if nothing else had happened, my reason would most certainly have failed me, unless I had escaped so soon. Thank God. I *did* escape.

The first night of this hateful disturbance, I was lying in the attitude of sleep, in that lumbering old bed. I hate to think of it. I was really wide awake, though I had put out my candle, and was lying as quietly as if I had been asleep; and although accidentally restless, my thoughts were running in a cheerful and agreeable channel.

I think it must have been two o'clock at least when I thought I heard a sound in that— that odious dark recess at the far end of the bedroom. It was as if someone was drawing a piece of cord slowly along the floor, lifting it up, and dropping it softly down again in coils. I sat up once or twice in my bed, but could see nothing, so I concluded it must be mice in the wainscot. I felt no emotion graver than curiosity, and after a few minutes ceased to observe it.

While lying in this state, strange to say; without at first a suspicion of anything supernatural, on a sudden I saw an old man, rather stout and square, in a sort of roan-red dressing-gown, and with a black cap on his head, moving stiffly and slowly in a diagonal direction, from the recess, across the floor of the bedroom, passing my bed at the foot, and entering the lumber-closet at the left. He had something under his arm; his head hung a little at one side; and, merciful God! when I saw his face.

TOM STOPPED for a while, and then said—

THAT AWFUL countenance, which living or dying I never can forget, disclosed what he was. Without turning to the right or left, he passed beside me, and entered the closet by the bed's head.

While this fearful and indescribable type of death and guilt was passing, I felt that I had no more power to speak or stir than if I had been myself a corpse. For hours after it had disappeared, I was too terrified and weak to move. As soon as daylight came, I took courage, and examined the room, and especially the course which the frightful intruder had seemed to take, but there was not a vestige to indicate anybody's having passed there; no sign of any disturbing agency visible among the lumber that strewed the floor of the closet.

I now began to recover a little. I was fagged and exhausted, and at last, overpowered by a feverish sleep. I came down late; and finding you out of spirits, on account of your dreams about the portrait, whose *original* I am now certain disclosed himself to me, I did not care to talk about the infernal vision. In fact, I was trying to persuade myself that the whole thing was an illusion, and I did not like to revive in their intensity the hated impressions of the past night— or, to risk the constancy of my scepticism, by recounting the tale of my sufferings.

It required some nerve, I can tell you, to go to my haunted chamber next night, and lie down quietly in the same bed, *continued Tom.* I did so with a degree of trepidation, which, I am not ashamed to say, a very little matter would have sufficed to stimulate to downright panic. This night, however, passed off quietly enough, as also the next; and so too did two or three more. I grew more confident, and began to fancy that I believed in the theories of spectral illusions, with which I had at first vainly tried to impose upon my convictions.

The apparition had been, indeed, altogether anomalous. It had crossed the room without any recognition of my presence: I had not disturbed *it*, and *it* had no mission to *me*. What, then, was the imaginable use of its crossing the room in a visible shape at all? Of course it might have *been* in the closet instead of *going* there, as easily as it introduced itself into the recess without entering the chamber in a shape discernible by the senses. Besides, how the deuce *had* I seen it? It was a dark night; I had no candle; there was no fire; and yet I saw it as distinctly, in colouring and outline, as ever I beheld human form! A cataleptic dream would explain it all; and I was determined that a dream it should be.

One of the most remarkable phenomena connected with the practice of mendacity is the vast number of deliberate lies we tell ourselves, whom, of all persons, we can least expect to deceive. In all this, I need hardly tell you, Dick, I

was simply lying to myself, and did not believe one word of the wretched humbug. Yet I went on, as men will do, like persevering charlatans and impostors, who tire people into credulity by the mere force of reiteration; so I hoped to win myself over at last to a comfortable scepticism about the ghost.

He had not appeared a second time— that certainly was a comfort; and what, after all, did I care for him, and his queer old toggery and strange looks? Not a fig! I was nothing the worse for having seen him, and a good story the better. So I tumbled into bed, put out my candle, and, cheered by a loud drunken quarrel in the back lane, went fast asleep.

From this deep slumber I awoke with a start. I knew I had had a horrible dream; but what it was I could not remember. My heart was thumping furiously; I felt bewildered and feverish; I sat up in the bed and looked about the room. A broad flood of moonlight came in through the curtainless window; everything was as I had last seen it; and though the domestic squabble in the back lane was, unhappily for me, allayed, I yet could hear a pleasant fellow singing, on his way home, the then popular comic ditty called, "Murphy Delany." Taking advantage of this diversion I lay down again, with my face towards the fireplace, and closing my eyes, did my best to think of nothing else but the song, which was every moment growing fainter in the distance:

" 'Twas Murphy Delany, so funny and frisky,
Stept into a shebeen shop to get his skin full;
He reeled out again pretty well lined with whiskey,
As fresh as a shamrock, as blind as a bull."

The singer, whose condition I dare say resembled that of his hero, was soon too far off to regale my ears any more; and as his music died away, I myself sank into a doze, neither sound nor refreshing. Somehow the song had got into my head, and I went meandering on through the adventures of my respectable fellow-countryman, who, on emerging from the "shebeen shop," fell into a river, from which he was fished up to be "sat upon" by a coroner's jury, who having learned from a "horse-doctor" that he was "dead as a doornail, so there was an end," returned their verdict accordingly, just as he returned to his senses, when an angry altercation and a pitched battle between the body and the coroner winds up the lay with due spirit and pleasantry.

Through this ballad I continued with a weary monotony to plod, down to the very last line, and then *da capo*, and so on, in my uncomfortable half-sleep, for how long, I can't conjecture. I found myself at last, however, muttering, "*dead* as a doornail, so there was an end"; and something like another voice

within me, seemed to say, very faintly, but sharply, "dead! dead! *dead*! and may the Lord have mercy on your soul!" and instantaneously I was wide awake, and staring right before me from the pillow.

Now— will you believe it, Dick?— I saw the same accursed figure standing full front, and gazing at me with its stony and fiendish countenance, not two yards from the bedside.

TOM STOPPED here, and wiped the perspiration from his face. I felt very queer. The girl was as pale as Tom; and, assembled as we were in the very scene of these adventures, we were all, I dare say, equally grateful for the clear daylight and the resuming bustle out of doors.

FOR ABOUT three seconds only I saw it plainly; then it grew indistinct; but, for a long time, there was something like a column of dark vapour where it had been standing, between me and the wall; and I felt sure that he was still there. After a good while, this appearance went too. I took my clothes downstairs to the hall, and dressed there, with the door half open; then went out into the street, and walked about the town till morning, when I came back, in a miserable state of nervousness and exhaustion. I was such a fool, Dick, as to be ashamed to tell you how I came to be so upset. I thought you would laugh at me; especially as I had always talked philosophy, and treated *your* ghosts with contempt. I concluded you would give me no quarter; and so kept my tale of horror to myself.

Now, Dick, you will hardly believe me, when I assure you, that for many nights after this last experience, I did not go to my room at all. I used to sit up for a while in the drawing-room after you had gone up to your bed; and then steal down softly to the hall door, let myself out, and sit in the "Robin Hood" tavern until the last guest went off; and then I got through the night like a sentry, pacing the streets till morning.

For more than a week I never slept in bed. I sometimes had a snooze on a form in the Robin Hood, and sometimes a nap in a chair during the day; but regular sleep I had absolutely none.

I was quite resolved that we should get into another house; but I could not bring myself to tell you the reason, and I somehow put it off from day to day, although my life was, during every hour of this procrastination, rendered as miserable as that of a felon with the constables on his track. I was growing absolutely ill from this wretched mode of life.

One afternoon I determined to enjoy an hour's sleep upon your bed. I hated mine; so that I had never, except in a stealthy visit every day to unmake

it, lest Martha should discover the secret of my nightly absence, entered the ill-omened chamber.

As ill-luck would have it, you had locked your bedroom, and taken away the key. I went into my own to unsettle the bed-clothes, as usual, and give the bed the appearance of having been slept in. Now, a variety of circumstances concurred to bring about the dreadful scene through which I was that night to pass. In the first place, I was literally overpowered with fatigue, and longing for sleep; in the next place, the effect of this extreme exhaustion upon my nerves resembled that of a narcotic, and rendered me less susceptible than, perhaps I should in any other condition have been, of the exciting fears which had become habitual to me. Then again, a little bit of the window was open, a pleasant freshness pervaded the room, and, to crown all, the cheerful sun of day was making the room quite pleasant. What was to prevent my enjoying an hour's nap *here*? The whole air was resonant with the cheerful hum of life, and the broad matter-of-fact light of day filled every corner of the room.

I yielded— stifling my qualms— to the almost overpowering temptation; and merely throwing off my coat, and loosening my cravat, I lay down, limiting myself to *half*-an-hour's doze in the unwonted enjoyment of a feather bed, a coverlet, and a bolster.

It was horribly insidious; and the demon, no doubt, marked my infatuated preparations. Dolt that I was, I fancied, with mind and body worn out for want of sleep, and an arrear of a full week's rest to my credit, that such measure as *half*-an-hour's sleep, in such a situation, was possible. My sleep was deathlike, long, and dreamless.

Without a start or fearful sensation of any kind, I waked gently, but completely. It was, as you have good reason to remember, long past midnight— I believe, about two o'clock. When sleep has been deep and long enough to satisfy nature thoroughly, one often wakens in this way, suddenly, tranquilly, and completely.

There was a figure seated in that lumbering, old sofa-chair, near the fireplace. Its back was rather towards me, but I could not be mistaken; it turned slowly round, and, merciful heavens! there was the stony face, with its infernal lineaments of malignity and despair, gloating on me. There was now no doubt as to its consciousness of my presence, and the hellish malice with which it was animated, for it arose, and drew close to the bedside. There was a rope about its neck, and the other end, coiled up, it held stiffly in its hand.

My good angel nerved me for this horrible crisis. I remained for some seconds transfixed by the gaze of this tremendous phantom. He came close to the bed, and appeared on the point of mounting upon it. The next instant I was

upon the floor at the far side, and in a moment more was, I don't know how, upon the lobby.

But the spell was not yet broken; the valley of the shadow of death was not yet traversed. The abhorred phantom was before me there; it was standing near the banisters, stooping a little, and with one end of the rope round its own neck, was poising a noose at the other, as if to throw over mine; and while engaged in this baleful pantomime, it wore a smile so sensual, so unspeakably dreadful, that my senses were nearly overpowered, I saw and remember nothing more, until I found myself in your room.

I had a wonderful escape, Dick— there is no disputing *that*— an escape for which, while I live, I shall bless the mercy of heaven. No one can conceive or imagine what it is for flesh and blood to stand in the presence of such a thing, but one who has had the terrific experience. Dick, Dick, a shadow has passed over me— a chill has crossed my blood and marrow, and I will never be the same again— never, Dick— never!

OUR HANDMAID, a mature girl of two-and-fifty, as I have said, stayed her hand, as Tom's story proceeded, and by little and little drew near to us, with open mouth, and her brows contracted over her little, beady black eyes, till stealing a glance over her shoulder now and then, she established herself close behind us. During the relation, she had made various earnest comments, in an undertone; but these and her ejaculations, for the sake of brevity and simplicity, I have omitted in my narration.

"It's often I heard tell of it," she now said, "but I never believed it rightly till now— though, indeed, why should I not? Does not my mother, down there in the lane, know quare stories, God bless us, beyont telling about it? But you ought not to have slept in the back bedroom. She was loath to let me be going in and out of that room even in the day time, let alone for any Christian to spend the night in it; for sure she says it was his own bedroom."

"*Whose* own bedroom?" we asked, in a breath.

"Why, *his*— the ould Judge's— Judge Horrock's, to be sure, God rest his sowl;" and she looked fearfully round.

"Amen!" I muttered. "But did he die there?"

"Die there! No, not quite *there*," she said. "Shure, was not it over the bannisters he hung himself, the ould sinner, God be merciful to us all? and was not it in the alcove they found the handles of the skipping-rope cut off, and the knife where he was settling the cord, God bless us, to hang himself with? It was his housekeeper's daughter owned the rope, my mother often told me, and the child never throve after, and used to be starting up out of her sleep, and screeching in the night time, wid dhrames and frights that cum an her; and

they said how it was the speerit of the ould Judge that was tormentin' her; and she used to be roaring and yelling out to hould back the big ould fellow with the crooked neck; and then she'd screech 'Oh, the master! the master! he's stampin' at me, and beckoning to me! Mother, darling, don't let me go!' And so the poor crathure died at last, and the docthers said it was wather on the brain, for it was all they could say."

"How long ago was all this?" I asked.

"Oh, then, how would I know?" she answered. "But it must be a wondherful long time ago, for the housekeeper was an ould woman, with a pipe in her mouth, and not a tooth left, and better nor eighty years ould when my mother was first married; and they said she was a rale buxom, fine-dressed woman when the ould Judge come to his end; an', indeed, my mother's not far from eighty years ould herself this day; and what made it worse for the unnatural ould villain, God rest his soul, to frighten the little girl out of the world the way he did, was what was mostly thought and believed by everyone. My mother says how the poor little crathure was his own child; for he was by all accounts an ould villain every way, an' the hangin'est judge that ever was known in Ireland's ground."

"From what you said about the danger of sleeping in that bedroom," said I, "I suppose there were stories about the ghost having appeared there to others."

"Well, there *was* things said— quare things, surely," she answered, as it seemed, with some reluctance. "And why would not there? Sure was it not up in that same room he slept for more than twenty years? and was it not in the *alcove* he got the rope ready that done his own business at last, the way he done many a betther man's in his lifetime?— and was not the body lying in the same bed after death, and put in the coffin there, too, and carried out to his grave from it in Pether's churchyard, after the coroner was done? But there was quare stories— my mother has them all— about how one Nicholas Spaight got into trouble on the head of it."

"And what did they say of this Nicholas Spaight?" I asked.

"Oh, for that matther, it's soon told," she answered.

And she certainly did relate a very strange story, which so piqued my curiosity, that I took occasion to visit the ancient lady, her mother, from whom I learned many very curious particulars. Indeed, I am tempted to tell the tale, but my fingers are weary, and I must defer it. But if you wish to hear it another time, I shall do my best.

When we had heard the strange tale I have *not* told you, we put one or two further questions to her about the alleged spectral visitations, to which the house had, ever since the death of the wicked old Judge, been subjected.

"No one ever had luck in it," she told us. "There was always cross accidents, sudden deaths, and short times in it. The first that tuck it was a family— I forget their name— but at any rate there was two young ladies and their papa. He was about sixty, and a stout healthy gentleman as you'd wish to see at that age. Well, he slept in that unlucky back bedroom; and, God between us an' harm! sure enough he was found dead one morning, half out of the bed, with his head as black as a sloe, and swelled like a puddin', hanging down near the floor. It was a fit, they said. He was as dead as a mackerel, and so *he* could not say what it was; but the ould people was all sure that it was nothing at all but the ould Judge, God bless us! that frightened him out of his senses and his life together.

"Some time after there was a rich old maiden lady took the house. I don't know which room *she* slept in, but she lived alone; and at any rate, one morning, the servants going down early to their work, found her sitting on the passage-stairs, shivering and talkin' to herself, quite mad; and never a word more could any of *them* or her friends get from her ever afterwards but, 'Don't ask me to go, for I promised to wait for him.' They never made out from her who it was she meant by *him*, but of course those that knew all about the ould house were at no loss for the meaning of all that happened to her.

"Then afterwards, when the house was let out in lodgings, there was Micky Byrne that took the same room, with his wife and three little children; and sure I heard Mrs. Byrne myself telling how the children used to be lifted up in the bed at night, she could not see by what mains; and how they were starting and screeching every hour, just all as one as the housekeeper's little girl that died, till at last one night poor Micky had a dhrop in him, the way he used now and again; and what do you think in the middle of the night he thought he heard a noise on the stairs, and being in liquor, nothing less id do him but out he must go himself to see what was wrong. Well, after that, all she ever heard of him was himself sayin', 'Oh, God!' and a tumble that shook the very house; and there, sure enough, he was lying on the lower stairs under the lobby, with his neck smashed double undher him, where he was flung over the banisters."

Then the handmaiden added—

"I'll go down to the lane, and send up Joe Gavvey to pack up the rest of the taythings, and bring all the things across to your new lodgings."

And so we all sallied out together, each of us breathing more freely, I have no doubt, as we crossed that ill-omened threshold for the last time.

Now, I may add thus much, in compliance with the immemorial usage of the realm of fiction, which sees the hero not only through his adventures, but fairly out of the world. You must have perceived that what the flesh, blood, and bone hero of romance proper is to the regular compounder of fiction, this

old house of brick, wood, and mortar is to the humble recorder of this true tale. I, therefore, relate, as in duty bound, the catastrophe which ultimately befell it, which was simply this— that about two years subsequently to my story it was taken by a quack doctor, who called himself Baron Duhlstoerf, and filled the parlour windows with bottles of indescribable horrors preserved in brandy, and the newspapers with the usual grandiloquent and mendacious advertisements. This gentleman among his virtues did not reckon sobriety, and one night, being overcome with much wine, he set fire to his bed curtains, partially burned himself, and totally consumed the house. It was afterwards rebuilt, and for a time an undertaker established himself in the premises.

I have now told you my own and Tom's adventures, together with some valuable collateral particulars; and having acquitted myself of my engagement, I wish you a very good night, and pleasant dreams.

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7: The Cruise of the "Idlewild"

Theodore Dreiser

1871-1945

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IT would be difficult to say just how the trouble aboard the *Idlewild* began, or how we managed to sail without things going to smash every fifteen minutes; but these same constitute the business of this narrative. It was at Spike, and the weather was blistering hot. Some of us, one in particular, were mortal tired of the life we were leading. It was a dingy old shop inside, loaded with machines and blacksmithing apparatus and all the paraphernalia that go to make up the little depots and furniture that railways use, and the labor of making them was intrusted to about a hundred men all told— carpenters, millwrights, wood turners, tinsmiths, painters, blacksmiths, an engineer, and a yard foreman handling a score of "guineas," all of whom were too dull to interest the three or four wits who congregated in the engine room.

Old John, the engineer, was one of these— a big, roly-poly sort of fellow, five foot eleven, if he was an inch, with layers of flesh showing through his thin shirt and tight trousers, and his face and neck constantly standing in beads of sweat. Then there was the smith, a small, wiry man of thirty-five, with arms like a Titan and a face that was expressive of a goodly humor, whether it was very brilliant or not— the village smith, as we used to call him. Then there was Ike, little Ike, the blacksmith's helper, who was about as queer a little cabin boy as ever did service on an ocean-going steamer or in a blacksmith's shop— a small misshapen, dirty-faced lad, whose coat was three, and his trousers four, times too large for him— hand-me-downs from some mysterious source; immensely larger members of his family, I presume. He had a battered face, such as you sometimes see given to satyrs humorously represented in bronze, and his ears were excessively large. He had a big mouthful of dirty yellow teeth, two or three missing in front. His eyes were small and his hands large, but a sweeter soul never crept into a smaller or more misshapen body. Poor little Ike. To think how near he came to being driven from his job by our tomfoolishness!

I should say here that the *Idlewild* was not a boat at all, but an idea. She evolved out of our position on Long's Point, where the Harlem joins the Hudson, and where stood the shop in which we all worked, water to the south of us, water to the west of us, water to the north of us, and the railroad behind us landward, just like the four— or was it the six? hundred— at Balaklava. Anyhow, we got our idea from the shop and the water all around, and we said, after much chaffering about one thing and another, that we were aboard the

Idlewild, and that the men were the crew, and that the engineer was the captain, and I was the mate, just as if everything were ship-shape, and this were a really and truly ocean-going vessel.

As I have said before, I do not know exactly how the idea started, except that it did. Old John was al ways admiring the beautiful yachts that passed up and down the roadstead of the Hudson outside, and this may have had something to do with it. Anyhow, he would stand in the doorway of his engine room and watch everything in the shape of a craft that went up and down the stream. He didn't know much about boats, but he loved to comment on their charms, just the same.

"That there now must be Morgan's yacht," he used to say of a fine black-bodied craft that had a piano-body finish to it, an' "That there's the *Waterfowl*, Governor Morton's yacht. Wouldn' ja think, now, them fellers 'd feel comfortable a-settin' back there on the poop deck an' smokin' them dollar cigars on a day like this? Aw, haw!"

It would usually be blistering hot and the water a flashing blue when he became excited over the yacht question.

"Right-o," I once commented enviously.

"Aw, haw! Them's the boys as knows how to live. I wouldn' like nothin' better on a day like this than to set out there in one o' them easy chairs an' do up about a pound o' tobacco. Come now, wouldn't that be the ideal life for your Uncle Dudley?"

"It truly would," I replied sadly but with an inher ent desire to tease, "only I don't think my Uncle Dudley is doing so very badly under the circumstances. I notice he isn't losing any flesh."

"Well, I dunno. I'm a little stout, I'll admit. Still, them conditions would be more congenial-like. I ain't as active as I used to be. A nice yacht an' some good old fifty-cent cigars an' a cool breeze 'd just about do for me."

"You're too modest, John. You want too little. You ought to ask for something more suited to your Lucullian instincts. What do you say to a house in Fifth Avenue, a country place at Newport, and the friendship of a few dukes and earls?"

"Well, I'm not backward," he replied. "If them things was to come my way I guess I could live up to em. Aw, haw!"

"Truly, truly, John, you're quite right, but you might throw in a few shovelfuls of shavings just to show that there are no hard feelings between you and the company while you're waiting for all this. I notice your steam is getting low, eh? What?"

"Hang the steam! If the road was decent they'd give a man coal to burn. It takes a hundred tons of shavin's a day to keep this blinged old cormorant goin'.

Think of me havin' to stand here all day an' shovelin' in shavin's! Seems to me all I do here is shovel. I'm an engineer, not a fireman. They ought to gimme a man for that, by rights."

"Quite so ! Quite so ! We'll see about that later— only, for the present, the shavings for yours. Back to the shovel, John!" The tone was heavily bantering.

"Well, the steam was gettin' a little low," John would cheerfully acknowledge, once he was able to resume his position in the doorway. It was these painful interruptions which piqued him so.

Out of such chaffering and bickering as this it was that the spirit of the Idlewild finally took its rise. It came up from the sea of thought, I presume.

"What's the matter with us having a boat of our own, John?" I said to him one day. "Here we are, out here on the bounding main, or mighty near it. This is as good as any craft, this old shop. Ease the thing around and hoist the Jolly Roger, and I'll sail you up to White Plains. What's the matter with calling her the *Idlewild*? The men will furnish the idle, and the bosses will furnish the wild, eh? How's that for an appropriate title?"

"Haw! Haw!" exclaimed stout John. "Bully! We'll fix 'er up to-day. You be the captain an' I'll be the mate an'—"

"Far be it from me, John," I replied humbly and generously, seeing that he had the one point of vantage in this whole institution which would serve admirably as a captain's cabin— with his consent, of course. It was more or less like a captain's cabin on a tug-boat, at that, picturesque and with a sea view, as it were! "You be the captain and I'll be the mate. Far be it from me to infringe on a good old sea dog's rights. You're the captain, all right, and this is a plenty good enough cabin. I'm content to be mate. Open up steam, Cap, and we'll run the boat up and down the yard a few times. Look out the window and see how she blows. It's ho! for a life on the bounding main, and a jolly old crew are we!"

"Right-o, my hearty !" he now agreed, slapping me on the back at the same time that he reached for the steamcock and let off a few preliminary blasts of steam— by way of showing that we were moving, as it were. The idea that we were aboard a real yacht and about to cruise forth actually seized upon my fancy in a most erratic and delightsome way. It did on John's, too. Plainly we needed some such idyllic dream. Outside was the blue water of the river. Far up and down were many craft sailing like ourselves, I said.

Inside of fifteen minutes we had appointed the smith, bos'n, and little Ike, the smith's helper, the bos'n's mate. And we had said that the carpenters and turnlers and millwrights were the crew and that the "guineas" were the scullions. Mentally, we turned the engine room into the captain's cabin, and here now was nothing but "Heave ho-s" and "How does she blow thar, Bill-s?" and "Shiver my timbers-s" and "Blast my top-lights-s" for days to come. We

"heaved ho" at seven o'clock in the morning when the engine started, "lay to and dropped anchor" at noon when the engine stopped, "hoisted and set sail" again at one, for heaven knows what port, and "sighted Spike" and "put hard to port" at six. Sometimes during the day when it was hot and we were very tired we took ideal runs to Coney and Manhattan Beach and Newport, where the best of breezes are, in imagination, anyhow, and we found it equally easy to sail to all points of the compass in all sorts of weather. Many was the time we visited Paris and London and Rome and Constantinople, all in the same hour, regardless, and our calls upon the nobility of these places were always a mat ter of light comment. At night we always managed to promptly haul up at Spike, which was another subject of constant congratulation between the captain and the mate. For if we had missed our trains and got ten home late!— Regardess of the fact that we were seafaring men, we wanted our day to end promptly, I noticed.

During the days which followed we elaborated our idea, and the *Idlewild* became more of a reality than is to be easily understood by those who have not in dulged in a similar fancy. We looked upon the shop as a trusty ship with a wheel at the stern, where the millwright, an Irishman by the name of Cullen, ran the giant plane, and an anchor at the prow, where the engine-room was. And there was a light in the captain's eye at times which, to me at least, betokened a real belief. It is so easy to enter upon a fancy, especially when it is pleasing. He would stand in the doorway of his small, hot engine-room, or lean out of the window which commanded the beautiful sweep of water so close to our door, and at times I verily believe he thought we were under way, so great is the power of self-hypnotism. The river was so blue; and smooth these summer days, the passing boats so numerous. We could see the waters race to and fro as the tides changed. It was such a relief from the dull wearisome grind of shoveling in shavings and carrying out ashes or loading cars, as I was occasionally compelled to do— for my health, in my own case, I should explain. I am sure that, as an ordinary fifteen-centan-hour-shaving-carrier, I valued my title of mate as much as I ever valued anything, and the smith, "the village smith," was smilingly proud to be hailed as "Bos'n." Little Ike being of an order of mind that fancied the world ended somewhere abruptly in the Rocky Mountains, and that you really could shoot buffaloes after you left Buffalo, New York, did not grasp the meaning of it all at once, but at last it dawned upon him. When he got the idea that we really considered this a ship and that he was the bos'n's mate with the privilege of lowering the boats in case of a wreck or other disaster, he was beside himself.

"Hully chee!" he exclaimed, "me a bos'n's mate! Dat's de real t'ing, ain't it! Heave ho, dere!" And he fell back on the captain's locker and kicked his heels in the air.

"You want to remember, though, Ike," I said, once in an evil moment—what small things regulate the good and evil fortunes of all things!— "that this is the captain's cabin and bos'n's mates are not much shucks on a vessel such as the *Idlewild*. If you want to retain your position you want to be respectful, and above all, obedient. For instance, if the captain 'should choose to have you act as stoker for a few minutes now and then, it would be your place to re joice at the request. You get that, do you?"

"Not on yer life," replied Ike irritably, who understood well enough that this meant more work.

"That's right, though," chimed in big John, pleased beyond measure at this latest development. "I'm cap tain here now, an' you don't want to forget that. No back lip from any bos'n's mate. What the mate says goes. The shovel for yours, bos'n, on orders from the captain. Now jist to show that the boat's in runnin' order you can chuck in a few shovelfuls right now."

"Na! I will not!"

"Come, Ike," I said, "no insubordination. You can't go back on the captain like that. We have the irons for recalcitrants," and I eyed a pile of old rusty chains lying outside the door. "We might have to truss him up, Cap, and lay him down below," and to prove the significance of my thought I picked up one end of a chain and rattled it solemnly. The captain half choked with fat laughter.

"That's right. Git the shovel there, Ike."

Ike looked as if he doubted the regularity of this, as if life on the briny deep might not be all that it was cracked up to be, but for the sake of regularity and in order not to be reduced to the shameful condition of a scullion, or worse, "irons," which was the only alternative offered, he complied. After he had thrown in eight scoop fuls we both agreed that this was true order and that the organization and dignity of the Idlewild might well be looked upon now as estab lished.

Things went from good to better. We persuaded Joe, who was the millwright's assistant, back at the "wheel," that his dignity would be greatly enhanced in this matter if he were to accept the position of day watch, particularly since his labors in that capacity would accord with his bounden duties as a hireling of the road; for, if he were stationed in the rear (front room, actually) anyhow, and compelled, owing to the need of receiving and tak ing away various planks and boards as they came out of the planes and molding machines, to walk to and fro, it would be an easy matter to notice any

suspi cious lights on the horizon forward and to come aft at once, or at least at such times as the boss was not looking, or when he came to heat his coffee or get a drink, and report.

Amiable Joe! I can see him yet, tall, ungainly, stoop-shouldered, a slight cast in one eye, his head bobbing like a duck's as he walked— a most agreeable and pathetic person. His dreams were so simple, his wants so few. He lived with his sister somewhere in Eleventh Avenue downtown in a tenement, and car ried home bundles of firewood to her at night all this great distance, to help out. He received (not earned— he did much more than that) seventeen and a half cents an hour, and dreamed of what? I could never quite make out. Marriage? A little cheap flat some where? Life is so pathetic at times.

"Light on the starboard bow," or "Light on the port bow," were the chosen phrases which we told him he was in duty bound to use, adding always "Sir," as respectful subordinates should. Also we insisted on his instantly making known to us at such times as we twain happened to be in the engine-room to gether, all bell buoys, whistle buoys, lighthouses, pass ing vessels and most of all the monthly pay car as it rounded the curve half a mile up the track about the fifteenth of every month. The matter of reporting the approach of the pay car was absolutely without excep tion. If he failed to do that we would be compelled, sad as it might be and excellent as his other services had been, to put him in irons. Here we showed him the irons also.

Joe cheerfully accepted. For days thereafter he would come back regularly when the need of heating his coffee or securing a drink necessitated, and lifting a straight forefinger to his forehead, would report, "Light on the port bow, Sir. I think it's in the steel works jist up the track here," or "Light on the starboard, Sir. It's the fast mail, maybe, for Chicago, jist passin' Kingsbridge."

"No thinks, Joseph," I used to reprimand. "You are not supposed to give your thinks. If the captain wishes to know what it is, he will ask. Back to the molding machine for yours, Joseph."

Joseph, shock-headed, with dusty hair, weak eyes and a weaker smile, would retire, and then we would look at each other, the captain and I, and grin, and he would exclaim:

"Pretty fair discipline, mate."

"Oh, I think we've got 'em going, Captain."

"Nothin' like order, mate."

"You're right, Cap."

"I don't suppose the mate'd ever condescend to take orders like that, eh, mate?"

"Well, hardly, Cap."

"Still, you don't want to forget that I'm captain, mate."

"And you don't want to forget that I'm mate, Captain."

Thus we would badger one another until one of the scullion crew arrived, when without loss of dignity on either side we could easily turn our attention to him.

And these scullions! What a dull crew! Gnarled, often non-English-speaking foreigners against or in front of whom we could jest to our hearts' content. They could not even guess the amazing things we were ordering them to do on penalty of this, that, and the other.

Things went from better to best. We reached the place where the fact of the shop's being a ship, and the engineer the captain, and I the mate, and the smith the bos'n, ad infinitum, came to be a matter of gen eral knowledge, and we were admired and congratu lated and laughed with until nearly all the workers of the shop, with some trifling and unimportant ex ceptions, the foreman for one, began to share our illusion— carpenters, cabinet-makers, joiners, all. The one exception, as I say, was the foreman, only he was a host in himself, a mean, ill-dispositioned creature, of course, who looked upon all such ideas as fol-de-rol, and in a way subversive of order and good work. He was red-headed, big-handed, big-footed, dull. He had no imagination beyond lumber and furniture, no poetry in his soul. But the crew, the hundred-headed crew, accepted it as a relief. They liked to think they were not really working, but out upon a blue and dancing sea, and came back one by one, the carpenters, the tinsmiths, the millwrights, one and all, with cheerful grins to do us honor.

"So you're the captain, eh?" lazy old Jack, the partner of car-loading Carder, asked of the engineer, and John looked his full dignity at once.

"That I am, Jack," he replied, "only able seamen ain't supposed to ask too many familiar questions. Are they, mate?"

"Well, I should say not," I replied, arriving with a basket of shavings. "Able seamen should always salute the captain before addressing him, anyhow, and never fail to say Sir. Still, our crew is new. It's not very able and the seamen end of it is a little on the fritz, I'm thinking. But, all things considered, we can afford to overlook a few errors until we get every thing well in hand. Eh, Captain?"

"Right, mate," returned the captain genially. "You're always right— nearly."

Before I could start an argument on this score, one of the able seamen, one who was thus discourteously commented on, observed, "I don't know about that. Seems to me the mate of this here ship ain't any too much shucks, or the captain either."

The captain and I were a little dismayed by this. What to do with an able seaman who was too strong and too dull to take the whole thing in the proper

spirit? It threatened smooth sailing! This particular person was old Stephen Bowers, the carpenter from the second floor who never to us seemed to have quite the right lightness of spirit to make a go of all this. He was too likely to turn rough but well-meant humor into a personal affront to himself.

"Well, Captain, there you are," I said cautiously, with a desire to maintain order and yet peace. "Mutiny, you see."

"It does look that way, don't it?" big John replied, eyeing the newcomer with a quizzical expression, half humorous, half severe. "What'll we do, mate, under such circumstances?"

"Lower a boat, Captain, and set him adrift," I suggested, "or put him on bread and water, along with the foreman and the superintendent. They're the two worst disturbers aboard the boat. We can't have these insubordinates breaking up our discipline."

This last, deftly calculated to flatter, was taken in good part, and bridged over the difficulty for the time being. Nothing was taken so much in good part or seemed to soothe the feelings of the rebellious as to in clude them with their superiors in an order of punish ment which on the very first day of the cruise it had been decided was necessary to lay upon all the guiding officers of the plant. We could not hope to control them, so ostensibly we placed them in irons, or low ered them in boats, classifying them as mutineers and the foreman's office as the lock-up. It went well.

"Oh no, oh no, I don't want to be put in that class," old Bowers replied, the flattering unction having smoothed his ruffled soul. "I'm not so bad as all that."

"Very well, then," I replied briskly. "What do you think, Captain?"

The latter looked at me and smiled.

"Do you think we kin let him go this wunst?" he inquired of me.

"Sure, sure," I replied. "If he's certain he doesn't want to join the superintendent and the foreman."

Old Bowers went away smiling, seemingly con vinced that we were going to run the boat in ship shape fashion, and before long most of the goodnatured members of the crew consented to have them selves called able seamen.

For nearly a month thereafter, during all the finest summer weather, there existed the most charming life aboard this ideal vessel. We used the shop and all its details for the idlest purposes of our fancy. Hammers became belaying pins, the machines of the shop ship's ballast, the logs in the yard floating debris. When the yard became too cluttered, as it did once, we pretended we were in Sargasso and had to cut our way out— a process that took quite a few days. We were about all day commenting on the weather in nautical phrases, sighting strange vessels, reporting disorders or mutiny on the part of the

officers in irons, or the men, or announcing the various "bells," light houses, etc.

In an evil hour, however, we lit upon the wretched habit of pitching upon little Ike, the butt of a thousand quips. Being incapable of grasping the true edge of our humor, he was the one soul who was yet genial enough to take it and not complain. We called upon him to shovel ashes, to split the wood, to run aft, that was, to the back gate, and see how the water stood. More than once he was threatened with those same "irons" previously mentioned, and on one occasion we actually dragged in a length, pretending to bind him with it and fasten him to the anvil (with the bos'n's consent, of course), which resulted in a hearty struggle, almost a row. We told him we would put him in an old desk crate we had, a prison, no less, and once or twice, in a spirit of deviltry, John tried to carry out his threat, nailing him in, much against his will. Finally we went to the length of attempting to physically enforce our commands when he did not obey, which of course ended in disaster.

It was this way. Ike was in the habit of sweeping up his room— the smith's shop— at three o'clock in the afternoon, which was really not reasonable consider ing that there were three hours of work ahead of all of us, and that he was inclined to resent having his fine floor mussed up thereafter. On the other hand I had to carry shavings through there all this time, and it was a sore temptation to drop a few now and then just for the devil's sake. After due consultation with the captain, I once requested him to order that the bos'n's mate leave the floor untouched until half past' four, at least, which was early enough. The bos'n's mate replied with the very cheering news that the cap tain could "go to the devil." He wasn't going to kill himself for anybody, and besides, the foreman had once told him he might do this if he chose, heaven only knows why. What did the captain think that he (the bos'n's mate) was, anyhow?

Here at last was a stiff problem. Mutiny! Mutiny! Mutiny! What was to be done? Plainly this was inconveniencing the mate and besides, it was mutiny. And in addition it so lacerated our sense of dignity and order that we decided it could not be. Only, how to arrange it. We had been putting so much upon the bos'n's mate of late that he was be coming a little rebellious, and justly so, I think. He was always doing a dozen things he need not have done. Still, unless we could command him, the whole official management of this craft would go by the board, or so we thought. Finally we decided to act, but how? Direct orders, somehow, were somewhat difficult to enforce. After due meditation we took the bos'n, a most approving officer and one who loved to tease Ike (largely because he wanted to feel superior himself, I think), into our confidence and one late afternoon just after Ike had, figuratively speaking,

swabbed up the deck, the latter sent him to some other part of the shop, or vessel, rather, while we strewed shavings over his newly cleaned floor with a shameless and lavish hand. It was intensely delicious, causing gales of laughter at the time— but—. Ike came back and cleaned this up— not without a growl, how ever. He did not take it in the cheerful spirit in which we hoped he would. In fact he was very morose about it, calling us names and threatening to go to the fore man [in the lock-up] if we did it again. However, in spite of all, and largely because of the humorous spec tacle he in his rage presented we did it not once, but three or four times and that after he had most labori ously cleaned his room. A last assault one afternoon, however, resulted in a dash on his part to the foreman's office.

"I'm not goin' to stand it," he is declared to have said by one who was by at the time when he appeared in front of that official. "They're strewin' up my floor with shavin's two an' three times every day after I've cleaned it up for the day. I'll quit first."

The foreman, that raw, non-humorous person pre viously described, who evidently sympathized with Ike and who, in addition, from various sources, had long since learned what was going on, came down in a trice. He had decided to stop this nonsense.

"I want you fellows to cut that out now," he declared vigorously on seeing us. "It's all right, but it won't do. Don't rub it in. Let him alone. I've heard of this ship stuff. It's all damn nonsense."

The captain and mate gazed at each other in sad solemnity. Could it be that Ike had turned traitor? This was anarchy. He had not only complained of us but of the ship!— the Idlewild! What snakiness of soul ! We retired to a corner of our now stormtossed vessel and consulted in whispers. What would we do? Would we let her sink or try to save her? Perhaps it was advisable for the present to cease pushing the joke too far in that quarter, anyhow. Ike might cause the whole ship to be destroyed.

Nevertheless, even yet there were ways and ways of keeping her afloat and punishing an insubordinate even when no official authority existed. Ike had loved the engineroom, or rather, the captain's office, above all other parts of the vessel because it was so com fortable. Here between tedious moments of pounding iron for the smith or blowing the bellows or polishing various tools that had been sharpened, he could retire on occasion, when the boss was not about and the work not pressing (it was the very next room to his) and gaze from the captain's door or window out on the blue waters of the Hudson where lay the yachts, and up the same stream where stood the majestic palisades. At noon or a little before he could bring his cold coffee, sealed in a tin can, to the captain's engine and warm it. Again, the captain's comfortable

locker held his coat and hat, the captain's wash bowl— a large wooden tub to one side of the engine into which comforting warm water could be drawn— served as an ideal means of washing up. Since the bos'n's mate had become friendly with the captain, he too had all these privi leges. But now, in view of his insubordination, all this was changed. Why should a rebellious bos'n's mate be allowed to obtain favors of the captain? More in jest than in earnest one day it was announced that unless the bos'n's mate would forego his angry opposition to a less early scrubbed deck

"Well, mate," the captain observed to the latter in the presence of the bos'n's mate, with a lusty wink and a leer, "you know how it goes with these here ini subordinates, don't you ? No more hot coffee at noon time, unless there's more order here. No more cleanin' up in the captain's tub. No more settin' in the cap tain's window takin' in the cool mornin' breeze, as well as them yachts. What say ? Eh ? We know what to do with these here now insubordinates, don't we, mate, eh?" This last with a very huge wink.

