# PAST MASTERS 191

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# PAST MASTERS 191

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

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## 1: The Black Cat

***Warwick Deeping***

1877-1950

*The New Magazine* (UK) Sep 1925

LEANING AGAINST THE WALL was a tall man dressed in the dirty clothes of a coal-porter. He had a knife in one hand and a raw onion in the other, and he was cutting slices from the onion and slipping them into his mouth. His hair and beard were grey, and yet he was a youngish man who looked as though he had been frosted before his time.

Muller was emerging from the crowd when the coal-porter happened to raise his eyes, and the slice that he had cut from the onion remained poised upon the blade of the knife. His blue eyes stared. They looked like two hard circles of stone. He remained absolutely still, with the onion slice balanced upon the blade of the knife.

Muller was not conscious of the man's stare. He was moving towards the main doorway, and he disappeared into the vestibule. The man with the onion made a quick, gliding movement along the wall, and saw Muller pushing open the glass door of the office. There were a number of people strung along the counter, waiting to buy tickets or to make inquiries as to the boat-sailings, and Muller took his place at the counter, and leaning easily against it, glanced at some of the pamphlets and advertisements that were displayed there.

The man with the onion had disappeared. He was running across the road in the direction of a lorry that had unloaded a pile of cases outside one of the sheds. A group of stevedores had gathered behind the lorry; they were arguing and making a great deal of noise. A slightly-built man with melancholy eyes and a pale face was leaning against the lorry, smoking a cigarette.

The man with the onion called to him and made a sign.

"Gorouki—"

The melancholy eyes expressed surprise. He moved languidly in the direction of the coal-porter, who stood waiting with an air of suppressed fierceness.

"What's the trouble, Saratoff? Seen a ghost?"

The man with the onion uttered two words.

"Petrovsky— Ginkelstein."

They had an extraordinary effect upon Gorouki. His melancholy eyes seemed to fill with red light; his languor disappeared; the whole of him seemed to stiffen.

"What are you saying—?"

Saratoff pointed with his knife.

"Over there in the office. Sure of it. His white rubber face and red mouth. Come and look—"

They went— these two— Saratoff, tall and lined and grey, and with eyes that seemed to stare at something that was a long way off; and Gorouki, fragile and fierce and trembling— and they stood among those Mediterranean people upon the pavement, and watched the doorway of the Compagnie Transatlantique. Gorouki was shaking. Saratoff kept a hand on his arm.

"Be careful, little mouse."

Gorouki made a noise in his throat.

"Mouse! Yes; and does he still slide about like a sleek black cat? You— remember?"

The big man's fingers tightened on his arm.

"Yes; that was a filthy night. He sat there and purred. Look—!"

Muller had reappeared. He stood for a moment on the step examining a steamer ticket. He smiled as he slipped it into a wallet, and replaced the wallet in his pocket. He did not see the two men.

Saratoff was holding Gorouki by the arm.

"Quiet, Paul."

Gorouki's eyes were red.

"Lend me your knife."

Saratoff restrained him.

"Not so fast. We did not expect such luck to come to us, did we? And just to use a knife is too easy. Besides, it is my knife."

"You are afraid?"

"Hardly. Don't you remember how often we have sat and discussed what we would like to do to that evil beast? And here he is. A miracle!"

Muller, alias Petrovsky, alias Ginkelstein, was walking away along the quay in the direction of Fort St. Jean.

"We shall lose him."

"I think not. Did you not see that ticket, and the colour? Let us enjoy ourselves."

Saratoff's deliberation was far more grim than Gorouki's febrile ferocity, and as they followed Ginkelstein along the Quay de la Joliette, a light came into the tall man's grey-blue eyes. He walked with a long-limbed jauntiness, holding Gorouki above the elbow; Ginkelstein was strolling, very much at his leisure; he paused to light another cigar.

Saratoff swung his friend round and made a show of being interested in a ship lying in the Bassin.

"He will be staying at an hotel. We will follow him there. He will dine. It is possible that he will stroll out to sit at a café and to look at the women. We shall be there. But we must be very careful; we must not waste this God-sent opportunity."

"Saratoff," said the little man, "if you will lend me your knife—I will do it now."

"Not so fast. There is a time and a place for everything. Besides—why should we have to pay up? We are going to collect a debt, and no one need know about it."

They followed Ginkelstein along the Quay de la Port, and up the Cannebière to the Cours Belsunce. The imagined smell of Ginkelstein's cigar drifted back to provoke them; he was the comfortable lounger, looking in the faces of the women, or dawdling by shop windows. The two friends had to be very careful in the crowded streets, for if Saratoff and Gorouki had recognized Ginkelstein, Ginkelstein might recognize Gorouki and Saratoff.

"But it is not very likely," said the tall man. "Who would imagine us here, carrying coal and cement; two aristos— ex-officers? Our friend is more interested in the women. Have you noticed it?"

Again Gorouki made that noise in his throat.

"Yes; and on that night— it was our women, my friend. Our helpless women. And we were trussed up. I wish you would give me that knife."

"My child, that would be too easy for Ginkelstein. Does one gulp down choice wine?"

They shadowed the suave, black Bohemian figure to the Hôtel de Provence, and they saw the blue-coated concierge open the door to it. Saratoff looked up at the windows of the hotel and at the great gilded letters of its name, and then he glanced humorously at his own rough, coal-grimed hands.

"The hands of a worker, Paul! What rot! And that little fat friend of the poor has the soft hands of a parasite! What is he doing in Marseilles? Why is he going to Algiers?"

Gorouki was staring like a starved man at the hotel doorway.

"Does it matter? The only thing that matters— is— that I shall tear his throat out to-night."

Saratoff caught the little man by the arm and swung him round.

"Come, a little drink; we must get on the other side of the street. That café. Now, I want to ask you a question."

"Ask away."

"Do you like to gulp down good wine, or sit and sip it, and let it trickle down slowly?"

"I want to make sure of my wine," said the little man grimly.

"Yes, yes; so do I. But, I tell you, I mean to enjoy it."

But the procuring of the rich red wine of their revenge was not to be the simple matter that it appeared to Paul Gorouki. Here were they, a couple of exiles, common toilers in this Mediterranean port, while the notorious Ginkelstein— alias Petrovsky— alias Muller, was well sheltered behind the plunder that he— like other of his ilk— had taken care to transfer to other countries. Muller put on a starched shirt, and dined à la carte at the Hôtel de Provence, while the two exiles skulked in the street and watched the door of the hotel. They watched it in vain, for it is possible that the suave Muller preferred to remain in the hotel after dark, for Marseilles can be a wicked city.

It grew cold, for the mistral was blowing, and the two Russians were thinly clad. Gorouki began to cough, but if the wind blew through him, his eyes remained two furnaces of hate.

"I shall stay here all night."

Big Saratoff would not hear of it.

"No, my friend. Besides, the police might begin to take notice. Obviously, he is not coming out. By the way, how much money have we?"

Gorouki kept the firm's books.

"About thirty francs. Why?"

"Because we may have to go to Algiers. It would do you good, my little Paul, and the Black Cat's affairs interest me. To-morrow, he will drive straight to the quay, and go on board the General Chanzy. We too must sail on the General Chanzy. I shall have to sell that ring."

He put his arm across Gorouki's shoulders and walked him down the street, but this little hater with the melancholy eyes was loth to leave his watch upon the hotel that sheltered the murderer of children and women.

"That butcher may not be going to Algiers. He may be going to Paris, or Rome."

"I tell you I saw his ticket, and I ought to know a boat ticket when I see it. You will go to bed, and at dawn I shall be out here on the watch, while you go and raise money on the ring. It is a good thing we kept it— for some great occasion."

"It will be a very great occasion," said Gorouki with terrible simplicity.

The General Chanzy sailed from Marseilles at noon. It was a blue day with a north wind blowing gently. The golden figure of Nôtre Dame de la Garde glittered against the azure north, and upon the grey Château d'If the sun shone as though that grim island had no memories. The first-class passengers were at lunch in the saloon, and on the main deck— among the riff-raff of all colours— Saratoff and Gorouki gnawed dry bread. But the third-class passengers could

look into the windows of the saloon, though they were shut out like beggars in a street, and Saratoff peered in through one of the windows.

He beckoned to Gorouki.

Ginkelstein was at one of the tables. They saw him in profile, a napkin tucked into his collar, and a bottle of choice wine before him. They watched the movements of his jaw and of his full red lips. He was enjoying his meal; he looked sleek and complacent; his voracity was smiling and bland.

"Why does he go to Algiers?" murmured Gorouki, with eyes of fierce desire.

"We shall see. I managed to get a glimpse of his luggage. His name is Muller these days."

"And what was the address?"

"Muller— Algiers. That was all."

They had a rough passage, and both Saratoff and his friend lay about on deck with that African crowd, dolorously sick; but Mr. Muller enjoyed himself on the boat promenade. He smoked his cigars, and went in to his meals; he was like white rubber, and he had no qualms. He was as superior to sea-sickness as he had been superior to pity during the days of the terror.

At Algiers the sun shone on the white houses, and the sea was very blue, but Gorouki was the colour of a lemon, even when the General Chanzy was roped up beside the quay. The crowd poured down the gangway to merge into that other many-coloured crowd thronging under the high walls of the harbour. Saratoff ploughed through alone towards a space where hotel buses and motor-cars were picking up the wealthy. He knew Ginkelstein by his big, broad-brimmed black hat and his spreading tie. An Arab porter was loading luggage into a taxi, and Mr. Muller stood with one foot on the step of the taxi, smiling and showing his white teeth.

He spoke to the driver.

"The Villa Felix, Mustapha. You know it?"

The driver scratched his head. There were so many new villas with strange names.

"The lane turns off the road to El Biar."

"Ah, from the Colonne Voirol."

"That's it."

Mr. Muller tipped his porter, got into the car, and was driven up into Algiers; while Saratoff looked about him for a little man with burning eyes and a yellow face.

"Come, little one, the earth is solid, and I know where the Black Cat has his saucer of milk."

Gorouki smiled faintly.

"My stomach is still going up and down. What do we do next, big one?"

"Look for a lodging. I'm hungry. Never have I felt so hungry in all my life."

The road from Algiers to Mustapha climbs steadily, with clanging trams and hooting automobiles and labouring carts, and ever the sea grows broader and the hills more green. The swinging curves of this great road seem to turn the landscape upon its axis. It is a dusty road, full of tree shadows and broad sunlight, and when Saratoff and Gorouki toiled up it on that spring morning it showed them life in rags and in royal blue. They passed the Governor's summer residence, where two or three Spahis lounged in their red cloaks, and the cosmopolitan Hôtel St. George where Americans make quick lunches and buy innumerable picture-postcards, and the gardens offer to red-faced northern ladies the white trumpets of arum lilies. They passed under the pines of the Bois and so came to the Colonne Voirol, and here Saratoff leaned against a wall and produced a carefully-folded piece of paper.

"Never trust to your memory, little one."

Gorouki snuggled up beside him, glancing at the paper upon which Saratoff had scribbled in pencil those magic words:

"Villa Felix. Lane off the road from the Colonne Voirol to El Biar."

He had spelt the names incorrectly, but that did not matter.

A sign indicated the road to El Biar. Saratoff produced two oranges, and gave one to Gorouki.

"We begin to explore. It is unwise to ask questions."

They went up the El Biar road, scattering orange peel, and discussing life. Once or twice Gorouki had to slip a hand under his shirt, for their lodging in the Kasbah had been full of other sorts of life.

There were roses in the hedgerows.

"I gather that our friend has a bed of roses. It is very peaceful country."

"Plenty of cream for the cat."

"It is a sly animal."

They came to a lane running to the right, and they adventured down this lane. It was leafy and still, and on either side of it the hidden gardens of scattered villas were full of secret flowers and perfumes. Cypresses close the blue of the sky. There were fruit trees, and old pines and olives, and mimosa, and creepers of purple and gold. Birds sang. White walls glimmered amid the green, and the hillside sunned itself happily.

"If he lives up here—" said the little man.

"Ah, it is gentler than Russia. The cat has chosen a spot in the sun. Wise cat."

They looked at each other and smiled.

Quite suddenly they arrived at the gateway of Monsieur Muller's retreat. It was an inconspicuous gate of wood, set back in a recess between two high stone pillars and overshadowed by trees. "Villa Felix." It was impossible to see over the gate, and from the lane the villa itself was invisible, for trees and shrubs screened it.

The two stood in silence, eyeing the gate.

"Oh, wise cat," said Saratoff in a whisper, "and yet— not quite wise enough. Life finds one out."

The lane descended, and Saratoff and Gorouki descended with it, peering cautiously into the green tangle for a glimpse of Ginkelstein's house. Where the garden ended a rough path led from the lane along a wild old terrace overgrown with trees. The two Russians explored the terrace. The garden of the Villa Felix was shut off from it by a bank of oleander and arbutus, and it was little Gorouki who found the spy-hole in the bottom of this evergreen hedge. He went on his knees. He held up a hand for silence, and then beckoned.