"You're right, Captain. Very right," the mate re plied. "You're on the right track now. No more favors— unless— Order must be maintained, you know."

"Oh, all right," replied little Ike now, fully in ear nest and thinking we were. "If I can't, I can't. Jist the same I don't pick up no shavin's after four," and off he strolled.

Think of it, final and complete mutiny, and there was nothing more really to be done.

All we could do now was to watch him as he idled by himself at odd free moments down by the waterside in an odd corner of the point, a lonely figure, his trousers and coat too large, his hands and feet too big, his yellow teeth protruding. No one of the other working men ever seemed to be very enthusiastic over Ike, he was so small, so queer; no one, really, but the captain and the mate, and now they had deserted him.

It was tough.

Yet still another ill descended on us before we came to the final loss, let us say, of the good craft Idlewild. In another evil hour the captain and the mate them selves fell upon the question of priority, a matter which, so long as they had had Ike to trifle with, had never troubled them. Now as mate and the originator of this sea -going enterprise, I began to question the authority of the captain himself occasionally, and to insist on sharing as my undeniable privilege all the dignities and emoluments of the office— to wit: the best seat in the window where the wind blew, the morning paper when the boss was not about, the right to stand in the doorway, use the locker, etc. The captain objected, solely on the ground of priority, mind you, and still we fell a-quarreling. The mate in a stormy, unhappy hour was reduced by the captain to

the position of mere scullion, and ordered, upon pain of personal assault, to vacate the captain's cabin. The mate reduced the captain to the position of stoker and stood in the doorway in great glee while the latter, perforce, owing to the exigencies of his position, was compelled to stoke whether he wanted to or no. It could not be avoided. The engine had to be kept go ing. In addition, the mate had brought many morning papers, an occasional cigar for the captain, etc. There was much rancor and discord and finally the whole affair, ship, captain, mate and all, was declared by the mate to be a creation of his brain, a phantom, no less, and that by his mere act of ignoring it the whole ship— officers, men, masts, boats, sails— could be extinguished, scuttled, sent down without a ripple to that limbo of seafaring men, the redoubtable Davy Jones's locker.

The captain was not inclined to believe this at first. On the contrary, like a good skipper, he attempted to sail the craft alone. Only, unlike the mate, he lacked the curious faculty of turning jest and fancy into seeming fact. There was a something missing which made the whole thing seem unreal. Like two rival generals, we now called upon a single army to follow us individually, but the crew, seeing that there was war in the cabin, stood off in doubt and, I fancy, indif ference. It was not important enough in their hard working lives to go to the length of risking the per sonal ill-will of either of us, and so for want of agree ment, the ship finally disappeared.

Yes, she went down. The *Idlewild* was gone, and with her, all her fine seas, winds, distant cities, fogs, storms.

For a time indeed, we went charily by each other.

Still it behooved us, seeing how, in spite of our selves, we had to work in the same room and there was no way of getting rid of each other's obnox-ious presence, to find a common ground on which we could work and talk. There had never been any real bitterness between us— just jest, you know, but seri ous jest, a kind of silent sorrow for many fine things gone. Yet still that had been enough to keep every thing out of order. Now from time to time each of us thought of restoring the old life in some form, however weak it might be. Without some form of humor the shop was a bore to the mate and the cap tain, anyhow. Finally the captain sobering to his old state, and the routine work becoming dreadfully mo notonous, both mate and captain began to think of some way in which they, at least, could agree.

"Remember the I*dlewild*, Henry?" asked the excaptain one day genially, long after time and fair weather had glossed over the wretched memory of previous quarrels and dissensions.

"That I do, John," I replied pleasantly.

"Great old boat she was, wasn't she, Henry?"

"She was, John."

"An' the bos'n's mate, he wasn't such a bad old scout, was he, Henry, even if he wouldn't quit sweepin' up the shavin's?"

"He certainly wasn't, John. He was a fine little fellow. Remember the chains, John ?"

"Haw ! Haw !" echoed that worthy, and then, "Do you think the old *Idlewild* could ever be found where she's lyin' down there on the bottom, mate?"

"Well, she might, Captain, only she'd hardly be the same old boat that she was now that she's been down there so long, would she— all these dissensions and so on? Wouldn't it be easier to build a new one— don't you think?"

"I don't know but what you're right, mate. What'd we call her if we did?"

"Well, how about the *Harmony*, Captain? That sounds rather appropriate, doesn't it ?"

"The *Harmony*, mate? You're right— the *Harmony*. Shall we? Put 'er there!"

"Put her there," replied the mate with a will. "We'll organize a new crew right away, Captain— eh, don't you think?"

"Right! Wait, we'll call the bos'n an' see what he says."

Just then the bos'n appeared, smiling goodnaturedly.

"Well, what's up?" he inquired, noting our unusually cheerful faces, I presume. "You ain't made it up, have you, you two?" he exclaimed.

"That's what we have, bos'n, an' what's more, we're thinkin' of raisin' the old *Idlewild* an' re-namin' her the *Harmony*, or, rather, buildin' a new one. What say?" It was the captain talking.

"Well, I'm mighty glad to hear it, only I don't think you can have your old bos'n' s mate any longer, boys. He's gonna quit."

"Gonna quit!" we both exclaimed at once, and sad ly, and John added seriously and looking really distressed, "What's the trouble there? Who's been doin' anything to him now?" We both felt guilty because of our part in his pains.

"Well, Ike kind o' feels that the shop's been rubbin' it into him of late for some reason," observed the bos'n heavily. "I don't know why. He thinks you two have been tryin' to freeze him out, I guess. Says he can't do anything any more, that everybody makes fun of him and shuts him out."

We stared at each other in wise illumination, the new captain and the new mate. After all, we were plainly the cause of poor little Ike's depression, and we were the ones who could restore him to favor if we chose. It was the captain's cabin he sighed for— his old pleasant prerogatives.

"Oh, we can't lose Ike, Captain," I said. "What good would the *Harmony* be without him? We surely can't let anything like that happen, can we ? Not now, anyhow."

"You're right, mate," he replied. "There never was a better bos'n's mate, never. The *Harmony*'s got to have 'im. Let's talk reason to him, if we can."

In company then we three went to him, this time not to torment or chastise, but to coax and plead with him not to forsake the shop, or the ship, now that every thing was going to be as before— only better— and—

Well, we did.

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8: The Lost Inheritance

H. G. Wells

1866-1946

The Minster, March 1896

"MY UNCLE," said the man with the glass eye, "was what you might call a hemi-semi-demi millionaire. He was worth about a hundred and twenty thousand. Quite. And he left me all his money."

I glanced at the shiny sleeve of his coat, and my eye travelled up to the frayed collar.

"Every penny," said the man with the glass eye, and I caught the active pupil looking at me with a touch of offence.

"I've never had any windfalls like that," I said, trying to speak enviously and propitiate him.

"Even a legacy isn't always a blessing," he remarked with a sigh, and with an air of philosophical resignation he put the red nose and the wiry moustache into his tankard for a space.

"Perhaps not," I said.

"He was an author, you see, and he wrote a lot of books."

"Indeed!"

"That was the trouble of it all." He stared at me with the available eye to see if I grasped his statement, then averted his face a little and produced a toothpick.

"You see," he said, smacking his lips after a pause, "it was like this. He was my uncle— my maternal uncle. And he had— what shall I call it—? A weakness for writing, edifying literature. Weakness is hardly the word— downright mania is nearer the mark. He's been librarian in a Polytechnic, and as soon as the money came to him he began to indulge his ambition. It's a simply extraordinary and incomprehensible thing to me. Here was a man of thirty-seven suddenly dropped into a perfect pile of gold, and he didn't go— not a day's bust on it. One would think a chap would go and get himself dressed a bit decent— say a couple of dozen pair of trousers at a West End tailor's; but he never did. You'd hardly believe it, but when he died he hadn't even a gold watch. It seems wrong for people like that to have money. All he did was just to take a house, and order in pretty nearly five tons of books and ink and paper, and set to writing, edifying literature as hard as ever he could write. I can't understand it! But he did. The money came to him, curiously enough, through a maternal uncle of his, unexpected like, when he was seven-and-thirty. My mother, it happened, was his only relation in the wide, wide world, except some second cousins of his. And I was her only son. You follow all that? The second cousins had one only son too, but they brought him to see the old

man too soon. He was rather a spoilt youngster, was this son of theirs, and directly he set eyes on my uncle, he began bawling out as hard as he could. 'Take 'im away— er,' he says, 'take 'im away,' and so did for himself entirely. It was pretty straight sailing, you'd think, for me, eh? And my mother, being a sensible, careful woman, settled the business in her own mind long before he did.

"He was a curious little chap, was my uncle, as I remember him. I don't wonder at the kid being scared. Hair just like these Japanese dolls they sell, black and straight and stiff all round the brim and none in the middle, and below, a whitish kind of face and rather large dark grey eyes moving about behind his spectacles. He used to attach a great deal of importance to dress, and always wore a flapping overcoat and a big-brimmed felt hat of a most extraordinary size. He looked a rummy little beggar, I can tell you. Indoors it was, as a rule, a dirty red flannel dressing-gown and a black skull-cap he had. That black skull-cap made him look like the portraits of all kinds of celebrated people. He was always moving about from house to house, was my uncle, with his chair which had belonged to Savage Landor, and his two writing-tables, one of Carlyle's and the other of Shelley's, so the dealer told him, and the completest portable reference library in England, he said he had— and he lugged the whole caravan, now to a house at Down, near Darwin's old place, then to Reigate, near Meredith, then off to Haslemere, then back to Chelsea for a bit, and then up to Hampstead. He knew there was something wrong with his stuff, but he never knew there was anything wrong with his brains. It was always the air, or the water, or the altitude, or some tommy-rot like that. 'So much depends on environment,' he used to say, and stare at you hard, as if he half suspected you were hiding a grin at him somewhere under your face. 'So much depends on environment to a sensitive mind like mine.'

"What was his name? You wouldn't know it if I told you. He wrote nothing that anyone has ever read— nothing. No one could read it. He wanted to be a great teacher, he said, and he didn't know what he wanted to teach any more than a child. So he just blethered at large about Truth and Righteousness, and the Spirit of History, and all that. Book after book he wrote and published at his own expense. He wasn't quite right in his head, you know really; and to hear him go on at the critics— not because they slated him, mind you— he liked that— but because they didn't take any notice of him at all. 'What do the nations want?' he would ask, holding out his brown old claw. 'Why, teaching— guidance! They are scattered upon the hills like sheep without a shepherd. There is War and Rumours of War, the unlaid Spirit of Discord abroad in the land, Nihilism, Vivisection, Vaccination, Drunkenness, Penury, Want, Socialistic Error, Selfish Capital! Do you see the clouds, Ted— ?' My name, you know—

'Do you see the clouds lowering over the land? and behind it all— the Mongol waits!' He was always very great on Mongols, and the Spectre of Socialism, and suchlike things.

"Then out would come his finger at me, and with his eyes all afire and his skull-cap askew, he would whisper: 'And here am I. What did I want? Nations to teach. Nations! I say it with all modesty, Ted, I could. I would guide them; nay! But I will guide them to a safe haven, to the land of Righteousness, flowing with milk and honey.'

"That's how he used to go on. Ramble, rave about the nations, and righteousness, and that kind of thing. Kind of mincemeat of Bible and blethers. From fourteen up to three-and-twenty, when I might have been improving my mind, my mother used to wash me and brush my hair (at least in the earlier years of it), with a nice parting down the middle, and take me, once or twice a week, to hear this old lunatic jabber about things he had read of in the morning papers, trying to do it as much like Carlyle as he could, and I used to sit according to instructions, and look intelligent and nice, and pretend to be taking it all in. Afterwards I used to go of my own free will, out of a regard for the legacy. I was the only person that used to go see him. He wrote, I believe, to every man who made the slightest stir in the world, sending him a copy or so of his books, and inviting him to come and talk about the nations to him; but half of them didn't answer, and none ever came. And when the girl let you in— she was an artful bit of goods, that girl— there were heaps of letters on the hall-seat waiting to go off, addressed to Prince Bismarck, the President of the United States, and such-like people. And one went up the staircase and along the cobwebby passage— the housekeeper drank like fury, and his passages were always cobwebby— and found him at last, with books turned down all over the room, and heaps of torn paper on the floor, and telegrams and newspapers littered about, and empty coffee-cups and half-eaten bits of toast on the desk and the mantel. You'd see his back humped up, and his hair would be sticking out quite straight between the collar of that dressing-gown thing and the edge of his skull-cap.

"'A moment!' he would say. 'A moment!' over his shoulder. 'The mot juste, you know, Ted, le mot juste. Righteous thought righteously expressed— Aah— ! Concatenation. And now, Ted,' he'd say, spinning round in his study chair, 'how's Young England?' That was his silly name for me.

"Well, that was my uncle, and that was how he talked— to me, at any rate. With others about he seemed a bit shy. And he not only talked to me, but he gave me his books, books of six hundred pages or so, with cock-eyed headings, *'The Shrieking Sisterhood*,' *'The Behemoth of Bigotry*,' *'Crucibles and Cullenders*,' and so on. All very strong, and none of them original. The very last

time, but one that I saw him, he gave me a book. He was feeling ill even then, and his hand shook and he was despondent. I noticed it because I was naturally on the look-out for those little symptoms. 'My last book, Ted,' he said. 'My last book, my boy; my last word to the deaf and hardened nations;' and I'm hanged if a tear didn't go rolling down his yellow old cheek. He was regular crying because it was so nearly over, and he hadn't only written about fifty-three books of rubbish. 'I've sometimes thought, Ted—' he said, and stopped.

" 'Perhaps I've been a bit hasty and angry with this stiff-necked generation. A little more sweetness, perhaps, and a little less blinding light. I've sometimes thought— I might have swayed them. But I've done my best, Ted.'

"And then, with a burst, for the first and last time in his life he owned himself a failure. It showed he was really ill. He seemed to think for a minute, and then he spoke quietly and low, as sane and sober as I am now. 'I've been a fool, Ted,' he said. 'I've been flapping nonsense all my life. Only He who readeth the heart knows whether this is anything more than vanity. Ted, I don't. But He knows, He knows, and if I have done foolishly and vainly, in my heart— in my heart—'

"Just like that he spoke, repeating himself, and he stopped quite short and handed the book to me, trembling. Then the old shine came back into his eye. I remember it all fairly well, because I repeated it and acted it to my old mother when I got home, to cheer her up a bit. 'Take this book and read it,' he said. 'It's my last word, my very last word. I've left all my property to you, Ted, and may you use it better than I have done.' And then he fell a-coughing.

"I remember that quite well even now, and how I went home cock-a-hoop, and how he was in bed the next time I called. The housekeeper was downstairs drunk, and I fooled about— as a young man will— with the girl in the passage before I went to him. He was sinking fast. But even then his vanity clung to him.

" 'Have you read it?' he whispered.

" 'Sat, up all night reading it,' I said in his ear to cheer him. 'It's the last,' said I, and then, with a memory of some poetry or other in my head, 'but it's the bravest and best.'

"He smiled a little and tried to squeeze my hand as a woman might do, and left off squeezing in the middle, and lay still. 'The bravest and the best,' said I again, seeing it pleased him. But he didn't answer. I heard the girl giggle outside the door, for occasionally we'd had just a bit of innocent laughter, you know, at his ways. I looked at his face, and his eyes were closed, and it was just as if somebody had punched in his nose on either side. But he was still smiling.

It's queer to think of— he lay dead, lay dead there, an utter failure, with the smile of success on his face.

"That was the end of my uncle. You can imagine me and my mother saw that he had a decent funeral. Then, of course, came the hunt for the will. We began decent and respectful at first, and before the day was out we were ripping chairs, and smashing bureau panels, and sounding walls. Every hour we expected those others to come in. We asked the housekeeper, and found she'd actually witnessed a will— on an ordinary half-sheet of notepaper it was written, and very short, she said— not a month ago. The other witness was the gardener, and he bore her out word for word. But I'm hanged if there was that or any other will to be found. The way my mother talked must have made him turn in his grave. At last a lawyer at Reigate sprang one on us that had been made years ago during some temporary quarrel with my mother. I'm blest if that wasn't the only will to be discovered anywhere, and it left every penny he possessed to that 'Take 'im away' youngster of his second cousin's— a chap who'd never had to stand his talking, not for one afternoon of his life."

The man with the glass eye stopped.

"I thought you said—" I began.

"Half a minute," said the man with the glass eye. "I had to wait for the end of the story till this very morning, and I was a blessed sight more interested than you are. You just wait a bit too. They executed the will, and the other chap inherited, and directly he was one-and-twenty he began to blew it. How he did blew it, to be sure! He bet, he drank, he got in the papers for this and that. I tell you, it makes me wiggle to think of the times he had. He blewed every ha'penny of it before he was thirty, and the last I heard of him was— Holloway! Three years ago.

"Well, I naturally fell on hard times, because as you see, the only trade I knew was legacy-cadging. All my plans were waiting over to begin, so to speak, when the old chap died. I've had my ups and downs since then. Just now it's a period of depression. I tell you frankly, I'm on the look-out for help. I was hunting round my room to find something to raise a bit on for immediate necessities, and the sight of all those presentation volumes— no one will buy them, not to wrap butter in, even— well, they annoyed me. I promised him not to part with them, and I never kept a promise easier. I let out at them with my boot, and sent them shooting across the room. One lifted at the kick, and spun through the air. And out of it flapped— You guess?

"It was the will. He'd given it to me himself in that very last volume of all."

He folded his arms on the table, and looked sadly with the active eye at his empty tankard. He shook his head slowly, and said softly, "I'd never opened

the book, much more cut a page!" Then he looked up, with a bitter laugh, for sympathy. "Fancy hiding it there! Eh? Of all places."

He began to fish absently for a dead fly with a finger. "It just shows you the vanity of authors," he said, looking up at me. "It wasn't no trick of his. He'd meant perfectly fair. He'd really thought I was really going home to read that blessed book of his through. But it shows you, don't it—?" his eye went down to the tankard again— "It shows you too, how we poor human beings fail to understand one another."

But there was no misunderstanding the eloquent thirst of his eye. He accepted with ill-feigned surprise. He said, in the usual subtle formula, that he didn't mind if he did.

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9: The Little Fiddler

Dy Edwardson

Edward Dyson, 1865-1931
Punch (Melbourne) 8 January 1914

IT WAS AGREED in Pansy Avenue that Hermann Holl hadn't a ghost of a chance. In the city Hermann Holl may have been a violinist, but in Pansy Avenue he was only a fiddler, and Jack Anderson was a cabinct-maker in constant employ, and earning close upon £5 a week.

Hermann Holl played in a small orchestra for a small salary by night, and took in small pupils by day. More often the small pupils took in Hermann Holl.

Then Hermann lacked style; his clothes were always shabby and often dusty, and he was pale-faced and subdued, where Jack Anderson was ruddy and aggressive and very good-looking, according to the somewhat material standards of Pansy Avenue.

Besides, Hermann Holl was a Dago— that is to say, he was neither English, French, nor German, and all other non-Engiish speaking Europeans are "Dagoes" in Pansy Avenue.

"I am not the Dago," Hermann explained quietly. "I am the true Bohemian. When you say 'Dago' at me I do no approve."

Naturally, Jack Anderson laughed at this. As if it mattered a tinker's cuss what the small fiddler approved or disapproved.

Violet Greenless, also of Pansy Avenue, had not been consulted; but Pansy Avenue had made up its mind about the matter, and she must abide by the decision of the majority, of course.

Violet, however, showed no particular eagerness to accept public opinion. She had known Jack for two years. She was aware that he was an excellent workman. She knew he was sober. She could see for herself what an uncommon fine fellow he was. Jack gave her every opportunity.

Naturally, Anderson did not take the little fiddler seriously as a rival. It was not in reason that a sensible girl like Violet would accept a sprat of a Dago musician, while she had the chance of a splendid specimen of the British mechanic like Jack Anderson.

Not that Hermann Holl really was a sprat. He was five feet eight inches and a half, slim, and so neatly put together that his curious disregard for clothes mattered little. Strange to say, Hermann's old clothes usually looked much better than Jack's new ones— but not in the opinion of Pansy Avenue. However, Jack was over six feet, and heavily built, and, comparatively speaking, Hermann amounted only to a sprat in Pansy Avenue.

It did not trouble Hermann Holl what Pansy Avenue might be thinking, or doing, or saying. He had his violin and a small and old but tuneful piano in his

room at Mrs. Archer's, where he boarded and lodged for nineteen shillings and sixpence a week, with two and sixpence extra for the use of Mrs. Archer's parlour for his classes. These filled his mind.

Hermann should not have been badly off, as his needs were trifling, but somtewhere on a mountain side in Moravia there was an old mother, whose hold on his heart-strings was strengthened by the length of the pull she had on him, and in Sydney were not a few compatriots who found it easier to become rooted in the soil of the strange, new land by reason of Holl's generosity.

Violet met Hermann at the coming-of-age party of Billy Archer. Hermann had been good enough to promise to play, and he kept his word like a hero. He gave them what they wanted. But there was one little thing for her— a quaint old folk-song of the goat-herds of Erzigebirge— and he played it right into her heart.

The romping ceased while the curious and vaguely understood complainings of a heartbroken peasant stole from his violin, and haunted the corners of their souls. All were touched, but Violet was possessed. Never had music meant so much to her.

He spoke to her two or three times in the intervals between dances, and while the guests were ravaging Mrs. Archer's wonderfully laden table, and when the great event was over she bade him good-night, a little timidly, and said:—

"Mother would like you to come and see us. We live in the white cottage with the Virginia creeper. Will you come, and play that strange air for us ?"

"You did like it ?" he asked.

"It hurt me," she said. "But I want to be hurt like that."

"That means you have some of the soul."

Hermann called on the following evening. He played the folk-song and other quaint, primitive tunes of the peasants of the Giant Mountains. He gave them in his own way, and with much of his own temperament infused.

"Why don't you do those things at the music halls?" asked Vdolet simple. "People would love them."

"I am too little for the music halls, lady," he said. "And too big," he added proudly.

After that Hermann Holl visited often at Mrs. Greenless's. He had undertaken to teach Violet to sing.

"The voice it is small," said he, "but it is sweet— none more sweet that I know."

He could say little things like that beautifully. They would have sounded awkward and foolish from Jack; but Hermann seemed to put his music into them. Their echoes echoed in her heart. They brightened her days at Madam'e

Aganbett's, where Violet assisted in fabricating Paris hats for Madame's Potts Point customers.

Jack often met the Dago at Violet's home now, but did not take him seriously as a rival. Holl was the teacher, but Violet was learning to please Jack. That was Jack's very natural summing-up of the situation.

Meanwhile, Hermann IIoll had fallen deeply and desperately in love with Violet Greenless, and the world had taken on a new aspect. He awoke to a sudden appreciation of the value of money.

"Ah! it is the terrible thing this money," he told her one Sunday afternoon. "It must be that we have it or we lose so much. We need so much the heart craves for, but to earn it we must make our souls unclean."

She regarded him with surprise. "I don't think that is quite true," she said. "Why should honest work for honest wages make us unclean?"

He shook his head till his long dark hair flapped about his ivory face. "No, no, no, no! Honest work, no! But can we have honest work always? My honest work would make me starve, so I do the unclean work, scraping the fiddle wretchedly in the wretched band that makes the ragtime and the 'Ole Bull and Bush.' In my soul I am artist— I have great hopes, ideas. I want to make the music that is in me; but no one ask for it— no one pay for it. The bad stuff give me bread— the good stuff give me a stone. You see now; you know?"

"I think I do." She looked at him sadly. "I am sorry it is so."

"But it is not with bread only that the bad stuff have his reward. He offer love, too."

"Love for the bad stuff?"

"Yes, it is so. If I love— if I love much, terribly, that my heart blaze up with it, and make a great torch in the darkness here,"— (he struck his breast)— "how am I to win that which I love ?"

"Love wins love." She was quoting something she had read recently, and thought it very convincing.

He shook his head. "No. To win that which I love I must not be shabby, and poor, and disregarded; I must cease to dream the big dreams. I must do the mean things that are paid for. You say I that already do in my bad orchestra over there. And that is true. But it is so little. That with the bad pupils is shut off. After it is done I forget, and I have time for the good. But to make the un-clean thing win, to make it bring me success, much money, all that love asks, I must give myself to it— all, all myself."

He seemed quite distracted, and although she did not understand she pitied him; and voice and eyes were so full of this when she spoke that he turned upon her wildly.

"You must not talk to me like that," he cried. "It make me all fire. Why? Because I love, love, love, love you! Yes, you, only you in all the world."

He had taken her in his arms, he was kissing her vehemently, and she, with relaxed limbs, lay her mouth against his kisses, and knew absolute rapture.

But it lasted only a minute. "You mustn't! You mustn't !" she whispered. She broke from his arms. "I am engaged to Mr. Anderson," she said.

"Engaged!" He clung to her with fingers of steel. "Engaged! That mean you will marry. You will marry to that big, good, empty, happy, foolish man?"

"Yes," she answered.

"No!" He almost screamed the word, beating his knuckles on the table. "No, no no! It is not possible. You, you, so beautiful, so fine, with a soul that is like the bud of the rose that an artist might open to the great glory. No, no, No!"

"Mother has promised him."

"But you, you— you have not promise?"

"Mother likes him very much. He does so well. He is steady. He has a house and a thousand pounds. He is going to start a factory of his own. He will be rich."

"But I will be rich, too. I will. I have the soul to sell. It shall bring not one thousand but ten, twenty, fifty thousan'! All for you. Wait, wait ! You will wait?"

"I have made no promises,"' she answered a little shyly.

He left her precipitately. She saw him dash down the street, his violin case in his hand. Next day Hermann Holl's piano was carted away from Mrs. Archer's. Hermann had sold his treasure.

For five or six weeks Jack Anderson had it pretty much his own way at Mrs. Greenlee's. Violet saw little of Hermann, and what she saw was not reassuring. He was wilder and shabbier than ever. Mrs. Archer came across one evening with a complaint that he was back in his board.

"And the silly man's gone and give up his job in the band at the livin' pictures," said Mrs. Archer. "It's well you didn't have nothin' to do with him, my dear."

Violet blushed. "But I did," she said bravely. "I am his friend. I like him very much."

"Nonsense! A mad fiddler. All them Dagoes is more or less dotty, if you ask me."

"I am sure he is not. But he is unhappy. He is a musician, a fine musician, and must earn his living playing with a lot of wretched tin-kettlers." Violet was quite eloquent.

"Well, if he don't pay his board he'll have to go," said Mrs. Archer decisively.

Violet saw Hermann Holl that afternoon. He admitted he had left the orchestra. He agreed he was worse off than ever.

"But there is still the soul to sell to the devil," he, said grimly.

"Oh, Hermann, don't !"

"Does it hurt you. Ah-h, it hurts you! I am glad. Fiendishly glad I am, because that mean you care. You love me!"

"What chance is there now? You are poorer than ever. You may even be hungry."

He nodded. "It is very like," he said. "I leave Mrs. Archer. I must dress the soul up well if the devil is to pay a good price, and money mus' not be wasted on food. Do not look so much frightened. The devil I sell to is not the old Mephisto; it is the commercial devil— the devil who pays best."

For over a month Violet saw nothing of Holl, heard nothing of him, and Jack was be-coming insistent. Once they had quarrelled when he caught her crying.

"You are thinking of that cursed fiddler!" he said.

She did not deny it, and he stormed for twenty minutes, like an ordinary, healthy, young lover, who has no other outlet for his emotions but in noise.

Next day Jack was back begging her pardon. He had a peace-offering in the shape of dress circle tickets for a show.

"You'll like it," he said, "and it will do you good. There's a fiddler there who'll knock all your silly notions about Holl clean out of your head. He'd play Holl stiff. He's a wonder. Do come. I want you to see the man just to make you understand what a tripester that pauper Dago was! He's down and out, and I don't want to crow over him, but you're harbourin' dilly notions that'll just evaporate when you hear what real fiddlin' is."

"Very well, I will go,'' she said.

"That's right. You've got to see this fellow. Sydney's shook on him. He's got the place by the scruff, and just does as he likes with the crowd."

She went, and sat through five eommonplace turns before Pilson appeared. Pilsen was billed as "The Mad Fiddler." Violet knew him at once. It was Hermann Holl. He was cerious-ly dressed in a rich travesty of a Moravian peasant costume. His costume was black with a very light trimming of barbaric red, gold, and green silk braid; the fiddle was black; the player's face was ivory white, with a red mouth, and eyes blacked in to look cavernous and wild.

The programme described Pilsen as an eccentric genius of Prague, who had amazed Europe with his weird handling of the violin; but Violet was never a moment in doubt. It amazed her that Jack did not recognise him.

Pilsen played many things all in a strange, eerie fashion. In one effort he represented a drunken man rocking home late, and ending his debauch by killing his wife. The effect was thrilling, the audience was delighted, awed, and completely captured. He played better, but nothing suited popular taste quite so well as that. Several of the folk-songs of Eastern Europe, played in Pilsen's way, were wonderfully effective. No one could doubt his triumph.

The effect on Violet was the last Anderson expected. She knew Hermann was lost to her. He was a popular idol, a man of the moment, in demand in a thousand homes. Probably she was already forgotten. She would see no more of him; but, come what might, she could never be Jack Anderson's wife, and shc told him so that night.

"I do not care for you, and I do care for someone else," she said. "I could die much easier than marry."

The tone left no room for doubt. Jack Anderson was thunderstruck, but convinced, as a man is apt to be when thunderstruck.

Next day was Sunday. There was a visitor in the afternoon. Violet went in to him. It was Hermann, dressed in a quiet suit of dark grey, looking marvellously well, she thought.

He was not content with one hand, he took both, and drawing her nearer kissed her lips.

"Well," he said, "you see I have made the sale. It is a success. I shall have much money. I can even afford to be happy. Will you have me now ?"

"No," she answered, "but I would have had you when you were poor, if you had asked me."

But, of course, that was not her final answer. When Pilsen sailed for Europe to make a new reputation in an Old World, Violet went with him. Hermann no longer thinks he has sold his soul.

"I have revealed the heart of my people to the world," he said, "and that is no mean thing."

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10: The Trailer For Room No. 8.

Richard Harding Davis

1864-1916

In: *Gallegher, and Other Stories* (1891)

THE "trailer" for the green-goods men who rented room No. 8 in Case's tenement, had had no work to do for the last few days, and was cursing his luck in consequence.

He was entirely too young to curse, but he had never been told so, and, indeed, so imperfect had his training been that he had never been told not to do anything as long as it pleased him to do it and made existence any more bearable.

He had been told when he was very young, before the man and woman who had brought him into the world had separated, not to crawl out on the fire-escape, because he might break his neck, and later, after his father had walked off Hegelman's Slip into the East River while very drunk, and his mother had been sent to the penitentiary for grand larceny, he had been told not to let the police catch him sleeping under the bridge.

With these two exceptions he had been told to do as he pleased, which was the very mockery of advice, as he was just about as well able to do as he pleased as is any one who has to beg or steal what he eats and has to sleep in hall-ways or over the iron gratings of warm cellars and has the officers of the children's societies always after him to put him in a " Home" and make him be "good."

"Snipes," as the trailer was called, was determined no one should ever force him to be good if he could possibly prevent it. And he certainly did do a great deal to prevent it. He knew what having to be good meant. Some of the boys who had escaped from the Home had told him all about that. It meant wearing shoes and a blue and white checkered apron, and making cane-bottomed chairs all day, and having to wash yourself in a big iron tub twice a week, not to speak of having to move about like machines whenever the lady teacher hit a bell. So when the green-goods men, of whom the genial Mr. Alf Wolfe was the chief, asked Snipes to act as "trailer" for them at a quarter of a dollar for every victim he shadowed, he jumped at the offer and was proud of the position.

If you should happen to keep a grocery store in the country, or to run the village post-office, it is not unlikely that you know what a green-goods man is; but in case you don't, and have only a vague idea as to how he lives, a paragraph of explanation must be inserted here for your particular benefit. Green goods is the technical name for counterfeit bills, and the green-goods men send out circulars to countrymen all over the United States, offering to

sell them $5000 worth of counterfeit money for $500, and ease their conscience, by explaining to them that by purchasing these green goods they are hurting no one but the Government, which is quite able, with its big surplus, to stand the loss. They enclose a letter which is to serve their victim as a mark of identification or credential when he comes on to purchase.

The address they give him is in one of the many drug-store and cigar-store post-offices which are scattered all over New York, and which contribute to make vice and crime so easy that the evil they do cannot be reckoned in souls lost or dollars stolen. If the letter from the countryman strikes the dealers in green goods as sincere, they appoint an interview with him by mail in rooms they rent for the purpose, and if they, on meeting him, there, think he is still in earnest and not a detective or officer in disguise, they appoint still another interview, to be held later in the day in the back room of some saloon.

Then the countryman is watched throughout the day from the moment he leaves the first meeting-place intil he arrives at the saloon. If anything in his conduct during that time leads the man whose duty it is to follow him, or the "trailer," as the profession call it, to believe he is a detective, he finds when he arrives at the saloon that there is no one to receive him. But if the trailer regards his conduct as unsuspicious, he is taken to another saloon, not the one just appointed, which is, perhaps, a most respectable place, but to the thieves' own private little rendezvous, where he is robbed in any of the several different ways best suited to their purpose.

Snipes was a very good trailer. He was so little that no one ever noticed him, and he could keep a man in sight no matter how big the crowd was, or how rapidly it changed and shifted. And he was as patient as he was quick, and would wait for hours if needful, with his eye on a door, until his man reissued into the street again. And if the one he shadowed looked behind him to see if he was followed, or dodged up and down different streets, as if he were trying to throw off pursuit, or despatched a note or telegram, or stopped to speak to a policeman or any special officer, as a detective might, who thought he had his men safely in hand, off Snipes would go on arun, to where Alf Wolfe was waiting, and tell what he had seen.

Then Wolfe would give him a quarter or more, and the trailer would go back to his post opposite Case's tenement, and wait for another victim to issue forth, and for the signal from No. 8 to follow him. It was not much fun, and "customers," as Mr. Wolfe always called them, had been scarce, and Mr. Wolfe, in consequence, had been cross and nasty in his temper, and had batted Snipe out of the way on more than one occasion. So the trailer was feeling blue and disconsolate, and wondered how it was that "Naseby" Raegen,

"Rags" Raegen's younger brother, had had the luck to get a two weeks' visit to the country with the Fresh Air Fund children, while he had not.

He supposed it was because Naseby had sold papers, and wore shoes, and went to night school, and did many other things equally objectionable. Still, what Naseby had said about the country, and riding horseback, and the fishing, and the shooting crows with no cops to stop you, and watermelons for nothing, had sounded wonderfully attractive and quite improbable, except that it was one of Naseby's peculiarly sneaking ways to tell the truth. Anyway, Naseby had left Cherry Street for good, and had gone back to the country to work there. This all helped to make Snipes morose, and it was with a cynical smile of satisfaction that he watched an old countryman coming slowly up the street, and asking his way timidly of the Italians to Case's tenement.

The countryman looked up and about him in evident bewilderment and anxiety. He glanced hesitatingly across at the boy leaning against the wall of a saloon, but the boy was watching two sparrows fighting in the dirt of the street, and did not see him. At least, it did not look as if he saw him. Then the old man knocked on the door of Case's tenement. No one came, for the people in the house had learned to leave inquiring countrymen to the gentleman who rented room No. 8, and as that gentleman was occupied at that moment with a younger countryman, he allowed the old man, whom he had fust cautiously observed from the top of the stairs, to remain where he was.

The old man stood uncertainly on the stoop, and then removed his heavy black felt hat and rubbed his bald head and the white shining locks of hair around it wich a red bandanna handkerchief. Then he walked very slowly across the street toward Snipes, for the rest of the street was empty, and there was no one else at hand. The old man was dressed in heavy black broadcloth, quaintly cut, with boot legs showing up under the trousers, and with faultlessly clean linen of home-made manufacture.

"I can't make the people in that house over there hear me," complained the old man, with the simple confidence that old age has in very young boys. "Do you happen to know if they're at home?"

"Nop," growled Snipes.

"I'm looking for a man named Perceval," said the stranger ; "he lives in that house, and I wanter see him on most particular business. It isn't a very pleasing place he lives in, is it— at least," he hurriedly added, as if fearful of giving offence, "it isn't much on the outside? Do you happen to know him?"

Perceval was Alf Wolfe's business name.

"Nop," said the trailer.

"Well, 'm not looking for him," explained the stranger, slowly, "'as much as I'm looking for a young man that I kind of suspect is been to see him to-day: a

young man that looks like me, only younger. Has lightish hair and pretty tall and lanky, and carrying a shiny black bag with him. Did you happen to hev noticed him going into that place across the way?"

"Nop," said Snipes.

The old man sighed and nodded his head thoughtfully at Snipes, and puckered up the corners of his mouth, as though he were thinking deeply. He had wonderfully honest blue eyes, and with the white hair hanging around his sun-burned face, he looked like an old saint. But the trailer didn't know that: he did know, though, that this man was a different sort from the rest. Still, that was none of his business.

"What is't you want to see him about?" he asked sullenly, while he looked up and down the street and everywhere but at the old man, and rubbed one bare foot slowly over the other.

The old man looked pained, and much to Snipe's surprise, the question brought the tears to his eyes, and his lips trembled. Then he swerved slightly, so that he might have fallen if Snipes had not caught him and helped him across the pavement to a seat on a stoop.

"Thankey, son," said the stranger; "I'm not as strong as I was, an' the sun's mighty hot, an' these streets of yours smell mighty bad, and I've had a powerful lot of trouble these last few days. But if I could see this man Perceval before my boy does, I know I could fix it, and it would all come out right."

"What do you want to see him about?" repeated the trailer, suspiciously, while he fanned the old man with his hat. Snipes could not have told you why he did this or why this particular old countryman was any different from the many others who came to buy counterfeit money and who were thieves at heart as well as in deed.

"I want to-see him about my son," said the old man to the little boy. "He's a bad man whoever he is. This 'ere Perceval is a bad man. He sends down his wickedness to the country and tempts weak folks to sin. He teaches 'em ways of evildoing they never heard of, and he's ruined my son with the others — ruined him. I've had nothing to do with the city and its ways; we're strict living, simple folks, and perhaps we've been too strict, or Abraham wouldn't have run away to the city. But I thought it was best, and I doubted nothing when the fresh-air children came to the farm. I didn't like city children, but I let 'em come. I took 'em in, and did what I could to make it pleasant for 'em. Poor little fellers, all as thin as corn-stalks and pale as ghosts, and as dirty as you.

"I took 'em in and let 'em ride the horses, and swim in the river, and shoot crows in the cornfield, and eat all the cherries they could pull, and what did the city send me in return for that? It sent me this thieving, rascally scheme of this man Perceval's, and it turned my boy's head, and lost him to me. I saw him

poring over the note and reading it as if it were Gospel, and I suspected nothing. And when he asked me if he could keep it, I said yes he could, for I thought he wanted it for a curiosity, and then off he put with the black bag and the $200 he's been saving up to start houseeeping with when the old Deacon says he can marry his daughter Kate." The old man placed both hands on his knees and went on excitedly.

"The old Deacon says he'll not let 'em marry till Abe has $2000, and that is what the boy's come after. He wants to buy $2000 worth of bad money with his $200 worth of good money, to show the Deacon, just as though it were likely a marriage after such a crime as that would ever be a happy one."

Snipes had stopped fanning the old man, as he ran on, and was listening intently, with an uncomfortable feeling of sympathy and sorrow, uncomfortable because he was not used to it.

He could not see why the old man should think the city should have treated his boy better because he had taken care of the city's children, and he was puzzled between his allegiance to the gang and his desire to help the gang's innocent victim, and then because he was an innocent victim and not a "customer," he let his sympathy get the better of his discretion.

"Saay," he began, abruptly, "I'm not sayin' nothin' to nobody, and nobody's sayin' nothin' to me— see? but I guess your son'll be around here to-day, sure. He's got to come before one, for this office closes sharp at one, and we goes home. Now, I've got the call whether he gets his stuff taken off him or whether the boys leave him alone. If I say the word, they'd no more come near him than if he had the cholera— see? An' I'll say it for this oncet, just for you. Hold on," he commanded, as the old man raised his voice in surprised interrogation, "don't ask no questions, 'cause you won't get no answers except lies. You find your way back to the Grand Central Depot and wait there, and I'll steer your son down to you, sure, as soon as I can find him— see? Now get along, or you'll get me inter trouble."