"I see him."

Saratoff crouched beside his friend. They were looking up towards the villa, and against its whiteness cherries and peach trees made a smother of white and cerise. The villa had a pillared loggia partly in sunlight and partly in shadow, and hung with creepers. There were palms and orange trees in the garden, and beds of many coloured anemone, violets and crimson stock; and between two of the white pillars of the loggia a man reclined in a long, cane chair. He was dressed in a suit of white drill, with a big black tie. He had just finished his morning coffee and rolls, and was lighting a cigar.

"By the blood of our martyrs," said the little man, "he takes his ease."

Somewhere in the white villa a woman began to sing. Her voice went up into the sunlight— a sensuous and happy voice. They saw her come to an upper window and lean out; she was combing a mass of honey-coloured hair, and she laughed down at the man in the chair. And he, sitting up and blowing smoke, enjoyed the desirableness of her, and spoke to her softly with a voice that was suave and tender.

Gorouki gripped Saratoff's arm.

"My God! The beast! He is happy. He has slunk away with the plunder. And our women lie tumbled together in a filthy hole in the ground."

"He is ours," said Saratoff softly.

They lay there in the grass like a couple of fierce beasts, watching this other beast and his mate, and yet there was a rightness, an ethical inevitableness in their ferocity. Their thoughts went back to Russia— where this man who sat in a chair and sunned himself had perpetrated unthinkable

things. Red-handed, suavely cruel, and loving cruelty for its own sake, he had robbed and butchered. Then, like the sly, suave, cunning creature that he was he had gathered up his plunder and disappeared. The black leopard had become the sleek black cat, a cosmopolitan animal, hiding itself in new countries, with the blood washed from its paws.

They talked in whispers.

"The Villa Felix! He feels himself safe. All his loot turned into foreign bonds."

"A respectable householder!"

"Wealthy and happy."

"He can travel like a rich merchant, and drink his wine and ogle the women, and own a villa in the sun. What do you think about it, little one?"

Gorouki made that noise in his throat.

"My wife and two children were kicked into a frozen hole in the ground. Why did we not die— then, my friend? Was it fate— hope, faith in the day that would come?"

He rested his chin on his crossed wrists.

"Yes, you were right— not to hurry. It is good to have seen him here, thinking himself so safe. How ironical! And— I wish him to die slowly—"

"Not one plunge of the knife, little one."

"No, no. Slowly. And I shall feel like a priest of justice. It will be a solemn moment, my friend, so very solemn. And afterwards—my heart will sing like the heart of a bird."

When the warm dusk descended upon the garden of the Villa Felix two figures crawled towards the white loggia. A table had been laid for dinner, and Saratoff and Gorouki lay curled up in one of the flower-beds, watching. Two Arab servants served the dinner, and Muller and his mate sat under a softly-shaded lamp, and laughed and talked and clinked glasses. When the meal was over, and the coffee had been served, Muller smoked, while the woman sat on his knees. He blew smoke at her, and she ruffled his oiled hair with her hands.

"Go and make music," he said.

Her figure flickered through the doorway of the room opening upon the loggia. There was the ripple of a piano; she began to sing, and while she sang two crouching figures with naked feet slipped into the further end of the loggia.

The woman sang:

"*L'amour—c'est la vie*."

Muller lay relaxed— purring.

And then two hands came from behind him and closed upon his throat, and a folded cap was pressed over his mouth.

The woman's voice floated out into the night:

*"Love is life—"*

Presently she ceased her singing, and sat with her hands resting upon the keyboard, and smiling.

"Chéri," she called, "what next?"

No one answered her, and with a little amused jerk of the shoulders, she rose and went out into the loggia.

"Méchant," she laughed; "when I sing— you sleep."

But Petrovsky— alias Ginkelstein— was sleeping the last, sleep— with a look of terror in his widely-open eyes.

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## 2: The Diamond Scarab

***Peter Cheyney***

1896-1951

*Sunday Times*, W. Aust., 28 April 1929

*Before he became a best seller novelist, Cheyney wrote many short stories, often in series; this is one of his "Alonzo MacTavish" tales of a gentleman crook.*

"IT'S a very nice flat you've got here. Mr. MacTavish," said Chief Detective Inspector McCarthy, settling himself comfortably in his armchair and lighting one of Alonzo's Coronas. "It must take a lot of money to keep a place like this going."

"It does," replied Alonzo, smilingly. "But you didn't come here to tell me that, did you, Chief?"

McCarthy grinned. "Candidly, I didn't," he replied. "And I'll tell you, very briefly, why I am here." He leaned forward and regarded MacTavish quizzically.

"As you know. Mr. MacTavish," McCarthy went on, "there have been during the past eighteen months, no less than six mysterious robberies In each case the article stolen was of great intrinsic value, and in several cases of great historic value as well, as, for instance, in the case of the Rodney Diadem. Well, the strange thing about these six particular thefts is this: in each case we have been unable to trace the thief, and also, in each case, after a fairly large reward bas been offered, you have come forward, and, acting on information supplied by you, we have recovered the stolen property!"

"Well?" queried Alonzo, still smiling.

McCarthy grinned. "Look here. Mr. MacTavish," he said, "let's not beat about the bush. I've got my own opinion, and I think that you know what it is. We've never been able to get our hands on you. You've always been too clever for us. and you've been too clever, too, to dispose of the stuff that you've stolen through the usual cheap channels. Oh, no, you just wait until the reward is big enough! My own candid opinion is that your brain and your organisation was behind every one of those theft?."

"Really, now. Chief," said Alonzo, laughing. "What do I say now?"

"Knowing you, I know that you say nothing, said McCarthy. "One of these fine days, Mac, you're going to make a slip, and then I'm going to be on you like a ton of bricks. I keep a little private notebook in my office at the Yard, and that book is full of unexplained mysteries, behind which, in my mind, lurks the rather clever personality of Alonzo MacTavish. You've given the police of Europe a jolly good run, and I think it's time that they had a bit of their own back. However, I'll get down to brass tacks, and tell you the real reason for my presence here today. Briefly the situation is this. On the day after tomorrow,

Cartier's head assistant Crallard, is coming over from Dieppe. He is bringing with him a carved Chinese box, and in that box is the world famous scarab belonging to the Maharajah of Tipoore, which he is presenting to the Egyptian Society. Now it occurred to me that that diamond scarab is just the sort of thing that would interest the gentleman who has been responsible for the other six thefts, just the sort of thing that he'd like to get his hands on, and I suppose a few weeks after its disappearance we should have Mr. Alonzo MacTavish coming forward and claiming the reward and telling us where it could be found."

The Chief Inspector looked straight at Alonzo and grinned. "Well, Mac," be went on, "my advice to you is this. Keep away from that diamond scarab. Directly Crallard gets his foot on the boat at Dieppe, that scarab comes under my charge. Two of my smartest men will never leave Crallard for one moment until that jewel is in the Egyptian Society's safe-keeping. Forewarned is forearmed; just keep away from that scarab, Mac."

The CID. man rose and picked up his hat.

"Chief," said Alonzo, rising, his usual charming smile illuminating his countenance, "I think that this is awfully nice of you. But why you should think the scarab interests me, I don't know. I suppose though, that if it disappeared, there would be a fairly large reward offered, wouldn't there? However, Chief, thank you very much for calling, I've been delighted to see you. Come in any time you're passing, won't you?"

After McCarthy had gone, Alonzo sat deep in thought for half an hour. Then be rose and pressed the bell. In a few moments Lon Ferrers, who when otherwise disengaged, posed as Alonzo's man, entered.

"Listen, Lon," said MacTavish. "The day after tomorrow, Crallard, Cartier's, the French jewellers' chief assistant, is coming over here via Dieppe, bringing with him the diamond scarab, you, know, the Tipoone jewel. Get into touch at once with our man in Paris, by telephone, and tell him to send us immediately a perfect drawing of the box in which the scarab is kept— it's a Chinese casket I'm told. If he gets on with it at once we should have the drawing by midday tomorrow. Directly it arrives ring up Blooey Stevens and tell him I want him to do a job for me. I shall leave for Dieppe probably tomorrow night, and you might look out a suitable set of false whiskers for me. I'm coming back on the same boat as this Crallard fellow."

"I thought you'd be after the diamond scarab, Mac," said Lon Ferrers."Be careful, though. They'll take care of it."

"I know," laughed Alonzo. "McCarthy was here to warn me to keep off it. Apparently they know who's been responsible for the last six jobs. I've got to be careful Lon, but with a little luck, well pull it off."

ON THURSDAY afternoon Crallard, bearing the casket containing the Diamond Scarab in a waterproof case beneath his arm, accompanied by two burley CID men, made his way across the gangway of the Mail Packet *Dieppe*, bound for Newhaven. Evidently McCarthy had told the detectives that they were to take no chances for, once aboard the boat, they made their way to the private deck cabin which had been reserved.

Alonzo, wearing a small fair moustache, and looking like a tourist in a rather loud suit of plus fours, quietly noticed the progress of the little party, and, having seen them ensconced in their cabin, procured a deck chair and prepared to while away an hour or so, with the aid of a newspaper.

He remained engrossed in the news for about an hour and a half, then, under cover of the newspaper, he produced from his breast pocket a small tube about the size of a tube of toothpaste. To this he fitted a small length of thin rubber tubing to which was attached an air bulb. Then he rose from his chair and walked casually in the direction of the cabin in which the party guarding the Diamond Scarab were travelling.

The wind had become fresh, and a slightly heavy sea was running. Alonzo was glad to note that the deck was fairly deserted. Standing with his back against the door of the cabin, he cautiously inserted the nozzle of the rubber tube through the keyhole, then puffing at his cigar, and holding the newspaper before him in his left hand, he commenced to press the air bulb until the tube in his right hand was empty. After which, with a glance round which showed him that be had been unobserved, he quietly made his way back to his chair and sat down.

He remained Interested in his paper for another half-hour, then he strolled below, and securing his suit case, opened it, and took from within a package. He made his way quickly back to the deck, his package under his arm. A quick glance up and down the deck told him that the moment had arrived, and inserting a master key In the Crallard cabin door, he pushed it open, slipped quietly inside and closed and locked the door after him.

Once inside. Alonzo acted quickly.

First of all he, donned a small gas mask which he took from his breast pocket. The inside of the cabin was hazy, and there was a distinct smell of chloroform about the place. Crallard and the two detectives lay, in different attitudes, just where the chloroform gas which Alonzo had pumped through the keyhole, and caught them.

He unwrapped his package and placed the contents on the table. It was a Chinese casket, exactly the same as the one in which the Diamond Scarab lay.

Alonzo worked quickly, and five minutes afterwards his task was completed. This done, he opened the air shutter in the cabin wall and napping vigorously with his newspaper, succeeded in dispelling most of the heavy fumes which hung about the place. This job concluded to his satisfaction, he slipped quietly from the cabin, made his way back to his deck chair, after dropping a small parcel into the sea, and went to sleep.

THE *DIEPPE* was already in sight of the Newhaven cliffs when Mr. Crallard, feeling very heavy about the eyes, awakened. He sat up, looking around the cabin, and rubbing his eyes. Then he saw the two recumbent figures of the CID. men as they lay across the table, breathing heavily.

"*Mon Dieu*!" almost screamed Mr. Crallard, "Ze diamond... it 'as been stole!" He shook the two sleeping figures frenziedly, until they, too, were awake.

"Someone 'as been in the cabin." exclaimed Crallard. "My friends, we 'ave been drugged. Ze diamond...!"

"What about the diamond?" asked one of the detectives. "Have you looked in the casket?"

Crallard undid the waterproof case which covered the casket, unlocked and opened the casket and looked within. Then an exclamation of amazement broke from his lips.

"Ze diamond is 'ere!" he exclaimed, excitedly. "It is not stole... Thank Heaven... it is all right!'

One of the detectives looked over Crallard's shoulder. There was no doubt about it. The Diamond Scarab lay in the middle of the velvet pad, untouched.

"It's funny," said the other C.LD. man, "all of us going off like that. Still, it might have been the sea air. It does funny things to you sometimes, especially If you're not used to it"

Crallard looked dubious. "I do not like eet," he said. "This MacTavish— this master robber of yours.... I 'ave been warned against 'im."

"Well you haven't much to worry about Mr. Crallard," said the detective. "There's the diamond all right in front of your nose! What have you got to worry about? Don't let's find any trouble until it happens."

Half an hour afterwards Crallard felt more secure, for his little party were met on the Newhaven Pier by four more stalwarts from the Yard. It was obvious that Chief Inspector McCarthy was taking no chances. At the same time, had the Frenchman seen the quiet smile which illuminated the countenance of Mr. Alonzo MacTavish as he watched the party of seven making for the London train, he would, possibly, not have for quite so much at peace with the world.