"You've been lying to me, then," cried the old man, "and youre as bad as any of them, and my boy's over in that house now."

He scrambled up from the stoop, and be fore the trailer could understand what he proposed to do, had dashed across the street and up the stoop, and up the stairs, and had burst into room No. 8.

Snipes tore after him. "Come back! come back out of that, you old fool!" he cried. "You'll get killed in there!" Snipes was afraid to enter room No. 8, but he could hear from the outside the old man challenging Alf Wolfe in a resonant angry voice that rang through the building.

"Whew!" said Snipes, crouching on the stairs, "there's goin' to be a muss this time, sure!"

"Where's my son? Where have you hidden my son?" demanded the old man. He ran across the room and pulled open a door that led into another room, but it was empty. He had fully expected to see his boy murdered and quartered, and with his pockets inside out. He turned on Wolfe, shaking his white hair like a mane. "Give me up my son, you rascal you!" he cried, "or I'll get the police, and Ill tell them how you decoy honest boys to your den and murder them."

"Are you drunk or crazy, or just a little of both?" asked Mr. Wolfe. "For a cent I'd throw you out of that window. Get out of here! Quick, now! You're too old to get excited like that; it's not good for you."

But this only exasperated the old man the more, and he made a lunge at the confidence man's throat.

Mr. Wolfe stepped aside and caught him around the waist and twisted his leg around the old man's rheumatic one, and held him.

"Now," said Wolfe, as quietly as though he were giving a lesson in wrestling, "if I wanted to, I could break your back."

The old man glared up at him, panting.

"Your son's not here," said Wolfe, "and this is a private gentleman's private room. I could turn you over to the police for assault if I wanted to; but," he added, magnanimously, "I won't. Now get out of here and go home to your wife, and when you come to see the sights again don't drink so much raw whiskey." He half carried the old farmer to the top of the stairs and dropped him, and went back and closed the door. Snipes came up and helped him down and out, and the old man and the boy walked slowly and in silence out to the Bowery. Snipes helped his companion into a car and put him off at the Grand Central Depot. The heat and the excitement had told heavily on the old man, and he seemed dazed and beaten.

He was leaning on the trailer's shoulder and waiting for his turn in the line in front of the ticket window, when a tall, gawky, good-looking country lad sprang out of it and at him with an expression of surprise and anxiety. "Father," he said, "father, what's wrong? What are you doing here? Is anybody ill at home? Are you ill?"

"Abraham," said the old man simply, and dropped heavily on the younger man's shoulder. Then he raised his head sternly and said: "I thought you were murdered, but better that than a thief, Abraham. What brought you here? What did you do with that rascal's letter? What did you do with his money?"

The trailer drew cautiously away; the conversation was becoming unpleasantly personal.

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Abraham, calmly. "The Deacon gave his consent the other night without the $2000, and I took the

$200 I'd saved and came right on in the fust train to buy the ring. It's pretty, isn't it?" he said, flushing, as he pulled out a little velvet box and opened it.

The old man was so happy at this that he laughed and cried alternately, and then he made a grab for the trailer and pulled him down beside him on one of tne benches.

"You've got to come with me," he said, with kind severity. "You're a good boy, but your folks have let you run wrong. You've been good to me, and you said you would get me back my boy and save him from those thieves, and I believe now that you meant it. Now yow're just coming back with us to the farm and the cows and the river, and you can eat all you want and live with us, and never, never see this unclean, wicked city again."

Snipes looked up keenly from under the rim of his hat and rubbed one of his muddy feet over the other as was his habit. The young countryman, greatly puzzled, and the older man smiling kindly, waited expectantly in silence. From outside came the sound of the car-bells jangling, and the rattle of cabs, and the cries of drivers, and all the varying rush and turmoil of a great metropolis. Green fields, and running rivers, and fruit that did not grow in wooden boxes or brown paper cones, were myths and idle words to Snipes, but this "unclean, wicked city," he knew.

"I guess you're too good for me," he said, with an uneasy laugh. "I guess little old New York's good enough for me."

"What!" cried the old man, in the tones of greatest concern. "You would go back to that den of iniquity, surely not— to that thief Perceval?"

"Well," said the trailer, slowly, "and he's not such a bad lot, neither. You see he could hev broke your neck that time when you was choking him, but he didn't. There's your train," he added hurriedly and jumping away. "Good by. So long, old man. I'm much 'bliged to you jus' for asking me."

Two hours later the farmer and his son were making the family weep and laugh over their adventures, as they all sat together on the porch with the vines about it; and the trailer was leaning against the wall of a saloon and apparently counting his ten toes, but in reality watching for Mr. Wolfe to give the signal from the window of room No. 8.

11: Mr. Braddy's Bottle

Richard Connell

1893-1949

People's Favorite Magazine, September 1920

"THIS," said Mr. William Lum solemnly, "is the very las' bottle of this stuff in these United States!"

It was a dramatic moment. He held it aloft with the pride and tender care of a recent parent exhibiting a first-born child. Mr. Hugh Braddy emitted a long, low whistle, expressive of the awe due the occasion.

"You don't tell me!" he said.

"Yes, siree! There ain't another bottle of this wonderful old hooch left anywhere. Not anywhere. A man couldn't get one like it for love nor money. Not for love nor money." He paused to regard the bottle fondly. "Nor anything else," he added suddenly.

Mr. Braddy beamed fatly. His moon face— like a two-hundred-and-twenty-pound Kewpie's— wore a look of pride and responsibility. It was his bottle.

"You don't tell me!" he said.

"Yes, siree. Must be all of thirty years old, if it's a day. Mebbe forty. Mebbe fifty. Why, that stuff is worth a dollar a sniff, if it's worth a jit. And you not a drinking man! Wadda pity! Wadda pity!"

There was a shade of envy in Mr. Lum's tone, for Mr. Lum was, or had been, a drinking man; yet Fate, ever perverse, had decreed that Mr. Braddy, teetotaler, should find the ancient bottle while poking about in the cellar of his very modest new house— rented— in that part of Long Island City where small, wooden cottages break out in clusters, here and there, in a species of municipal measles.

Mr. Braddy, on finding the treasure, had immediately summoned Mr. Lum from his larger and more pretentious house near by, as one who would be able to appraise the find, and he and Mr. Lum now stood on the very spot in the cellar where, beneath a pile of old window blinds, the venerable liquor had been found. Mr. Braddy, it was plain, thought very highly of Mr. Lum's opinions, and that great man was good-naturedly tolerant of the more placid and adipose Mr. Braddy, who was known— behind his back— in the rug department of the Great Store as "Ole Hippopotamus." Not that he would have resented it, had the veriest cash boy called him by this uncomplimentary but descriptive nickname to his face, for Mr. Braddy was the sort of person who never resents anything.

"Y'know, Mr. Lum," he remarked, crinkling his pink brow in philosophic thought, "sometimes I wish I had been a drinking man. I never minded if a man took a drink. Not that I had any patience with these here booze fighters. No.

Enough is enough, I always say. But if a fella wanted to take a drink, outside of business hours, of course, or go off on a spree once in a while— well, I never saw no harm in it. I often wished I could do it myself."

"Well, why the dooce didn't you?" inquired Mr. Lum.

"As a matter of solid fact, I was scared to. That's the truth. I was always scared I'd get pinched or fall down a manhole or something. You see, I never did have much nerve." This was an unusual burst of confidence on the part of Mr. Braddy, who, since he had moved into Mr. Lum's neighborhood a month before, had played a listening rôle in his conferences with Mr. Lum, who was a thin, waspy man of forty-four, in ambush behind a fierce pair of mustachios. Mr. Braddy, essence of diffidence that he was, had confined his remarks to "You don't tell me!" or, occasionally, "Ain't it the truth?" in the manner of a Greek chorus.

NOW inspired, perhaps, by the discovery that he was the owner of a priceless bottle of spirits, he unbosomed himself to Mr. Lum. Mr. Lum made answer.

"Scared to drink? Scared of anything? Bosh! Tommyrot! Everybody's got nerve. Only some don't use it," said Mr. Lum, who owned a book called "The Power House in Man's Mind," and who subscribed for, and quoted from, a pamphlet for successful men, called "I Can and I Will."

"Mebbe," said Mr. Braddy. "But the first and only time I took a drink I got a bad scare. When I was a young feller, just starting in the rugs in the Great Store, I went out with the gang one night, and, just to be smart, I orders beer. Them was the days when beer was a nickel for a stein a foot tall. The minute I taste the stuff I feel uncomfortable. I don't dare not drink it, for fear the gang would give me the laugh. So I ups and drinks it, every drop, although it tastes worse and worse. Well, sir, that beer made me sicker than a dog. I haven't tried any drink stronger than malted milk since. And that was all of twenty years ago. It wasn't that I thought a little drinking a sin. I was just scared; that's all. Some of the other fellows in the rugs drank— till they passed a law against it. Why, I once seen Charley Freedman sell a party a genuine, expensive Bergamo rug for two dollars and a half when he was pickled. But when he was sober there wasn't a better salesman in the rugs."

Mr. Lum offered no comment; he was weighing the cob-webbed bottle in his hand, and holding it to the light in a vain attempt to peer through the golden-brown fluid. Mr. Braddy went on:

"I guess I was born timid. I dunno. I wanted to join a lodge, but I was scared of the 'nitiation. I wanted to move out to Jersey, but I didn't. Why, all by life I've wanted to take a Turkish bath; but somehow, every time I got to the door

of the place I got cold feet and backed out. I wanted a raise, too, and by golly, between us, I believe they'd give it to me; but I keep putting off asking for it and putting off and putting off—"

"I was like that— once," put in Mr. Lum. "But it don't pay. I'd still be selling shoes in the Great Store— and looking at thousands of feet every day and saying thousands of times, 'Yes, madam, this is a three-A, and very smart, too,' when it is really a six-D and looks like hell on her. No wonder I took a drink or two in those days."

He set down the bottle and flared up with a sudden, fierce bristling of his mustaches.

"And now they have to come along and take a man's liquor away from him— drat 'em! What did our boys fight for? Liberty, I say. And then, after being mowed down in France, they come home to find the country dry! It ain't fair, I say. Of course, don't think for a minute that I mind losing the licker. Not me. I always could take it or leave it alone. But what I hate is having them say a man can't drink this and he can't drink that. They'll be getting after our smokes, next. I read in the paper last night a piece that asked something that's been on my mind a long time: 'Whither are we drifting?'"

"I dunno," said Mr. Braddy.

"You'd think," went on Mr. Lum, not heeding, as a sense of oppression and injustice surged through him, "that liquor harmed men. As if it harmed anybody but the drunkards! Liquor never hurt a successful man; no, siree. Look at me!"

Mr. Braddy looked. He had heard Mr. Lum make the speech that customarily followed this remark a number of times, but it never failed to interest him.

"Look at me!" said Mr. Lum, slapping his chest. "Buyer in the shoes in the Great Store, and that ain't so worse, if I do say it myself. That's what nerve did. What if I did used to get a snootful now and then? I had the self-confidence, and that did the trick. When old man Briggs croaked, I heard that the big boss was looking around outside the store for a man to take his place as buyer in the shoes. So I goes right to the boss, and I says, 'Look here, Mr. Berger, I been in the shoes eighteen years, and I know shoes from A to Z, and back again. I can fill Briggs' shoes,' I says. And that gets him laughing, although I didn't mean it that way, for I don't think humor has any place in business.

"'Well,' he says, 'you certainly got confidence in yourself. I'll see what you can do in Briggs' job. It will pay forty a week.' I knew old Briggs was getting more than forty, and I could see that Berger needed me, so I spins on him and I laughs in his face. 'Forty popcorn balls!' I says to him. 'Sixty is the least that

job's worth, and you know it.' Well, to make a long story short, he comes through with sixty!"

This story never failed to fascinate Mr. Braddy, for two reasons. First, he liked to be taken into the confidence of a man who made so princely a salary; and, second, it reminded him of the tormenting idea that he was worth more than the thirty dollars he found every Friday in his envelope, and it bolstered up his spirit. He felt that with the glittering example of Mr. Lum and the constant harassings by his wife, who had and expressed strong views on the subject, he would some day conquer his qualms and demand the raise he felt to be due him.

"I wish I had your crust," he said to Mr. Lum in tones of frank admiration.

"You have," rejoined Mr. Lum. "I didn't know that I had, for a long, long time, and then it struck me one day, as I was trying an Oxford-brogue style K6 on a dame, 'How did Schwab get where he is? How did Rockefeller? How did this here Vanderlip? Was it by being humble? Was it by setting still?' You bet your sweet boots it wasn't. I just been reading an article in 'I Can and I Will,' called 'Big Bugs— And How They Got That Way,' and it tells all about those fellows and how most of them wasn't nothing but newspaper reporters and puddlers— whatever that is— until one day they said, 'I'm going to do something decisive!' And they did it. That's the idea. Do something decisive. That's what I did, and look at me! Braddy, why the devil don't you do something decisive?"

"What?" asked Mr. Braddy meekly.

"Anything. Take a plunge. Why, I bet you never took a chance in your life. You got good stuff in you, Braddy, too. There ain't a better salesman in the rugs. Why, only the other day I overheard Berger say, 'That fellow Braddy knows more about rugs than the Mayor of Bagdad himself. Too bad he hasn't more push in him.'"

"I guess mebbe he's right," said Mr. Braddy.

"Right? Of course, he's right about you being a crack salesman. Why, you could sell corkscrews in Kansas," said Mr. Lum. "You got the stuff, all right. But the trouble is you can sell everything but yourself. Get busy! Act! Do something! Make a decision! Take a step!"

Mr. Braddy said nothing. Little lines furrowed his vast brow; he half closed his small eyes; his round face took on an intent, scowling look. He was thinking. Silence filled the cellar. Then, with the air of a man whose mind is made up, Hugh Braddy said a decisive and remarkable thing.

"Mr. Bill Lum," he said, "I'm going to get drunk!"

"What? You? Hugh Braddy? Drunk? My God!" The idea was too much even for the mind of Mr. Lum.

"Yes," said Mr. Braddy, in a hollow voice, like Cæsar's at the Rubicon, "I'm going to drink what's in that bottle this very night."

"Not all of it?" Mr. Lum, as an expert in such things, registered dismay.

"As much as is necessary," was the firm response. Mr. Lum brightened considerably at this.

"Better let me help you. There's enough for both of us. Plenty," he suggested.

"Are you sure?" asked Mr. Braddy anxiously.

"Sure," said Mr. Lum.

ii

AND he was right. There was more than enough. It was nine o'clock that night when the cellar door of Mr. Braddy's small house opened cautiously, and Mr. Braddy followed his stub nose into the moonlight. Mr. Lum, unsteady but gay, followed.

Mr. Braddy, whose customary pace was a slow, dignified waddle, immediately broke into a brisk trot.

"Doan' go so fas', Hoo," called Mr. Lum, for they had long since reached the first-name stage.

"Gotta get to city, N'Yawk, b'fore it's too late," explained Mr. Braddy, reining down to a walk.

"Too late for what, Hoo?" inquired Mr. Lum.

"I dunno," said Mr. Braddy.

They made their way, by a series of skirmishes and flank movements, to the subway station, and caught a train for Manhattan. Their action in doing this was purely automatic.

Once aboard, they began a duet, which they plucked out of the dim past:

"Oh, dem golden slippers! Oh, dem golden slippers!"

This, unfortunately, was all they could remember of it, but it was enough to supply them with a theme and variations that lasted until they arrived in the catacombs far below the Grand Central Station. There they were shooed out by a vigilant subway guard.

They proceeded along the brightly lighted streets. Mr. Braddy's step was that of a man walking a tight-rope. Mr. Lum's method of progression was a series of short spurts. Between the Grand Central and Times Square they passed some one thousand eight hundred and twenty-nine persons, of whom one thousand eight hundred and twenty-nine remarked, "Where did they get it?"

On Broadway they saw a crowd gathered in front of a building.

"Fight," said Mr. Braddy hopefully.

"'Naccident," thought Mr. Lum. At least a hundred men and women were industriously elbowing each other and craning necks in the hope of seeing the center of attraction. Mr. Braddy, ordinarily the most timid of innocent bystanders, was now a lion in point of courage.

"Gangway," he called. "We're 'tectives," he added bellicosely to those who protested, as he and Mr. Lum shoved and lunged their way through the rapidly growing crowd. The thing which had caused so many people to stop, to crane necks, to push, was a small newsboy who had dropped a dime down through an iron grating and who was fishing for it with a piece of chewing gum tied on the end of a string.

They spent twenty minutes giving advice and suggestions to the fisher, such as:

"A leetle to the left, now. Naw, naw. To the right. Now you got it. Shucks! You missed it. Try again." At length they were rewarded by seeing the boy retrieve the dime, just before the crowd had grown to such proportions that it blocked the traffic.

The two adventurers continued on their way, pausing once to buy four frankfurters, which they ate noisily, one in each hand.

Suddenly the veteran drinker, Mr. Lum, was struck by a disquieting thought.

"Hoo, I gotta go home. My wife'll be back from the movies by eleven, and if I ain't home and in bed when she gets there, she'll skin me alive; that's what she'll do."

Mr. Braddy was struck by the application of this to his own case.

"Waddabout me, hey? Waddabout me, B'lum?" he asked plaintively. "Angelica will just about kill me."

Mr. Lum, leaning against the Automat, darkly considered this eventuality. At length he spoke.

"You go getta Turkish bath. Tell 'Gellica y' hadda stay in store all night to take inventory. Turkish bath'll make you fresh as a daisy. Fresh as a li'l' daisy—fresh as a li'l' daisy—" Saying which Mr. Lum disappeared into the eddying crowd and was gone. Mr. Braddy was alone in the great city.

But he was not dismayed. While disposing of the ancient liquor, he and Mr. Lum had discussed philosophies of life, and Mr. Braddy had decided that his was, "A man can do what he is a-mind to." And Mr. Braddy was very much a-mind to take a Turkish bath. To him it represented the last stroke that cut the shackles of timidity. "I can and I will," he said a bit thickly, in imitation of Mr. Lum's heroes.

iii

THERE was a line of men, mostly paunchy, waiting to be assigned dressing rooms when Mr. Braddy entered the Turkish bath, egged sternly on by his new philosophy. He did not shuffle meekly into the lowest place and wait the fulfillment of the biblical promise that some one would say, "Friend, go up higher." Not he. "I can and I will," he remarked to the man at the end of the line, and, forthwith, with a majestic, if rolling, gait, advanced to the window where a rabbit of a man, with nose glasses chained to his head, was sleepily dealing out keys and taking in valuables. The other men in line were too surprised to protest. Mr. Braddy took off his huge derby hat and rapped briskly on the counter.

"Service, here. Li'l' service!"

The Rabbit with the nose glasses blinked mildly.

"Wotja want?" he inquired.

"Want t' be made fresh as a li'l' daisy," said Mr. Braddy.

"Awright," said the Rabbit, yawning. "Here's a key for locker number thirty-six. Got any valuables? One dollar, please."

Mr. Braddy, after some fumbling, produced the dollar, a dog-eared wallet, a tin watch, a patent cigar cutter, a pocket piece from a pickle exhibit at the World's Fair in Chicago, and some cigar coupons.

The Rabbit handed him a large key on a rubber band.

"Put it on your ankle. Next," he yawned.

And then Mr. Braddy stepped through the white door that, to him, led into the land of adventure and achievement.

He found himself in a brightly lighted corridor pervaded by an aroma not unlike the sort a Chinese hand laundry has. There were rows of little, white doors, with numbers painted on them. Mr. Braddy began at once a search for his own dressing room, No. 36; but after investigating the main street and numerous side alleys, in a somewhat confused but resolute frame of mind, he discovered that he was lost in a rabbit warren of white woodwork. He found Nos. 96, 66, 46, and 6, but he could not find No. 36. He tried entering one of the booths at random, but was greeted with a not-too-cordial, "Hey, bo; wrong stall. Back out!" from an ample gentleman made up as grandpa in the advertisements of Non-Skid underwear. He tried bawling, "Service, li'l' service," and rapping on the woodwork with his derby, but nothing happened, so he replaced his hat on his head and resumed his search. He came to a door with no number on it, pushed it open, and stepped boldly into the next room.

Pat, pat, pat, pat, pat, pat, pat, pat, pat, pat— it was the shower bath on Mr. Braddy's hat.

"'Srainin'," he remarked affably.

An attendant, clad in short, white running pants, spied him and came bounding through the spray.

"Hey, mister, why don't you take your clothes off?"

"Can't find it," replied Mr. Braddy.

"Can't find what?" the attendant demanded.

"Thirry-sizz."

"Thirry sizz?"

"Yep, thirry-sizz."

"Aw, he means room number thoity-six," said a voice from under one of the showers.

The attendant conducted Mr. Braddy up and down the white rabbit warren, across an avenue, through a lane, and paused at last before No. 36. Mr. Braddy went in, and the attendant followed.

"Undress you, mister?"

The Mr. Braddy of yesterday would have been too weak-willed to protest, but the new Mr. Braddy was the master of his fate, the captain of his soul, and he replied with some heat:

"Say, wadda you take me for? Can undress m'self." He did so, muttering the while: "Undress me? Wadda they take me for? Wadda they take me for?"

Then he strode, a bit uncertainly, out into the corridor, pink, enormous, his key dangling from his ankle like a ball and chain. The man in the white running pants piloted Mr. Braddy into the hot room. Mr. Braddy was delighted, intrigued by it. On steamer chairs reclined other large men, stripped to their diamond rings, which glittered faintly in the dim-lit room. They made guttural noises, as little rivulets glided down the salmon-pink mounds of flesh, and every now and then they drank water from large tin cups. Mr. Braddy seated himself in the hot room, and tried to read a very damp copy of an evening paper, which he decided was in a foreign language, until he discovered he was holding it upside down.

An attendant approached and offered him a cup of water. The temptation was to do the easy thing— to take the proffered cup; but Mr. Braddy didn't want a drink of anything just then, so he waved it away, remarking lightly, "Never drink water," and was rewarded by a battery of bass titters from the pink mountains about him, who, it developed from their conversation, were all very important persons, indeed, in the world of finance. But in time Mr. Braddy began to feel unhappy. The heat was making him ooze slowly away. Hell, he thought, must be like this. He must act. He stood up.

"I doan like this," he bellowed. An attendant came in response to the roar.

"What, you still in the hot room? Say, mister, it's a wonder you ain't been melted to a puddle of gravy. Here, come with me. I'll send you through the steam room to Gawge, and Gawge will give you a good rub."

He led Mr. Braddy to the door of the steam room, full of dense, white steam.

"Hey, Gawge," he shouted.

"Hello, Al, wotja want?" came a voice faintly from the room beyond the steam room.

"Oh, Gawge, catch thoity-six when he comes through," shouted Al.

He gave Mr. Braddy a little push and closed the door. Mr. Braddy found himself surrounded by steam which seemed to be boiling and scalding his very soul. He attempted to cry "Help," and got a mouthful of rich steam that made him splutter. He started to make a dash in the direction of Gawge's door, and ran full tilt into another mountain of avoirdupois, which cried indignantly, "Hey, watch where you're going, will you? You ain't back at dear old Yale, playing football." Mr. Braddy had a touch of panic. This was serious. To be lost in a labyrinth of dressing rooms was distressing enough, but here he was slowly but certainly being steamed to death, with Gawge and safety waiting for him but a few feet away. An idea! Firemen, trapped in burning buildings, he had read in the newspapers, always crawl on their hands and knees, because the lower air is purer. Laboriously he lowered himself to his hands and knees, and, like a flabby pink bear, with all sense of direction gone, he started through the steam.

"Hey!"

"Lay off me, guy!"

"Ouch, me ankle!"

"Wot's the big idea? This ain't no circus."

"Leggo me shin."

"Ouf!"

The "ouf" came from Mr. Braddy, who had been soundly kicked in the mid-riff by an angry dweller in the steam room, whose ankle he had grabbed as he careered madly but futilely around the room. Then, success! The door! He opened it.

"Where's Gawge?" he demanded faintly.

"Well, I'll be damned! It's thoity-six back again!"

It was Al's voice; not Gawge. Mr. Braddy had come back to the same door he started from!

He was unceremoniously thrust by Al back into the steaming hell from which he had just escaped, and once more Al shouted across, "Hey, Gawge, catch thoity-six when he comes through."

Mr. Braddy, on his hands and knees, steered as straight a course as he could for the door that opened to Gawge and fresh air, but the bewildering steam once again closed round him, and he butted the tumid calves of one of the Moes and was roundly cursed. Veering to the left, he bumped into the legs of another Moe so hard that this Moe went down as if he had been submarined, a tangle of plump legs, arms, and profanity. Mr. Braddy, in the confusion, reached the door and pushed it open.

"Holy jumpin' mackerel! Thoity-six again! Say, you ain't supposed to come back here. You're supposed to keep going straight across the steam room to Gawge." It was Al, enraged.

Once more Mr. Braddy was launched into the steam room. How many times he tried to traverse it— bear fashion— he never could remember, but it must have been at least six times that he reappeared at the long-suffering Al's door, and was returned, too steamed, now, to protest. Mr. Braddy's new-found persistence was not to be denied, however, and ultimately he reached the right door, to find waiting for him a large, genial soul who was none other than Gawge, and who asked, with untimely facetiousness, Mr. Braddy thought:

"Didja enjoy the trip?"

Gawge placed Mr. Braddy on a marble slab and scrubbed him with a large and very rough brush, which made Mr. Braddy scream with laughter, particularly when the rough bristles titillated the soles of his feet.

"Wot's the joke?" inquired Gawge.

"You ticker me," gasped Mr. Braddy.

He was rather enjoying himself now. It made him feel important to have so much attention. But he groaned and gurgled a little when Gawge attacked him with cupped hands and beat a tattoo up and down his spine and all over his palpitating body. Wop, wop, wop, wop, wop, wop, wop, wop wop went Gawge's hands.

Then he rolled Mr. Braddy from the slab, like jelly from a mold. Mr. Braddy jelled properly and was stood in a corner.

"All over?" he asked. Zizzzzzz! A stream of icy water struck him between his shoulder blades.

"Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow, ow!" he cried. The stream, as if in response to his outcries, immediately became boiling hot. First one, then the other played on him. Then they stopped. An attendant appeared and dried Mr. Braddy vigorously with a great, shaggy towel, and then led him to a dormitory, where, on white cots, rows of Moes puffed and wheezed and snored and dreamed dreams of great profits.

Mr. Braddy tumbled happily into his cot, boiled but triumphant. He had taken a Turkish bath! The world was at his feet! He had made a decision! He

had acted on it! He had met the demon Timidity in fair fight and downed him. He had been drunk, indubitably drunk, for the first and last time. He assured himself that he never wanted to taste the stuff again. But he couldn't help but feel that his one jamboree had made a new man of him, opening new lands of adventure, showing him that "he could if he would." As he buried his head in the pillow, he rehearsed the speech he would make to Mr. Berger, the manager, in the morning. Should he begin, "Mr. Berger, if you think I'm worth it, will you please raise my pay five dollars a week?" No, by Heaven, a thousand noes! He was worth it, and he would say so. Should he begin, "See here, Mr. Berger, the time has come for you to raise my salary ten dollars?" No, he'd better ask for twenty dollars while he was about it, and compromise on ten dollars as a favor to his employers. But then, again, why stop at twenty dollars? His sales in the rugs warranted much more. "I can have thirty dollars, and I will," he said a number of times to the pillow. Carefully he rehearsed his speech: "Now, see here, Berger—" and then he was whirled away into a dream in which he saw a great hand take down the big sign from the front of the Great Store, and put up in its place a still larger sign, reading:

BRADDY'S GREATER STORE
Dry Goods and Turkish Baths
Hugh Braddy, Sole Prop.

iv

HE WOKE feeling very strange, and not exactly as fresh as a daisy. He felt much more like a cauliflower cooled after boiling. His head buzzed a bit, with a sort of gay giddiness, but for all that he knew that he was not the same Hugh Braddy that had been catapulted from bed by an alarm clock in his Long Island City home the morning before.

"A man can do what he's a mind to," he said to himself in a slightly husky voice. His first move was to get breakfast. The old Hugh Braddy would have gone humbly to a one-armed beanery for one black coffee and one doughnut— price, one dime. The new Hugh Braddy considered this breakfast, and dismissed it as beneath a man of his importance. Instead, he went to the Mortimore Grill and had a substantial club breakfast. He called up Angelica, his wife, and cut short her lecture with—"Unavoidable, m'dear. Inventory at the store." His tone, somehow, made her hesitate to question him further. "It'll be all right about that raise," he added grandly. "Have a good supper to-night. G'by."

He bought himself an eleven-cent cigar, instead of his accustomed six-center, and, puffing it in calm defiance of a store rule, strode into the

employees' entrance of the Great Store a little after nine. Without wavering, he marched straight to the office of Mr. Berger, who looked up from his morning mail in surprise.

"Well, Mr. Braddy?"

Mr. Braddy blew a smoke ring, playfully stuck his finger through it, and said:

"Mr. Berger, I'm thinking of going with another concern. A fellow was in to see me the other day, and he says to me, 'Braddy, you are the best rug man in this town.' And he hinted that if I'd come over with his concern they'd double my salary. Now, I've been with the Great Store more than twenty years, and I like the place, Mr. Berger, and I know the ropes, so naturally I don't want to change. But, of course, I must go where the most money is. I owe that to Mrs. B. But I'm going to do the square thing. I'm going to give you a chance to meet the ante. Sixty's the figure."

He waved his cigar, signifying the utter inconsequence of whether Mr. Berger met the ante or not. Before the amazed manager could frame a reply, Mr. Braddy continued:

"You needn't make up your mind right away, Mr. Berger. I don't have to give my final decision until to-night. You can think it over. I suggest you look up my sales record for last year before you reach any decision." And he was gone.

All that day Mr. Braddy did his best not to think of what he had done. Even the new Mr. Braddy— philosophy and all— could not entirely banish the vision of Angelica if he had to break the news that he had issued an ultimatum for twice his salary and had been escorted to the exit.

He threw himself into the work of selling rugs so vigorously that his fellow salesmen whispered to each other, "What ails the Ole Hippopotamus?" He even got rid of a rug that had been in the department for uncounted years— showing a dark-red lion browsing on a field of rich pink roses— by pointing out to the woman who bought it that it would amuse the children.

At four o'clock a flip office boy tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Mr. Boiger wants to see you." Mr. Braddy, whose head felt as if a hive of bees were establishing a home there, but whose philosophy still burned clear and bright, let Mr. Berger wait a full ten minutes, and then, with dignified tread that gave no hint of his inward qualms, entered the office of the manager.

It seemed an age before Mr. Berger spoke.

"I've been giving your proposition careful consideration, Mr. Braddy," he said. "I have decided that we'd like to keep you in the rugs. We'll meet that ante."

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12: Who Wants a Green Bottle?

Tod Robbins

Clarence Aaron Robbins, 1888-1949

All-Story Weekly December 21 1918

SUDDENLY there came a flash of lightning, so brilliant, so dazzling, that all the wild countryside was lit up for an instant as though by an immense conflagration. Then, far off, from the other side of those threatening, hump-backed mountains, I heard a low, rumbling sound as night once more closed and barred her ebony doors.

But in that brief moment I had caught a glimpse of what I sought. There, not a hundred yards away, on a rise of ground overlooking the road and the valley, was the long, low building which a second before the lightning had traced on a madly galloping background of clouds. Now, although my eyes were still straining in that direction, I saw nothing. Not a light beckoned. The house, the hill, the sky, had been blotted out.

Nevertheless I had the general direction. Backing the car into a nest of bushes beside the road, I took out my small electric flashlight and began to ascend the slope.

It was a stiff climb for a corpulent man well over fifty; soon I was breathing like one of my asthmatic patients. What little breath I had left was swept away by a gust of wind which struck me full in the face, just as I breasted the slope. It took me quite by surprise— for down below I could have held a lighted match till it burned my fingers— and snatched off my soft hat, spinning it away somewhere into space. My legs were not too steady under me when I reached the house. For a space I leaned against one of the large, white pillars on the veranda to regain my breath and my dignity.

As I waited, another gust, straight from the lake, went howling by, stirring the tall pine-trees about the house into a muttering, mutinous revolt and causing a loose shutter somewhere in the upper blackness to beat out a devil's tattoo against the ivy-covered wall. Then suddenly all became silence again— a brilliant silence lit up by a flash of lightning which showed me the rounded bowl of the valley and the white stretch of road. And on its heels there followed such a crash of thunder that the whole landscape seemed to turn sick and dizzy.

"This is no night to be out," I thought, and, wasting no more time, rapped sharply on the door.

Scarcely had the echo of my knocking died away when the windows on the lower floor winked out at me; and, before I could so much as brush the wind-tossed hair out of my eyes, the door swung open and I came face to face with the Laird of Lockleaven.

After the blackness which had followed the flash of lightning, that hallway seemed blazing. And there he stood, as long and lean as a fishing-pole, looking out at me with the great terror-stricken eyes of a startled deer. He wore some kind of fuzzy bathrobe which made him seem even taller; and he had a mad tuft of gray hair on his chin which twitched oddly— or maybe it was the wind stroking it. That was all I caught at a glance.

"Come in, Dr. O'Brien," he said with a bow like a dancing-master. "You're late."

Now what from the battering of the wind, the loss of my best hat, and perhaps a glass too many at the Claymore, I was too fuddled already to marvel much at his words. Not a thought did I give to how he knew my name or why he expected me at all, till after the door had closed on the night.

"You'll pardon my intrusion, sir," I said as soon as I got my breath. "The fact is that I was motoring home, and a half mile up the road my headlights flickered out. Now, if there had been a moon, or—"

But he cut me short with a wave of his hand. "Nonsense, Dr. O'Brien!" he said as sharp as the crack of a whip. "I was expecting you; and this lady and gentleman— *they* were expecting you, too." He jerked his thumb toward the wall.

Wheeling about in some confusion at that, I came face to face with a hard-featured old chap in a periwig glaring down at me from a mildewed picture-frame. To his right was the portrait of a very determined old lady with a pointed chin that curled up like the toe of an old slipper. She had a fan in her hand, but she held it as I have seen boys grip their shillalahs on the way to the county-fair.

"Ancestors?" I asked with a half-hearted chuckle, for the stony eyes of the painted lady had somehow or other gotten under my skin.

"My great grandfather and grandmother, Sir Robert Lockleaven and his lady," he says rather proud. "Now step this way, Dr. O'Brien. There's a fire in the library and a bottle of good old port uncorked. And I'm thinking you'll be needing both before the dawn breaks."

With that he ushered me into as cheery a room as I ever want to see. In the days when this house had been built, they knew the meaning of fireplaces. It did my heart good to see the great log flaring up on the hearth, a log the size of a well-grown tree-trunk; in front of it, a semicircle of easy-chairs that tired men could sleep in; and, last of all, the mahogany table with two glasses and a decanter of wine which glowed ruby-red where the light touched it. And even the glimpse I caught of other sour-faced portraits on the wall failed to overshadow my good spirits.

He motioned me into one of the easy-chairs and, pouring out two glasses of port, handed me one and raised the other aloft. "Here's success to you, Dr. O'Brien!" he cried, while his frightened eyes flashed and once again the mad wisp of hair on his chin twitched oddly.

"And here's success to you," said I, draining my glass at a swallow, for the dust of the road had got into my throat. "That goes without saying," said he. "If *you* win, *I* win. Do you happen to have a green glass bottle in your pocket, Dr. O'Brien?"

"A green glass bottle?" I said dumfounded. "What ever would I be doing with a green glass bottle, Mr.—"

"Lockleaven's the name," he muttered, seating himself and adjusting the folds of his bathrobe as I have seen old ladies do with their skirts after getting into a bus. "I was christened Robert Lockleaven after my great grandfather." He bent his head and began to pick nervously at a loose strand of worsted. "I'm pretty well known in the village," he finished with a haughty tilt to his chin.

At that I started so that I nearly dropped the glass. I was new to that country, but already 'the name was familiar enough. Indeed it had more than once figured in Scottish history. But gradually that fiery stream had slackened; and now, if report could be believed, the last of the line was a man weakened in both body and mind. In the village he was known as "The daft Laird of Lockleaven;" and scandalous stories were still told of his escapades before old age had taken the marrow out of his bones.

Now, as he refilled my glass, I studied the man. He had the high, broad forehead of a thinker, the deep-set, fiery eyes of a dreamer, the firmly arched nose and expanding nostrils of a warrior. But the lower half of his face was deplorable. Here all the weaknesses of his soul were laid bare. The pitiable indecision of that twitching chin, the animal pout of the thickish red lips, the long, yellow tooth poking out at each side of his mouth— all these were enough to give a Christian the shivers.

"How did you know that I was coming tonight, Mr. Lockleaven?" I asked.

"Know it!" he cried with an unpleasant snicker. "Why, *I* know everything." He paused, and a look of caution creased his jowls. "Besides, didn't I send Meg for you?" he finished.

"I've been away for the week, and—"

But again he cut me short with a quick motion of his hand. "Never puzzle your head over that, man," he cried peevishly. "There's more pressing matters afoot. What's crystal-gazing and such bairns' play when it comes to the saving of a live, human soul?"

"Is there someone sick here?" I asked.

"So there is," he said soberly; "so there is— unco sick. But sh! What's that?"

Usually I am as steady as the next man. But there was something in the Laird of Lockleaven's eyes, something in the Laird of Lockleaven's voice, which grated on my nervous system like sandpaper. I felt goose flesh rippling up my back.

For several moments we both sat silent, listening to the reverberating thunder which still echoed faintly far off in the hills, to the crackling of the fire, to the scampering of the mice behind the wainscoting in the wall.

"Do you hear them?" he asked.

"I hear nothing," I answered sharply enough; "nothing but the thunder and the fire and the mice in the wall."

"The mice!" cried the Laird of Lockleaven with a quick, low laugh. "Did you ever hear tell of mice that could sing and talk and cry? Put your ear to the wall and listen."

To humor him I did as he told me. At first I could hear nothing; but soon a low, suppressed note, very much like a muffled sob, made my eardrum tingle.

"Poor Aunt Mary!" said the Laird of Lockleaven solemnly. "She wouldn't stop mourning in life and now she cannot. Night and day I hear her, night and day."

With a mighty effort I shook off the strange, numbing fear which was creeping over me like a coverlet of snow. "Mr. Lockleaven," I cried with a forced laugh, "you are to be congratulated— you have singing mice in your wall! They're not too common, but there *are* such things. Look, there goes one now!" I pointed to a little, brown speck which scurried across the room and vanished somewhere in the shadows.

The Laird of Lockleaven raised his head. "My grandfather has just let his cattle out to graze," he murmured.

"What did you say?" I asked, making no sense out of his words.

For a moment he was silent, and then he cried out in a loud, authoritative voice: "Will you listen to me, Dr. O'Brien, or will I just have to be trusting my soul to Meg's withered hands and dim eyes? Will you listen to the tale I've got to tell, Dr. O'Brien?"

I took a long pull at the port before I spoke. My nerves were trembling like fiddle-strings. I had an odd fancy that the portraits on the wall— all those hard featured, sour-faced Lockleavens— had poked their heads out of their frames to lend an ear to our talk. "I am awaiting your pleasure, sir," I said very slowly.

THE LOCKLEAVENS are an ill-starred race, *my host began*. The balance of sanity is not in them. Each one of my house must either ride or be ridden. They saddle and bridle a hobby, then spur it till both horse and man are foundered. Whether it be generosity or greed, swashbuckling or psalm-singing, drunkenness or sobriety, each of us travels too far on that road.

My uncle, the tenth Laird of Lockleaven, like others of our blood, spurred his hobby a wee bit too far. As a young man he had the name in the countryside of being a canny laddie; at middle age, when I first remember him, he was as withered as a dead branch, with a pinched, frost-bitten face and bitter blue eyes. He had begun by being careful with the small fortune his gambling father had left him; he ended by nearly starving his household to death to fill the great money-chest at the head of his bed.

One by one he got rid of the extra mouths to feed, till at last there was only Meg and me to minister to him. What a spider of a man he was— going about the house, soft-footed, in his list slippers and cocking his eye at us if we so much as blinked at his iron-bound chest. I can see him now with his sidelong gait, his long thin fingers stroking his beard like bent twigs in a hedge, and his silly, solitary smile wrinkling the loose skin of his jowls.

When he came to die there was little mourning in Lockleaven Hall. I was a lean lad of eighteen on the night when the great sickness gripped him. Meg set me to watch at his bedside, while she scuttled off to the village for Dr. McLean. Before she left she lighted the old-fashioned tapers above his bed; and I sat all hunched up in one corner, watching the light flickering over the sick man's face and the heaving of the bedclothes at each long breath.

How long I sat there, to this day I don't know— it might have been an hour or more— but after a time I grew drowsy and closed my eyes for a bit. When I opened them again, there had come a change. The laird had been lying flat on his back, his eyes on the ceiling; but now he lay on one side, his face to the wall. The frayed fringe of his whiskers trembled slightly, but his loud breathing had ceased.

I rose and approached my uncle with a feeling of awe that death should have hovered so near while I slept; and then, as I put my hand on the foot-board of his bed and looked down, horror gripped me by the hair. Horror did I say? It was more than that. It was just as though my brain had been turned into soft, quivering jelly.

My eyes had wandered to my uncle's gray beard. There, through the tangled meshes on the pillow, I saw a tiny crouching form and a pair of flaming pinpoint eyes. For an instant it glared up at me like a cornered rat under a wisp of hay; and then, with a shrill squeak, away it swished under the rumpled bedclothes and was gone.

THE LAIRD OF LOCKLEAVEN paused to wipe gleaming drops of perspiration from his forehead. Through the silence which followed his words, I heard a great commotion behind the wainscoting— a galloping as of a troop of horse, a shrill piteous squeaking, and then a sound which might have been a distant bugle-call.

"You hear them?" he said with a haggard smile. "That's Mad Anthony and his hounds. They've sighted a buck, or I'm much mistaken."

"There's an army of rats and mice in your walls," I broke in with an involuntary shudder, for the knowing, listening tilt of his head was an unhealthy thing to see.

"Rats and mice there *are* for those who hunt and ride," he said. "But it's not these I have in mind, nor one of them I saw that night through the tangle of my dead uncle's beard."

"What was it then?" I asked, taking another long drink of port to steady me.

I'M COMING TO THAT, *said he*. After my uncle's death, the chest of money was mine. You can readily surmise that I lost no time in opening it. Having no taste of pleasure up to this— for the most part going about in rags with a belly as empty as a toy balloon— it was no wonder that I played pitch and toss with the ten commandments.

I can give you my word that I lived the devil of a life for a round dozen years, with never a breathing spell on the Sabbath, till my uncle's old chest sounded as hollow as a drum when I gave it a tap with the toe of my boot. And Meg grew soft and yellow as a tub of butter from good living and gin; and tales were told in the village of how she was seen taking a glass with the devil on Black Friar's Heath.

Well, time went on with a jig-step till one All Soul's Eve— twenty years ago tonight. I had had a few gentlemen playing cards with me up at the Hall, but they had ridden off before midnight in a black rage with some cock-and-bull story of how I had slipped a card up my sleeve.

I was sitting in this very chair, nodding a bit, an empty glass in my hand, when what should I see but a gold piece lying on the carpet at my feet. I was about to reach down for it— for I was always a careful man even in drink— when out of the corner of my eye I spied something which made the hair on my head ruffle up.

You can believe it or not— but there, creeping out from the wall, was a wee man no bigger than my thumb; a wee man in a yellow gown and nightcap,

with a few threads of beard hanging from his chin. On all fours he was creeping toward me, wagging his head as he came.

"A fairy!" I said to myself, remembering what Meg had told me of the tiny folk who dance in the moonlight. "If I can catch him, he'll give me a wish." So I waited as patient as Job with my eyelashes lowered, snoring a bit just to put heart in him, till up he came and laid hold of the gold piece. Then you should have seen the sweating time he had over it! First he'd bend his crooked old back and hoist and hoist till he had lifted it up a pin's breadth on one side; and then, just as he thought he had it fairly started, down it would come on his knuckle-bones and he'd let out a shrill squeak like a mouse. It was all I could do to watch him and not roar with laughter.

"So!" I thought to myself. "After all the good things I've heard tell of you from Meg, you're nothing but a pack of thieves when it comes to that! Break into my house and steal my gold, will you?" As quick as a flash, I leaned down and clapped my glass over him— and he with his back still bent over the coin.

But he wasn't quiet long. No sooner did he have the bottom of the tumbler as a roof for his head, than up he jumped as spry as you please. And what a commotion there was! First he leaped straight up like a startled buck, and the top of his head clinked against the glass; next he whirled about with outstretched arms, making a noise all the time like a beetle caught between two windowpanes; and then, when there came no hope from Heaven or Hell, down he flopped on his knees and whimpered and whined till all the tumbler was tinkling with it.

By this time, as you may guess, I was near dead from laughing so. But soon I remembered that it was All-Soul's Eve and that, if Meg did not lie, a wish might be had for the asking. So I got down on all fours and squinted through the tumbler. Then, of a sudden, I knew the wee man and I clapped my hand to my mouth to keep back a yell.

iii

THE LAIRD of Lockleaven paused. All his face was twitching till it seemed to me that he hadn't one face but a dozen. But his eyes were still; they looked like two frozen lakes in the moonlight.

"And who was the little man?" I asked.

THERE WAS only one mortal man could cock his eye like a Kelpie, *he answered solemnly*. 'Twas none other than my dead and buried uncle.

Yes, there he sat in his old yellow robe and slippers, his nightcap clapped on his head all awry, his bitter blue eyes eating holes in my self-esteem. It was

a sight to make your blood run cold. And he was champing his lean old jaws at me like one who has the taste of bitter words on his tongue.

"Well, Uncle Peter," said I, though my teeth were clicking together from fright, "it's a pleasure to welcome you home to the Hall. And to see you so spry for a man of your years," I added, for he had made a spring against the glass like a spider at a fly.

"Robbie Lockleaven," my uncle cried, "I'll have the hide off you for this!"

"You will not, Uncle Peter," said I. "You'll stay right where you are as a disgusting example of an old man in his cups!"

At that his eyes glowed like two fireflies and his beard curled up, till I would have taken to my heels had it not been for the good liquor in me. As small as he was, I couldn't forget the fear I had of him.

"Robbie Lockleaven," he cried again in a voice like a pin scratching against the windowpane, "you're a spendthrift and worse! You're building up a mountain of trouble in the life to come. But just lift up the tumbler, laddie, and I'll let bygones be bygones. Ye'll no be adding disrespect to your ither sins? You'll no be sic a fule, Robbie?"

Now as his speech began to soften into the dialect of the countryside, I saw plain enough that I had the upper hand. Besides, when it came to that, how could a mite of a man do me bodily harm? Thinking in this wise, I spoke up bravely enough.

"I'll lift up the glass under one condition, Uncle Peter," I said. "It's All Soul's Eve; it's only fair that a body should wish a wish. Grant me a wish, and I'll let you go free."

Well, he grinned a bit in an uncommonly nasty way, he stroked his beard a bit, and then he lifted his voice in a whine. "Hae ye no had my bonny treasure-box?" he squalled. "Hae ye no scattered my siller to the four winds like chaff? Hae ye no made me come oot o' the wall to lift precious guineas till my back is no more than a broken reed?"

Now I knew that I had won the victory, and I laughed aloud. "You old foxy-eyed thief!" I cried. "I've caught you fair; and a wish I will have. You can't go prowling about Lockleaven Hall when you should be six feet deep in the kirk-yard, stealing my money and playing pranks altogether unseemly for a man of your years, without just paying the piper. A wish I will have."

"Weel then, have your wish and be damned!" Uncle Peter cried in a rage. "Wish quick now, for the fumes of vile liquor in this glass are making my auld head spin around like a whirligig."

Well, I thought for a while before I spoke. Finally I said: "There's only one thing worth knowing to a worldly wise man like me. I'm going to ask you for that which has no weight in the hand, but is more precious than jewels. I'm just

seeking knowledge of Heaven and Hell. What's the human soul like, Uncle Peter; and what follows life for the good and the bad?"

Now the old man again cocked his eye at me and stroked his beard, like I'd often seen him do while driving home a good bargain. "So that's your wish, Robbie?" he says, smooth as syrup.

By the tone of his voice, the manner he had of stroking his beard, and most of all by the glint in his eye, I knew well enough that trouble was brewing. But I couldn't retract, having once stated my wish in the Kings' English. So I answered, "Just that," and held my breath like a man under water.

"Weel then, to begin," said Uncle Peter with a twitch of a smile, "the human soul is just a wee mite o' a man like me. I am the human soul of Peter Lockleaven, deceased."

"Did you take shape after death?" I asked.

"Na, na," says he. "I was always in the man like the core in an apple. You have one as weel, Robbie Lockleaven— a canny wee man, hidin' within, as like to yoursel' as two peas. Hae ye no felt him tinkerin' awa at your brain?"

"Nonsense!" said I. "Such a theory is contrary to science."

"Is it so?" he cried. "To modern science, ye mean. There were wise men of old who knew well enough that the human soul had a body to it. Did they no debate lang syne on the matter— growin' red in the face ower the question of how many souls could be dancin' a Hieland fling on the point of a needle? Robbie, will ye be denyin' that the human body weighs a wee mite less when the soul has sped?"

"So I have heard," I answered with a flicker of fear. "Yet surely it can be accounted for by—"

But Uncle Peter brushed my words aside as though they had been so many dead leaves. "Na, na," he piped. "it canna be accounted for— except ye believe lees. There's nae doot aboot it— a human soul there is, with a body to it and all."

"Then, Uncle Peter," I said, "will you explain to me how it is that doctors don't see it when they operate; or why we don't get a glimpse of it when we see a man die?"

"I will that," said Uncle Peter with a smile and a sneer. "We souls are no ower anxious to be poked at and handled. When a doctorin' man cuts into our hame, we just scuttle awa to anither room till he's done with his work. Say he's tinkerin' at the brain; weel, we take to our heels and hide in the belly."

"And when a man dies?" I broke in.

"When a man dies, we just bide our time till naebody's heedin'; and then awa we go to Heaven or Hell. It's simple enough, laddie, when they're bendin' ower the deceased, half-blinded by tears— or maybe the fule doctor's feelin'

for heartbeats and not carin' ower much what the soul may be at— to scuttle awa to the foot of the bed, to slip to the floor and go tip-toin' off in the dark. But, mind ye, I'm no sayin' that we hae no been seen one time or anither. There was yoursel, Robbie, poppin' your een at me when I was bidin' my time in the dead Laird of Lockleaven's beard."

In spite of myself my knees began to shake from fright. Uncle Peter had begun to chuckle; his merriment came through the tumbler like the chirping of a sick canary.

"And where does your soul go to when it leaves the body?" I asked.

"Heaven or Hell lies in the walls of ilka hame," said he. "Lockleaven Hall is well stocked with souls, Robbie. Dinna ye hear 'em scramblin' aboot in the wainscotin', chatterin' and whimperin', blowin' on horns and pipin' on bagpipes? Rats and mice? Na, na. Though some of 'em we hae for Mad Anthony, who is never content till he's thrown his leg ower the back of a nag and is awa to the huntin'. Twa-score Lockleavens hae died in this house— twa-score souls are in yonder wall. You'll be joinin' us soon, Robbie, I'm thinkin'."

But still I wasn't convinced that Uncle Peter was telling the truth. "If I let you out of the tumbler," I said, "you'll just have to show me Heaven and Hell."

"I canna do that, Robbie," he whined. "Heaven is no for me. They wouldna hae us prowlin' aboot through that blessed wall. Now will a visit to Hell content ye?"

Well, I thought so hard for a minute that my head ached; and then, all of a sudden, I made up my mind like a man jumping off a high cliff. "I'll just have to be contented with Hell, Uncle Peter," I said, "seeing that you're not over-anxious to take me to Heaven."

"Dinna think that!" he cried with a shake of his head. "The will is there, but the godliness is missin'. Now just lift up the tumbler, Robbie, and we'll be startin' in twa shakes."

"And you will not take to your heels?" I asked.

"Na, na," he muttered. "I couldna do that on All Souls' Eve."

"And you'll bring me back safe out of Hell, Uncle Peter?" I said, not liking the grin that twitched his flea-bitten beard.

"That I will, laddie," he says very solemn.

Well, Dr. O'Brien, I took a long drink out of a bottle of Scotch which stood on the table and then I bent down and lifted the tumbler. And my dead uncle sat still as a toad the while, and never so much as blinked an eye.

"Now sit ye doun beside me, Robbie," he said. And when I had done as he wished, he began to sing a snatch of a song which ran something like this:

"Dinna ye hear the pipes of Locklear

Aweepin' and whimperin' oot there in the night?
Dinna ye greet for souls that maun keep
A watchin' and waitin' for threads o' the light?

Come oot o' the body
Wee souls while ye can,
There's buckets o' toddy
For ilka wee man."

Hardly had his voice died away, when everything seemed to vanish into space. I felt that I was enclosed in some kind of shadowy dungeon— or rather at the bottom of some pit down which a faint light sifted. And with this feeling, there came a wild desire to escape. I climbed up and up and soon came to the mouth of the tunnel. Squeezing between two jagged lines of ivory pillars which blocked my path, I leaped out into the open.

At the next moment, I was rolling down a steep declivity with the speed of lightning. Soon I collided violently with Uncle Peter at the bottom— an Uncle Peter who had suddenly regained his full stature and who was regarding me sourly.

"Ye daft fule!" he cried, rubbing his back. "Is that ony way to be runnin' against a man? Ye should look afore ye leap oot o' sic a tall hame."

iv

WELL, DR. O'BRIEN, I looked up and saw that I was standing in the shadow of a gigantic statue— a statue which I thought must be at least two hundred feet tall. It sat cross-legged with bowed head and its huge tunnel-like mouth was open.

"What's that, Uncle Peter?" I asked.

"That's naething more nor less than your ain body, Robbie Lockleaven," he said very solemn. "I've charmed your soul oot o' it."

"I see you've grown to full size!" I cried.

"Na, na," said he. "It's *you* that's grown small as a match. But we'd best be on our way, Robbie, for it's a lang walk to the wall of Hell and I'm no so spry as I was."

Well, as you may guess, my head was spinning around from all I'd heard; so I thought it best to say no more, but to follow his lead. When he started ambling off with a jerk of his head at me, I put my best foot forward and was at his heels in no time.

First we skirted a small tower of glass, which Uncle Peter said was the tumbler— not that I believed him or could— and off we started across a level space where long red grass sprouted up above my slippers.

"Ye should tear up this carpet, Robbie," Uncle Peter called back over his shoulder. "It's most unco wearisome when a body's leg-weary."

But I made him no answer, for I was looking about and wondering at all I saw. I seemed to be on a kind of desert. As far as the eye could reach, the landscape was level, except for the statue and several weird wooden structures which rose up on each side of it. The sky was a threatening gray. Not a star glimmered. But somewhere in the remote distance, I saw a gigantic sun which lighted the whole landscape with blazing effrontery. "So this is Hell!" I murmured.

"Na, na," said Uncle Peter, uneasily. "We hae no reached it yet. This is naething more than the library of Lockleaven Hall."

"What's Hell like, Uncle Peter?" I asked, coming up alongside of him.

"Hell?" he cried with a start. "Why, Hell is just Hell! Ye can be takin' notes soon enow, Robbie. It's an unco wearisome place."

"Then why were you so anxious to go back to it?" I couldn't help asking, for the drink and curiosity were still strong in me.

"Anxious to gang back!" cried Uncle Peter. "Are ye daft, Robbie? If ye had a wee mite of sense, ye'd have just kept me in that bonnie glass till Judgment day. And I'd have thanked ye for it on my bended knees, Robbie; though I'm a temperate man with a distaste for the smell o' strong drink."

"You were clamoring loud enough to get out of it," said I.

"Nae doot," he muttered. "But ye shouldna hae given me heed. 'Twas not me that was clamorin', Robbie, but the spirit of Hell which gives me no rest. After we leave our mortal bodies behind us, we can no longer do just as we please. We've just got to scuttle awa on the devil's errands, and pay with sweat for our sins."

"And how do you pay, Uncle Peter?" I asked.

"Why, just by livin' under the same roof with a fule like *you*," he says very sharp. "Do ye no think I sweat tears o' blood when I see ye throwin' my gude siller awa like it was chaff? Twa-score times hae I seen my bright gold pieces lyin' on the carpet; twa-score times hae I bent my auld back to 'em— just to find them ower heavy to lift. Me, who they say was a wee bit too canny, to see sic wastefulness in Lockleaven Hall!"

Uncle Peter had worked himself up into such a fury that I thought it best to say no more for the present; so once again I glanced about me.

We had been walking at a brisk pace for upward of a half-hour, yet, on looking over my shoulder, I could still see that gigantic seated colossus which

my uncle assured me was my own body. Indeed, from this distance, I noted a certain resemblance to myself. Of course, when I had been standing directly under it, it had seemed all out of human proportion; but now, from a mile or so away, I noted with an odd sensation of fear that it had something strangely familiar about it. Perhaps it was the incongruity of a statue wearing dressing-gown and slippers which caused great beads of perspiration to spring out on my brow.

As I continued to stare back, I suddenly heard a threatening roar above my head and, looking up, saw a flock of strange birds flying swiftly past. Larger than eagles and inky black, they emitted a thundering sound like a thousand steam-engines going at once. Soon they became black specks in the distance, specks which hovered over the statue. Finally I saw one of them descend on its nose.

"Never fash your head ower them, Robbie," said Uncle Peter. "They're naething more nor less than house-flies taking a wee flight. Come awa, laddie."

I turned about. As I did so, I saw, very dim and hazy in the distance, a black, towering cliff which seemed to rise straight up into the somber sky.

"'Tis the wall of Hell," said Uncle Peter sadly and started off at a brisk pace.

Now, as I followed him, pushing through the tangle of red grass, I fell to wondering what the old gentleman meant when he said that he'd have been happy to live out his days in my whiskey glass. Perhaps, if I found Hell to be such an unpleasant place as he hinted, I could cheat it in time, had I once the secret.

"Were you safe from Hell in that glass, Uncle Peter?" I asked.

"Not altogether," he said kind of careless over his shoulder. "They couldna hae got me out, but they would hae tormented me sore. Had it been a green glass bottle, Robbie— as green as the sea— why, I'd hae been as safe as a bug in a rug."

At that I burst out into a laugh. "Thank you kindly, Uncle Peter!" I cried. "So a green glass bottle is the refuge from Hell? I'll be minding that when my time comes to die."

And then, as I saw plainly, the old gentleman could have snapped his own nose off in rage. But all he said was: "Ah weel, Robbie, there's mony a slip twixt the cup and the lip. Ye canna hide awa in green glass bottles when Hell is beckonin'."

But now we were in the shadow of the cliff. And well might Uncle Peter call it a wall, for it shot straight up with no foothold for man or beast. And away to the left, a great cave had been scooped out of it; and in this cave, roaring and thundering, was a many headed sheet of flame fully a hundred feet high.

"Is that Hell?" I asked.

"Na, na," said Uncle Peter with a snort of contempt. "That's naething but your ain fireplace and a wee birch log sputterin' a bit. Come this way, Robbie, if ye are seekin' Hell."

At that, Uncle Peter took my hand as though I were a bairn and led me right up to the face of the cliff. Then I saw that it was no cliff at all, rightly speaking; but just a great wall of dark-colored wood which ran up and up till it lost itself in the sky. And down at my feet was a round hole in this wall, just large enough for a man to put his head and shoulders through.

"I'll gang first," whispered Uncle Peter. And he got down on his knees and popped into that hole as smooth as a rat.

Before I followed, I turned and took a last look at the world I was leaving.

There, that strange desert stretched away as flat as the palm of your hand; and there, like a giant brooding over the universe, sat that great statue of me in its gown and slippers, its jaw dropped low on its chest. How I pitied it then, Dr. O'Brien— yet, for the life of me, I couldn't tell why. There it sat, staring out over that crimson grass with its sightless eyes. "You are leaving me forever," it seemed to be saying, "me who has carried you in sickness and health, in joy and in sorrow! Shame on your soul, Robbie Lockleaven!"

"Now that ye are at Hell's gate, do ye fear to enter?" said Uncle Peter, popping his head out of the hole and sneering at me. "I misdoot ye have heart for the venture."

For answer, I flopped down on my hands and knees and, after a tight squeeze of it, crawled after him through the gates of Hell.

v

AGAIN the Laird of Lockleaven paused to wipe glistening drops of moisture from his forehead; while I took advantage of his silence to stir the fire a bit. Indeed, I was needing the warmth and cheer of it. What from my host's wild words, the distant rumble of thunder and all, I was never before so much in want of creature comforts. I have seen mad men enough in my day, but never one with such a plausible way of telling a tale as this same old chap in his gown and felt slippers.

And to make matters worse, as the saying is, the rats and mice in the wall were never still for a minute. I could hear them tripping and traipsing about as though they were dancing; and, every now and then, a thin, quavering squeak which sounded uncommonly like a poorly played fiddle.

"It's the Highland fling they're dancing," said the Laird of Lockleaven with a ghastly grin. "Do you get the lilt of it, Dr. O'Brien?" And he began to sway his head from side to side and tap out the tune with the toe of his slipper.

"You were about to tell me of Hell," I said, thinking the man was better talking.

"To be sure," said he with a start. "I had just entered the jaws of Hell, had I not?"

"You had," I answered, wishing with all my heart that he had stayed there.

WELL, DR. O'BRIEN, it was a tight squeeze at first; and so black that you couldn't see hand before face. But after a few minutes of crawling, we got through the neck and into the belly of Hell, so to speak. The tunnel grew bigger and bigger till a man could stand on his feet. And then a strange, green, quivering light came creeping along the black roof like a snake.

"Where does this unwholesome light come from?" I asked in a voice which I intended to make low, but which echoed through the vault like the boom of a cannon.

Uncle Peter chuckled at that, and it made a most horrid din. "'Tis naething more nor less," said he, "than the sulfur ta'en from matches. Hae ye no heard Meg complainin' about findin' wee broken bits of 'em lyin' on the carpet? Weel, for all her witchcraft, she had no suspicion 'twas her auld master had a hand in it."

He turned and started on again, still cackling to himself over his thieving, while I followed uneasily beneath the band of quivering light. At first the passage was so straight that you might have shot an arrow down it, but soon it began to twist a bit from side to side like the trail of a man coming home from the alehouse. And then, on a sudden, a wind arose, hot as the breath of a furnace a strange wind made up of a multitude of voices, indistinct, muffled, vaguely reproachful and filled with a great longing to be heard. But there were so many of them and so intermingled that they were like drops of water in a swiftly moving stream.

"Where does this wind come from, Uncle Peter?" I asked.

"Death-bed repentences, Robbie," he answered. "Breath wasted lang syne by puir fules who knew no better. They thought nae doot that God would be lendin' an ear to their skirlin'. Dead men's lees, laddie, choaked in dust."

For some time we plodded on in silence, while that melancholy wind swept past us like a perpetual lament. A cold sweat broke out on me from the heat of it, and all the time I was shaken by fear. And then, on a sudden, Uncle Peter spun around on his heel and pushed me up against the wall.

"Hush, laddie!" he whispered hot in my ear. "The hunt's on, or I'm much mistaken. Mad Anthony is ridin' hard tonight; he's no the man to turn aside for anither soul. Flatten yoursel to the wall, Robbie! Dinna ye hear the thunderin' and screechin'? All Hell's let loose when Mad Anthony rides!"

And now, Dr. O'Brien, I heard a great hubbub. First, there came to my ears the clear note of a hunting horn; next, a shrill scream and a thundering as of horses' hoofs; and then, as I peered fearfully into the gloom, I saw the huge figure of a man astride some strange round-eared beast. Down this wild rider swept on me like the wind, with never a look to right or left, leaning low on the neck of his steed like a man winning a race. And not four jumps behind, were a dozen gray monsters with long dragging tails.

But before I had time to draw breath, before I could so much as let out a groan, they were past me and vanishing in the shadows. And now I heard Uncle Peter's unpleasant snicker.

"Ha, ha, Robbie," he says, nudging me with the point of his elbow, "ye're no owerpleased with Hell, I'm thinkin'. But never ye fash yoursel aboot Mad Anthony. *He*, who was for always huntin' the puir beasties, must now be hunted by 'em. There's a kind o' justice in Hell, Robbie. 'Tis only with me they've been owersevere."

"What's he being hunted by?" I asked with a shudder.

"Just a half dozen o' rats, Robbie," said Uncle Peter. "And Mad Anthony's ridin' a wee gray mousie. But step along, laddie; we hae muckle to see ere the dawn breaks."

Uncle Peter started off again at a kind of ambling trot. Although I was trembling in every limb, I followed close at his heels. We went on down the passage for a hundred yards or so and then took a sudden turn to the right which brought us up sharp in a large chamber which had no less than four phosphorescent ribbons of light on the ceiling. There were a score of dark figures in the center of this chamber; and a monotonous stream of talk rose from them, as though the floodgates of reason had been swept away.

"What manner of place is this?" I asked.

"'Tis just the council-room of those puir souls that went aboot the world tryin' to make ithers understand them," said Uncle Peter very solemnly. "Step up, Robbie, and lend an ear to their talk."

I strode up to the group. Although I was nearly deafened by their uproar, I managed to overhear a few words of a man and a woman who stood on the out skirts. Looking up into his face piteously, she was saying, "Hector Lockleaven, canna ye no understand me? My soul is—" And he was saying at the same time, giving no heed to her, "Anna, my dear, canna ye no understand me? When I do this it is not because—" And then both his words and hers were swept away in a furious torrent of words from the others— words which battered against the ceiling and fell back again, hollow and dead. I heard a loud buzzing about me of "Won't you listen?" "Can't you understand?" "I've got

something to tell you," till I couldn't bear it any longer and, shoving my thumbs in my ears, hurried back to my uncle.

"Not one of them hears what the other is saying!" I cried. "They're all talking at once, Uncle Peter! What's the meaning of it?"

He grinned at me in his queer way and turned to go. "All those souls," he mumbled over his shoulder, "hae pestered the lives oot o' ithers by bein' ower communicative. Tak warnin', Robbie. If ye want to be understood in the world, say naething aboot yoursel."

Uncle Peter led the way out of that chamber and into another, several hundred yards further down the passage. This was larger than the first, and even more noisy. Before we reached it, my ears were deafened by a thundering sound as though a thousand hammers were beating on iron, intermingled with loud shouts and deep groans.

"Here ye will find the chieftains of Lockleaven who were ower fond of blood and rapine," said Uncle Peter when we reached the threshold. "These gentry were quick to draw steel."

I saw a dozen figures in armor, slashing at each other as though their blood were up. The clashing of their claymores, the clanking of their shields, their shouts and groans, made the hollow chamber echo like a drum.

I watched them for several moments with a beating heart. "No one falls, Uncle Peter!" I cried at last.

"Quite right," said he with a bitter smile. "We hae no victors and no vanquished here— and no rest. They must just keep at it, with aching backs and wheezing lungs, till the end of time. This is Hell, Robbie."

"I think I'll be stepping back into the library, Uncle Peter," I said. "You've shown me more than I wanted to see."

"Ye'll no be ganging hame till ye've had a peep at your ain chamber?" murmured Uncle Peter in his most persuasive tone. "I'll no rest content till I've given ye a glimpse at Pleasure Hall."

"Pleasure Hall?" said I.

"Pleasure Hall," said he. "'Tis the room we hae gi'en to those jolly souls who hae frisked aboot. Ye'll find gude company there, Robbie."

Now by this time I had had a bellyful of Hell. But I could not offend Uncle Peter on his own hearth-stone, so to speak; so I just followed where he led. Well, we may have walked for a dozen score yards or more, when suddenly I heard such a howling and screaming and sobbing that it was enough to make your blood run cold. I can hear that hubbub yet in my dreams. And pretty soon we came to a bright light, and then—

THE LAIRD OF LOCKLEAVEN broke down and clasped his hands over his eyes. And then he began to tremble in his armchair like a leaf in a gale.

For my part, I finished the wine in my glass and stirred the fire and wished for the dawn to break. If the rats and mice had only kept still, I could have stood the shadows in Lockleaven Hall. How they did creep out at me from the corners! And the portraits seemed to be nodding and winking on the walls.

At last my host dropped his hands from his face. "I cannot tell you of Pleasure Hall," he said very solemn. "What I saw there is locked in my breast for all time. But this I will say: No man could have seen what I saw and gone about thereafter like other men. It left a red mark on my brain like the touch of a bloody hand."

"There's no doubt about that," I thought to myself. But aloud I said: "Did your uncle guide you safely back out of Hell, Mr. Lockleaven?"

"Yes, he did that. But he kept chuckling all the way like a man who is well pleased with a stroke of business. I didn't pay him much heed, for my mind was on other matters. We got out of Hell, some way or other, and waded back across the miles of red grass till we came to the big statue of me which sat with its chin on its breast. Now he chanted some devil's rhyme and up I popped into the statue's mouth and squeezed through the ivory pillars. Then, before a man could call for hot Scotch, I blinked my eyes open and saw Uncle Peter scuttling away, turned into a wee man not as big as a pencil."

"And you let him go back to Hell?" I asked.

"I did so," said the Laird of Lockleaven with a weary gesture. "After the unpleasant time he'd given I wouldn't have saved Uncle Peter had I been able. Besides, there was no green glass bottle handy."

vi

AFTER the Laird of Lockleaven had told his tale, he closed his eyes like a man who is tired. The lamp on the table was going out in a fretful, flickering way; and had it not been for the lusty log in the fireplace, the room would have been as black as a cellar.

"I'm afraid I'm keeping you out of bed, Mr. Lockleaven," I said at last. "There's the dampness of morning in the air. Why not turn in and leave me here? I'll be off when the light is strong enough to see the road by."

But he wouldn't listen to that. "No, no," he said, sitting up with a start. "There are many matters we've got to face ere daybreak."

"Matters to face, Mr. Lockleaven? What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I'm saying!" he cried, wiggling his beard at me in an excited way. "First we'll drink a toast to the confusion of Hell; then we'll prepare our plans."

He rose to his feet and poured out two glasses of wine. Then he handed me one with a courtly bow, but he hid the other for an instant in the folds of his gown ere he lifted it on high.

"Here's confusion to Hell!" he shouted, and drained the glass without once taking his lips from the brim.

"With all my heart, Mr. Lockleaven," said I, following suit. "From what you've told me this night, 'tis not a country I'd like to be traveling in."

"Then get yourself a green glass bottle when your time comes to die," he muttered. "That's what I'm doing this night."

"But, Mr. Lockleaven," I put in, persuasive enough, "your time's not come yet. There's a round score of years to run before you'll be tipping your hat to the devil."

At that, he laughed as wild as a loon on the lake. "So you think so, Dr. O'Brien?" he cried. "And do you suppose that I'd be willing to live those years with the devils of doubt gnawing away inside, not knowing at what moment my soul might pop out and be off to the wall of Hell? No, no, I've had enough of this life; now I'm just longing to rest in a green glass bottle."

"Don't tell me," said I, "that you've—"

"Just that," said he, very calm. "I've taken a wee nip of poison. It was in that glass of port. No, don't trouble me, man,"— for I had leaped to my feet— "just give heed to my words."

"If you've taken poison, I'll have it out of you!" I cried.

"You'll not," said he, "for it's—" And he mentioned the name of the deadliest drug known to man. "But there are matters of more importance on hand. Come close, for already I'm feeling its grip on me."

As I bent over the dying Laird of Lockleaven, he raised his voice to a shrill halloo. "Meg!" he cried, "Meg! You bag of old bones, where are you?"

Now hardly had the echo of his voice died away, when I saw the library door swing open. And there, on the threshold, curtsying and grinning, was a scrawny old woman with the long white whiskers of a cat. In one hand she held something which flashed green where the light touched it.

"Have you got the bottle, Meg?" cried the Laird of Lockleaven.

"Aye, that I have, Robbie," she cackled, stepping up to him like a walking broomstick. "'Tis the bonnie one oot o' the cellar with the wee angels stamped all ower it. Ye can rest quiet betimes, Robbie."

The Laird of Lockleaven heaved a deep sigh of relief and the twitching of his beard ceased as though by magic. "Well done, tried and trusted servant," he muttered, and his chin sank down on his breast.

But soon he bethought himself of something and raised his great eyes to my face. "'Tis your duty as a medical-man, Dr. O'Brien," he said with a catch in

his breath which I knew meant the beginning of the end, "to tell Meg the exact moment when the spark of life flickers out; and then to help her find my soul and pop it into the bottle."

"Whar think ye it'll be hidin' when it's weel oot o' your body?" piped Meg, champing her nutcracker jaws. "I dinna ken rightly whar to be searchin'."

"Just search my body from top to toe!" cried the Laird of Lockleaven in a breaking voice. "And Dr. O'Brien, here, will be lending you a helping hand. Oh, but the pain grips me!" And his face seemed to writhe up into ridges and knots, while the knuckles of his hands stood out white from the grip he had on the arms of the chair.

Now, being a doctor of long experience, I had seen many men die in my time— some with a smile and a sigh like tired children going off to sleep, some fighting hard for their breath with the black dread of Hell deep down in their eyes, some making a great hubbub for fear St. Peter was taking a nap and wouldn't open the gate to their rapping— but never one of them all had played such a tune on the strings of my heart as this long, lean Laird of Lockleaven.

We carried him over to the couch by the window where the light from the fire could scarce reach us. And we propped a pillow under his head, then sat ourselves down and waited for death and the morning. But how long the man took to die! A dozen times I thought his soul had sped; but when I'd bent down, I'd see the mournful gleam of his eyes and the twitch of his beard which meant that life was still in him.

Once he murmured low: "Have you the green glass bottle handy?"

And Meg, who held it tight to her breast, piped up: "I hae it, Robbie."

Well, the gray of morning was sifting through the blind like the mildewed shreds of a rotting pall, when the Laird of Lockleaven sat up on a sudden as quick as the blade of a jackknife. "I'm a dead man!" he cried in a voice which seemed to come from far down underground. "I'm a dead man! Take heed, for my soul is ganging awa!" And at that he fell back with a gasp and a sigh.

But before I could so much as reach out to feel for his heart beats, Meg, that withered old witch, had sprung on him like a cat on a mouse. "I'll find your bonnie soul, Robbie!" she mumbled. And she began to paw him in a manner I thought unseemly.

"Away with you, old she-cat!" I cried, for it made my blood run cold to see her antics. "Have you no respect for the dead?"

But she paid me no heed— just began to cackle away like a dozen hens disturbed in the night.

"Get out of this!" I shouted. "Get down from that perch, or I'll give you the back of my hand!"

Now she let out a squeal like a Banshee; and I saw both her withered old hands slip under his robe and grip hold of something. Then she turned her head over her shoulder; and, though the light was still dim enough, I could see that her eyes were as bright as a toad's and that the long gray hairs on her chin were trembling.

"I hae it fast!" she cried. "The soul of Robbie Lockleaven will no sup in Hell this day! Will ye just hand me the bottle, Dr. O'Brien?"

"I will not, Meg," I said, for the light of dawn was giving me commonsense. "All night I've been lending an ear to the most scandalous lies that ever were told. You're mad, like your master before you; and I'm through with dancing attendance on goblins and fairies."

"Mon, mon," cried Meg in a voice shrill with alarm, "don't be standin' there blasphemin'! If ye willna bring me the bottle, just grip Robbie's wee soul tight— it's owerstrong for these auld fingers!"

Well, as you've found out by this for yourselves, I am an accommodating, easy-going man. In an instant I realized that the only way to get Meg off her master's chest was by humoring her a bit. Madness is kindlier disposed when you pat it on the back. So I nodded my head, without any more to say on the matter, and leaned down and put my hands where she showed me.

"Do ye feel the wee body o' it?" she mumbled, cocking her eye at me.

"Yes," said I— for at the moment I had felt something through his robe which might have been a chamois-bag where he kept a charm against evil.

"Weel, hold tight to it," she said, "while I'm gettin' the bottle. A human soul is an unco canny beastie when it's fairly oot o' the body."

"Never you fear for that," said I. "I'll never let go of it this side of Hell."

I've often noticed that when a man throws big brave words up into the air they're as like as not to come down on his head. So it happened to me. No sooner had I said my say, thinking that I had a bag of beads in my fist and nothing more, no sooner had Meg come down from her perch and hobbled off for the bottle, than I let out a yell and loosened my grip. And well might I stagger back from the fright of it, for the bag had come alive in my hand.

Alive, did I say? Yes, and more than that. It had kicked out like a beast caught in a net; it had wriggled and turned; and, last of all, it had set its teeth in my thumb. And I have the scar to this day to prove that my story is true.

"Mother of God! What's that?" I cried as soon as I could speak at all.

Then Meg spun around on her heel. "Ye fule!" she cried. "Ye have let Robbie's soul slip frae your fingers!" And then, as I stood silent with a great fear at my heart, she scuttled back to the Laird of Lock leaven. "Quick!" she cried. "Dinna be gapin' and gabblin' there! On your knees, mon, and be searchin' the floor; while I give a look to the couch."

Well, I did as she told me— for, somehow or other, I believed all she said. But it was a black business crawling over the carpet, with not light enough yet to make out what lurked in the corners. Once I caught sight of something near the fireplace which scampered away into the wall when I reached out a hand. What ever it was, it was too quick to be caught by a portly old chap on all fours. At last, winded and dusty, I climbed to my feet.

Meg, too, had given up the search. She now sat beside her dead master, rocking back and forth, her face in her hands. Never will I forget that scene if I live to be a hundred— the pallid light of dawn resting on both the quick and the dead; the Laird of Lock leaven rumpled and shaken like a pillow in the search for his soul; and that old hag, crouched down beside him, swinging back and forth like a gate in the wind.

"The Laird of Lockleaven is ganging awa!" she moaned.

"Nonsense, woman!" I cried sharply enough. "'Twas nothing more nor less than a mouse in his gown. Now I'm off to the village for help. He's in no fit state to go into his grave."

But Meg never so much as lifted her face from her hands. Bending backward and forward, giving no heed to my words, she mournfully chanted that dismal refrain: "The Laird of Lockleaven is ganging awa! the Laird of Lockleaven is ganging awa!" And to my over-strained nerves it seemed, that behind the wainscoting in the wall, I heard an echo of her lament rising and falling with the melancholy cadence of the wind: "The Laird of Lockleaven is ganging awa!— The Laird of Lockleaven is ganging awa!"

YOU HAVE HEARD my story. Now, what do *you* think? Was it a mouse I held in the fold of his gown, or was it— But why should I put such thoughts in your head? They've worried me now for ten long years worried me so that each night I put my ear to the wall, listening and wondering, till I seem to hear voices and music and the treading of feet.

Perhaps it was a mouse after all. Don't let such thoughts work into your mind. If they once get in, they'll rattle about like dice in a cup. And they'll make you do very strange things— things which you wouldn't confide to your neighbors.

———————————

What sort of things? Why, soon you'll be collecting bottles of every shape and size known to man— little ones and big ones, thin ones and fat ones, round ones and square ones.

And here's a queer thing! They may be all shapes, and they may be all sizes; but there's only one color you'll want. And that color will be green— pale green like the sea. Isn't that strange, now?

———————————

13: The Story of Malachi

Henry Lawson

1867-1922

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MALACHI was very tall, very thin, and very round-shouldered, and the sandiness of his hair so cried aloud for an adjective. All the boys considered Malachi the greatest ass on the station, and there was no doubt that he was an awful fool.

He had never been out of his native bush in all his life, excepting once, when he paid a short visit to Sydney, and when he returned it was evident that his nerves had received a shaking. We failed to draw one word out of Malachi regarding his views on-the city— to describe it was not in his power, for it had evidently been some thing far beyond his comprehension.

Even after his visit had become a matter of history, if you were to ask him what he thought of Sydney the dazed expression would come back in to his face, and he would scratch his head and say in a slow and deliberate , manner. "Well, there's no mistake, it's a caution." And as such the city remained. so far as Malachi's opinion of it was concerned.

Malachi was always shabbily dressed, in spite of his pound a week and board, and "When Malachi gets a new suit of clothes" was the expression in variably used by the boys to fix a date for some altogether improbable event.