AT TWELVE o'clock that night, Chief Inspector McCarthy's telephone bell rang. He went to the instrument, and was surprised to hear the cheerful voice of Mr. Alonzo MacTavish.

"Is that you. Chief." said Alonzo. "I'm terrible sorry to hear about the Diamond Scarab!"

"What the devil do you mean, MacTavish?" said the police officer.

"What do I mean?" repeated Alonso in surprise. "Well, I hear that the scarab bas been stolen, that's all! Incidentally, I was going to suggest that if the reward is big enough I might give you a hand in recovering the jewel!"

"Now look here, MacTavish," said the astounded police officer, "I've had two of my best men watching that casket ever since it arrived in London, and they're watching it now. The jewel is there all right!"

"Is it?" said Alonzo cheerfully. "Well, I'm prepared to bet you a five pound note that it isn't. I've information that the jewel has been stolen. Incidentally I've got an excellent idea where the Diamond Scarab is at the present moment. Look here, If you don't believe me, get into a taxicab and meet me round at the Egyptian Society headquarters, where the jewel was taken on arrival. You'll find that it's gone."

"Very well," spluttered McCarthy, "but I tell you, MacTavish, that its impossible that the scarab has been stolen. Still, I'll meet you round there." He rang off.

Half an hour later, Alonzo, McCarthy, two C.I.D. men, and the president of the Egyptian Society, who had been summoned by telephone stood round the table on which the casket stood McCarthy took the key and rather red in the face opened the casket. The others crowded round, amazement written on their faces, except in the case of Alonzo, who grinned cheerfully. The casket was empty! The Diamond Scarab was gone!

McCarthy stifled an exclamation.

"Well, that beats me," he said "Who's got it, MacTavish?"

Alonzo grinned. "I can't say for certain," he answered. "But I think I know. The point is that if you want that scarab back you'll have to be pretty quick about offering a reward otherwise it will probably be out of the country by tomorrow morning."

McCarthy looked at the president.

"We can offer a reward of fire thousand pounds," said the latter. "It is absolutely necessary that we recover the scarab. Do you think that will be sufficient. Chief Inspector?"

McCarthy, red in the face, scowled at Alonzo.

"I think it's too much," he muttered. "Still, I suppose it's got to be paid. Where's that scarab, MacTavish?"

Alonso smiled. "I don't think we ought to be in a burry." he said, "Lets leave it like this. I'm fairly certain that I can produce that stone when the reward is paid over. So if you'll hand me the five thousand tomorrow morning, I give you my word that I'll produce the stone within ten minutes of receiving the money. Will that do?"

"Very well," said McCarthy. "In the meantime, I'm going to keep this casket. There may be some finger prints on it. It'll go hard with the thief if I get my fingers on him." He glowered at Alonzo.

Alonzo smiled cheerfully. "All right," he said. "Let's meet here tomorrow morning. Good night, gentlemen."

AT ELEVEN o'clock on the following morning the party met in the private office of the president of the Egyptian Society. McCarthy had found no trace of fingerprints on the casket, and was more nonplussed than ever.

Rather dubiously, the president produced a packet of bank notes and laid them on the table.

"There's just one point, Mr. MacTavish," he said. "How do I know when I hand you this money that you will actually be able to produce the scarab. Once you leave this room, we have absolutely no guarantee.

"Quite," said Alonzo cheerfully, "but you see I do not intend to leave this room." He reached out, took the packet of banknotes, counted them, and placed them in his breast pocket Then he sat down and taking out his cigarette case, selected and lit a cigarette.

"Well, said McCarthy impatiently. "Who's got that scarab, MacTavish?"

Alonzo looked up with a smile. "You have!" he said quietly.

"What the devil do you mean?" spluttered the angry detective.

"Look in the casket," said Alonzo, still grinning.

McCarthy took the key, opened the casket, and gasped. There, on its black velvet setting, lay the Diamond Scarab, its brilliant facets twinkling in the morning sunlight.

Alonzo put on his hat. "Well, gentlemen." he said, "thanks for the reward. Possibly I'll see you later, Chief. Good morning, all!"

He sauntered out.

What Mr. McCarthy said is not printable.

IT WAS late that evening when Chief Inspector McCarthy rang the bell of Alonzo's flat. Lon Ferrers, looking thoroughly staid, and without the shadow of a smile on his grave countenance, led McCarthy to Alonzo's sitting room.

McCarthy accepted the cigar which MacTavish offered. Then, he sat back in his armchair and looked straight at Alonzo, who sat smiling at him.

"Well," said McCarthy, "how was it done?"

Alonzo lit a cigarette. "They tell me that it was done like this," he said. "The people who planned this job had someone on the boat who shot a little sleeping gas through the keyhole of the cabin door where the scarab was being carefully guarded. Crallard and your two men went off to sleep. Then, someone forced the door, entered, and"— Alonzo paused and grinned— "simply substituted a casket for the one containing the jewel, carefully placing the jewel in the new casket. When Crallard and the two C.I.D. men awoke, they immediately looked into the casket to see if the jewel was safe, and finding that it was, they did not worry further.

"Had they examined the casket carefully, they would have discovered that it had a false bottom worked by a time watch mechanism, and eight hours afterwards, the bottom simply turned over. Of course the casket appeared empty. Twelve hours after that the mechanism worked again, and the scarab reappeared, but in the meantime the jewel had been missed and the reward, so generously paid to me, had been offered. I was paid for telling you where the scarab was, and I did so. I told you it was in the casket— and it was! Have another cigar, Chief?"

McCarthy rose to his feet. His face was a study. Then his sense of humour got the better of him, and he roared with laughter.

"One of these fine days Mac," he said, "you'll go a little bit too far, and then I'll get you— as sure as Fate!"

Alonzo smiled. "Possibly, Chief," he said. "But you'll have to get up a lot earlier in the morning. Going? Good night. I'm off to Monte Carlo tomorrow to spend a little of that five thousand. When I come back, I'll be glad to see you again. Cheerio, Chief!"

———————————

## 3: Beyond the Last League

***Beatrice Grimshaw***

1870-1953

Sun (Sydney), 7 April 1940

IT was very quiet there on the beach of Nor-West Island. Planes, cars, wireless sets were a thousand miles away. People, who talked and fussed about, beat things with hammers, called to dogs and to each other, were nearly as far away. It was very quiet.

On the beach the small waves of the lagoon went creaming like, spilled soda water, with a tiny hiss. Across the lake of green and opal shallows slowly, rhythmically came the bursting fall of breakers on the reef.