WE were always having larks with Malachi, for we looked on him as our legitimate butt. He seldom complained, and when he did his remonstrance hardly ever went beyond repeating the words, "Now, none of your pranktical jokes!" If this had not the desired effect, and we put up some too outrageous trick on him, he would content himself by muttering with sorrowful conviction, "Well, there's no mistake, it's a caution."

We were not content with common jokes, such as sewing up the legs of Malachi's trousers while he slept, fix ing his bunk, or putting explosives in his pipe— we aspired to some of the higher branches of the practical joker's art.

It was well known that Malachi had an undying hatred for words of four syllables and over, and the use of them was always sufficient to forfeit any good opinions he might have previously entertained concerning the liser. "I hate them high-flown words," he would say— "I got a book at home that I could get them all out of if I wanted them; but I don't."

The book referred to was a very dilapidated dictionary. Malachi's hatred for high-flown words was only equalled by his aversion to the opposite sex; and,

this being known, we used to write letters to him in a feminine hand, threatening divers breach of promise actions, and composed in the high-flown language above alluded to. We used to think this very funny, and by these means we made his life a burden to him.

Malachi put the most implicit faith in everything we told him; he would take in the most improbable yarn provided we preserved a grave demeanor and used no high-flown expressions. He would indeed sometimes remark that our yarns were a caution, but that was all.

We played upon him the most gigantic joke of all during the visit of a certain bricklayer, who came to do some work at the homestead. "Bricky" was a bit of a phrenologist, and knew enough of physiognomy and human nature to give a pretty fair delineation of character. He also went in for spirit-rapping, greatly to the disgust of the two ancient housekeepers, who declared that they'd have "no dalins wid him and his divil's worruk."

The bricklayer was from the first an object of awe to Malachi, who carefully avoided him; but one night we got the butt into a room where the artisan was entertaining the boys with a seance. After the table-rapping, during which Malachi sat with uncovered head and awestruck expression, we proposed that he should have his bumps read, and before he could make his escape Malachi was seated in a chair in the middle of the room and the bricklayer was running his fingers over his head.

I really believe that Malachi's' hair bristled between the phrenologist's fingers. Whenever he made a hit his staunch admirer, "Donegal," would exclaim, "Look at that, now!" while the girls tittered and said, "Just fancy!", and from time to time Malachi would be heard to mutter to himself, in a tone of the most intense conviction, that "without the least mistake it was a caution."

Several times at his work the next day Malachi was observed to rest on his spade, while he tilted his hat forward with one hand and felt the back of his head as though he had not been previously aware of its existence.

We "ran" Malachi to believe that the bricklayer was mad on the subject of phrenology, and was suspected of having killed several persons in order to obtain their skulls for experimental purposes... We further said that he had been heard to say that Malachi's skull was a most extraordinary one, and so we advised him to be careful.

MALACHI occupied a hut some distance from the. station, and one night, the last, night of the bricklayer's stay, as Malachi sat smoking over the nre the door opened quietly and the phrenologist entered. He earned a bag with a pumpkin in the; bottom of it, and, sitting down on a stool, he let the bag down

with a bump on the floor between his feet, Malachi. was badly scared, but he managed to stammer out—

" 'Ello!"

" 'Ello!" said the phrenologist.

There was an embarrassing silence, which was at last broken by "Bricky. saying, "How are you gettin' on, Malachi?"

"Oh, jist right," replied Malachi.

Nothing was said for a while, until Malachi, after fidgeting a good deal on his stool, asked the bricklayer when he was leaving the station.

" 'Oh. I'm going away in the morning, early," said he. "I've jist been over to Jimmy Nowlett's camp, and as I was passing I thought I'd call and. let your head."

"What?"

"I come for your skull,

"Yes," the phrenologist continued, while Malachi sat horror-stricken; "I've got Jimmy Nowlett's skull here," and he lifted the bag and lovingly felt the pumpkin— it must have weighed forty pounds, "I spoilt one of his best bumps with the tomahawk. I had to hit him twice, but it's no use crying over spilt milk."

Here he drew a heavy shingling hammer out of the bag and wiped off with his sleeve something that looked like blood. Malachi had been edging round for the door, and now he made a rush for it. But the skull-fancier was there before him.

"Gor-sake, you don't want to murder me!" gasped Malachi.

"Not if I can get your skull any other way," said Bricky.

"Oh!" gasped Malachi— and then, with a vague idea that it was best to humor a lunatic, he continued, in a tone meant to be off-hand and careless— "Now, look here, if yer only waits till I die you can have my whole skelington and welcome."

"Now, Malachi," said the phrenologist sternly, "d'ye think I'm a fool? ain't going to stand any humbug If yer acts sensible you'll be quiet, and it'll soon be over, but if yer—"

Malachi did not wait to hear the rest. He made a spring for the back of the hut and through it, taking down a large new sheet of stringybark in his flight. Then he could be heard loudly ejaculating "It's a caution!" as he went through the bush like a startled kangaroo, and he didn't stop till he reached the station.

Jimmy Nowlett and I had been peeping through a crack in the same sheet of bark that Malachi dislodged; it fell on us and bruised us somewhat, but it wasn't enough to knock the fun out of the thing.

When Jimmy Nowlett crawled out from under the bark he had to lie down on Malachi's bunk to laugh, and even for some time afterwards it was not unusual for Jimmy to wake up in the night and laugh till we wished him dead.

I should like to finish here, but there remains something more to be said about Malachi.

One of the best cows at the homestead had a calf, about which she made a great deal of fuss. She was ordinarily a quiet, docile creature, and though somewhat fussy after calving, no one ever dreamed that she would injure anyone.

It happened one day that the squatter's daughter and her intended husband, a Sydney exquisite, were strolling in a paddock where the cow was. Whether the cow objected to the masher or his lady love's red parasol, or whether, she suspected designs upon her progeny, is not certain; anyhow, she went for them.

The young man saw the cow coming first, and he gallantly struck a bee-line for the fence, leaving the girl to manage for herself, She wouldn't have managed very well if Malachi hadn't been passing just then. He saw the girl's danger and ran to intercept the cow with no weapon but his hands.

It didn't last long. There was a roar, a rush, and a cloud of dust, out of which the cow presently emerged, and went scampering back to the bush in which her calf was hidden.

WE carried Malachi home and laid him on a bed. He had a terrible wound in the head and the blood soaked through the bandages like water. We did all that was possible for him, the boys killed the squatter's best horse and spoilt two others riding for a doctor, but it was of no use. In the last half-hour of his life we all gathered round Malachi's bed; he was only twenty-two. Once he said:

"I wonder how mother'll manage now?"

"Why, where's your mother?" someone asked gently; we had never dreamt that Malachi might have someone to love him and be proud of him.

"In Bathurst." he answered wearily— "she'll take on awful, I 'spect, she was awful fond of me— we've been pulling together this last ten years— mother and me— we wanted to make it all right for my little brother Jim —poor Jim!"

"What's wrong with Jim?" someone asked

"Oh, he's blind," said Malachi— "always was— we wanted to make it all right for him agin time he grows up— I— I managed to send home about — about forty pounds a year— we bought a bit of ground, and— and— I think— I'm going now. Tell 'em, Harry— tell 'em how it was—"

I had to go outside then. I couldn't stand it any more. There was a lump in my throat and I'd have given anything to wipe out my share in the practical jokes, but it was too late now.

Malachi was dead when I went in again, and that night the hat went round with the squatter's cheque in the bottom of it and we made it "all right" for Malachi's blind brother Jim.

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14: A Compound Felony

Ambrose Pratt

1874-1944

Wagga Wagga Express (NSW) 28 April 1934

Australian author of novels and short stories in romantic and grand setting.

THE EXILED GRAND DUKE Dimitri Michaelovski and the beautiful young Marchioness of Ogilvy, from the moment of their meeting in the casino of the Hotel of La Haye Sainte, at Pau, became friends. The Marchioness, who was intimately acquainted beforehand with the Grand Duke's romantic history, pitied him because of his banishment and of his comparative poverty; but, above all, because of the recent death of the charming though lowly born lady for whose sake he had braved the uncompromising anger of the greatest potentate on earth.

The Grand Duke liked the Marchioness because she was an American, and her conversation amused him. He cultivated her friendship, and endured her crabby old husband, because she was a millionairess in her own right and because of the wonderful jewels she wore each evening, jewels that in another setting might have adorned an emperor's crown.

Pau shrugged its shoulders at the intimacy, and behind gloves, cigars, and fans whispered uncharitable or insincerely sympathetic speeches concerning the doting Marquis. The friends were alive to the interest they excited, but the lady, who detested all conventions, was perfectly indifferent, while the Grand Duke, all his life habituated to notoriety, would have keen disappointed had no notice been taken of his so far innocent flirtation.

One evening, on entering the gambling hall of the casino rather later than usual, he perceived the marchioness seated beside her husband at a certain table. Her hair, throat, and shoulders were ablaze with diamonds, and her hands, as they moved in play, described glittering arcs of multi-coloured light. That she was winning was evident for her expression was triumphant and a considerable mound of notes and golden coins were heaped up before her.

The Grand Duke gazed at the lady in rapt silence for a while, his eyes meditatively following the flashing changes of her jewels.

"They must he worth £50,000," he muttered softly to himself; then slowly crossing the chamber, he took up a position immediately behind her chair. He watched her stake a large sum and lose, whereupon, stooping, he whispered in her ear:

"The luck has changed, my child. Be wise, and risk no more. Let us take a stroll in the gardens."

The Marchioness gave him a dazzling smile.

"See me break the bank first,"' she replied, and even as she spoke, with a sweeping movement of her hands she pushed the whole mass of her remaining winnings on to a certain square. The spectators tittered loud exclamations of amazement, for of a certainty not one of them had ever seen so considerable a sum staked upon a single turn of fortune's wheel.

The Marquis of Ogilvy, who had the reputation of a miser, was gambling with five-franc pieces, and when he observed the extent of his wife's recklessness he could not contain his indignation. Turning pale with fury, he twisted in his chair, and faced his consort.

"Are you mad?" he demanded in English, his tones shrill with anger.

"*Faites votre jeux, mesdames et messieurs*!" called out the croupier. "*Faites votre jeux*!"

The Marchioness smiled in her husband face. "Nothing venture, nothing win," she replied.

"And nothing lose!" snapped the Marquis.

But in the short interval of their preoccupation fate had spoken, and a chorus of startled sighs and cries made them swiftly turn. The croupier was silently and with curiously grim looks counting the money risked by the Marchioness, and for every livre that she had staked he placed ten before her on the table.

The Marquis, hardly able to believe his eyes, stared stupidly at the rapidly increasing rows of coins, his face the colour of old parchment, his mouth fallen wide open.

"My God, you've won!" he murmured presently in a gasping voice.

"What did I tell you?" cried the lady. "Nothing venture, nothing win. You see!"

But the Marquis was too overcome to retort, and the Marchioness, perceiving her victory, raised her eyes in search of further conquests. She was surrounded by a dense throng of eager chattering people, who had deserted the other tables in order to witness her good fortune, but even in the full flush of her triumph the glances she encountered chilled her. Not a countenance could she see that was not disfigured with an expression of hungry covetousness and savage greed. The eyes that gazed at her might have been the eves of starving animals watching through bars another feeding.

The impervious soul-mask of imperturbability had been momentarily allowed to slip from each of the faces about her, and the Marchioness felt her heart contract with a sort of terror at the sight of the naked and hideous passions so revealed. She turned with a little shudder for comfort, and perhaps for sympathy, to the Grand Duke, who stood behind her chair; but to her

dismay she found him feverishly absorbed in contemplation of the croupier's still unfinished task. Nay, more, he was reckoning up the fortune she had won.

She heard him mutter under his breath certain numerals— one, two, three, four ten. She watched him with surmise and measuring eyes, for she had not dreamed of such a weakness in his character— the love of gold.

"*Et tu Brute*!" she whispered presently. He heard, and repressing a start. His expression quickly changed. Looking down at her with a sudden smile, he said. "My child, you have won almost two hundred thousand francs. It is a fortune!"

"So much?" she exclaimed.

The croupier at that moment stood up, and on his face was fixed a mirthless grin.

"*Mesdames et Messieurs*," he announced, "*la banque est fermee pour ce soir*."

For a moment there was silence; then followed a perfect storm of astonished cries, expostulating murmurs and plaudits, strangely intermingled. The Marchioness became aware that at least six harpies were addressing her at the same time, and all with requests for a trifling loan. With a gesture of disgust she waved them aside and got to her feet.

"My dear," cried the Marquis, who was trembling with excitement and suffering agonies of apprehension lest some part of the treasure should be stolen, "what are you going to do with the money?"

The Marchioness gave him a look of contempt.

"You had better take charge of it," she answered, and with insolent and magnificent indifference she swept down the hall and passed thence into the gardens , without a single backward glance, The Marquis, uttering an inarticulate cry, swooped like a hawk upon the treasure.

The Grand Duke observed him for a moment in evident amusement, then lighting a cigar, he strolled off in the direction taken by Lady Ogilvie.

He found her, after a long search, standing in the open moonlight before the stone balustrade of the lower terrace. She was gazing out over the landscape with a rapt commemorative look, and her pose was statuesque.

" *'At length I saw a lady within call. Stiller than chiselled marble standing there*!' " quoted the Grand Duke. " *'A daughter of the gods, divinely tall. And most divinely fair*!'— Your name is Helen, too," he added softly.

The Marchioness turned slowly about and looked straight into his eyes.

"I know you better to-night than ever before," she said. "You are only a little better than the others, and you are of Royal blood! Why do you love money so much? You are not poor?"

"Ah!" he smiled. "Did I show it so plainly as that, my child?"

"You looked"— she shivered— "like a thief!"

"What an honest little woman it is," he said, smiling still. "So I looked like a thief, eh? But tell me, my child, did I look like a coward too?"

"I beg your pardon!"

"All men are thieves at heart. Helen; but I am a coward as well."

"Your Highness!" she cried, "How can you say such a thing?"

"Your straightforwardness has inspired the confession, little friend. Do you know what is in my mind at this moment?"

"No."

"A too ardent admiration of these baubles, child!"

He touched gently, as he spoke, one of the splendid chains that fell from her neck in a sparkling stream across her bosom, "and not because of their beauty either, though they are very beautiful. Really, my friend, you are reckless to adorn yourself so richly— and most unwise to trust yourself in these gardens without protection."

"You are here," she retailed.

"True," he said gravely, "and as I am a coward you are safe enough from me, and because of my presence from bolder thieves."

The Marchioness looked hurt. "I do not like that sort of jesting," she exclaimed.

He shrugged his shoulders. "You call it jesting."

"Are you— in need of money?" she demanded suddenly. He uttered a low, musical laugh, then bowed and answered "Yes."

"But how can that be? You receive the income from your estates, although you are in exile."

"My estates are heavily encumbered, child; but there, let us change the topic; we cannot possibly find another so unpleasant, I fancy. What are your plans for to-morrow, madame?"

The lady sighed— "I have made none yet. I wish I could understand you."

"And I," murmured the Grand Duke, echoing her sigh, "I wish that I were dead, or that you were a widow. Pardon!" he added quickly, as she frowned, but the Marchioness raised her hand.

"What has come over you tonight?" she demanded; "you are pleased to forget our compact."

"Do you think I am trying to flirt? You are wrong."

"What then?"

"I don't know. My mood is reckless; if it continues I may forget I am a coward"

"And then—" He stroked this moustache. "We would hear of a daring robbery at the hotel— or an elopement. Come! I shall leave the matter in your

hands. In either case you are likely to be the sufferer, for are you not my friend? Which shall it be, madame?— Choose!"

The lady gave him a penetrating glance, but his eyes were inscrutable, and presently, against her will, a flush of blood suffused her cheeks.

"Will your Highness permit me to speak plainly," she asked, "as a woman might to a man a mere man?"

"Permit!" he echoed. "I beg you to do so."

"You see," she explained, "to the exalted rank of a Grand Duke such a term as 'cad' would be outrageously inapplicable, but—"

"But to a man— a mere man?" he queried, smiling.

"What is your opinion?" she asked softly.

"Yours," he shrugged. "I am thoroughly ashamed of myself, my child."

She moved a step forward, and placed a tremulous hand upon his arm.

"We have been perilously near a quarrel, Duke," she murmured. "Don't you think it would have been better to have trusted me? Are we not friends?"

"But, yes."

"Then tell me as a friend how much you need."

He started back and bit his lip. "Oh! oh!" he muttered. "That is going too far. I merely jested— it was in bad taste, I admit, but—"

"But," she interrupted, "whatever you may wish me to think now, there is no need to — pardon me — to prevaricate. It would, as well, be useless, for I saw your eyes. These jewels I am wearing are worth some twenty thousand pounds. Will you let me lend you that amount?"

His Highness's face went crimson, then white as death. He bit his cigar in two, then tossed the ends over the balustrade. Finally, he faced the Marchioness and forced himself to speak.

"Impossible," he muttered hoarsely. "Rather the other. I— I love you, madame. It is with absolute respect, I tell you so, madame—"

"Wertheimer is right," said the Marchioness, in tones of great bitterness. "Platonic love exists, but only between husband and wife."

The Grand Duke fell on his knees before her. "I swear to you," he cried with passion , "that nothing less than your generous offer and the desperate position I am in would have extracted the confession from my lips. And even so, I swear to you that I spoke with absolute respect."

"Nevertheless, our friendship is at an end."

"I bow myself to your decree."

"Please arise, Duke. The situation is ridiculous— we may be observed."

He obeyed and stood with bowed head before her. She gazed at him awhile, her expression gradually softening. At length she said "A little while

since you asked me my plans for to-morrow. I know them now— I shall leave Paul!"

"You mean that?" he cried.

"Yes. You must not follow me. At least that. Do you understand?"

"You need not fear," he muttered .

"I could not eyen if I would."

"What! You are penniless?"

"Not quite, I have a rouleau left, but I am terribly in debt!"

He threw out his hands with a sudden tragic gesture. "To-morrow I shall once more dice with fate; if fortune flouts me— then— Bah! What am I saying? How beautiful the moonlight is, madame."

"Is it not?" she answered quietly. "Did your Highness mean to suggest a possibility of someone committing suicide?"

"You cannot despise me, child, more than I despise myself. But what would you?"— he shrugged his shoulders. "I have nothing to live for any more— not even your friendship."

"Certainly not that," said the lady icily. "But remember there are other women in the world, and the sort of friendship you seek can readily he bought."

"Your words are very cruel— but they are inconclusive. Even were your intention just, money would be indispensable."

"Money!" her lip curled. "I have offered it to you."

"And I have refused," he answered eagerly.

"You have refused to borrow, not to steal."

"You believe me capable of that?"

"If you will follow me, I shall give you an opportunity of proving my opinion false."

"Come then!" He offered her his arm, but with a gesture of disdain she declined to accept it.

Side by side, but separated by the space of a yard, they moved off in the direction of the hotel. They found the great vestibule deserted, for the hour was late, and the guests were assembled with very few exceptions, in the casino. In unbroken silence the Grand Duke and the Marchioness ascended the stairs and traversed a wilderness of corridors.

The lady paused at last before a certain door, which very softly she unlocked. A moment later, in obedience to a gesture, her companion followed her into a brilliantly lighted room, which one glance showed to be a bed-chamber. Crossing the apartment on tip-toe, the Marchioness approached a distant cabinet and therefrom withdrew a small black leather case. This she

opened upon the bed, and after a little search she took out and lifted to the light a crystal phial and a white square of woollen padded cloth.

"Come!" she whispered, pointing to an inner door and placing a finger to her lips.

The Grand Duke was trembling with excitement and curiosity, but like a shadow he attended her. Noiseless as phantoms they passed through a dark ante-room into a second bed-chamber that was faintly illuminated by a tinted glow lamp swinging from the ceiling. Upon the bed, lying on his right side, was the Marquis of Ogilvy, asleep. The clothes were drawn up to his ohm, and his head was covered with a linen nightcap. In repose his weazened and wrinkled face looked uncannily old and eerie. He was breathing with long, deep respirations like a child.

The Marchioness approached her husband with an undulating, soundless motion; pausing beside him she uncorked the phial and poured its contents on the wadding. A second later she leaned over the bed and held the wadding beneath the old man's nostrils. The Marquis stirred uneasily and turned over in the bed, but the lady's hand followed him remorselessly. He began to pant and fight for air, yet without awakening, for the fumes had already drugged his senses. Very soon the Marchioness pressed the wadding to his face, and after one or two convulsive shudders he lay still.

Satisfied that her task was achieved, Lady Ogilvy drew herself erect, but next instant she again stooped, over the bed and fumbled beneath the pillow on which her husband's head reposed. The Grand Duke, who had observed all that had passed in a sort of spell-bound stupor, saw the lady presently turn about, holding in her right hand a bunch of keys. Without a glance in his direction she crossed the room and halted before a small fireproof safe that stood against the further wall.

The Grand Duke saw upon the floor of the safe a neatly arranged mass of treasure in notes and gold. He made no doubt it was the money which Lady Ogilvy had won that evening and given into her husband's keeping.

The Marchioness unpinned from her shoulder a silken scarf, which she spread out carefully upon the floor. Then stretching out her hands, she swiftly but quietly transferred the money from the safe until all was laid upon the scarf. Afterwards, with a series of rapid gestures, she tore the jewels that she wore from her hair and throat, and allowed them to fall upon the money. At length she turned and faced her companion.

"If the money were stolen and the diamonds left, Lord Ogilvy would perhaps suspect me," she said. "He is a most suspicious man, your Highness."

Having spoken she moved some paces off, and then pausing, stood gazing at her husband with her back to the other, motionless as a statue The Grand

Duke looked from her to the treasure, and slowly he grasped the full significance of her actions and intention. She wished him to take and use the treasure— but at the expense of her respect for him! His face was very pale, hut his eyes gleamed brilliantly.

"She loves me," he thought, "and she wished at any cost to be my benefactress."

His glance embraced the woman, but presently it wandered, and alighting on the jewels rested long, detained by a sort of fascination. He was thinking now of what the money meant to him. He was also beginning to realise that he was I tempted, and to wrestle with a torturing fear of consequence.

"Make haste!" said the woman, of a sudden. "He will mot remain I unconscious for ever."

"Helen," said the Grand Duke, "my honour is at stake— not only here, but elsewhere. Unless I find a large sum immediately shall be posted. I owe Lord Effingham ; £20,000— a gambling debt. You know what that means."

"Make haste!" she repeated.

"Have pity on me!" he cried. "My life is in your hands. I could not survive public disgrace? You are tempting me to live!"

"Oh be quick!" said the Marchioness.

He bit his lips and wrung his hands.

"I can't," he groaned.

"Coward!" said Lady Ogilvy.

The Grand Duke flushed scarlet. "I understand," he muttered. Striding forward suddenly, he sank on his knees before the safe, and, gathering up the ends of the scarf, knotted them above the coins and precious stones.

The Marchioness watched him over her shoulder without his cognisance, and in her eyes was a look of pain and indescribable bewilderment. Unconsciously she sighed, and the Grand Duke started guiltily and glanced up; but too late, she had turned again.

"Make haste!" she said in a strained voice. He sprang to his feet, holding the treasure in his hand. She was pointing silently to the outer door of the apartment that opened on the corridor.

"God bless you," he muttered, and forthwith obeyed the gesture.

As the door closed behind his retreating figure the Marchioness sighed again, and softly went over to her insensible husband's side.

Removing the wadding from his face she took up the phial and passed out of the apartment into her own bedchamber. A moment later she had restored the bottle to its place, and locked up the medicine chest within the cabinet. She turned then, and caught her breath with a sudden gasp at seeing the Grand Duke .

"I have returned— because l could not go— without a word!" he muttered. "I want you to tell me why you have done— this?"

"Surely, to help you," she whispered, her hand pressed tightly to her side. "And— and— "Because I was lately fool enough to worship a clay idol. Do not mistake me; I regret nothing, for you have taught me wisdom. But"— she paused a second and her lip curled scornfully— "go now, your Highness! I pray to God we shall never meet again!"

His face went pale as chalk. "I shall repay you in full— one day!" he muttered. "And— and— I shall love you to the last hour of my life!"

She gave him a look before which his eyes fell abashed and shamed.

"Go!" she repeated.

"Helen — Helen!" cried out at that instant a groaning voice from the Marquis's bed chamber.

"You hear?" asked Lady Ogilvy.

The Grand Duke bowed, and darting to the door slipped out into the corridor. The Marchioness tore off her clothes, and turning out the electric light, got softly into her bed.

"Helen!" cried her husband's voice again.

"What is the matter?" she demanded in tones of simulated drowsiness.

A loud shriek answered her.

"I have been robbed— robbed!" screamed Lord Ogilvy. "Robbed! do you hear?" There followed the sound of a heavy fall, and the Marchioness a moment later found her husband lying insensible before his rifled safe.

Next morning all Europe rang with the news of the most daring, successful, and mysterious robbery of modern times, but the first person in Pau to sympathise with the victims thereof was his Highness the Grand Duke Dimitri Michaelovski.

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15: My First Murder

George Hurdis Purves

1850-1889

The Australasian, Melb, 29 May and 5 June 1886

I BELIEVE that mine is a unique case, but, if not, it is the only one that I have ever heard of. Men whose lives have been spoilt by their failures are common enough, but how many are there whose existence has been rendered insupportable by success? Yet this is my case, and I drag a lengthening chain of dissatisfaction because I was forced to earn a victory where defeat— constant defeat— might have made me a comparatively happy man. Do not turn from this page, gentle reader. Do not shrink from reading my story, classing me as you do so with Palmer, with Brinvilliers, with the Borgias. Though I am weak and nervous, though I lack resolution and self-assertion, I am not a bad man, and I am, I confidently assert, undeserving of the fate that I have met.

I was perfectly aware, long before my mother-in-law told me so, that I was "marrying above me" when I led the blushing Winifred Drisbergh to the altar, but, at the time, it was a pride and a pleasure to acknowledge it. Thus I felt no annoyance when Mrs. Drisbergh, drawing me aside, after we had partaken of a somewhat frugal wedding-breakfast, put the case to me in, I must admit, a slightly unpalatable form.

"John Smith," she said in her verdict-with-the-black-cap manner, "never forget that you have this day married a Drisbergh. Do not imagine because the Drisberghs are poor, and their daughters for the last few generations have not been dowered as in the palmy days of old, that you are conferring a benefit on our daughter (Mrs. Drisbergh always used the plural as if she were of Royal blood) because you yourself are in affluent circumstances. Remember that wealth is eminently plebeian unless associated for many years with broad acres. Riches may be at times a subject of congratulation— of pride never. Birth is the only attribute which gives a right to pride, and, though I say it with all modesty, not wishing to make a point of our descent, it is the thing which is far above rubies."

I stammered out that I was not likely to forget it (which was quite true, whilst she was at my elbow), and that I fully recognised that I had contracted an alliance far above what I might have expected.

"I am glad to hear you say so," she said, still in that awe-inspiring voice. "Your obscure origin— excuse me for putting it so plainly— is certainly a matter of regret, but during your honeymoon I shall review your social position, and consider what can be done to ameliorate it."

That was the last thing she said to me before we drove away, and it amazes me now to recall the indifference with which I heard the words— words which

were to exercise such an important influence on my life. But I was carried away by the intoxication of the moment. As we drove to the station I thought of nothing but the blushing maiden at my side, and deemed myself the luckiest dog in the world!

We spent our honeymoon at Bath, for Mrs. Drisbergh, who had kindly taken the direction of everything into her hands, had urged that that was the proper place to go to, adding, by way of confirmation, that she herself had spent her honeymoon there, which statement, of course, settled the question. Whatever our motive in going there, the result far exceeded my most sanguine expectations. I still look back on our sojourn at Bath as an oasis in the desert of my married life. Not only did we visit with appreciative delight all the local sights, but I rented a little pony chaise— for Winnie "adored," she said, that description of vehicle— and we drove to all the objects of interest for miles and miles around. My wife, who had seen but little of English scenery, was in ecstasies with everything, and her delight enhanced my pleasure. Good-looking as she had always been, she never showed to such advantage as then. A sparkle of excitement brightened her eyes, and a flush of pleasure lit up her cheeks, which made her more attractive than ever.

"Dearest," I whispered in her ear a hundred times a day, "are you happy?" And a hundred times a day she answered me (accompanying the remark with suitable action), "Yes! dear John, quite!" She had only one regret, that her mother, that dearly-loved, admirable being, was not with her to share her pleasure. That regret was no sooner expressed than silenced. I promised her that I would take the whole family down there the very next holiday I took, which promise I then considered was amply repaid by a warm kiss of gratitude. But honeymoons, like other moons, are subject to eclipses, partial or otherwise— alas! that ours should have been a total one!— and one bright spring morning, with many regrets, we turned our backs on Bath, and came back to London to face our new life.

We dined the first night— at my wife's particular request— at her mothers. It was a family party. Besides ourselves there were only Mrs. Drisbergh, her daughters Eleanor and Boadicea, and her son Norman who derived his name from "The Conquest," their descent from which the widow Drisbergh was always thrusting under one's nose. I was still so much under the influence of recent events that I managed to overcome my usual reserve, and chatted away the whole time. I even went so far as to praise my mother-in-law's Amontillado— that is what she called it.

What is more, I drank it freely. But at last dinner was at an end, and I rose and opened the door for the ladies. Mrs. Drisbergh marshalled out her three daughters, and then turning to Norman, who was a lad of eighteen at the time,

told him that she had something particular to speak to me about, and that for once she would like him to join his sisters in the drawingroom. Norman grumbled but obeyed. How gladly would I have changed places with him.

Mrs. Drisbergh took a chair next to me, and, without any preliminaries (she always prided herself on "coming straight to the point"), broached a subject which was to be ever afterwards of paramount importance to me.

"John Smith," she said, she always gave me my name in full when she wished to be impressive, "you will remember that in the last words I spoke to you before you left I promised that I would review your position, and consider how the lamentable accident of your birth and name could be got over. Since then that question and that question only has occupied my mind."

Mrs. Drisbergh here gave me a look over her spectacles which made me so nervous that I upset the wineglass I was fumbling with, and with it also upset what little equanimity I had left. Mrs. Drisbergh was the neatest of women, and the cloth was a clean one, so I fully expected a home-thrust in answer to my muttered ejaculation, "Dear me! How awkward." But my mother-in-law was for once too engrossed with her subject to heed minor matters. I filled up my glass again, and drained the said in one gulp, which fact alone could attest the state of mind I was in.

"Now, of course, your birth cannot be remedied," Mrs. Drisbergh went on.

"No! I can't be born again," I interjected with a nervous laugh.

"Your birth cannot be remedied," repeated Mrs. Drisbergh sternly. "You were born John Smith, and John Smith you alas! must remain. But if you cannot have the status which blue blood gives, you must endeavour to wipe out the— the drawback which attaches to the fact that you are of bourgeois birth. Conspicuous merit can alone do this. It cannot, indeed, place you on the highest rung of the social ladder— that is reserved for us— but it can secure you a highly respectable recognition."

Mrs. Drisbergh walked to the bookcase, and took down the volume of an Encyclopaedia labelled PUE to SOU, and, opening it at the S's, placed her hand on the open book.

"On consulting this work," she said, "although I do not find that any John Smith has distinguished himself I see that several of your surname have attracted considerable attention. There was Adam Smith, a writer of some eminence. Sydney Smith, also a writer, and a wit of repute. I do not recall others, but....

Now I do not know what possessed me to make such an ill-timed jest, whether it was the Amontillado (which, though vile stuff, had intoxicating properties which were not to be ignored) or the exuberance of my spirits consequent on recent events, but I boldly made a suggestion.

"Oh! there was Goldsmith," I said.

Never had I seen such a look in those awful eyes as they gleamed at me over the spectacles. It annihilated me. Mrs. Drisbergh slammed the book to, and marched like a grenadier to the bookcase.

"Mr. John Smith," she said, as she turned round after replacing the book, "I take your levity as a personal insult."

What would anyone have done in my place? Would they not have done as I did? I protested that the name had come into my head. I knew not how, that without motive I had let it escape me, that nobody could have been in reality more attentive, and that I would work heart and soul to carry out her wishes. So in the end she came round, and explained the designs she had made on my behalf. She had watched me carefully, she said, ever since our first acquaintance, and had been, in consequence, the more easily guided to the only possible result. She knew that I had no taste for, or knowledge of, art, and she had more than once reproved me for attempting to sing, on the ground that I had no notion of time or tone, and had no ear— "one of which qualifications is at least desirable in a musician," she had said. I was not sufficiently well off to go into Parliament, and was too old to enter a profession.

"What remains?" she asked me, as if she were doing a subtraction sum.

I did not answer— not because my one answer had not been a happy one. Besides, no reasonable reply suggested itself.

"Literature remains," she complacently answered; "and through literature you most redeem your lowly birth and homely name. I should die satisfied if I knew that one day you would lie in that Abbey, where so many of our great are buried." She said our great, as if the dead spoken of were her ancestors and relations to a man. "What department of literature do you propose taking up?"

That was "a staggerer" and the worst of it was that Mrs. Drisbergh stopped, evidently meaning to have an answer. Now what department of literature did I mean to take up? I asked the question two or three times, and finding no answer. I repeated it aloud.

"Yes; she said, quietly. "What department do you propose taking up? Poetry?"

I shook my head.

"History?"

I shook my head again.

"Political Economy?"

"Heaven forbid!" I exclaimed.

"Essays?"

I declined again.

"Well, light literature," she said, in a tone which implied that that was as easy as A B C. "Sketches, travels, and novels."

"Light literature be it," I said in desperation. "I will do my best, Mrs. Drisbergh, but don't blame me if I fail."

"Thank you, John," said my mother-in-law, with an amiable smile, as she took my arm. "We will join the young folk in the drawingroom now. You know," she said in the passage, "you need not start with a novel. You can graduate, so to speak, with short stories."

During the evening we talked the matter over *en famille*, and it was agreed (I use the impersonal pronoun, for really I had so little to do with the matter that it would not be true to say I agreed) that I should start my literary labours the next day, and that Thursday evenings should be set apart for me to read over my week's work. By general consent the plot of my first story was left entirely to me, though Norman, in his boorish way, suggested that it should be a love story.

ii

THE NEXT MORNING, memorable day! I began my literary labours. That is to say, I bought five quires of manuscript-paper, new pens, new ink, and new blotting-paper. Then, going into my study— for so my smoking-room was already called— I sat myself down before a blank sheet of paper, and for a time merely looked at it. Not but what I had an idea of my ultimate plot, for I had lain awake the whole night, thanks to Mrs. Drisbergh's infernal Amontillado, and had thus had plenty of time to study it, but that the difficulty of commencing it seemed to me almost insuperable. It was to be called "Thou Shalt Not Marry Thy Grandmother," and was to be the story of a lad who falls in love with a woman older than himself. The main incidents being true, and having come under my personal knowledge, I thought that I should have no difficulty in writing it straight off. But somehow my sentences got involved, my antecedents quarrelled with their relatives, and I, who had hitherto prided myself on my correspondence as a model of style and grammar, found myself making slips that any schoolboy would be ashamed of. Then again, when I had written a few pages a new "opening" would suggest itself, and when I had torn up what I had written and adopted my second thoughts a third scheme would suddenly come into my head which I felt bound to employ. Thus after three days' work I found myself with three pages written, and three pages with which I was thoroughly dissatisfied. I went out for a walk, hoping to get some ideas. I got more ideas than I wanted, for during my peregrinations I thought over my story, and on reflection its plot not only seemed to me trivial, but

utterly absurd and impracticable. Not only this, but another plot suggested itself to me, which I immediately recognised (I am describing my feelings at the time) as vastly superior to the first. The next day I started that story, but with no better result than the first. When the first Thursday arrived, to my own shame, and to Mrs. Drisbergh's bitter indignation, *I had nothing to read*.

At my mother-in-law's solicitation I stated in detail my difficulties, and invited the deliberation and advice of the family thereon. I must say that the matter was thoroughly discussed— for we sat from nine till twelve "hard at it" the whole time— though it has since struck me that in these family councils my convenience and feelings were hardly as much considered as they might have been. However, in the end a definite plot was arrived at, and, what was more, sketched out on paper, and I went home, to quote Mrs. Drisbergh, "with the backbone of a charming story, which I had to convert into flesh and blood.

The next day, before breakfast, I started to perform this feat, but, by night, confessed to myself that convening backbones into flesh and blood was not the sort of miracle I was likely to effect, at any rate for the time being. However, within the week I managed, by dint of constant corrections, interlineations, and re-writing, to read to the Drisbergh family the first half of my story. They were alive with expectation and excitement. I was glad to find that on the whole, they were pleased with my first effort, and that, too, notwithstanding my nervousness, which greatly impaired my reading. By the next Thursday the story was finished, and the verdict was favourable.

"For a first attempt," Mrs. Drisbergh admitted, "it is highly creditable."

Now, I have no intention of entering into particulars of the various stories which succeeded "Thou Shalt Not Marry Thy Grandmother"— that, after all, was my first story— for I gradually found the management of my plot easier, the treatment of dialogue less troublesome, and the mere scrivener's work less irksome. It is true that sometimes I got myself into difficulties; placed my heroes and my heroines in positions whence I found it impossible to extract them, and got my plot into an inextricable tangle. But after a while I learnt many "tricks of the trade," and avoided like annoyances by a wise disposition of my plot before I put my pen to paper. Thus before twelve months were over I had twelve complete stories written, and though I had learned to abhor the work, and the very sight of pen and ink made me recoil, I still slaved away for hours daily, "graduating with short stories" that I might ultimately (to please Mrs. Drisbergh, for I was utterly indifferent myself) write an imperishable work of fiction which should secure me a niche in our Walhalla.

Alas! long before my third story was completed I had found out that it was one thing to write, another to get what you have written published. Mrs. Drisbergh and the girls had studiously copied out the various "Directions to

Correspondents" which are inserted in the magazines as a guide to would be contributors, and these directions I carefully carried out. I enclosed the required "stamped envelopes," and directed them to myself (which at first seemed to me to resemble somewhat Mr. Toota's memorable proceeding) in a large bold hand. But my contributions came back to me with a marvellous persistency. Sometimes an editor condescended to notice them; sometimes he enclosed a printed form, which stated that he "returned the enclosed MSS. with thanks"; but as often as not the stories came back unaccompanied by any letter. These reverses would have quite satisfied me that "light literature" was not my forté had it only depended on myself. But the Drisbergh Family Council was behind me, alas! and when a story came back they complacently observed, "Well! you must send it to another magazine," pointing out truly enough, that the requirements of all journals are not alike, that what does not suit one might suit another, &c. Thus at the end of twelve months I had as many stories in circulation. (I use that term advisedly, for were not my stories "going the rounds" of the publishers?) No sooner did one come back than off it went again by the next post elsewhere; and the very process of doing up, and undoing the parcels, weighing, stamping, and addressing them was in itself no mean labour.

But this was not all.

At first, when only a limited number had been written, I could "carry in my head" the magazines to which I had despatched the particular articles, but, after a while when the bantlings of my brain had attained double figures, I found that I was in danger of sending the same story twice to one editor, which, in fact, did happen to me once. Under the circumstances, I devised a plan which at least preserved me from making such a mistake again. I bought a ledger which I had ruled and "headed" as follows:—

When sent and To Whom	*When Received Back*	*Remarks (if any)*

In the middle of the page, just over the word, "back," I would write in red ink the name of the story to the use of which that particular page was dedicated, and I blush to admit that some of the stories had very soon to be "carried forward" over several pages.

With this ledger under my arm, I used to go to the Drisberghs of a Thursday, who would go through it with never-failing punctuality, and whose first question now was, "How many have come back this week?" Then we used to hold that infernal council, and the "Remarks (if any)" column of the ledger used to be eagerly scanned by the family in the hope that some faint glimmer

of encouragement might be derived from the answers of editors, which were duly chronicled under that head. There you might read that "Just His Luck" was utterly unsuitable for our columns, that "your plot is a great deal too involved, and your story much too long and wearisome;" that "Born to Glory" is not of a character to suit our requirements and a hundred other items of useful but unpalatable criticism. But, after all, it was from "Remarks (if any)" that Mrs. Drisbergh derived the piece of information which was to ruin me.