The solitary person who was sitting on the beach was quietest of all. She did not move; She did not speak. If you or I had carelessly passed by her (but we should not have done, that) she would not have looked at us. She seemed to be content to stay there where she was, in sight of the lagoon and the wool-white reef and the blue sea beyond. She had not stirred, while moons came up and set, while they grew dark and waxed, and waned again. Her shining bones, held fast in the net of climbing convolvulus, grew while week by week; the round small head that lay on her knees, as if set there for a jest, shone like an ivory hall. On her fingers there had been rings; they lay in the sand beside her, sparkling to the sky. She seemed to be waiting.

ACROSS a sea of platinum and pale blue the ketch came slowly in, her out-of-date little engine painfully throbbing, threatening each moment to slop. They had been a long time coming up from Samurai— Harry Kane, George Filson, Dorothy, Filson's wife, and Lind, who was Dorothy's sister. The ketch was old; she was run by a native crew. She was a cheap charter, but even so she had cost almost more than they could afford, after paying their fares from Sydney to Papua.

Because it happened that George and Dorothy and Lind and Harry were all practically "broke."

The place to which they were going, a deserted coconut plantation on Nor-West, belonged to Harry, for what that might be worth. It had made no money for the past few years; it had been rented on speculation by a couple from the mainland, but when they both died of fever within a few months nobody took their place.

HARRY. out of a job in Sydney, longing, as he had longed for years, to get back to the islands, even if there was nothing more than a bare living in it, made a sporting proposal to his three friends. Let them pool their small funds,

take passage to Samarai and thence to Nor-West. They could live in the old house. They could grow their food and catch fish. They wouldn't be cold or hungry, and they could wear any sort of clothes that covered them— the less the better.

After the port of entry, they had travelled for days on days through wonders unheard; through groups and constellations of islands that seemed to be on no known map, figured in no book or story— thousands of them, hundreds of miles of them. Nobody to see you, nobody to talk about you, nobody to say it was all your fault and why hadn't you provided against the depression before it came; a world of beauty, culminating in one of the loveliest of all the far-out islands— Nor-West, where they were to take refuge, stay unlit the storm was past.

But Papua.

Papua cannot be trusted.

Even in the endless archipelago of her islands, so like the famous Samoas, Cooks, Fijis, where fever does not come, where the people are small and simple and kindly, unlike the roaring cannibals of the mainland— where life seems easy, and beautiful as a dream— the mocking spirit of black New Guinea hovers. Things happen. Things at which you could not have guessed.

LIKE the swarm of devil fish that rose from deep water in the Cape Nelson fiords, and dragged a boat and its screaming passengers down. Like the water-spout that sprang from a calm sea, and hit the schooner of Dinny Lawton, leaving none to tell the tale.

Kane, remembering, hour by hour, more of the life that he had left behind; understanding, as none of his passengers could understand, the sinister side of all this New Guinea beauty and wonder, was the first to see the little white figure sitting on the beach, and recognise it for what it was. And that was something more than George and Dorothy and Lind recognised, even while they cried out in amazement and horror at the sight, landing from the ketch's dinghy and stopping to stare, with wide dismayed eyes, at the sole occupant of Nor-West beach.

"What is it? What's happened? Shall we be killed if we go ashore?" Dorothy, demanded, more in anger than fear. You would, have thought that Kane was her Cook's conductor and she a discontented tourist. Dorothy was a beauty— what former generations, used to call a "raving, tearing beauty," though she neither raved nor tore; only caused most men she knew to rave and to tear their hair over her, if not their hearts. And like most beauties, she knew her value.

George had had a hard time with her since he lost his accountant's place.

Now she was addressing in cool anger— Dorothy never grew hot— she left that to her admirers— Harry Kane, this long, thin, herringy fellow who hadn't a good point about, him except his extremely blue, small eyes set like turquoise beads in the brown of his face. Clearly she thought that he might have managed things better. The "we are not amused" expression sat blackly upon her handsome face like a crow on a marble temple.

Lind, smallish, dark, vital, silent, stood in her flannel slacks, with feet apart as if she were still on the plunging ketch, and smoked a cigarette. She said nothing.

George Filson said, "I say, you know— look here— this really isn't— "

They are all blaming me, thought Kane; all but that little sport of a Lind. And maybe she is too. You never know what she thinks. She is unnaturally silent for a girl most of the time. Inferiority complex or something...

He did not know Lind very well; the others were older friends.

Taking command of the situation, he told them:

"Don't worry. It's only that poor little Mrs. Finch. What brought her to the beach? Well, when people, have fever very badly they sometimes go off their heads, jump out of bed and try to get into the nearest water."

And that's true, he thought; only— only— I don't believe it...

"Leave her there," he said, "and I'll see to burying it by and by."

Dorothy suggested: "Hadn't I better take care of the rings?" and scraped them towards her with the point of her shoe.

Rather silently, for all their pleasure in touching land at last, they made their way together up the avenue that led, or had led, to the bungalow. It was all overgrown, thick with kuru-kuru grass, and sopping underfoot with decayed windfalls of mangoes, oranges, limes from the trees above.

The path went steeply upward; every now and then they paused to rest and look about them; and in the silence that suddenly fell, the voice of the Pacific, the long reveille of the reef, spoke heavily, monotonously below.

"It doesn't care," said Lind, halting to look and listen.

"Care?" Dorothy repealed. "What queer things you do say sometimes!"

Filson said: "Somehow, you know, I feel as if something had been chasing us, and as if we'd got away from it at last, if you know what I mean."

THEN they came in sight of the bungalow, red-roofed, drowned in flowers, a wreck, but a wreck that could with very little care be made habitable again. And it was cool and pleasant there, with the southeast blowing and the whole sky filled with the splendor of the sea, as the air was filled with the salt taste and the sound of it. And everywhere there was the sense of a great peace.

It seemed to Filson, sore with a hundred humiliations, to Dorothy, anxious to hide her head where no rich acquaintances could find her until the world came right side up again, that here at last, there would be refuge and escape. But Lind looked at the face of Harry Kane and wondered.

Kane, glancing sidewise. caught her eye. She had long eyes, amber-brown, shaded by heavy lashes; her mouth was firm and small.

"Long eyes— sees everything," he thought. "Little mouth; keeps quiet about what she sees."

He was not sure, even yet, that there was anything to keep quiet about. It was so long since he had been in this world of New Guinean islands; it was quite possible that he might be mistaken in what he thought. And anyhow, the ketch would be leaving again with its native crew to-night; the die was cast.

It was astonishing, even to Kane himself; how quickly he slipped back into the island life. Within a week he felt as if he had never left it. A fellow felt so safe..... Even if the place had gone to the devil because of the copra slump, nothing, not even another war, could take away one's food and one's roof, out here upon Nor-West.

And what else was there that really mattered?

Girls? He had never married, in Sydney. They wanted too much. It took such years and years of toil, all a man's time, all his freedom just to secure a roof and a place to sleep. Here on Nor-West it was different. Was Lind the girl, at last?

He did not know.

Dorothy, the beauty, seemed to be temperamental— sulked, because there was housework to do, because none of the few surviving natives of Nor-West cared to come over to the bungalow and cook and sweep them. Kane did the gardening; that was what he liked; the women did the housework; George did nothing at all that he could help. They had potatoes, fish, fruit in plenty. They were safe.

And the days went by.

KANE woke up. It was not the middle of the night, that hour, by civilised tradition consecrate to robbers, ghosts, and murder. It was the danger hour of savage countries; the moment that comes when "dawn's left hand is in the sky," night not dead and day not born. Kane knew it well; he was too good an islander to sleep quite soundly at that hour, even after many years away.

There was nothing. Nothing whatever. He told himself this, sat up on his mat, and listened again. No sound. Not even the slight vibration of the verandah boards that tells the watcher someone is about in the darkness.

"Go to sleep again, you fool," Kane told himself; and immediately got up, and slipped, noiseless, barefoot, into Lind's room.

He listened. She was breathing quietly; she slept.

Out again; down the verandah— blast those boards, how they creaked I He was a fool to think that anyone could Into the room of Dorothy and Filson.

Still. Listen.

That's Dorothy; she snores a little. One can't hear Filson for the rustling sound of it. Now she's quiet. Filson— can't hear him yet; he must have got up, gone out. Whisper: "George!" No answer. Quiet, quiet; up to the bed; just put your hand out and make sure he isn't there; she's sleeping like the dead.

If Filson woke and caught him, what'd he think? Dorothy is a devil; she would make any man look at her once too often, with those half-shut eyes of hers. If he found Filson's place warm, empty. Fool, to get the wind up about nothing; put oneself into a compromising position. It's just this sort of thing, playing with fire, that—

He is there. He is lying quite still, and one can't hear him breathe. He doesn't feel one's exploring hand. He is not— very— warm.

Kane found himself, hardly knowing how he had got there, at the threshold of Lind's room; beside her bed. He flashed the torch on her face. She woke instantly, and did not scream!

"Come with me," he whispered. "There's something wrong. I want you to help me to get Filson out of his bed and carry him away without making a noise."

"Yes," she said; and that was all. In her pyjamas, barefoot, she followed. Kane had put out the light. He said: "Does she sleep soundly?"

"Like a pig," Lind answered him; the first time he had heard her say anything sharp about her sister, whom he thought she did not much love.

"Take the feet," he said, "and move as quietly as you can."

Filson was— not warm. Growing colder. They laid him on the living-room floor, and Kane turned on the torch. Filson was dead, and there were marks about his neck showing that he had been strangled in his sleep; strangled so efficiently and quietly, that Dorothy, by his side, had simply gone on sleeping.

LIND shivered a little and caught back a sob.

"Harry," she whispered, "is he dead? What is it?"

Kane was staring hard at the bruised throat. "They can take the pigeons off the trees at night," she heard him say, as if to himself. "They can strangle one by the side of its mate, and take the mate after. They can—"

"Who? Why?" she asked, beating him on the arm. He was conscious of her now; looked at her, as if he saw for the first time the firm slimness of her in her night attire, the orange glow of the torch on her fancied curls.

He did not answer her.

"You're prettier than Dorothy, but not so beautiful," he said. He seemed to be thinking....

She did not understand; but something in his tone seemed to have offended her. She drew away.

"I must go to Dorothy," she said. "It will break her heart, poor darling."

"Tell her," he said, "that George died in a fit in his sleep. I'll go and bury him before she has a chance of asking to see him."

It was strange how little difference the death of Filson seemed to make only week or so after he had been laid beneath the flowering mango trees. He had never, Kane told himself, been a fellow of strong character; he had slipped through life— and out of it— like a knotless thread.

There were other things to think of, however. The peace of the island was flawed like a broken mirror; the safety of it was a dream. If Dorothy really had not chosen to rid herself of her husband, as Kane almost thought she had (and the morbid interest lent to her by that idea seemed to add. somehow, to her unholy charm), then someone else had done it, and that someone might do the same thing again.

Nobody knew for certain that the Pinches had died of fever— it had been so reported a long time after, when the houseboys made Samarai in a sailing canoe and told the magistrate of the deaths. Nobody, again, knew that they hadn't; the use that had been made of Mrs. Pinch's skeleton was no proof.

"Keep away," it had warned all and sundry in native language— if it had been put there, and if the woman hadn't really made for the salt water when she felt herself burning, dying of fever.

It was all a puzzle; but this much stood out, that one had better be careful. So Kane advised the women to sleep together, and close their room at night, regardless of beat.

FOR himself, he was content to follow the old island way of constantly changing his sleeping place, like a dog that couches in the bush, and defeats its enemies by shifting from lair to lair.

"After all," he asked himself, "why— why? There's no reason. There's no damned reason at all."

Just to make sure, he visited the small native village on the far side of the island, where a score or so of Nor-West people lived by fishing and by gardening. He was kindly received, with perhaps a little reserve; but that might

be due, he thought, to the presence of half a dozen boys who were certainly runaways— not Nor-West people, they looked like Tagulas, and he'd make a bet they had run from some of the Misima or Woodlark mines and were afraid to go home. The natives hated mine work.

Well, that was no business of his; those five beggars who edged away from him seemed to like the shade better than the sun when he approached, were welcome to stop as long as they liked. Five... What was there in that number that woke up a warning bell in his brain? He couldn't tell. It was so long since he had been a boy in the islands. Some foolish superstition, no doubt, like the feeling against lighting three cigarettes with one match. Not worth thinking about.

With the help of Lind, he conducted an intensive search of the grounds and gardens near the house. He had an idea that some wandering native who had a grudge against Finch might have landed in the night and, attacked the man whom he thought to be the plantation manager. But there were difficulties about that idea. There were difficulties about any possible solution of the mystery.

Meantime, Lind, it seemed, began to grow shy of him and Dorothy.

No mistake about it; Dorothy, all of a sudden, had turned about and was making love to him. And excellently she did it. This woman, when she chose, could swing her whole personality into a word, a trivial act; with a single look or touch she could make you forget the rest of the world, see nothing, think of nothing but Dorothy, Dorothy.