I had just executed my long-standing promise (I had been married fifteen months), and had taken the whole family to Bath— a place to which I had (between ourselves) frequently consigned them in the interim. On my return to town there was quite a heap of parcels for me, about half of them being accompanied by letters. With a sigh, I proceeded to enter them up in the ledger, and had duly "noted" three or four when I came across a letter which differed so much from the rest that it arrested my attention. An editor, in returning "A Seaside Idyll," "ventured to give me some advice." He pointed out that once a fortnight for twelve months he had been receiving stories from me, all of which he had returned, and suggested that, unless I struck out in a new direction, I should cease sending to him. "You seem to have got into one groove," so the letter ran, "and, in my opinion, a very bad one. Your stories deal with one phase of life only— the mawkish sentimental; your characters are too superficially sketched, your dialogues are wearisome, your situations not dramatic. I would suggest to you the advisability of having your plot very clearly defined in your mind before you start writing, and that you should try something totally different from your previous efforts. For love stories you have no talent. Why not try the sensational?"

There was to be an "extraordinary meeting" that night in honour of our return, and, with my wife on one arm and the infernal ledger— I have not read it, but I have my own idea as to why Dante called his chief work the *Inferno*— under the other, I walked over to the Drisberghs. You can have no idea of the depressing effect of those "Council nights." I used to feel as miserable as a body at an inquest while it was being "eat upon" by that delightful family. Everyone felt that they had a right to have "a dig" at me. Even Norman, whom I had endeavoured to propitiate by sundry tips, one night produced what he termed "A design for a bust of John Smith, Esq., to be erected in Westminster Abbey," and which, if it was like me, also bore a suspicious resemblance to the ordinary donkey of commerce.

The letter I have quoted immediately caught Mrs. Drisbergh's eagle eye. The last sentence especially engaged her attention.

"Why not try the sensational?" she repeated, looking at me over her glasses. "I understand that it is Mr. Wenham Lake, the distinguished novelist,

who edits *The Cornucopia*. His advice is surely worth following, and you will not be foolish enough to disregard it."

I need not say that the result of the sitting was that I promised to bring a sketch of a story for the ordinary meeting on Thursday. That evening I went to bed, as always came about when I had passed the evening at my mother-in-law's, with a bleeding heart, which, perhaps, after all, was the proper condition for a man who was resolved to commit murder.

"To commit murder!" you exclaim.

Yes! But not the crime which you would naturally impute to me, namely, the dissolution of Mrs. Drisbergh. The deed I planned that night was but another offspring of my brain. My murder was to be done on paper.

I submitted the plot at the next meeting.

Maud Poynings is a sad flirt, and at the opening of the story is engaged to the Rev. John Jones. The wedding day is fixed, "the wedding clothes provided," when Maud evinces a preference for a recently made acquaintance, Plantagenet Volauvent, a captain in the Guards. Maud is up to the requirements of the situation, and stabs the Rev. John Jones to death in the lonely dell by the cross roads. Captain Volauvent, deeply as he loves Maud, turns away from her now, having an inkling that she is guilty of poor Jones's death, he swears a terrible oath that he will leave no stone unturned to unmask the murderer, though, naturally, he reserves to himself the right to marry the queen of his soul if he proves her innocent. Piece after piece of evidence turns up to prove Maud's guilt, and just when disclosure is imminent she commits suicide. Of course, Volauvent's life is blasted, and so he states, looking very thin in his black clothes, in a soliloquy with which the tale ends. It is called, "Once I Loved a Maiden Fair," after a charming ballad, which my wife sings admirably.

The idea was received with rapture, and so imbued was I with it that I dashed off four chapters (it was to be in nine; before the next Thursday arrived. For once I bent my steps towards the Drisberghs with some pleasure. I had received three stories back that very morning, which fact was recorded in the ledger under my arm (Vol. II. this was!) but I felt that Mrs. Drisbergh's comments would be less bitter when she knew the progress that I had made with the new tale. I had just got to the point where the Rev. Jones has to disappear. In order to make his death the more lamented, and "to heighten the agony" of the situation, I had lavished all the praise my pen was capable of on Maud's victim, and had endowed him with the characteristics of Raleigh, Bayard, and goodness knows whom besides. So I read what I had written with some confidence, which rose as I heard Mrs. Drisbergh comment favourably from time to time under her breath on the way I had performed my task.

When I had finished I was greeted with applause and congratulation on all sides. It was admitted by all that I had been especially happy in my pourtrayal of the poor little curate. Nothing could be better.

It was then that Norman made a most unfortunate remark.

"Oh! what's the good of him being interesting? He's to be killed in the next chapter."

The fact was, of course, true enough, but Mrs. Drisbergh and her daughters had been so engrossed in what I had written that for the moment they had forgotten it. No sooner had Norman pointed it out, however, than they were unanimous that the death of Mr. Jones would be a serious mistake. It was in vain that I protested that his murder was the pivot on which the whole story turned; that Mr. Wenham Lake's advice should certainly be followed; that they were urging me to failure. I was met by the simple statement that Mr. Jones was so well drawn that it would be a shame to remove him from the scene so early in the story. It was suggested "Couldn't I kill somebody else?" When I pointed out that if I killed Maud I should have no heroine, and that if I killed Volauvent it would be impossible to find a motive for the crime, I was only met by an opinion that anyone's death was preferable to Jones's.

Now I had stood a great deal in that house and had borne it like a man, but somehow that night— to my subsequent grief and sorrow— I asserted myself. Notwithstanding Mrs. Drisbergh's indignant comment that "It was simply brutal," I determined to carry out the story on its original lines. I received but a cold shake of the hand when I left, and the usual "We shall see you, of course, next Thursday," was omitted. I saw that my poor little wife had tears in her eyes as we walked home, and that she held down her head, which certainly made me feel somewhat a brute. However, like the fine little woman she is, just as she was going to bed she put her dear arms round my neck, and, as she kissed me, hoped my story would turn out well. "You know," she faltered, "that mamma's suggestion is meant for your own good." How I have regretted since not taking it!

Ten days afterwards the story was finished, and my wife, who happened to be in the study, not only entered it herself in the ledger, but did up the parcel with her own neat little fingers. Not only that; she ran up stairs and put on her bonnet, insisted on accompanying me to the post, and would not let the precious parcel out of her own hands. "Oh! Mr. Wenham Lake," she said, as she looked at the MSS.— it was to be sent to that literary light— "Oh! Mr. Wenham Lake! be kind to us, and deal tenderly with our little story!" and I could have kissed away the tear which stood in my darling's eye, though it was in the street and broad daylight, for the kind heart which prompted the speech.

I could not believe my eyes! My hands trembled so that I could hardly read the lines before me! I felt cold all over, and, my knees giving way, I sank into my chair as if I had been shot! By a quick revulsion of feeling the blood rushed back into my face, and, with a hysterical laugh, I dashed out of the room, and, snatching up my hat, rushed along the street to the Drisberghs. I knew my wife was there (she had gone there to patch up the unfortunate misunderstanding which had arisen in connexion with the late Mr. Jones), and though I would have preferred to tell her the news when by ourselves, I felt incapable of keeping it for a minute longer to myself. The door was no sooner opened than I ran across the hall, and dashed up the stairs. I burst into Mrs. Drisbergh's drawingroom, to the utter amazement of that lady, who happened to be seated there with her entire family, and, with an inarticulate gasp, sank into an arm-chair.

Mrs. Drisbergh, waving her daughters majestically back, took the letter which I held out to her from my hand. Even she, Roman matron though she is, changed colour. Her voice, too, faltered when she spoke.

"This is, indeed, news!" she said at last. "My dears! John's last story has been accepted by *The Cornucopia*, and will appear shortly."

My wife threw herself into my arms. She only said, "You dear, dear, old John," but the simple words were more eloquent than any Demoethenes could have found.

That, gentle reader, was my first murder, and though I have committed scores since the only one that has ever appeared in print I have long since used-up, I may say, all the crimes. I have poisoned, shot, and drowned men, women, and children. I have committed bigamy. I have been divorced, I have married my deceased wife's sister, I have robbed the widow and the fatherless. But all to no purpose. Editors and publishers are blind to my merits.

Thanks to my first success Mrs. Drisbergh has implicit faith in my literary future, and, though I cannot get anything accepted by the editors, confidently asserts that I shall yet lie in Westminster Abbey. And as I am utterly under her thumb and my dear wife is as sanguine as ever, I still grind, grind, grind away at my desk, and have just bought a new ledger, on the back of which, in gilt letters is the number VII. Though I hate the work, and it is a perfect holiday if I am laid up in bed with the gout (which I have contracted, thanks to Mrs. Drisbergh's infernal Amontillado), I can blame on one but myself. I am forced to admit that it was in face of the representations of the whole Drisbergh family that I committed "My First Murder."

16: The Hard-Boiled Egg

Ellis Parker Butler

1869-1937

The Red Book Magazine, May 1913

The story which introduced Philo Gubb, "the foremost deteckative of Riverbank, Iowa." The stories original title was simply "Philo Gubb".

WALKING CLOSE along the wall, to avoid the creaking floor boards, Philo Gubb, paper-hanger and student of the Rising Sun Detective Agency's Correspondence School of Detecting, tiptoed to the door of the bedroom he shared with the mysterious Mr. Critz. In appearance Mr. Gubb was tall and gaunt, reminding one of a modern Don Quixote or a human flamingo; by nature Mr. Gubb was the gentlest and most simple-minded of men. Now, bending his long, angular body almost double, he placed his eye to a crack in the door panel and stared into the room. Within, just out of the limited area of Mr. Gubb's vision, Roscoe Critz paused in his work and listened carefully. He heard the sharp whistle of Mr. Gubb's breath as it cut against the sharp edge of the crack in the panel, and he knew he was being spied upon. He placed his chubby hands on his knees and smiled at the door, while a red flush of triumph spread over his face.

Through the crack in the door Mr. Gubb could see the top of the washstand beside which Mr. Critz was sitting, but he could not see Mr. Critz. As he stared, however, he saw a plump hand appear and pick up, one by one, the articles lying on the washstand. They were: First, seven or eight half shells of English walnuts; second, a rubber shoe heel out of which a piece had been cut; third, a small rubber ball no larger than a pea; fourth, a paper-bound book; and lastly, a large and glittering brick of yellow gold. As the hand withdrew the golden brick, Mr. Gubb pressed his face closer against the door in his effort to see more, and suddenly the door flew open and Mr. Gubb sprawled on his hands and knees on the worn carpet of the bedroom.

"There, now!" said Mr. Critz. "There, now! Serves you right. Hope you hurt chuself!"

Mr. Gubb arose slowly, like a giraffe, and brushed his knees.

"Why?" he asked.

"Snoopin' an' sneakin' like that!" said Mr. Critz crossly. "Scarin' me to fits, a'most. How'd I know who 'twas? If you want to come in, why don't you come right in, 'stead of snoopin' an' sneakin' an' fallin' in that way?"

As he talked, Mr. Critz replaced the shells and the rubber heel and the rubber pea and the gold-brick on the washstand. He was a plump little man

with a shiny bald head and a white goatee. As he talked, he bent his head down, so that he might look above the glasses of his spectacles; and in spite of his pretended anger he looked like nothing so much as a kindly, benevolent old gentleman— the sort of old gentleman that keeps a small store in a small village and sells writing-paper that smells of soap, and candy sticks out of a glass jar with a glass cover.

"How'd I know but what you was a detective?" he asked, in a gentler tone.

"I am," said Mr. Gubb soberly, seating himself on one of the two beds. "I'm putty near a deteckative, as you might say."

"Ding it all!" said Mr. Critz. "Now I got to go and hunt another room. I can't room with no detective."

"Well, now, Mr. Critz," said Mr. Gubb, "I don't want you should feel that way."

"Knowin' you are a detective makes me all nervous," complained Mr. Critz; "and a man in my business has to have a steady hand, don't he?"

"You ain't told me what your business is," said Mr. Gubb.

"You needn't pretend you don't know," said Mr. Critz. "Any detective that saw that stuff on the washstand would know."

"Well, of course," said Mr. Gubb, "I ain't a full deteckative yet. You can't look for me to guess things as quick as a full deteckative would. Of course that brick sort of looks like a gold-brick—"

"It *is* a gold-brick," said Mr. Critz.

"Yes," said Mr. Gubb. "But— I don't mean no offense, Mr. Critz— from the way you look— I sort of thought— well, that it was a gold-brick you'd bought."

Mr. Critz turned very red.

"Well, what if I did buy it?" he said. "That ain't any reason I can't sell it, is it? Just because a man buys eggs once— or twice— ain't any reason he shouldn't go into the business of egg-selling, is it? Just because I've bought one or two gold-bricks in my day ain't any reason I shouldn't go to sellin' 'em, is it?"

Mr. Gubb stared at Mr. Critz with unconcealed surprise.

"You ain't,— you ain't a con' man, are you, Mr. Critz?" he asked.

"If I ain't yet, that's no sign I ain't goin' to be," said Mr. Critz firmly. "One man has as good a right to try his hand at it as another, especially when a man has had my experience in it. Mr. Gubb, there ain't hardly a con' game I ain't been conned with. I been confidenced long enough; from now on I'm goin' to confidence other folks. That's what I'm goin' to do; and I won't be bothered by no detective livin' in the same room with me. Detectives and con' men don't mix noways! No, sir!"

"Well, sir," said Mr. Gubb, "I can see the sense of that. But you don't need to move right away. I don't aim to start in deteckating in earnest for a couple

of months yet. I got a couple of jobs of paper-hanging and decorating to finish up, and I can't start in sleuthing until I get my star, anyway. And I don't get my star until I get one more lesson, and learn it, and send in the examination paper, and five dollars extra for the diploma. Then I'm goin' at it as a reg'lar business. It's a good business. Every day there's more crooks— excuse me, I didn't mean to say that."

"That's all right," said Mr. Critz kindly. "Call a spade a spade. If I ain't a crook yet, I hope to be soon."

"I didn't know how you'd feel about it," explained Mr. Gubb. "Tactfulness is strongly advised into the lessons of the Rising Sun Deteckative Agency Correspondence School of Deteckating—"

"Slocum, Ohio?" asked Mr. Critz quickly. "You didn't see the ad. in the 'Hearthstone and Farmside,' did you?"

"Yes, Slocum, Ohio," said Mr. Gubb, "and that is the paper I saw the ad. into; 'Big Money in Deteckating. Be a Sleuth. We can make you the equal of Sherlock Holmes in twelve lessons.' Why?"

"Well, sir," said Mr. Critz, "that's funny. That ad. was right atop of the one I saw, and I studied quite considerable before I could make up my mind whether 'twould be best for me to be a detective and go out and get square with the fellers that sold me gold-bricks and things by putting them in jail, or to even things up by sending for this book that was advertised right under the 'Rising Sun Correspondence School.' How come I settled to do as I done was that I had a sort of stock to start with, with a fust-class gold-brick, and some green goods I'd bought; and this book only cost a quatter of a dollar. And she's a hummer for a quatter of a dollar! A hummer!"

He pulled the paper-covered book from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Gubb. The title of the book was "The Complete Con' Man, by the King of the Grafters. Price 25 cents."

"That there book," said Mr. Critz proudly, as if he himself had written it, "tells everything a man need to know to work every con' game there is. Once I get it by heart, I won't be afraid to try any of them. Of course, I got to start in small. I can't hope to pull off a wire-tapping game right at the start, because that has to have a gang. You don't know anybody you could recommend for a gang, do you?"

"Not right offhand," said Mr. Gubb thoughtfully.

"If you wasn't goin' into the detective business," said Mr. Critz, "you'd be just the feller for me. You look sort of honest and not as if you was too bright, and that counts a lot. Even in this here simple little shell game I got to have a podner. I got to have a podner I can trust, so I can let him look like he was winnin' money off of me. You see," he explained, moving to the washstand,

"this shell game is easy enough when you know how. I put three shells down like this, on a stand, and I put the little rubber pea on the stand, and then I take up the three shells like this, two in one hand and one in the other, and I wave 'em around over the pea, and maybe push the pea around a little, and I say, 'Come on! Come on! The hand is quicker than the eye!' And all of a suddent I put the shells down, and you think the pea is under one of them, like that—"

"I don't think the pea is under one of 'em," said Mr. Gubb. "I seen it roll onto the floor."

"It did roll onto the floor that time," said Mr. Critz apologetically. "It most generally does for me, yet. I ain't got it down to perfection yet. This is the way it ought to work— oh, pshaw! there she goes onto the floor again! Went under the bed that time. Here she is! Now, the way she ought to work is— there she goes again!"

"You got to practice that game a lot before you try it onto folks in public, Mr. Critz," said Mr. Gubb seriously.

"Don't I know that?" said Mr. Critz rather impatiently. "Same as you've got to practice snoopin', Mr. Gubb. Maybe you thought I didn't know you was snoopin' after me wherever I went last night."

"Did you?" asked Mr. Gubb, with surprise plainly written on his face.

"I seen you every moment from nine P.M. till eleven!" said Mr. Critz. "I didn't like it, neither."

"I didn't think to annoy you," apologized Mr. Gubb. "I was practicin' Lesson Four. You wasn't supposed to know I was there at all."

"Well, I don't like it," said Mr. Critz. "'Twas all right last night, for I didn't have nothin' important on hand, but if I'd been workin' up a con' game, the feller I was after would have thought it mighty strange to see a man follerin' me everywhere like that. If you went about it quiet and unobtrusive, I wouldn't mind; but if I'd had a customer on hand and he'd seen you it would make him nervous. He'd think there was a— a crazy man follerin' us."

"I was just practicin'," apologized Mr. Gubb. "It won't be so bad when I get the hang of it. We all got to be beginners sometime."

"I guess so," said Mr. Critz, rearranging the shells and the little rubber pea. "Well, I put the pea down like this, and I dare you to bet which shell she's goin' to be under, and you don't bet, see? So I put the shells down, and you're willin' to bet you see me put the first shell over the pea like this. So you keep your eye on that shell, and I move the shells around like this—"

"She's under the same shell," said Mr. Gubb.

"Well, yes, she *is*," said Mr. Critz placidly, "but she hadn't ought to be. By rights she ought to sort of ooze out from under whilst I'm movin' the shells

around, and I'd ought to sort of catch her in between my fingers and hold her there so you don't see her. Then when you say which shell she's under, she ain't under any shell; she's between my fingers. So when you put down your money I tell you to pick up that shell and there ain't anything under it. And before you can pick up the other shells I pick one up, and let the pea fall on the stand like it had been under that shell all the time. That's the game, only up to now I ain't got the hang of it. She won't ooze out from under, and she won't stick between my fingers, and when she does stick, she won't drop at the right time."

"Except for that, you've got her all right, have you?" asked Mr. Gubb.

"Except for that," said Mr. Critz; "and I'd have that, only my fingers are stubby."

"What was it you thought of having me do if I wasn't a deteckative?" asked Mr. Gubb.

"The work you'd have to do would be capping work," said Mr. Critz. "Capper— that's the professional name for it. You'd guess which shell the ball was under—"

"That would be easy, the way you do it now," said Mr. Gubb.

"I told you I'd got to learn it better, didn't I?" asked Mr. Critz impatiently. "You'd be capper, and you'd guess which shell the pea was under. No matter which you guessed, I'd leave it under that one, so'd you'd win, and you'd win ten dollars every time you bet— but not for keeps. That's why I've got to have an honest capper."

"I can see that," said Mr. Gubb; "but what's the use lettin' me win it if I've got to bring it back?"

"That starts the boobs bettin'," said Mr. Critz. "The boobs see how you look to be winnin', and they want to win too. But they don't. When they bet, I win."

"That ain't a square game," said Mr. Gubb seriously, "is it?"

"A crook ain't expected to be square," said Mr. Critz. "It stands to reason, if a crook wants to be a crook, he's got to be crooked, ain't he?"

"Yes, of course," said Mr. Gubb. "I hadn't looked at it that way."

"As far as I can see," said Mr. Critz, "the more I know how a detective acts, the better off I'll be when I start in doin' real business. Ain't that so? I guess, till I get the hang of things better, I'll stay right here."

"I'm glad to hear you say so, Mr. Critz," said Mr. Gubb with relief. "I like you, and I like your looks, and there's no tellin' who I might get for a roommate next time. I might get some one that wasn't honest."

So it was agreed, and Mr. Critz stood over the washstand and manipulated the little rubber pea and the three shells, while Mr. Gubb sat on the edge of

the bed and studied Lesson Eleven of the "Rising Sun Detective Agency's Correspondence School of Detecting."

When, presently, Mr. Critz learned to work the little pea neatly, he urged Mr. Gubb to take the part of capper, and each time Mr. Gubb won he gave him a five-dollar bill. Then Mr. Gubb posed as a "boob" and Mr. Critz won all the money back again, beaming over his spectacle rims, and chuckling again and again until he burst into a fit of coughing that made him red in the face, and did not cease until he had taken a big drink of water out of the wash-pitcher. Never had he seemed more like a kindly old gentleman from behind the candy counter of a small village. He hung over the washstand, manipulating the little rubber pea as if fascinated.

"Ain't it curyus how a feller catches onto a thing like that all to once?" he said after a while. "If it hadn't been that I was so anxious, I might have fooled with that for weeks and weeks and not got anywheres with it. I do wisht you could be my capper a while anyway, until I could get one."

"I need all my time to study," said Mr. Gubb. "It ain't easy to learn deteckating by mail."

"Pshaw, now!" said Mr. Critz. "I'm real sorry! Maybe if I was to pay you for your time and trouble five dollars a night? How say?"

Mr. Gubb considered. "Well, I dunno!" he said slowly. "I sort of hate to take money for doin' a favor like that."

"Now, there ain't no need to feel that way," said Mr. Critz. "Your time's wuth somethin' to me— it's wuth a lot to me to get the hang of this gold-brick game. Once I get the hang of it, it won't be no trouble for me to sell gold-bricks like this one for all the way from a thousand dollars up. I paid fifteen hundred for this one myself, and got it cheap. That's a good profit, for this brick ain't wuth a cent over one hundred dollars, and I know, for I took it to the bank after I bought it, and that's what they was willin' to pay me for it. So it's easy wuth a few dollars for me to have help whilst I'm learnin'. I can easy afford to pay you a few dollars, and to pay a friend of yours the same."

"Well, now," said Mr. Gubb, "I don't know but what I might as well make a little that way as any other. I got a friend—" He stopped short. "You don't aim to *sell* the gold-brick to him, do you?"

Mr. Critz's eyes opened wide behind their spectacles.

"Land's sakes, no!" he said.

"Well, I got a friend may be willing to help out," said Mr. Gubb. "What'd he have to do?"

"You or him," said Mr. Critz, "would be the 'come-on,' and pretend to buy the brick. And you or him would pretend to help me to sell it. Maybe you

better have the brick, because you can look stupid, and the feller that's got the brick has got to look that."

"I can look anyway a'most," said Mr. Gubb with pride.

"Do tell!" said Mr. Critz, and so it was arranged that the first rehearsal of the gold-brick game should take place the next evening, but as Mr. Gubb turned away Mr. Critz deftly slipped something into the student detective's coat pocket.

It was toward noon the next day that Mr. Critz, peering over his spectacles and avoiding as best he could the pails of paste, entered the parlor of the vacant house where Mr. Gubb was at work.

"I just come around," said Mr. Critz, rather reluctantly, "to say you better not say nothing to your friend. I guess that deal's off."

"Pshaw, now!" said Mr. Gubb. "You don't mean so!"

"I don't mean nothing in the way of aspersions, you mind," said Mr. Critz with reluctance, "but I guess we better call it off. Of course, so far as I know, you are all right—"

"I don't know what you're gettin' at," said Mr. Gubb. "Why don't you say it?"

"Well, I been buncoed so often," said Mr. Critz. "Seem's like any one can get money from me any time and any way, and I got to thinkin' it over. I don't know anything about you, do I? And here I am, going to give you a gold-brick that cost me fifteen hundred dollars, and let you go out and wait until I come for it with your friend, and— well, what's to stop you from just goin' away with that brick and never comin' back?"

Mr. Gubb looked at Mr. Critz blankly.

"I've went and told my friend," he said. "He's all ready to start in."

"I hate it, to have to say it," said Mr. Critz, "but when I come to count over them bills I lent you to cap the shell game with, there was a five-dollar one short."

"I know," said Gubb, turning red. "And if you go over there to my coat, you'll find it in my pocket, all ready to hand back to you. I don't know how I come to keep it in my pocket. Must ha' missed it, when I handed you back the rest."

"Well, I had a notion it was that way," said Mr. Critz kindly. "You look like you was honest, Mr. Gubb. But a thousand-dollar gold-brick, that any bank will pay a hundred dollars for— I got to get out of this way of trustin' everybody—"

Mr. Critz was evidently distressed.

"If 'twas anybody else but you," he said with an effort, "I'd make him put up a hundred dollars to cover the cost of a brick like that whilst he had it. There! I've said it, and I guess you're mad!"

"I ain't mad," protested Mr. Gubb, "'long as you're goin' to pay me and Pete, and it's business; I ain't so set against puttin' up what the brick is worth."

Mr. Critz heaved a deep sigh of relief.

"You don't know how good that makes me feel," he said. "I was almost losin' what faith in mankind I had left."

Mr. Gubb ate his frugal evening meals at the Pie Wagon, on Willow Street, just off Main, where, by day, Pie-Wagon Pete dispensed light viands; and Pie-Wagon Pete was the friend he had invited to share Mr. Critz's generosity. The seal of secrecy had been put on Pie-Wagon Pete's lips before Mr. Gubb offered him the opportunity to accept or decline; and when Mr. Gubb stopped for his evening meal, Pie-Wagon Pete— now off duty— was waiting for him. The story of Mr. Critz and his amateur con' business had amused Pie-Wagon Pete. He could hardly believe such utter innocence existed. Perhaps he did not believe it existed, for he had come from the city, and he had had shady companions before he landed in Riverbank. He was a sharp-eyed, red-headed fellow, with a hard fist, and a scar across his face, and when Mr. Gubb had told him of Mr. Critz and his affairs, he had seen an opportunity to shear a country lamb.

"How goes it for to-night, Philo?" he asked Mr. Gubb, taking the stool next to Mr. Gubb, while the night man drew a cup of coffee.

"Quite well," said Mr. Gubb. "Everything is arranged satisfactory. I'm to be on the old house-boat by the wharf-house on the levee at nine, with *it*." He glanced at the night man's back and lowered his voice. "And Mr. Critz will bring you there."

"Nine, eh?" said Pie-Wagon. "I meet him at your room, do I?"

"You meet him at the Riverbank Hotel at eight-forty-five," said Mr. Gubb. "Like it was the real thing. I'm goin' over to my room now, and give him the money—"

"What money?" asked Pie-Wagon Pete quickly.

"Well, you see," said Mr. Gubb, "he sort of hated to trust the— trust *it* out of his hands without a deposit. It's the only one he has. So I thought I'd put up a hundred dollars. He's all right—"

"Oh, sure!" said Pie-Wagon. "A hundred dollars, eh?"

He looked at Mr. Gubb, who was eating a piece of apple pie hand-to-mouth fashion, and studied him in a new light.

"One hundred dollars, eh?" he repeated thoughtfully. "You give him a hundred-dollar deposit now and he meets you at nine, and me at eight-forty-five, and the train leaves for Chicago at eight-forty-three, halfway between the house-boat and the hotel! Say, Gubby, what does this old guy look like?"

Mr. Gubb, albeit with a tongue unused to description, delineated Mr. Critz as best he could, and as he proceeded, Pie-Wagon Pete became interested.

"Pinkish, and bald? Top of his head like a hard-boiled egg? He ain't got a scar across his face? The dickens he has! Short and plump, and a reg'lar old nice grandpa? Blue eyes? Say, did he have a coughin' spell and choke red in the face? Well, sir, for a brand-new detective, you've done well. Listen, Jim: Gubby's got the Hard-Boiled Egg!"

The night man almost dropped his cup of coffee.

"Go 'way!" he said. "Old Hard-Boiled? Himself?"

"That's right! And caught him with the goods. Say, listen, Gubby!"

For five minutes Pie-Wagon Pete talked, while Mr. Gubb sat with his mouth wide open.

"See?" said Pie-Wagon at last. "And don't you mention me at all. Don't mention no one. Just say to the Chief: 'And havin' trailed him this far, Mr. Wittaker, and arranged to have him took with the goods, it's up to you?' See? And as soon as you say that, have him send a couple of bulls with you, and if they can do it, they'll nab Old Hard-Boiled just as he takes your cash. And Old Sleuth and Sherlock Holmes won't be in it with you when to-morrow mornin's papers come out. Get it?"

Mr. Gubb got it. When he entered his bedroom, Mr. Critz was waiting for him. It was slightly after eight o'clock; perhaps eight-fifteen. Mr. Critz had what appeared to be the gold-brick neatly wrapped in newspaper, and he looked up with his kindly blue eyes. He had been reading the "Complete Con' Man," and had pushed his spectacles up on his forehead as Mr. Gubb entered.

"I done that brick up for you," he said, indicating it with his hand, "so's it wouldn't glitter whilst you was goin' through the street. If word got passed around there was a gold-brick in town, folks might sort of get suspicious-like. Nice night for goin' out, ain't it? Got a letter from my wife this aft'noon," he chuckled. "She says she hopes I'm doin' well. Sally'd have a fit if she knew what business I was goin' into. Well, time's gettin' along—"

"I brung the money," said Mr. Gubb, drawing it from his pocket.

"Don't seem hardly necess'ry, does it?" said Mr. Critz mildly. "But I s'pose it's just as well. Thankee, Mister Gubb. I'll just pile into my coat—"

Mr. Gubb had picked up the gold-brick, and now he let it fall. Once more the door flew open, but this time it opened for three stalwart policemen, whose revolvers pointed unwaveringly at Mr. Critz. The plump little man gave one glance, and put up his hands.

"All right, boys, you've got me," he said in quite another voice, and allowed them to seize his arms. He paid no attention to the police, but at Mr. Gubb, who was tearing the wrapper from what proved to be but a common vitrified paving-brick, he looked long and hard.

"Say," said Mr. Critz to Mr. Gubb, "I'm the goat. You stung *me* all right. You worked me to a finish. I thought I knew all of you from Burns down, but you're a new one to me. Who are you, anyway?"

Mr. Gubb looked up.

"Me?" he said with pride. "Why— why— I'm Gubb, the foremost deteckative of Riverbank, Iowa."

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17: Tasmanian Jim's Specialities

A. E. W. Mason

1865-1948

Collected in: *Dilemmas, 1934*

AUDREY LANE decided to become a vamp at half-past ten on the night of the first Sunday in August. The decision, surprising in an efficient secretary of an earnest Member of Parliament, can be traced back to an unwise prayer uttered a fortnight before.

Roddy Garrow had said, "God bless you, Miss," as he tripped down the staircase. That was all. But the perfunctory and professional tone of Roddy's voice, as much as the cant phrase itself, betrayed him. For half an hour Roddy had been draping himself in the murky dignity of a great criminal. A moment's relaxation when the costume was complete had stripped him bare. He was shown to be just a cadger.

"God bless you. Miss," said Roddy, and the girl wearing the eyeshade and the heavily rimmed spectacles and the holland sleeves upon her arms slammed the door of the flat with a quite startling violence. Roddy stopped and looked upwards uneasily, and with the hand which did not hold the parcel, he tilted his hat on one side and scratched his head. His story and the honest manliness with which he told it were his stock-in-trade, his special contribution to a very simple piece of roguery which in spite of its simplicity seldom failed.

"It's my business to get the necessary money," Roddy reflected, "and if there's anything wrong with the way I get it I've got to know about it."

But the story held together. It was big. It was moving. A boy in a circus; manager of the western circuit at the age of twenty-four; a bet on a horse-race and a win; other bets and losses; the profits of a season used in a desperate plunge; a bit of forgery— the big crime. The big punishment followed. None of your trumpery little sentences in the squalid court of a magistrate, but the Assizes; trumpeters, sheriffs, and a red Judge. Five years' penal servitude; freedom at the age of twenty-nine, but freedom destitute. A relapse into peddling trickeries, and at last the chance to stand upright. His little wife— had he said "little"?— he hoped not— no!— his wife had stood by him all through. She was a waitress at Dreamland, a kind of permanent fair in Margate, and if he could only meet some generous person who would give him an old dress-suit and lend him his railway money to Margate and a pound or two to pay off his lodging, she could find a place for him too. He would be free of Tasmanian Jim and his little squad of sneak-thieves. He would be able to run straight.

It was a good story Roddy assured himself. He had told it well too, without a whine or a break of the voice over the fidelity of his wife. He had three pounds of the girl's salary in his pocket, and wrapped in a brown-paper parcel an old dress-suit which she had commandeered from her employer's wardrobe. Yet at the end she had slammed the door on him. His uneasiness remained with him. He pawned the dress-suit in the Marylebone Lane for eight shillings, he extracted twenty-five pounds from a soft-hearted lady and smaller sums from others. He had a quite successful day. Yet he was troubled.

"I don't get it," he said to himself.

But he was to get it later on and in the neck. For he left behind the slammed door a highly resourceful young woman in a state of extreme exasperation. Audrey Lane never suffered fools gladly and when she had behaved like one herself, her indignation was unbounded. She flew out into the hall the moment she heard her employer's latchkey in the lock.

"Mr. Giscombe," she cried breathlessly, "I have given an old dress-suit of yours to a thief and you must stop it out of my salary."

"I can do better than that," Mr. Giscombe returned. "I'll take it out in overtime for the Brighton Conference. I have been chosen to propose a motion for the reform of our penal system."

"I can certainly help you there," said Miss Lane viciously. "We'll stiffen it up a bit."

The Annual Conference of Political Associations was going to be an affair of crowded hours. Mr. Giscombe was booked for meetings, speeches, receptions, and dinners. Thus the fortnight of preparation was heavy and Miss Lane worked overtime. But at Brighton she had her reward. Mr. Giscombe lunched with her on the Sunday in the big hotel on the sea-front.

"There will be nothing for you to look after but the routine letters," he said. "So you must take a holiday which you thoroughly deserve. You will probably find a girl friend amongst the other secretaries. So— "

He handed her a couple of envelopes with a smile.

Audrey opened the envelopes and found in them vouchers for the Grand Stand.

"You're a dear," she said vaguely, her thoughts rather aloof.

"The first three days Brighton, the second three Lewes," he explained. "The Brighton week, you know."

"Races?" cried Audrey Lane suddenly.

"Yes."

"That's it! Of course that's it," she exclaimed. "And that's Tasmanian Jim."

Mr. Giscombe was puzzled for a moment. But he prided himself on being a man of the world.

"Tasmanian Jim!" he replied. "Oh, I see. A horse."

"A pig of a horse," said Miss Lane with violence.

"You have lost money on him, I'm afraid," said Mr. Giscombe.

"No, but I have on Roddy," said Miss Lane.

"I see," Mr. Giscombe remarked. "They're both from the same stable, I suppose."

Now, no man objects to be thought a wit even if he only achieves his witticism by accident. Mr. Giscombe had not the remotest idea why Miss Lane's eyes danced and why her laugh was so hearty. But it was his doing and he rewarded her for her appreciation.

"Brighton races are not Ascot," he remarked. "There will probably be undesirable people present."

"Tough babies," said Miss Lane sedately.

"Tough, certainly, but babies only in the matter of bottles," Mr. Giscombe returned. "So I think that if during this week you take a car from the hotel and keep it to bring you back, we should reckon it under legitimate expenses."

"I said you were a darling," Miss Lane observed. She had not, but Mr. Giscombe did not correct her. It was the more attractive word of the two. He looked at his watch. In twenty minutes the Chief Organizer of his Party would arrive at the Railway Station.

"I must be off," he said, "and please, Miss Lane"— he smiled. Oh, he could talk the vernacular as naturally as anyone— "Don't put your shirt on Tasmanian Jim. He might be scratched."

"I'd willingly go without my shirt if I could do the scratching," said Miss Lane, and her fingers curved suddenly in the most illustrative fashion.

To Mr. Giscombe that morning his secretary was rather cryptic, but in fact she had never been more natural. For on the opposite side of the most expensive restaurant in Brighton sat the man who should have been waiting on trippers at Dreamland in Mr. Giscombe's old dress-suit. Roddy was elegantly clothed in pale grey, he was eating sumptuous food and between courses was consulting privately with a small, elderly, sharp man.

"Wait till Roddy catches sight of me," said Miss Lane to herself. "I shan't see him for dust."

She walked out of the restaurant and straight to the office counter in the hall. On the counter stood the Visitors' Book. Miss Lane looked down the list of arrivals— and there the names were written not as lasting but certainly as bold as brass.

Mr. James Kershaw. Hobart, Tasmania.

Mr. Roderick Garrow. London.

As she turned away she saw Roddy. He too was on his way to the Visitors' Book. Audrey Lane was in his path and she remained in his path, savouring delightedly the moment of triumph which must be hers when Roddy recognized her. But the moment never came. Audrey with her fair hair prettily waved, her shining brown eyes, her lips properly varnished, Audrey wearing a modish blue hat, a white frock and smart shoes, was not to be identified with the little pale grub of a secretary who wore an eyeshade and horn spectacles. All the return she got for standing in Roddy's way was a glad eye— or rather half a glad eye, for Roddy was bent upon serious business and not even a prepossessing young woman must interfere with that.

Audrey plumped herself down in a chair and quivered with rage. She had an impulse to seek the hotel manager and tell him about Roddy in revenge. But she would probably not be believed.

"Oh, if I could only show him,"— it was curious how exactly the American idioms expressed her moods, "— if I could only show him where he gets off!"

And her chance came that evening. She was sitting in the lounge, a novel upon her lap, a cigarette between her lips. She had chosen that particular seat because Roddy and Mr. Kershaw occupied a settee close by. Suddenly Mr. Kershaw sat up straight and touched his companion on the sleeve.

"By Jingo, if that isn't Carstairs!" he cried in a voice unnecessarily loud. "Over there! Just coming out of the dining-room."

Audrey looked as well as Roddy and her heart exulted within her. A tiny man with a wide mouth, a short chin and an air indefinably horsey was standing by the dining-room door. Now, Carstairs was the name of the leading jockey of the day, but it was more than that to Audrey. It was a key-word, a revelation. Roddy the good story-teller had ingeniously woven fact with fiction when he had melted the clasp of Audrey's purse. The big crime and the red Judge were fiction, but the squalid little swindles were taken from life— Roddy's life. If Miss Lane did not yet know where Roddy got off, she at all events knew where she was; and she settled herself in her chair like a visitor at the play.

Mr. James Kershaw's voice rose again.

"Why not ask him to play you a hundred up, my boy?" and Roddy moved obediently off.

Miss Lane asked herself for whom the little scene was staged. The young couple obviously on their honeymoon? No! The stout Hebrew on his holiday? It might be. He looked wealthy— and then she saw the intended victim, to make sure of whose arrival Roddy had been hurrying to the Visitors' Book that afternoon. An ingenuous and lonely young man was sitting within earshot, a newspaper folded at the sporting page upon his knees, a little book with a

brown-paper cover on the floor beside his chair. From the cut of his clothes, the packet of Camel cigarettes which he held in his hand and his eager, puzzled air, she classified him as one of the minor plutocrats from one of the smaller towns of America curious to learn something of the cultures and pleasures of Europe. The name of Carstairs had set him on fire. He watched Roddy pilot the little horsey man to the settee. He heard Mr. Kershaw boom:

"Yes, you two run along! I'll join you in a minute."

He saw the two wander off, and he began to shift in his seat. The American desire to make friends was fighting the tradition of the Englishman's inaccessibility. But just when he was resigning himself to his paper and his brown book, Mr. Kershaw's eyes swept round the hall, embracing the whole company with a smiling benevolence. The young man plunged, or as Audrey put it, was hooked. In a second he was at the settee.

"May I speak to you, sir?"

"Of course, my boy." Mr. Kershaw could have sat for a statue of geniality. "Sit down!" and he patted the settee at his side.

The young man sat down.

"My name's Conroy," he said. "Henry Conroy. I am from Dallas in the United States."

"Ah! Your first visit to us?"

"Yes. I know no one here at all."

"You'll make friends when you wish for them, Mr. Conroy."

"I was wondering— was that Mr. Carstairs, the famous jockey?" he asked.

Kershaw shook his head and laughed indulgently.

"Oh, no, no! Carstairs the jockey is probably sitting in the hot room of a Turkish Bath. He rides to-morrow, you know. Still, you weren't so far wrong," and Mr. Kershaw had a look of admiration in his eyes and a note of admiration in his voice. "You were very near to it, in fact. He's the jockey's brother. We'll join him if you like."

The two men got up and followed Roddy and Carstairs to the billiard-room. But before they were out of sight Mr. Kershaw stopped his new young friend and said something to him in a whisper, something serious like a warning.

A little while after they had gone, Audrey noticed that the little brown book with the paper cover was still lying upon the carpet by the side of Conroy's chair. She moved unobtrusively and picked it up. It was entitled Form at a Glance. Holding it in her hand she looked at the clock. It was half-past ten and it was precisely at half-past ten that she decided to become a vamp.

THE NEXT MORNING after the routine letters had been written and Mr. Giscombe packed off to his meeting, Miss Lane descended to the hall with

Form at a Glance in her hand. She was fortunate enough to find Mr. Conroy busy with the morning papers. She went straight up to him. She was wearing a dress of pale yellow with a big white straw hat and she looked like a summer morning. Mr. Conroy could not believe that it was breaking upon him.

"This is yours, I think," she said, with a smile. "I thought that if I didn't retrieve it for you, you'd never see it again."

"Oh, say!" Conroy exclaimed. How kind people were! "I'm ashamed to have caused you the trouble."

Audrey laughed away his apologies.

"As a matter of fact, I rather jumped at the opportunity of looking up some of those horses' records myself."

"Then you're going to the races?"

"I am."

At this point Audrey should have turned away, but she did not.

"Of course, you're with a party," said Mr. Conroy.

"I'm alone," Miss Lane replied. She told him who she was and why she would be alone.

"Look at here!" exclaimed Mr. Conroy. "Do you think— I mean— would you mind if I came up and spoke to you?"

"I shan't call for the police if you do," Audrey returned.

Heaven, it seemed, was opening for this young man.

"We might have some tea together," he said.

"If you're allowed," said Audrey coldly.

Heaven seemed to be closing. Nevertheless, at half-past four that afternoon— just after a horse at three to one on had won a race, Henry found the lonely Miss Lane in the Paddock.

"May I offer you some tea?" he asked, and Miss Lane, who was hot and bored stiff into the bargain, responded with alacrity.

Across the tea-table Mr. Conroy burst into enthusiasm.

"It's wonderful, Miss Lane. Yesterday I could have cut my throat. I landed in England three weeks ago and I've done nothing ever since but play solitaire. Now I've had the honour of meeting you— that's first, of course— and three quite charming gentlemen."

Miss Lane's lips twitched and a dimple showed in each cheek.

"By the way," she said. "I take it that you backed that horse at three to one on."

Mr. Conroy's eyes grew round with amazement at her sagacity.

"How in the wide world did you know. Miss Lane? I did. I won thirty-three shillings in your coinage. But," and after a look this way and that, he continued in a whisper, "I'm promised a big tip for to-morrow."

"I am sure you are," said Miss Lane.

"I'll tell you about it as soon as I know," he went on.

"I think I'll tell you about it first," Miss Lane said dryly.

Henry Conroy became subtle and wily, but there was never anything so obvious as his subtlety and wiliness.

"You couldn't tell me about it this evening, could you? If perhaps— you won't think it impertinent, will you— if perhaps you would dine with me?"

Miss Lane shook her head.

"I won't dine with you, Mr. Conroy, but you might dine at my table," she said. "And now I'm going back to the hotel."

Conroy found her car for her and she drove away.

Miss Lane had a cunning little black velvet frock which she reserved for what her circle called soirees. She put it on that evening and she allowed Mr. Conroy to order champagne, chiefly because Mr. Kershaw and his companions across the room were watching them with goggle-eyed dismay.

"And how do you like Tasmanian Jim?" she asked, towards the end of dinner.

Conroy stared.

"I beg your pardon."

"Mr. Kershaw I mean, of course," she explained carelessly.

"Tasmanian Jim!" young Conroy repeated. "Do you know, Miss Lane, that sounds as if he wasn't straight."

"It does and he isn't," said Miss Lane.

"But how can you know?"

"I've had some," said Miss Lane.

Conroy leaned back in his chair.

"But really— "

"Please don't look round, they are watching us."

"I won't," and young Conroy gladly leaned forward over the table, for Audrey's eyes were getting to work at the vamp business. "But I'm sure you must be mistaken."

"You're not from Dallas," Miss Lane remarked. "You're from Missouri and I'm showing you— that is, if I'm allowed," she added hastily. For she detected signs of haste across the room.

Mr. Kershaw's little wee lamb was being stolen from him, was being vamped by a yellow-haired siren. Tasmanian Jim wouldn't stand for it. He had made his plans and they mustn't be interfered with. Miss Goldilocks must pick up somebody else. Kershaw demanded his bill so that he might initial it and demanded it urgently. Miss Lane decided that that formality should be postponed at her table.

"Let's slip out on to the Parade quickly. You don't want a hat with all that hair"— Conroy had just the ordinary amount of hair, but he smoothed it with a smile— "and my wrap's on the back of my chair."

They were only just in time, but they were in time. They found a dark shelter where only the whiteness of their faces was visible. The sea was spread in front of them, placid as a lagoon; overhead the stars moved in their slow procession across a clear sky; Audrey sighed with contentment.

"That was a pleasant sound," said the young man; and Audrey was a little disturbed. She had a strong suspicion that her sigh was no part of her vamping but an honest-to-goodness sigh.

"Give me a Camel," she said, and as he held the lighted match to it, her eyes looked at him over the flame and danced.

"Let us be serious!" she said. "Here is a true account of your acquaintance with Tasmanian Jim. When he stopped you last night on the way to the billiard-room it was to warn you not to refer to the jocky at all. Carstairs was very sensitive about it, for the moment it got known he was the jockey's brother, he was surrounded by undesirable people clamouring for information."

"That's just what Kershaw did say," cried young Conroy, round-eyed with amazement.

"Of course Carstairs' real name isn't Carstairs at all," she continued. "Tasmanian Jim probably told you also that Roddy's business was to buy blood stock for Lord Derby in the Argentine, but that mustn't be mentioned either."

"That's all true," said Mr. Conroy. "But you don't know— "

"But I do know," Audrey Lane insisted. "You were warned off betting. You were told it's a mug's game. You were very reluctantly allowed to give Carstairs a five-pound note to put on a horse if he could find his brother to tip him a winner. Carstairs stayed away until a horse was three to one on. Then he returned and gave you back your fiver and one pound thirteen shillings and told you you had won it. Ground bait, Mr. Conroy."

Mr. Conroy sat without speaking. He was shaken and hurt. But he had a young man's stubborn faith in his knowledge of the world. Audrey had, however, a master stroke of an argument.

"Did you, by any chance, go into Mr. Kershaw's bedroom? she asked.

"Yes, we all went up with him and had a final drink."

"Did you notice that he had a set of silver-backed toilet things spread out rather elaborately on his dressing-table?"

"I did," cried Conroy.

"Now listen!" She explained to him how Roddy Garrow had come to tell her some of the tricks of his gang. He had to collect some money— not so very much— but enough to pay their single railway fares, their entrances into

Tattersall's Ring and a good second-hand dressing-case with solid silver fittings to inspire confidence in the hotel staff. The silver fittings were essential. They made it sure that the bill would not be presented until the end of the week.

"But at the end of the week it would still be presented," Conroy argued.

"And they would have your money to pay it with," said Audrey. She turned quickly towards him. "I take it that you have a certain amount of money which you can afford to lose."

"I have."

Audrey nodded.

"Tasmanian Jim has two specialities. One is to know what a given victim can afford to lose without squealing and to be content with just that. So he seldom gets into trouble."

Young Conroy was convinced. But he was very downcast.

"No one took me for a sucker in Dallas," he said, and he stared gloomily out over the black sea. "I suppose I go back to solitaire unless you'd let me go to the races with you to-morrow."

"But I'm not going to the races to-morrow," she returned. "I'm going to take the loveliest drive in the world. Through Arundel and across the Downs to a little old sleepy town called Midhurst, and back again in the cool of the evening."

There was quite a pause when she had ended. Audrey was conscious of disappointment. It began to look as if there was a flaw in her vamping. But at last he spoke.

"I've heard of your Arundel Castle."

He called it Arundel Castle with the accent on the run, but the accent was not more noticeable than the wistfulness in his voice. Audrey cheered up.

"Would you care to come with me?" she asked.

"Oh!" said Mr. Conroy, clasping his hands together. So he went.

THE CAR WAS descending Bury Hill on the following afternoon when Miss Lane said accusingly:

"You have something on your mind, Mr. Conroy."

Mr. Conroy grew red.

"I ought to have knocked him down," said he.

"Which one?" Miss Lane asked.

"Roddy Garrow."

Miss Lane set her lips together.

"What did he say about me?" she asked, and Conroy jumped in his seat.

"You are quick!" he exclaimed. "I didn't do a thing because I didn't want a scandal and— "

"What did he say?" Miss Lane interrupted.

"I could never tell you."

And then he told her.

"When I said to him in the lounge that I wasn't going to the races, he answered nastily. I really ought to have hit him. He said— oh, I can't repeat it— he said, 'You've fallen for the bird who tried to pick me up in the hall on Sunday.'"

Miss Lane flushed scarlet, but she only said meekly and quietly:

"Yes, I've quite a lot to thank Roddy for."

There was, besides, a question at the back of Conroy's mind, but subdued by the magic of that summer day and the wealth of gold and green through which they passed, he forgot it until they were once more in the hall of the hotel. Then he said:

"Oh, yes. I wanted to ask you. What is Tasmanian Jim's second speciality?"

Audrey Lane was startled.

"Yes...Yes..." she said. "That reminds me," and she walked straight to the Visitors' Book on the counter. She examined it and nodded her head in relief.

"It's all right so far, as the man who fell off the roof was heard to say at the sixth storey," she said, but from that moment in the intervals of revealing to the young American at Mr. Giscombe's expense the beauties of West Sussex, she kept an eye on the Visitors' Book.

"You are expecting someone," said Mr. Conroy, accusing her.

"No, something," Audrey answered; and on the afternoon of Thursday it had happened. Tasmanian Jim had changed his room. He had moved down, but not to the third floor where Conroy was lodged as she had expected, but to the fourth on which she slept herself.

For a foolish second Audrey went cold.

"You're shivering," said Harry Conroy, who stood close to her. He was Harry now and usually close to her.

Audrey lifted her head and laughed. The big motives, revenge for instance, and the big crimes, for instance murder, were not for Tasmanian Jim and his crew of sneak-thieves. They were after the money for the Saturday bill. Harry Conroy had failed them. Well, then, Tasmanian Jim's second gift must be called upon.

Audrey looked carefully for the names of the visitors upon the fourth floor and an obvious name flashed out at her.

"Mr. Joseph Amersheim."

Yes, that was the stout and prosperous man whom she had noticed in the lounge on her first night in the hotel. She had met him once or twice in the

corridor. His room was near to hers, but on the opposite and more expensive side.

"I suppose Mr. Amersheim is a regular visitor?" she said to the clerk.

The clerk smiled. He was for the moment free.

"Every summer, Miss, and every Christmas. He calls the hotel his little grey home in the west. Witty, I call it, though it isn't really in the west, if you understand me."

"Nor is it grey," said Audrey, thinking of the red bricks.

"Nor is it little," added the clerk. "But it's witty, isn't it?

"It's rich," said Audrey, "like Mr. Amersheim."

The clerk spread out his hands to indicate Mr. Amersheim's wealth. Then he added: "It's funny you should ask about him. Someone else was doing the same yesterday."

"Ah?" said Audrey, quite carelessly.

"A gentleman who has left, I think."

"Mr. Carstairs," Audrey suggested. Mr. Carstairs had left on the day before.

"I believe it was, Miss. Funny, isn't it?"

"Funny but not witty," said Audrey as she turned away.

So Mr. Amersheim was to be the victim of Tasmanian Jim's second gift, and either to-night or to-morrow night. For the Saturday bill was imminent.

At this point Miss Lane undoubtedly misbehaved. She should have warned the manager of the hotel and there is not very much to be said for her. This, perhaps. Tasmanian Jim never carried firearms and never fought. If they were caught they submitted and took their little sentences as the order of the day. The worst that could happen in Miss Lane's opinion was that Mr. Amersheim should have a fright. Against that she set the overwhelming pleasure which she herself would enjoy. There were three lovely Latin words which were so much in her mind that evening that she was afraid that unconsciously that she would speak them aloud. In flagrante delicto.

To-night or to-morrow night! Think of it! Miss Lane could think of nothing else, not even of Harry Conroy. At some time after eleven Tasmanian Jim, followed by Roddy, walked towards the lift. As the door was thrown open, he said to Roddy:

"You might have a drink in my room and we'll discuss that plan for next week."

He spoke loudly enough for the lift man and anyone near to hear him. Audrey heard him and Audrey was thrilled. Here was the prepared excuse if the pair were found late at night in the corridor. Mr. Kershaw, the conversation finished, was conducting his friend to the lift. It was to be for to-night, then. Audrey rubbed her hands together. She looked about the lounge. Mr.

Amersheim was early to bed and late to rise. He had gone up to his room an hour ago. Audrey waited for another ten minutes. Then she ascended to her floor. She did not undress. She placed a chair in position, set her door slightly ajar, arranged the telephone instrument so that it would be by her hand, switched off her light and sat down in the darkness to wait. Through the chink she looked obliquely across the passage to the door of Amersheim's room. There was only one light left burning and that at a distance. Here all was silence and shadows.

It was in the natural contrariety of things that after an hour's vigil during which nothing had happened an intense desire to sleep should steal over Audrey. Her head would fall forward, her eyelids would close and her bed called to her like a church bell. Certainly she dozed in her chair— and then was suddenly awake, wide awake. Someone was moving very quietly in the corridor. Two people. She saw their shadows on the wall and with a heart beating so noisily that she feared it would warn them, she recognized them. She heard a whisper.

"Watch!"

Then in a second Tasmanian Jim, in a dressing-gown over his pyjamas, was exercising his second gift. He was stooping at the door of Amersheim's room with his ear against the panel, holding his breath. The gift by which he had profited a score of times was that of knowing from the sound of the breathing whether the sleeper slept heavily or slept light. Snoring, according to the experience of Tasmanian Jim, meant nothing at all. Some of the noisiest snorers awoke at the creak of a wardrobe or the flutter of a blind against the frame of an open window. It was obvious in a moment or two that Tasmanian Jim was not satisfied to-night. He stood up, straightening his shoulders to relieve his back, and stooped again. He was puzzled rather than disappointed. It looked to Audrey as if he had come across some kind of respiration which he could not understand or classify. Roddy crept to his side and his movement decided Tasmanian Jim.

"We've got to," Roddy whispered.

Kershaw nodded. He took a little shining forceps of steel from the pocket of his dressing-gown and inserted it into the lock of the door. The key turned, the door swung slowly inwards. A dim light was burning within the room and shone on the side wall. For a couple of tense seconds the two men stood one behind the other ready for flight. But no sound reached Audrey at all and none reached the watchers beyond the breathing of their quarry. They slipped like shadows into the room and noiselessly closed the door behind them.

Audrey closed her door too and got busy. She telephoned to the night porter. Two men had managed to unlock Mr. Amersheim's door. She knew

them as thieves. Would the porter get the manager and the police and be very quick and very silent? Audrey slipped out of her room and past Mr. Amersheim's door. A few paces beyond it a broad hall branched off and from the hall the staircase and the lift descended. Audrey planted herself at the junction of corridor and hall. "Only over my dead body," she said to herself with a little giggle of excitement. It seemed to her that hours passed before the lift door opened, but when it did there emerged the night porter, a half-dressed manager, and a calm and hefty policeman. Audrey vamped him with a smile, laid her forefinger on her lips and led the little party on tiptoe to Mr. Amersheim's door. As they reached it, it opened. Tasmanian Jim peeped out. Audrey had a glimpse of a face convulsed with terror. For a moment, though his eyes wandered from the manager's face to the policeman and from the policeman to Audrey, he was not aware of them. Then with a little squeal he tried to close the door again. But he did not succeed.

"Now then! Now then! What's up here?" said the policeman, and suddenly they were all in the room and all silent. Most silent of all was Mr. Amersheim. For he lay in his bed with his eyes staring at the ceiling and his chin dropped.

"We never touched him, I swear," Kershaw stammered. "I knew there was something wrong when I listened outside. You can't fix it on us."

"He didn't wake up," Roddy explained in a shaking voice. Audrey had never seen terror in the raw before, and she did not like it. "I was watching him. We didn't frighten him. He never knew we were in the room. He stopped breathing and his eyes opened— oh," and his face was contorted and a spasm of sickness shook his body. "He never woke up."

That was the question. Mr. Amersheim's doctor refused to commit himself. Mr. Amersheim's heart? Yes, he might have died naturally and peacefully in his sleep. On the other hand, the shock of finding thieves in his room might very well have killed him. And in that case Roddy and Tasmanian Jim would have been guilty of manslaughter certainly and murder perhaps. The magistrates sent the prisoners to the Assizes and so Roddy and his friend came before a red Judge at last. They were acquitted on the graver charge. Audrey, who was in Court, saw the colour return to their faces as the verdict was given. They had pleaded guilty to burglary, however, and the tale of their squalid little villainies, recited by an officer of the C.I.D., bleached them again.

"Ten years' penal servitude," said the red Judge, and Roddy clutched at the rail of the dock. If he had not committed the big crime, he had got the big punishment.

"Ten years!" he repeated with a slobbering mouth. "Ten years!" Suddenly he stopped and the slobbering mouth hung open. For looking straight at him from the seat occupied a second ago by the bird who had tried to pick him up

in the lounge of the hotel, was the little grub of a secretary with the eyeshade and the hornrimmed spectacles.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Roddy as the warder tapped him on the shoulder. Even in the minor matters of expressing himself Roddy was a poor creature.

18: The House of Evil

William Le Queux

1864-1927

In: *The Crimes Club*, 1927

THE facts concerning "The Cedars," an ancient house on Richmond Green, to be sufficiently understood, must be recorded in their right sequence.

In the ordinary course of business the old-established firm of Peyton & Crow, auctioneers, valuers and estate agents of Richmond, Surrey, were, by the executors of the late Mrs. D'Arcy Haviland, given the sole agency to dispose of certain premises with their contents in that pleasant riparian town. The place was described as a most desirable freehold property situated on Richmond Green, "with characteristic features of oak floors, original panelling, and Queen Anne staircase."

According to the advertisements the charming old-world residence, entirely modernized, faced that quiet open space near the Thames just off the bustling centre of Richmond, a spot which is a backwater of suburban London, the same to-day pretty much as in the days when Anne was Queen.

Naturally such a property, together with the antique furniture and works of art which had been for more than two centuries in the ancient family of Haviland, attracted considerable notice among connoisseurs and men who, being engaged in business in the City, were anxious to purchase an old-fashioned property so near London.

On the death of the last owner, an eccentric widow, Mrs. D'Arcy Haviland, the house had been closed for nearly twenty years owing to some litigation. It was never cleaned, and the old rooms with their priceless furniture, which included several very rare Carolean chairs and a day-bed, was given over to the moths, rats, and dust. The shutters were closed, and the line garden with its big spreading cedars became overgrown, and the front garden filled with litter.

Naturally, in Richmond, all sorts of weird stories were told concerning the place. One story was to the effect that the late owner, a pleasant widow of sixty, was murdered there. It was true that she had been found dead one evening at the foot of the great old staircase, the wide oaken steps which were worn thin by the tread of generations. She was in her night attire, and as there were marks on the back of her head and her neck was broken, it was quite plain that she had met with death by accident. She had come from her room attracted by some noise, real or fancied, below, and had slipped and fallen, sustaining injuries that were at once fatal. Evidence of this was shown by the plated bedroom candlestick which lay upon the stone floor of the hall, and the half-burnt candle which was lying near by. None of the four servants had heard anything in the night, and none of the ground-floor windows were found

unfastened. But that was in 1906, and as the house had been closed ever since it was quite natural that an air of mystery had grown up around it, and that locally it was known as the house where a rich old woman was murdered.

The aspect of the old, red-brick, inartistic place was certainly mysterious. Through the years the tattered green holland blinds had been down. The ivy had overgrown half the house, the lower windows were heavily shuttered and barred, the gravel drive in front was choked with weeds and moss, the bushes had grown high, and grass and wild flowers grew on many of the window-sills. Through those years the old wrought-iron gates had always been secured by a rusty chain and padlock which nobody had been seen even to unlock.

The houses in the vicinity, all of them early Georgian residences, were well-kept and prosperous, for they were the artistic, old-fashioned homes of barristers and merchants, yet "The Cedars" remained an eyesore upon a very charming spot.

One day, however, workmen came and filed the chain which secured the gate to admit two estate agents, after which the blinds were drawn up, the rotting windows opened, and a board was next day put up announcing that this desirable property was to be sold by Peyton & Crow. Then the whole neighbourhood became instantly agog.

A curious story was, however, at once bruited abroad to the effect that on the second night of the re-opening of the long-closed house a constable, passing across the Green, saw a red, glowing object moving slowly across one of the ground-floor rooms that had been unshuttered. On investigation he found the house locked and the gate chained, for the agents had locked it up for the night and taken the key. Hence, the old untenanted place, full of dust and cobwebs, was declared by all the neighbours to be haunted.

Advertisements that the place was for sale just as it stood, with its antique contents, soon attracted a number of interested persons. Old furniture is interesting to most people, and numbers of persons, out of mere curiosity, in order to go over the house of sinister reputation, applied for orders to view.

Up and down that wonderful old oak staircase, wide and easy of tread, with its oak balustrade and hand-rail, people went daily, while the caretaker placed in charge, an old commissionaire named Donald Blair, escorted them through the sombre, time-dimmed rooms into which the wintry light struggled through the leaded panes.

It was concerning this house that a special meeting of the club was convened, to hear the report which the dark-eyed, round-faced French lawyer, Maître Jean Tessier, had brought with him from London.

With the exception of the stout Madame Léontine Van Hecke, all the members were present.

"Our friend Frazer, of Scotland Yard, is much puzzled by a very strange sequence of inexplicable events in a house at Richmond, near London," said Lucien Dubosq. "I ask our dear Maître to describe to you the facts which are put forward for the consideration of the club."

Thereupon the famous criminal lawyer adjusted his gold pince-nez and read from some typewritten pages a most weird and curious story. Certain visitors to that long-closed house had been curiously affected by some sinister influence which was utterly mysterious and inexplicable.

On the second day that orders to view "The Cedars" were given out by Messrs. Peyton & Crow, at about two o'clock in the afternoon a well-known member of the Stock Exchange named Mr. Ralph Crowher, attracted by the advertisement, went by car to Richmond Green, and attended by the commissionaire, Blair, inspected the premises. He was in excellent health, but on descending into the hall he was seized by a sudden stroke, and on being carried into his car, expired before his chauffeur could reach Kensington, where he lived. There was an autopsy, and at the inquest death was declared to have resulted from angina pectoris.

Two days later, at ten o'clock in the morning, a young clerk named Lamb, employed by Peyton & Crow, had been making a schedule of some odds and ends in an attic when, on leaving the house, he was seized by violent fits of shivering, followed by paralysis of the lower extremities. He was conveyed on a police ambulance to the Richmond Hospital, where his symptoms were found to be most mysterious. He had suddenly become delirious, and imagined he was seeing horrible and ghastly reptiles crawling over the ceiling and upon the walls. It was a fortnight before he was discharged cured.

The next curious event took place three days after the young clerk's mysterious seizure, and concerned a young man named Harold Fludyer, the nephew of a peer, who was about to marry, and whose *fiancée* was a great lover of antique furniture. The pair went to "The Cedars" with an order to view and spend two hours in the house. They were together the whole time, but suddenly, while in the dusty, neglected drawing-room, with its faded damasks and moth-eaten carpet, the young fellow complained of violent pains in his arms and legs. He sat down in an old armchair, and in pain, cried:

"Oh! my throat! Oh!— oh!"

Those were the last words he uttered, for his limbs stretched themselves out. Then, in convulsions, he fell upon the floor, while his *fiancée* screamed for help. Blair dashed into the room, and kneeling, held up his head, but two minutes later he was dead.

The Richmond Coroner and the police were now thoroughly mystified, and an account of the inquest appearing in the Press, and with some comments of the Coroner, at once aroused the public curiosity.

The Criminal Investigation Department determined to investigate, and one morning Superintendent Frazer and Chief Inspector Charman motored down to Richmond and went over the house of mystery, when, to everyone's surprise, the sinister influence, or whatever it was, made itself felt to Inspector Charman, with the result that while in one of the second floor rooms he suddenly collapsed. The police surgeon, who lived close by, was summoned, but it was twenty-four hours before he sufficiently recovered to be able to be removed to his home.

The most searching investigation had resulted in nothing tangible to account for this remarkable phenomena. One fact remarked, however, was that, though dozens of women had visited the place, not one had— as far as was known— experienced any ill-effects.

On the weird circumstances being published in the papers, no fewer than eight persons— all men— wrote stating that within a short time of visiting "The Cedars" they, too, had experienced great pain in their arms and legs, accompanied by shortness of breath, vertigo, or semi-consciousness. Each of these persons had been seen by two eminent medical men appointed by the Home Office, but the symptoms could not be identified with any of those of common diseases. All sorts of theories had been set up by amateur investigators, spiritualists and others, all of which had been dismissed by Scotland Yard. It was at this juncture that the aid of the expert investigators who composed the Crimes Club were invited to view the premises and give an opinion of the cause of the extraordinary sinister influence prevailing in the place.

When the great French criminal lawyer had finished reading the amazing statement there was a dead silence for some moments, each member seated around the table exchanging glances with his neighbour.

"A complete mystery, Messieurs," remarked the stout Baron d'Antenac. "We should, I think, endeavour to solve the problem. Scotland Yard are quite baffled, it would appear."

"Superintendent Frazer spoke to me over the telephone from London last night," the elegant Chef de la Sûreté added. "Still another tragedy occurred yesterday. Mr. Crow, of the firm of Peyton & Crow, happened to be upstairs in the house talking with a prospective purchaser when a boy telegraph messenger, who had been to deliver a message to him, descended and mounted his cycle on his way back to the post office, when he reeled and fell

off. When he was picked up life was extinct. He had been in the drawing-room, the same in which Mr. Fludyer had been so suddenly attacked!"

Gordon Latimer at once announced his readiness to assist in the investigation, and was joined by Fernande Buysse and Maurice Jacquinot, both of whom were ever on the look out for a fresh "stunt" for *Le Journal*. Next moment both the easy-going Baron and Professor Lemelletier agreed also to go to London and endeavour to unravel the mystery.

Four days later a young Frenchman, accompanied by a fair-haired young Englishman, took rooms at the Roebuck Hotel on Richmond Hill, which offered a magnificent view across the picturesque Terrace Gardens and away up the winding valley of the Thames. They were Gordon Latimer and Maurice Jacquinot, who were there to once again try for success in unravelling one of the most remarkable mysteries with which the Metropolitan Police had ever been faced. The Professor, the Baron, and Fernande Buysse had taken their quarters at the Grosvenor Hotel in London, so as to be near Scotland Yard.

The morning after their arrival was cold and wet, but at eleven o'clock Latimer and Jacquinot, with umbrellas, turned from George Street on to the Green, and by the estate agents' board recognised the big red brick, Queen Anne house, half hidden by its riot of untrimmed ivy. Beneath the porch stood Blair, the commissionaire, who had received notice of the two visitors. Inside the great, square, rather dark hall, stood the Professor, Mademoiselle Fernande, and the stout Baron in conversation. They had arrived a few moments before, therefore the door having been closed, all four proceeded to make an inspection of the lower rooms. The big dining-room, with its heavy furniture and a dozen fine old family portraits, looked gloomy and mysterious; the library, filled from floor to ceiling with heavy brown-backed tomes, had an old-fashioned geographical globe at the dirt grimed window; and the morning-room with its heavy leather furniture, and the ante-room upholstered in faded green damask, ragged and rotten, smelt damp and mouldy. In the corners huge cobwebs waved in the draught when doors were opened, and the very carpets seemed to rub away to thinness beneath one's feet.

"What a dismal place!" exclaimed the Baron, in French. "No wonder some people have experienced a creepy feeling."

"And no wonder that somebody has declared that a ghost walks across the library at night!" remarked the sprightly young Parisienne, who wore a big fur coat and close-fitting hat.

Latimer and Jacquinot made a cool and studied tour of each apartment, while the Professor scrutinised everything through his pince-nez, and the Baron stood and surveyed the rooms in general.

Presently they ascended the wide staircase, and as they did so, they were joined by Superintendent Frazer, who had that moment arrived, the tall commissionaire following.

The big old-world drawing-room, the three bay windows of which looked out upon the Green, was shabby and dirty in the morning light, the old Brussels carpet, grey and threadbare in patches, the gilt furniture, tarnished and blackened by age, the straight-backed cane chairs of the days of King Charles, the Queen Anne tables, the rusty old fire-dogs, the decaying red silk damask curtains which hung in rags, and some of the pictures, being half obscured by great black cobwebs, rendered the apartment depressing and mysterious.

Blair, pointing to an old armchair upholstered with old yellow silk damask, woven with coloured birds, said:

"Mr. Fludver was taken ill and died in that chair within six minutes."

The little knot of visitors regarded the big old chair with considerable interest. The Professor and the Baron both sat in it, and were followed by the pretty Fernande. The latter, as she sat in the chair, gazed thoughtfully around the depressing old room, with its air of a century ago, and yet the furniture of which would probably fetch record prices under the hammer.

"Tell us about the ghost," Latimer asked of the white haired old commissionaire in uniform.

"Well, sir, I don't believe in no ghosts, and yet— — " and he paused.

"Well? Have you seen anything?" inquired Fernande in her broken English.

"The night before last, Miss, just before I locked up at five o'clock, I was on my way downstairs, and passing the door of this room, I saw distinctly shining from underneath a dull red glow. I at once opened the door, but the room was in darkness. Yet I could have sworn that I had seen a funny light here, like the light of a fire!"

"You didn't investigate further?" asked the chief of the Criminal Investigation Department.

"I went round the room, Sir, but I saw nothing."

"Imagination, I should say!" remarked the Professor.

"The constable who first reported having seen the curious glow downstairs, I have myself questioned very closely, and he is convinced that he really saw something unusual," the Superintendent remarked.

The party went round the rooms on the first floor, and then by a wide spiral staircase, a continuation of the oaken one, they ascended to the bedrooms on the second floor, where, in each room, stood an old carved four-poster, hung with its original chintzes, now black with age, and in many places tattered and decayed. Like the rooms below, they were all dirty, with windows begrimed with dirt and pests, cobwebs swaying everywhere.

So far as the party could see there was nothing whatever to account for the fatal injuries, or the sudden serious indisposition, by which other unfortunate visitors had been stricken. That some unknown but deadly influence was present in that long closed house had been proved a number of times, but strangely enough, of the dozens of women who had gone in and out, not one had ever complained of any extraordinary feeling.

The party had reassembled in the dining-room when Superintendent Frazer asked Blair to leave them, and then locked the door.

Addressing them, he said slowly in English, so that all could understand:

"Now, Mademoiselle and gentleman, you have seen the house, which I have ordered to be closed to the public while you are conducting your investigations. I confess that the problem has completely baffled us. There seems no logical reason for the weird phenomena. Indeed, you will agree, I think, that there is something entirely uncanny about the whole circumstances. I hand over the inquiry unreservedly to you, well knowing the abilities of your excellent club. We have held several theories, but each has, on investigation, broken down. I am highly interested in your views, and of course if you wish for any help, I have already given orders to the sub-divisional inspector of police here in Richmond, to give you every assistance possible."

"Oh! Oh!" cried the stout Baron suddenly, as though in pain, and taking a deep breath he suddenly gasped in French: "I— I don't feel very well myself!" The others, alarmed, instantly noticed how flushed his face had suddenly become, and in a second Latimer had drawn a chair behind him, and taking his arm, sat him in it, while Lemelletier was instantly at his side asking how he felt.

"I am quite dizzy! My head seems bursting, and terrible shooting pains are going through my eyes. My legs are cold— ugh! shivering!" he said. And he huddled himself in the chair, his wide open eyes staring fixedly straight before him, while his hands clenched with the pain he suffered.

"Someone fetch some brandy— quick! A bottle!" cried the grave-faced old medico-legist, and instantly Latimer dashed out of the house to the nearest public-house. He got the bottle opened by the bar-man, and taking a syphon of soda and a tumbler, he rushed back to where the Baron sat, half-conscious, with Jacquinot and Fernande supporting him.

The Professor poured out nearly a quarter of a tumbler of neat brandy, and forced it between the Baron's lips. Then, taking a little scribbling-block from his pocket, he wrote out a prescription, and this the young Englishman took to the nearest chemist who at once made it up. A dose of this mixture was administered to the Baron every ten minutes, while the others stood aside conversing only in whispers.

They had there proof positive that any attempt to solve the uncanny mystery would be at great personal risk.

What was the secret of that fatal influence which made itself felt only upon men?

In about an hour the Baron had sufficiently recovered to be assisted into the car which had brought him, with the Professor and Fernande, from London, and the meeting broke up without anything being definitely arranged. Everybody had been alarmed and mystified beyond measure at the amazing suddenness of the Baron's attack.

Back at the Roebuck, Latimer and Jacquinot calmly discussed the situation for nearly two hours, the pair being locked in Latimer's bedroom.

"One would almost suspect the existence of some sinister kind of death-ray," remarked the young inventor of radio-television, whose discovery had made him world-famous. "Of course there is, up to the present, no such thing as a death-ray, yet I see no reason why, with the rapid development of electricity, some such device may not be demonstrated in the very near future."

"Well, my dear friend, what is your theory?" asked the popular French journalist.

"I have none. I cannot see why this mysterious unseen influence should affect some— even to death— while others are immune," he said. "What, for example, actually happened to the Baron? He was at my side the whole time. He was affected, while I felt nothing!"

"Exactly. It is all most horribly weird and uncanny. Superintendent Frazer seems to have grown apprehensive lest either one of us may be stricken with death. He warned us to be extremely careful, you will recollect," said Jacquinot.

"Personally, I think that if we are to solve the problem, we ought to have the premises entirely at our disposal," said Latimer. "Blair should be withdrawn, and the house, closed to all visitors, should be put entirely into our charge. If you agree, then we will see the estate agents regarding it."

"I entirely agree," said the young Frenchman. Hence the pair later on called upon Mr. Peyton, an affable, alert, middle-aged man in glasses, who at once expressed interest in their inquiries, and acceded to their request that no further orders to view be given, and that Blair should be withdrawn.

The young clerk, Mr. Lamb, was called, and gave his experience of the mysterious attack, his symptoms and his subsequent delirium.

"What's your opinion regarding the red glow that a constable saw one night and that Blair also saw quite recently?" asked Latimer of the estate agent.

Mr. Peyton smiled incredulously and replied: "In most cases houses that have been closed for long periods earn the reputation of harbouring shadows from the spirit world. We have had several such cases. Indeed, in these days when such interest is being taken in spiritualism, the number of houses declared to be the refuge of those from the Beyond seems to be increasing.

"Then you dismiss that?" remarked Jacquinot in English.

"Certainly I do. But of course, the evil influence present in the house is a bewildering problem. I cannot in the least account for it. Indeed, I regret that my firm have ever had anything to do with the Haviland estate."

In reply to Gordon Latimer, Mr. Peyton told them that the solicitor representing the executors was a Mr. Drage, whose offices were in Lincoln's Inn Fields. So that afternoon he and Jacquinot called upon him.

Latimer explained the reason of the visit, and how they were endeavouring to elucidate this mystery of "The Cedars," and asked the elderly, well-preserved lawyer whether they might know something of the history of the estate.

"Certainly," he replied, and calling a clerk, sent him for the papers. In a few moments the young man returned with a formidable bundle of faded and dusty documents bound with tape that had once been pink but was now grey with age.

"The estate was first placed in the hands of my grandfather in 1830," said the clean-shaven lawyer. "Our new client was a Mr. Henry D'Arcy Haviland, who also had an estate near Iver, in Buckinghamshire. From the correspondence Mr. Haviland appears to have been something of a recluse; the scion of a very ancient family who had lived since 1662 in the house at Richmond, now known as 'The Cedars,' the grounds of which were then very extensive and ran down to the Thames. He had travelled considerably, and had been in South America in the early days. He had married a Brazilian lady, but as far as I can discover, the lady either died or lived apart from him, as there is no record of her ever having been at 'The Cedars.' In 1862 Mr. Henry died, leaving the whole of his property, including 'The Cedars' and its contents, to a young cousin, Mr. D'Arcy Haviland, who married, lived there with his wife until 1906, when he died. Apparently in the last ten years of his life Haviland, who had shown great promise at Oriel, became a studious recluse, for there are people still in the neighbourhood who recollect him, dressed in the style of the 'sixties, sitting in his garden in summer, and very rarely being seen beyond the threshold of his front gate. During those years the place became dirty and neglected. He kept chickens in the basement to supply him with eggs, which seemed his staple diet, and at one time had no fewer than fourteen cats on account of the swarm of mice with which the house had become infested.

Then, when he died, litigation arose, and his wife, who was eccentric and lived apart from him, died suddenly. Then the house was closed and sealed, the key handed to Messrs. Peyton & Crow as estate agents, and for nearly twenty years nobody set foot into the place till just recently, when the state of the premises was found to be as you have seen them."

"It is little wonder that the public imagination has declared it to be inhabited by something super-natural," Latimer remarked.

"It seems to be extraordinary from all I hear!" declared Mr. Drage. "I only hope, gentlemen, that you and your friends will be successful in ferreting out the truth, and put an end for ever to this death-trap for the unwary."

During the two days that followed, Jacquinot and Latimer were in London in consultation with the Professor, the Baron, and Fernande, when, after many theories had been advanced, Latimer and the French journalist volunteered to keep night-watch inside the house of mystery in order to investigate the mysterious red glow that had been witnessed on at least two occasions. Mademoiselle Fernande was eager to accompany them, but they would not hear of it. The risk was far too great they all agreed.

The house was closed, and the keys of the padlock on the gate and that of the front door had been given them. Hence, on the following night at about nine o'clock, the pair, carrying electric torches and automatic pistols, entered the house unobserved, and drawing the ragged blinds so as not to be noticed from outside, lit a child's night-light and placed it in a saucer in the grate of the dining-room, where they produced their flasks and sandwiches, and noiselessly settled themselves down in two big old easy chairs to wait. Their movements were exactly those of two detectives whom Frazer had sent there some weeks before, and who had discovered nothing. Would the Crimes Club fare any better?

Hour after hour they kept vigil, but beyond the rattling of the windows, the howling of the winter wind, the banging of an upstairs door, and the slow rustling of a tattered silk curtain blown by the draught, nothing was heard and nothing seen. The room through the long night presented a weird, mysterious scene illuminated only by the faint little light burning in the grate, flickering ever and anon and casting strange shadows upon the ceiling. At two o'clock they emptied their flasks and ate their sandwiches, and at seven, just as day was dawning, relinquished their watch and returned to the hotel to snatch a few hours' sleep. Before doing so, however, Latimer telephoned to his friends at the Grosvenor Hotel reporting the result of their vigil.

Next night and the next went by just as uneventfully. The nights had grown colder, and not daring to have a fire, they were compelled to wrap themselves in travelling rugs to keep themselves warm.

On the fourth night Jacquinot was replaced by the Professor, who was most anxious to bear his share in watching, and as they sat together at about two o'clock, Latimer's quick ears suddenly caught a light sound, apparently out in the hall. Motioning to the Professor to keep quiet, he rose stealthily, and taking up his pistol, crept quietly and noiselessly to the door, which, with a sudden movement, he flung open.

A blood-red glow almost blinded him, and so startled was he, that an exclamation of surprise escaped him, but next second the hall was plunged in complete darkness. Snatching his flash-lamp, he turned it on, and with the Professor searched every nook and cranny. There was no place where anything could be concealed, hence, though the phenomenon of the red glow was corroborated, its origin was as complete an enigma as before.

Thus the investigators became even more puzzled. The glow which the constable had first noticed was no imagination but an actual fact! Yet the whole circumstances were entirely baffling, and it was felt that only by tireless vigilance could the mystery of the strange red glow, and with it that of the sinister influence, be discovered.

Hence night after night a ceaseless watch was kept, but all without result. At last it was decided to withdraw for a week, allow the place to be visited by prospective purchasers, and then suddenly keep further watch.

This course was adopted, but on the very first day the public, ignorant of the investigation in progress, were admitted, a retired Mincing Lane merchant named Tweedie, who had looked over the place with his wife, complained of feeling unaccountably unwell immediately he entered the drawing-room, and he sat for a whole hour in that fatal armchair before he felt sufficiently recovered from vertigo to descend and return to the station.

Therefore, once again the house of death on Richmond Green was closed, and then, after a lapse of a week, Latimer, Jacquinot, and the Professor formed a trio to watch again.

The night was cold and damp, and a heavy fog lay over the valley of the Thames, so that by midnight the Green was enveloped so thickly that it was hard to distinguish any object a yard away. Inside the house, as the three men sat facing the tiny light which shed its uncertain rays to the ceiling of the spacious room, the silence was complete. The door had been purposely left half open, and now and then strange sounds were heard, as there are in every house in the silent hours, stairs creaking, panelling cracking, or the scamper of mice overhead. The watchers made no sound, for it had been agreed not to speak. They only made signs to each other, hardly discernible in the dim light.

The old oak stairs had creaked once or twice, but they put the noise down to the expansion of the wood, which, after being depressed by the feet of

those who had last ascended, was expanding. But Latimer, seized by sudden curiosity, pointed to the door to show his intention, and rising, crept noiselessly along the wall, and then suddenly out into the hall.

Next second the sharp report of a pistol rang through the house, instantly followed by a second. A cry of pain and the exclamation, "My God!" Latimer's two companions dashed out with their torches, only to find him lying crumpled up against the panelling of the hall, while half-way up the stairs lay the body of an undersized, bearded little man with a gorilla-like face. He had been shot through the jaw in self-defence by Latimer.

The latter was still conscious.

"Don't— don't touch that hand-rail!" he managed to gasp as they found that he was wounded in the chest.

While the Professor remained, Jacquinot rushed round to the police station, where the sergeant on duty telephoned to the doctor while two constables and another sergeant hurried round to "The Cedars."

At once they identified the foreign-looking little man, who was quite dead, as having lived for years in Friars Lane, a narrow way which led from the Green to the towing-path beside the river. His name was Teddy Haviland who, though well educated, followed the calling of waterman, and whose old cronies had always understood that he was in some way connected with the Havilands who once owned "The Cedars." While the doctor, hastily summoned, examined Latimer, the others made searching investigation of the strange little man who had been shot on the stairs. At the bottom of the staircase lay a small flash-lamp across the glass of which was stuck a thin layer of red gelatine, while near by lay a small bottle, of which the brown greasy contents— which looked like furniture polish— had nearly all escaped.

The unconscious man's warning not to touch the hand-rail upon the stairs caused them to search, whereupon they at last discovered that just above the spot where the intruder had fallen the wood had been smeared with some of the greasy liquid from the bottle.

At the inquest Mr. Peyton gave evidence that as soon as the news was circulated that "The Cedars" was to be opened and sold, the eccentric old waterman called and declared to a clerk that he was the rightful owner of the place. But his claim was laughed to scorn and quickly forgotten. Whether there was any justification in the claim is not known, but the police authorities, eager to suppress the actual truth, regarded the death as that of suicide while temporarily insane, a verdict to that effect being returned.

Professor Lemelletier and Professor Boyd, the Home Office expert, were soon busy analysing the contents of the bottle, some of which was found spread upon the hand-rail of the stairs.

The fact that the dead waterman, Haviland, had told Mr. Peyton's clerk that he had lived his early life in Brazil gave the Professor a clue to the bewildering affair, and within a week he and Professor Boyd were able to make an authentic statement to Superintendent Frazer to the effect that the ugly little man, obsessed by the fact that what he rightly or wrongly considered to be his birthright was to be sold, conceived a dastardly idea of revenging himself upon those who desecrated the place by going there to inspect its antique treasures.

In South America they found he had for some years lived with a native tribe on the banks of the Amazon River, a thousand miles from its mouth, and had, from a medicine-man, learnt the secret of perhaps the only deadly poison which can be absorbed through the skin. Years before he had written down the formula, and also the various ingredients, two of which were extremely difficult to obtain in this country. He had, however, been able to get them from a herbalist in Paris, and, after infinite trouble, had mixed the deadly compound with which, from time to time, he paid secret visits to the house, and smeared the hand-rail of the stairs, with the terrible results already described.

The Professor and his colleague were able to identify the poison; the chief ingredients were the ground seeds of the *cebera odollam* mixed with those of the *carica papaya*, mercury, and several other substances which combine to make one of the most terrible and deadly poisons, yet one hardly at all known to European toxicologists.

As the hands of the innocent persons rested upon the rail on the top of the banisters they absorbed the poison, and by it were more or less affected according to the amount absorbed.

Hence the reason that no lady was attacked was rendered quite clear, because they invariably wore gloves.

To-day "The Cedars" has been renovated, pointed, restored, and refurnished, and for obvious reasons its name has been changed by its new owner.

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19: A Ghost Story

Anonymous

Queenslander, 19 July 1890

Scottish word "fou" means drunk.

THERE WAS a large party of us commercial travellers in the smoking-room of the "George." One of us had started the subject of ghosts, and we were very merry over stories of folk, fou and sober, who imagined they had seen a ghost and afterwards found their mistake. Jim Peters, however, who was the oldest man in the room, sat smoking in silence. He usually led the conversation of any company he happened to be in, and had besides a large stock of anecdotes, so that his silence was remarkable.

"Thinking over a good thing, Peters?" said some one. "You are very quiet to-night."

"I don't like your joking about the subject," said he seriously. "I once saw a real ghost."

Every eye was instantly turned on him at this announcement. Peters took a sip of toddy and proceeded to refill his pipe, remarking at the same time, "It happened a long time ago; before a lot of you fellows were born."

Our curiosity being excited, we pressed him to relate his experience.

"It was about forty years ago," he said. "I was quite a young fellow, but I held some very good commissions in the wine trade. A traveller's life was very different then: there were no railways; I did most of my journeys in a light gig. I had been up through the Highlands as far as Inverness, and was driving over to Elgin, when I saw the ghost. It was a wild night. A storm of wind and hail sprang up, and I made but slow progress. Darkness set in while I was still some miles from the town. The wind was cold and piercing, and the hail felt like drops of molten lead upon my face. I don't know that I ever was more miserable. However, I comforted myself as well as I could, and longed earnestly for John Laing's fireside. He had been a customer of my father's, who was on the road before me. I was always sure of a good order and a warm welcome from old John. Well, I say, I was heartily wishing myself at his fireside over a tumbler of toddy, when the wind lulled a little and the moon came out, and to my surprise I saw coming towards me no other than John Laing himself, accompanied by a tall, dark looking man.

" 'Why,' cried I,' are you so far from town on such a night, Mr Laing?' He did not answer but walked on and as he passed I leaned over the gig side to repeat my question. Great God! his throat seemed cut from ear to ear, and in his hand the tall man carried a razor dripping with blood! I sat spell-bound watching them, till the moon once more becoming obscured, I lost sight of them in the

darkness. The cold sweat was standing like beads on my forehead, and I shook in every limb. My horse had been strangely restless since the two appeared, and now that they were behind him, he set off for Elgin, despite the wind and rain, as if the devil were after him.

"I drove straight to John Laing's house—"

"And found your friend all safe and sound," broke in one of us with a laugh.

Peters bent forward and said solemnly, "I found that he had been got in bed that morning with his throat cut from ear to ear."

A cry of horror broke from us, but Peters, waving his hand to command silence, continued.

"The motive of the crime was clearly robbery. John Laing did not believe in banks. He had a small safe in his bedroom, in which he kept his savings. It was open and empty."

"Was the criminal never found?" asked some one.

"A stranger— a tall, dark man— had been hanging about one of the hotels for some days. He disappeared at the time of the murder without paying his bill, but all efforts to find him failed. I waited for poor Laing's funeral, and then made my way southward. When I went to square up I found that the firm from whom I held my best commissions had taken on a partner, and as he was to travel, I was no longer required. The others I held were not much to depend on, so I looked about, and at last got a start from a large grain and flour merchant. I had to cover the south of Scotland, and so far into England as Newcastle. On my first journey to the latter place I put up at the 'Piercy Arms,' a nice new hotel. I got on very well, and booked some large orders. One evening, as I was returning rather later than usual, I encountered a tall, dark-haired man in the hotel lobby. He seemed aghast at my appearance, and gesticulated wildly, saying, 'The man in the dream!' He was in such a state of terror that I looked closely and curiously at him. I felt a cold shiver come over me as I recognised him. He was the ghostly man I had seen with the blood-stained razor that fearful night. He recovered his composure long before I did, and said, with an attempt at a smile, 'I have to apologise for my rudeness. I am the landlord, Mr. Harris. I was practising for private theatricals— l hope you do not think me mad.' I tried to look as if his explanation were quite satisfactory, and declining his invitation to step into the bar-parlour, passed on to my room. I did not sleep any that night. I lay tossing in bed, trying to unravel my thoughts about the matter, but it was no use. The house seemed strangely quiet, and an eerie feeling which had hung about me since my encounter in the lobby became more and more intensified. The shutting of a door somewhere downstairs seemed to break the spell. I bounded out of bed and pulled up my blind. It was a beautiful moonlight night, almost clear enough to read by, and

to my surprise I saw the landlord, Mr. Harris, sneaking down the street, with a small black bag in his hand. My mind was instantly made up to follow him. I watched which turn he took, and, hastily dressing, followed as fast as I could. As I suspected, he went straight to the docks. The tide was almost full, and the London boat would sail in an hour. I saw him go aboard, and then looked about for a policeman. I had resolved to venture on a bold stroke. Fortunately I easily secured a constable, and telling him I wished to arrest a man for murder, he got another. When Harris saw me come aboard with the police, he turned ashy pale.

" 'I accuse this man of the murder of John Laing in Elgin,' I said.

" 'It's a lie!' he shouted in an agony of fear as the officers seized him. '

"Now that he was captured, the full responsibility of my situation flashed on me. I had absolutely no evidence against the man— nothing but my own sure conviction, the reason of which I felt sure would only be laughed at by any one else. As we walked to the Police Office the prisoner continued to glance sideways at me, and to mutter to himself. By a great effort I managed to hear, 'The man of my dream— the man of my dream.'

" 'Yes,' I said, 'the man of your dream!' He started at my repeating his words, and the policemen tightened their hold of him, thinking he meant resistence.

" 'You need not be afraid,' he said in a shaky voice, 'I won't try to escape; I'll confess all when we get in.'

And he did confess. He was the very man. He hid in Elgin after the deed was done till darkness fell, then he stole out of the town. He passed me on the road, and was terrified by my hailing him by the name of his victim and staring at him so earnestly. How I came to see my poor old friend by his side, or to see himself carrying the weapon with which he did the awful deed, no one could ever explain. I have always held that it was a vision permitted me, that I might avenge the death of my poor old friend."

"What did Harris mean by 'the man of my dreams,' said one of us, "and what became of him?"

"He was hanged at Edinburgh," replied Peters. "My saluting him by the name of his victim and staring at him so earnestly made such an impression on his mind that he constantly dreamed of me as pursuing him to hand him over to justice, as indeed I did. That's my story. You see I have good reason for not thinking ghosts a fit subject for laughter."

20: The Reporter and the Old Lady

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

The Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 8 April 1937

THE REPORTER who told me this story swears it happened to him around three o'clock yesterday afternoon— and I see no reason to disbelieve him.

He was walking from Fifth to Sixth Avenue in one of the blocks in the Forties. As he neared Sixth Avenue, he came upon a very old woman, who was holding a slip of paper in her hand and looking about in bewildered fashion. The woman was a rather pitiful figure. She was bent away over and seemed barely able to hobble with the aid of the heavy cane she was carrying. You might spot her age as anywhere from seventy to eighty. The reporter was about to pass her when she stopped him.

"Pardon me, sir," she said in a very low tone. "I wonder if you would be kind enough to help an old lady."

With a hand that was shaking visibly, she extended the slip of paper.

"I don't know where I am," she murmured. "I have the address of the people I must see. It's on this piece of paper. But on my way over from Brooklyn, I broke my glasses. It's very hard for me to see anything. Could you point out to me exactly where I am to go?"

The newspaperman looked at the slip. It carried the name of Reynolds— and the address under the name was the very house in front of which they were standing. He smiled. "You haven't far to go, madam," he told her. "This is your spot right here. Right in this house." He returned the slip of paper, tipped his hat and turned to so.

"You've been so kind," she said. "Could you help me just a little more? I was told to ring a bell under the name of Reynolds and that the door would open. I'm afraid that, without my glasses I won't be able to find the name."

The old lady seemed so frightened and apologetic that the newspaperman was touched.

"Let me take you in," he stated. "I'll be only too happy to find the proper bell for you. Take your time now. Easy."

Together they walked slowly down the three steps that led to the hall of the walk-up apartment.

"It's good of you to be so nice to an old lady," said the woman.

"Nothing at all," the reporter assured her.

He peered at the various bells in a search for the name of Reynolds. He wrinkled his brow.

"Strange," he observed. "There doesn't seem to be anybody by that—"

That was as far as he reached. The old woman had suddenly straightened. And into the newspaperman's ribs went something that he now claims was the biggest revolver he had ever seen.

The old woman spoke. But when she spoke this time it was in the voice of a very healthy man. In other words, the poor "old lady" was a male crook with a new idea.

"Make a sound, buddy," he muttered, "and you'll be making the last mistake of your life. Just hand over your money and that ring on your left hand."

The reporter did exactly as he was told. Which was just what you or I would have done, I imagine. He had $150 in his pocket, and he forked it over without a second's hesitation. The ring went the same route.

"Okay," said the crook. "I'm backing out of this hall now, and if you make a sound or stick your face out until I'm gone I'll blow your brains out. understand?"

The newspaperman was too frightened to do anything by now. And he kept his word, too. He waited fully five minutes before he ventured to move. By that time, of course, the poor "old lady" had vanished. There's nothing strange about the story. That's the way it actually occurred.

As far as I'm concerned, the only element of mystery in the thing is how any reporter happened to have $150.

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21: The Beetle-Hunter

Arthur Conan Doyle

1859-1930

The Strand Magazine June 1898

Originally "The Story of the Beetle-Hunter", but since always reprinted with the shorter title.

A CURIOUS EXPERIENCE? said the Doctor. Yes, my friends, I have had one very curious experience. I never expect to have another, for it is against all doctrines of chances that two such events would befall any one man in a single lifetime. You may believe me or not, but the thing happened exactly as I tell it.

I had just become a medical man, but I had not started in practice, and I lived in rooms in Gower Street. The street has been renumbered since then, but it was in the only house which has a bow-window, upon the left-hand side as you go down from the Metropolitan Station. A widow named Murchison kept the house at that time, and she had three medical students and one engineer as lodgers. I occupied the top room, which was the cheapest, but cheap as it was it was more than I could afford. My small resources were dwindling away, and every week it became more necessary that I should find something to do. Yet I was very unwilling to go into general practice, for my tastes were all in the direction of science, and especially of zoology, towards which I had always a strong leaning. I had almost given the fight up and resigned myself to being a medical drudge for life, when the turning-point of my struggles came in a very extraordinary way.

One morning I had picked up the Standard and was glancing over its contents. There was a complete absence of news, and I was about to toss the paper down again, when my eyes were caught by an advertisement at the head of the personal column. It was worded in this way:

"Wanted for one or more days the services of a medical man. It is essential that he should be a man of strong physique, of steady nerves, and of a resolute nature. Must be an entomologist— coleopterist preferred. Apply, in person, at 77B, Brook Street. Application must be made before twelve o'clock today."

Now, I have already said that I was devoted to zoology. Of all branches of zoology, the study of insects was the most attractive to me, and of all insects beetles were the species with which I was most familiar. Butterfly collectors are numerous, but beetles are far more varied, and more accessible in these islands than are butterflies. It was this fact which had attracted my attention to them, and I had myself made a collection which numbered some hundred varieties. As to the other requisites of the advertisement, I knew that my

nerves could be depended upon, and I had won the weight-throwing competition at the inter-hospital sports. Clearly, I was the very man for the vacancy. Within five minutes of my having read the advertisement I was in a cab and on my was to Brook Street.

As I drove, I kept turning the matter over in my head and trying to make a guess as to what sort of employment it could be which needed such curious qualifications. A strong physique, a resolute nature, a medical training, and a knowledge of beetles— what connection could there be between these various requisites? And then there was the disheartening fact that the situation was not a permanent one, but terminable from day to day, according to the terms of the advertisement. The more I pondered over it the more unintelligible did it become; but at the end of my meditations I always came back to the ground fact that, come what might, I had nothing to lose, that I was completely at the end of my resources, and that I was ready for any adventure, however desperate, which would put a few honest sovereigns into my pocket. The man fears to fail who has to pay for his failure, but there was no penalty which Fortune could exact from me. I was like the gambler with empty pockets, who is still allowed to try his luck with the others.

No. 77B, Brook Street, was one of those dingy and yet imposing houses, dun-coloured and flat-faced, with the intensely respectable and solid air which marks the Georgian builder. As I alighted from the cab, a young man came out of the door and walked swiftly down the street. In passing me, I noticed that he cast an inquisitive and somewhat malevolent glance at me, and I took the incident as a good omen, for his appearance was that of a rejected candidate, and if he resented my application it meant that the vacancy was not yet filled up. Full of hope, I ascended the broad steps and rapped with the heavy knocker.

A footman in powder and livery opened the door. Clearly I was in touch with the people of wealth and fashion.

"Yes, sir?" said the footman.

"I came in answer to—"

"Quite so, sir," said the footman. "Lord Linchmere will see you at once in the library."

Lord Linchmere! I had vaguely heard the name, but could not for the instant recall anything about him. Following the footman, I was shown into a large, book-lined room in which there was seated behind a writing-desk a small man with a pleasant, clean-shaven, mobile face, and long hair shot with grey, brushed back from his forehead. He looked me up and down with a very shrewd, penetrating glance, holding the card which the footman had given him

in his right hand. Then he smiled pleasantly, and I felt that externally at any rate I possessed the qualifications which he desired.

"You have come in answer to my advertisement, Dr. Hamilton?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you fulfil the conditions which are there laid down?"

"I believe that I do."

"You are a powerful man, or so I should judge from your appearance.

"I think that I am fairly strong."

"And resolute?"

"I believe so."

"Have you ever known what it was to be exposed to imminent danger?"

"No, I don't know that I ever have."

"But you think you would be prompt and cool at such a time?"

"I hope so."

"Well, I believe that you would. I have the more confidence in you because you do not pretend to be certain as to what you would do in a position that was new to you. My impression is that, so far as personal qualities go, you are the very man of whom I am in search. That being settled, we may pass on to the next point."

"Which is?"

"To talk to me about beetles."

I looked across to see if he was joking, but, on the contrary, he was leaning eagerly forward across his desk, and there was an expression of something like anxiety in his eyes.

"I am afraid that you do not know about beetles," he cried.

"On the contrary, sir, it is the one scientific subject about which I feel that I really do know something."

"I am overjoyed to hear it. Please talk to me about beetles."

I talked. I do not profess to have said anything original upon the subject, but I gave a short sketch of the characteristics of the beetle, and ran over the more common species, with some allusions to the specimens in my own little collection and to the article upon "Burying Beetles" which I had contributed to the *Journal of Entomological Science*.

"What! not a collector?" cried Lord Linchmere. "You don't mean that you are yourself a collector?" His eyes danced with pleasure at the thought.

"You are certainly the very man in London for my purpose. I thought that among five millions of people there must be such a man, but the difficulty is to lay one's hands upon him. I have been extraordinarily fortunate in finding you."

He rang a gong upon the table, and the footman entered.

"Ask Lady Rossiter to have the goodness to step this way," said his lordship, and a few moments later the lady was ushered into the room. She was a small, middle-aged woman, very like Lord Linchmere in appearance, with the same quick, alert features and grey-black hair. The expression of anxiety, however, which I had observed upon his face was very much more marked upon hers. Some great grief seemed to have cast its shadow over her features. As Lord Linchmere presented me she turned her face full upon me, and I was shocked to observe a half-healed scar extending for two inches over her right eyebrow. It was partly concealed by plaster, but none the less I could see that it had been a serious wound and not long inflicted.

"Dr. Hamilton is the very man for our purpose, Evelyn," said Lord Linchmere. "He is actually a collector of beetles, and he has written articles upon the subject."

"Really!" said Lady Rossiter. "Then you must have heard of my husband. Everyone who knows anything about beetles must have heard of Sir Thomas Rossiter."

For the first time a thin little ray of light began to break into the obscure business. Here, at last, was a connection between these people and beetles. Sir Thomas Rossiter— he was the greatest authority upon the subject in the world. He had made it his lifelong study, and had written a most exhaustive work upon it. I hastened to assure her that I had read and appreciated it.

"Have you met my husband?" she asked.

"No, I have not."

"But you shall," said Lord Linchmere, with decision.

The lady was standing beside the desk, and she put her hand upon his shoulder. It was obvious to me as I saw their faces together that they were brother and sister.

"Are you really prepared for this, Charles? It is noble of you, but you fill me with fears." Her voice quavered with apprehension, and he appeared to me to be equally moved, though he was making strong efforts to conceal his agitation.

"Yes, yes, dear; it is all settled, it is all decided; in fact, there is no other possible way, that I can see."

"There is one obvious way."

"No, no, Evelyn, I shall never abandon you— never. It will come right— depend upon it; it will come right, and surely it looks like the interference of Providence that so perfect an instrument should be put into our hands."

My position was embarrassing, for I felt that for the instant they had forgotten my presence. But Lord Linchmere came back suddenly to me and to my engagement.

"The business for which I want you, Dr. Hamilton, is that you should put yourself absolutely at my disposal. I wish you to come for a short journey with me, to remain always at my side, and to promise to do without question whatever I may ask you, however unreasonable it may appear to you to be."

"That is a good deal to ask," said I.

"Unfortunately I cannot put it more plainly, for I do not myself know what turn matters may take. You may be sure, however, that you will not be asked to do anything which your conscience does not approve; and I promise you that, when all is over, you will be proud to have been concerned in so good a work."

"If it ends happily," said the lady.

"Exactly; if it ends happily," his lordship repeated.

"And terms?" I asked.

"Twenty pounds a day."

I was amazed at the sum, and must have showed my surprise upon my features.

"It is a rare combination of qualities, as must have struck you when you first read the advertisement," said Lord Linchmere; "such varied gifts may well command a high return, and I do not conceal from you that your duties might be arduous or even dangerous. Besides, it is possible that one or two days may bring the matter to an end."

"Please God!" sighed his sister.

"So now, Dr. Hamilton, may I rely upon your aid?"

"Most undoubtedly," said I. "You have only to tell me what my duties are."

"Your first duty will be to return to your home. You will pack up whatever you may need for a short visit to the country. We start together from Paddington Station at 3:40 this afternoon."

"Do we go far?"

"As far as Pangbourne. Meet me at the bookstall at 3:30. I shall have the tickets. Goodbye, Dr. Hamilton! And, by the way, there are two things which I should be very glad if you would bring with you, in case you have them. One is your case for collecting beetles, and the other is a stick, and the thicker and heavier the better."

You may imagine that I had plenty to think of from the time that I left Brook Street until I set out to meet Lord Linchmere at Paddington. The whole fantastic business kept arranging and rearranging itself in kaleidoscopic forms inside my brain, until I had thought out a dozen explanations, each of them more grotesquely improbable than the last. And yet I felt that the truth must be something grotesquely improbable also. At last I gave up all attempts at finding a solution, and contented myself with exactly carrying out the

instructions which I had received. With a hand valise, specimen-case, and a loaded cane, I was waiting at the Paddington bookstall when Lord Linchmere arrived. He was an even smaller man than I had thought— frail and peaky, with a manner which was more nervous than it had been in the morning. He wore a long, thick travelling ulster, and I observed that he carried a heavy blackthorn cudgel in his hand.

"I have the tickets," said he, leading the way up the platform.

"This is our train. I have engaged a carriage, for I am particularly anxious to impress one or two things upon you while we travel down."

And yet all that he had to impress upon me might have been said in a sentence, for it was that I was to remember that I was there as a protection to himself, and that I was not on any consideration to leave him for an instant. This he repeated again and again as our journey drew to a close, with an insistence which showed that his nerves were thoroughly shaken.

"Yes," he said at last, in answer to my looks rather than to my words, "I AM nervous, Dr. Hamilton. I have always been a timid man, and my timidity depends upon my frail physical health. But my soul is firm, and I can bring myself up to face a danger which a less-nervous man might shrink from. What I am doing now is done from no compulsion, but entirely from a sense of duty, and yet it is, beyond doubt, a desperate risk. If things should go wrong, I will have some claims to the title of martyr."

This eternal reading of riddles was too much for me. I felt that I must put a term to it.

"I think it would very much better, sir, if you were to trust me entirely," said I. "It is impossible for me to act effectively, when I do not know what are the objects which we have in view, or even where we are going."

"Oh, as to where we are going, there need be no mystery about that," said he; "we are going to Delamere Court, the residence of Sir Thomas Rossiter, with whose work you are so conversant. As to the exact object of our visit, I do not know that at this stage of the proceedings anything would be gained, Dr. Hamilton, by taking you into my complete confidence. I may tell you that we are acting— I say 'we,' because my sister, Lady Rossiter, takes the same view as myself— with the one object of preventing anything in the nature of a family scandal. That being so, you can understand that I am loath to give any explanations which are not absolutely necessary. It would be a different matter, Dr. Hamilton, if I were asking your advice. As matters stand, it is only your active help which I need, and I will indicate to you from time to time how you can best give it."

There was nothing more to be said, and a poor man can put up with a good deal for twenty pounds a day, but I felt none the less that Lord Linchmere was

acting rather scurvily towards me. He wished to convert me into a passive tool, like the blackthorn in his hand. With his sensitive disposition I could imagine, however, that scandal would be abhorrent to him, and I realized that he would not take me into his confidence until no other course was open to him. I must trust to my own eyes and ears to solve the mystery, but I had every confidence that I should not trust to them in vain.

Delamere Court lies a good five miles from Pangbourne Station, and we drove for that distance in an open fly. Lord Linchmere sat in deep thought during the time, and he never opened his mouth until we were close to our destination. When he did speak it was to give me a piece of information which surprised me.

"Perhaps you are not aware," said he, "that I am a medical man like yourself?"

"No, sir, I did not know it."

"Yes, I qualified in my younger days, when there were several lives between me and the peerage. I have not had occasion to practise, but I have found it a useful education, all the same. I never regretted the years which I devoted to medical study. These are the gates of Delamere Court."

We had come to two high pillars crowned with heraldic monsters which flanked the opening of a winding avenue. Over the laurel bushes and rhododendrons, I could see a long, many-gabled mansion, girdled with ivy, and toned to the warm, cheery, mellow glow of old brick-work. My eyes were still fixed in admiration upon this delightful house when my companion plucked nervously at my sleeve.

"Here's Sir Thomas," he whispered. "Please talk beetle all you can."

A tall, thin figure, curiously angular and bony, had emerged through a gap in the hedge of laurels. In his hand he held a spud, and he wore gauntleted gardener's gloves. A broad-brimmed, grey hat cast his face into shadow, but it struck me as exceedingly austere, with an ill-nourished beard and harsh, irregular features. The fly pulled up and Lord Linchmere sprang out.

"My dear Thomas, how are you?" said he, heartily.

But the heartiness was by no means reciprocal. The owner of the grounds glared at me over his brother-in-law's shoulder, and I caught broken scraps of sentences— "well-known wishes...hatred of strangers...unjustifiable intrusion...perfectly inexcusable." Then there was a muttered explanation, and the two of them came over together to the side of the fly.

"Let me present you to Sir Thomas Rossiter, Dr. Hamilton," said Lord Linchmere. "You will find that you have a strong community of tastes."

I bowed. Sir Thomas stood very stiffly, looking at me severely from under the broad brim of his hat.

"Lord Linchmere tells me that you know something about beetles," said he. "What do you know about beetles?"

"I know what I have learned from your work upon the coleoptera, Sir Thomas," I answered.

"Give me the names of the better-known species of the British *scarabaei*," said he.

I had not expected an examination, but fortunately I was ready for one. My answers seemed to please him, for his stern features relaxed.

"You appear to have read my book with some profit, sir," said he. "It is a rare thing for me to meet anyone who takes an intelligent interest in such matters. People can find time for such trivialities as sport or society, and yet the beetles are overlooked. I can assure you that the greater part of the idiots in this part of the country are unaware that I have ever written a book at all—I, the first man who ever described the true function of the elytra. I am glad to see you, sir, and I have no doubt that I can show you some specimens which will interest you." He stepped into the fly and drove up with us to the house, expounding to me as we went some recent researches which he had made into the anatomy of the lady-bird.

I have said that Sir Thomas Rossiter wore a large hat drawn down over his brows. As he entered the hall he uncovered himself, and I was at once aware of a singular characteristic which the hat had concealed. His forehead, which was naturally high, and higher still on account of receding hair, was in a continual state of movement. Some nervous weakness kept the muscles in a constant spasm, which sometimes produced a mere twitching and sometimes a curious rotary movement unlike anything which I had ever seen before. It was strikingly visible as he turned towards us after entering the study, and seemed the more singular from the contrast with the hard, steady, grey eyes which looked out from underneath those palpitating brows.

"I am sorry," said he, "that Lady Rossiter is not here to help me to welcome you. By the way, Charles, did Evelyn say anything about the date of her return?"

"She wished to stay in town for a few more days," said Lord Linchmere. "You know how ladies' social duties accumulate if they have been for some time in the country. My sister has many old friends in London at present."

"Well, she is her own mistress, and I should not wish to alter her plans, but I shall be glad when I see her again. It is very lonely here without her company."

"I was afraid that you might find it so, and that was partly why I ran down. My young friend, Dr. Hamilton, is so much interested in the subject which you

have made your own, that I thought you would not mind his accompanying me."

"I lead a retired life, Dr. Hamilton, and my aversion to strangers grows upon me," said our host. "I have sometimes thought that my nerves are not so good as they were. My travels in search of beetles in my younger days took me into many malarious and unhealthy places. But a brother coleopterist like yourself is always a welcome guest, and I shall be delighted if you will look over my collection, which I think that I may without exaggeration describe as the best in Europe."

And so no doubt it was. He had a huge, oaken cabinet arranged in shallow drawers, and here, neatly ticketed and classified, were beetles from every corner of the earth, black, brown, blue, green, and mottled. Every now and then as he swept his hand over the lines and lines of impaled insects he would catch up some rare specimen, and, handling it with as much delicacy and reverence as if it were a precious relic, he would hold forth upon its peculiarities and the circumstances under which it came into his possession. It was evidently an unusual thing for him to meet with a sympathetic listener, and he talked and talked until the spring evening had deepened into night, and the gong announced that it was time to dress for dinner. All the time Lord Linchmere said nothing, but he stood at his brother-in-law's elbow, and I caught him continually shooting curious little, questioning glances into his face. And his own features expressed some strong emotion, apprehension, sympathy, expectation: I seemed to read them all. I was sure that Lord Linchmere was fearing something and awaiting something, but what that something might be I could not imagine.

The evening passed quietly but pleasantly, and I should have been entirely at my ease if it had not been for that continual sense of tension upon the part of Lord Linchmere. As to our host, I found that he improved upon acquaintance. He spoke constantly with affection of his absent wife, and also of his little son, who had recently been sent to school. The house, he said, was not the same without them. If it were not for his scientific studies, he did not know how he could get through the days. After dinner we smoked for some time in the billiard-room, and finally went early to bed.

And then it was that, for the first time, the suspicion that Lord Linchmere was a lunatic crossed my mind. He followed me into my bedroom, when our host had retired.

"Doctor," said he, speaking in a low, hurried voice, "you must come with me. You must spend the night in my bedroom."

"What do you mean?"

"I prefer not to explain. But this is part of your duties. My room is close by, and you can return to your own before the servant calls you in the morning."

"But why?" I asked.

"Because I am nervous of being alone," said he. "That's the reason, since you must have a reason."

It seemed rank lunacy, but the argument of those twenty pounds would overcome many objections. I followed him to his room.

"Well," said I, "there's only room for one in that bed."

"Only one shall occupy it," said he.

"And the other?"

"Must remain on watch."

"Why?" said I. "One would think you expected to be attacked."

"Perhaps I do."

"In that case, why not lock your door?"

"Perhaps I WANT to be attacked."

It looked more and more like lunacy. However, there was nothing for it but to submit. I shrugged my shoulders and sat down in the arm-chair beside the empty fireplace.

"I am to remain on watch, then?" said I, ruefully.

"We will divide the night. If you will watch until two, I will watch the remainder."

"Very good."

"Call me at two o'clock, then."

"I will do so."

"Keep your ears open, and if you hear any sounds wake me instantly—instantly, you hear?"

"You can rely upon it." I tried to look as solemn as he did.

"And for God's sake don't go to sleep," said he, and so, taking off only his coat, he threw the coverlet over him and settled down for the night.

"It was a melancholy vigil, and made more so by my own sense of its folly. Supposing that by any chance Lord Linchmere had cause to suspect that he was subject to danger in the house of Sir Thomas Rossiter, why on earth could he not lock his door and so protect himself?" His own answer that he might wish to be attacked was absurd. Why should he possibly wish to be attacked? And who would wish to attack him? Clearly, Lord Linchmere was suffering from some singular delusion, and the result was that on an imbecile pretext I was to be deprived of my night's rest. Still, however absurd, I was determined to carry out his injunctions to the letter as long as I was in his employment. I sat, therefore, beside the empty fireplace, and listened to a sonorous chiming clock somewhere down the passage which gurgled and struck every quarter of an

hour. It was an endless vigil. Save for that single clock, an absolute silence reigned throughout the great house. A small lamp stood on the table at my elbow, throwing a circle of light round my chair, but leaving the corners of the room draped in shadow. On the bed Lord Linchmere was breathing peacefully. I envied him his quiet sleep, and again and again my own eyelids drooped, but every time my sense of duty came to my help, and I sat up, rubbing my eyes and pinching myself with a determination to see my irrational watch to an end.

And I did so. From down the passage came the chimes of two o'clock, and I laid my hand upon the shoulder of the sleeper. Instantly he was sitting up, with an expression of the keenest interest upon his face.

"You have heard something?"

"No, sir. It is two o'clock."

"Very good. I will watch. You can go to sleep."

I lay down under the coverlet as he had done and was soon unconscious. My last recollection was of that circle of lamplight, and of the small, hunched-up figure and strained, anxious face of Lord Linchmere in the centre of it.

How long I slept I do not know; but I was suddenly aroused by a sharp tug at my sleeve. The room was in darkness, but a hot smell of oil told me that the lamp had only that instant been extinguished.

"Quick! Quick!" said Lord Linchmere's voice in my ear.

I sprang out of bed, he still dragging at my arm.

"Over here!" he whispered, and pulled me into a corner of the room. "Hush! Listen!"

In the silence of the night I could distinctly hear that someone was coming down the corridor. It was a stealthy step, faint and intermittent, as of a man who paused cautiously after every stride. Sometimes for half a minute there was no sound, and then came the shuffle and creak which told of a fresh advance. My companion was trembling with excitement. His hand, which still held my sleeve, twitched like a branch in the wind.

"What is it?" I whispered.

"It's he!"

"Sir Thomas?"

"Yes."

"What does he want?"

"Hush! Do nothing until I tell you."

I was conscious now that someone was trying the door. There was the faintest little rattle from the handle, and then I dimly saw a thin slit of subdued light. There was a lamp burning somewhere far down the passage, and it just sufficed to make the outside visible from the darkness of our room. The greyish slit grew broader and broader, very gradually, very gently, and then

outlined against it I saw the dark figure of a man. He was squat and crouching, with the silhouette of a bulky and misshapen dwarf. Slowly the door swung open with this ominous shape framed in the centre of it. And then, in an instant, the crouching figure shot up, there was a tiger spring across the room and thud, thud, thud, came three tremendous blows from some heavy object upon the bed.

I was so paralysed with amazement that I stood motionless and staring until I was aroused by a yell for help from my companion. The open door shed enough light for me to see the outline of things, and there was little Lord Linchmere with his arms round the neck of his brother-in-law, holding bravely on to him like a game bull-terrier with its teeth into a gaunt deerhound. The tall, bony man dashed himself about, writhing round and round to get a grip upon his assailant; but the other, clutching on from behind, still kept his hold, though his shrill, frightened cries showed how unequal he felt the contest to be. I sprang to the rescue, and the two of us managed to throw Sir Thomas to the ground, though he made his teeth meet in my shoulder. With all my youth and weight and strength, it was a desperate struggle before we could master his frenzied struggles; but at last we secured his arms with the waist-cord of the dressing-gown which he was wearing. I was holding his legs while Lord Linchmere was endeavouring to relight the lamp, when there came the pattering of many feet in the passage, and the butler and two footmen, who had been alarmed by the cries, rushed into the room. With their aid we had no further difficulty in securing our prisoner, who lay foaming and glaring upon the ground. One glance at his face was enough to prove that he was a dangerous maniac, while the short, heavy hammer which lay beside the bed showed how murderous had been his intentions.

"Do not use any violence!" said Lord Linchmere, as we raised the struggling man to his feet. "He will have a period of stupor after this excitement. I believe that it is coming on already." As he spoke the convulsions became less violent, and the madman's head fell forward upon his breast, as if he were overcome by sleep. We led him down the passage and stretched him upon his own bed, where he lay unconscious, breathing heavily.

"Two of you will watch him," said Lord Linchmere. "And now, Dr. Hamilton, if you will return with me to my room, I will give you the explanation which my horror of scandal has perhaps caused me to delay too long. Come what may, you will never have cause to regret your share in this night's work.

"The case may be made clear in a very few words," he continued, when we were alone. "My poor brother-in-law is one of the best fellows upon earth, a loving husband and an estimable father, but he comes from a stock which is deeply tainted with insanity. He has more than once had homicidal outbreaks,

which are the more painful because his inclination is always to attack the very person to whom he is most attached. His son was sent away to school to avoid this danger, and then came an attempt upon my sister, his wife, from which she escaped with injuries that you may have observed when you met her in London. You understand that he knows nothing of the matter when he is in his sound senses, and would ridicule the suggestion that he could under any circumstances injure those whom he loves so dearly. It is often, as you know, a characteristic of such maladies that it is absolutely impossible to convince the man who suffers from them of their existence.

"Our great object was, of course, to get him under restraint before he could stain his hands with blood, but the matter was full of difficulty. He is a recluse in his habits, and would not see any medical man. Besides, it was necessary for our purpose that the medical man should convince himself of his insanity; and he is sane as you or I, save on these very rare occasions. But, fortunately, before he has these attacks he always shows certain premonitory symptoms, which are providential danger-signals, warning us to be upon our guard. The chief of these is that nervous contortion of the forehead which you must have observed. This is a phenomenon which always appears from three to four days before his attacks of frenzy. The moment it showed itself his wife came into town on some pretext, and took refuge in my house in Brook Street.

"It remained for me to convince a medical man of Sir Thomas's insanity, without which it was impossible to put him where he could do no harm. The first problem was how to get a medical man into his house. I bethought me of his interest in beetles, and his love for anyone who shared his tastes. I advertised, therefore, and was fortunate enough to find in you the very man I wanted. A stout companion was necessary, for I knew that the lunacy could only be proved by a murderous assault, and I had every reason to believe that that assault would be made upon myself, since he had the warmest regard for me in his moments of sanity. I think your intelligence will supply all the rest. I did not know that the attack would come by night, but I thought it very probable, for the crises of such cases usually do occur in the early hours of the morning. I am a very nervous man myself, but I saw no other way in which I could remove this terrible danger from my sister's life. I need not ask you whether you are willing to sign the lunacy papers."

"Undoubtedly. But *two* signatures are necessary."

"You forget that I am myself a holder of a medical degree. I have the papers on a side-table here, so if you will be good enough to sign them now, we can have the patient removed in the morning."

So that was my visit to Sir Thomas Rossiter, the famous beetle-hunter, and that was also my first step upon the ladder of success, for Lady Rossiter and

Lord Linchmere have proved to be staunch friends, and they have never forgotten my association with them in the time of their need. Sir Thomas is out and said to be cured, but I still think that if I spent another night at Delamere Court, I should be inclined to lock my door upon the inside.

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