Sitting in a long chair and hardly speaking, she overcame you as if she had her arms about your neck. And all the time there was the constant doubt in Kane's mind— did she do it? She hardly spoke of George and of his death; it seemed that she had accepted the lie that Kane told her— or that she knew all about it without need of asking.

Lind came to him one evening, as she seldom came now, and bluntly asked him if he knew where Dorothy was.

"No," he answered her. "Neither do I. I wonder is it safe for her to go off wandering alone every afternoon as she does?" Kane was alert. "Where does she go?"

"Down into that valley where she and George used to walk when we first came. If I offer to go with her, she says she'd rather be by herself."

"Is she— fretting, or anything, after George?"

"I do not think," Lind said drily, "that she's fretting— after George. But she does seem to have something on her mind."

"How do you know?"

"Well, she laughs and talks — in her sleep."

Kane would ask and Lind would not say what it was that Dorothy talked about. But a sudden flush on the cheek of the girl set him guessing.

"I wonder— if she does?" he thought, and felt the red steal into his own face. Lind went on:

"She comes back tired out and sometimes all muddy, as if she'd been walking in the stream. It's a long way from the house. I think, maybe—"

Kane understood. "Yes, I think so, too. I'll see to it. Thanks, Lind. You're a darling girl."

She did not flush at that; she just looked at him with level eyes, before silently she turned and left the room.

Dorothy wandering by herself half a mile from the house. Dorothy with something on her mind. Talking...

IT was late afternoon; he might find her there if he went. Of course, he would have to warn her. He and Lind had managed to keep her from the actual manner of her husband's death; it was done to spare her, but maybe they had been wrong, after all. If Kane had hoped for a romantic rendezvous, he was disappointed. Dorothy, as he approached from one side of the valley, was already climbing the other, on her way home. Whatever the attraction might be that linked her to the thickets and the stream, it was over for the day, and he none the wiser.

He would have caught her up, but for an incident that seized on his attention and made him, for the moment, almost forget her altogether. There were five native men down in the valley, they were walking together, with a creeping, soundless step, and they seemed to have only that moment emerged from one of the thickets of pandanus and huge lalang grass.

One of them had a small bow and arrow in his hand, and seemed to be intent on stalking. The others, Kane judged, were acting as beaters. No harm in it. No harm at all. "Black peril," in these islands, was unknown.

Nevertheless, the thought of that significant number— five— leaped into his mind again, as he saw the natives unconcernedly pass. It tortured him; he could not remember what it stood for, and yet he felt sure that he ought to remember; that the matter was, somehow or other, vital.

"I'll talk to her to-night," he thought. "I'll put it straight to her. We shouldn't have kept things back."

But when he reached the bungalow, Dorothy was not visible; and later Lind told him that her sister was alone in the bedroom, with the door locked, and wouldn't come out.

"She takes odd fits sometimes," Lind commented. "I would leave her alone, if I were you, till she comes round."

"You'll stay with her to-night?"

"Of course. And lock the door, as you told us to do."

Again that night, near dawn, Kane suddenly awakened, with a sense of impending trouble strong upon him. This time he wasted no moments arguing with himself; he got up at once and went to the girls' room. The door was locked, and everything seemed quiet. He had heard no noise across the partition that, island fashion, divided the rooms, leaving the roof open over all; and nobody had called.

But now he did hear a noise; a sound as of something sliding, very lightly, down the wall into his own room. Resisting an impulse to rush back into his room, he battered on the door. Lind came to open it.

"What's the matter?" she asked, and then cried suddenly, "Oh!"

The light of his torch had fallen on the big double bed, where Dorothy lay, writhing in apparent agony, her hands about her throat. On her wrists and on her ankles were red, angry marks. The bedclothes had been little disturbed, but the pillow had fallen to the floor, carrying with it a paper packet that seemed to have been hidden underneath. The packet was broken, and its shining contents scattered across the boards.

Kane, in that moment, was not openly aware of anything but Dorothy; nevertheless, some hidden part of his brain took note, and whispered sub-consciously, "Good Lord!" while the conscious part of him was busy in the room. "Get her out into the air," he said, dashing water from the bedroom jug upon her face.

"She's only fainted. They haven't done for her. Do you mean to say you never heard or felt—"

"I got up," Lind said. "I— I thought I heard a very little noise, like something sliding down the wall, and I. thought it might be a snake, but the torch had fallen down somewhere, and I— I—"

They were half carrying, half supporting Dorothy into the fresher air of the verandah. Kane swiftly slipped into his own room; found it, as he expected, empty; took a loaded Colt from the drawer of the table, and rejoined the women.

"I'll tell you," he said to Lind, "what you heard sliding down the wall. It wasn't a snake. It was five men. Five Yela men. A strangling team. I ought to know. I ought to be hanged for not remembering before."George George — he remembered that he hadn't seen George's wrists and ankles; they were covered by the pyjama sleeves and legs. But he would have sworn now that they had been bruised, like Dorothy's. Oh, he remembered! The Yela strangling teams, from the island where the three hundred shipwrecked Chinamen had been captured and devoured in the fifties of last century. The runaway boys—

from the gold mine islands of Misima and Wood-lark— they hadn't been Tagulas; they were from Tagula's famous, infamous neighbor, Rossel, otherwise known as Yela. And one by one they had been picking off the whites of Nor-West Island, as they picked off pigeons for a feast from the boughs of a midnight tree. Finch— Mrs. Finch— George Filson— now Dorothy. Well, they hadn't got her after all, thanks to him, though he had been only just in time. She was better; sitting up on the floor, sobbing and staring about her.

"What was it?" she demanded. "Something caught me—"

Lind knelt beside her, soothing. "You're all right, dear. You're safe. It was a native who tried to kill you, but we'll take good care—"

She paused. Kane was hone. No sign of him on the verandah, in the house. But from far off, away down in the valley, came the sound of a shot and a scream. Another shot; no cry. And another. When he came back, he put away the revolver, said nothing. But the women knew that henceforth they would be safe.

LIND was still puzzled; she could not understand what had happened. The day that followed did little to enlighten her. Kane, who had been ready to kiss the very ground on which Dorothy walked, now seemed to avoid her. And Dorothy, after one or two efforts to attract his attention, lapsed into sulkiness. The mirror of peace was shattered indeed: the lovely island was paradise no more. And yet— It could have been so perfect, for two who loved each other! Lind knew now that she cared for the Island life, even as Kane cared for it.

But Dorothy—

Dorothy, in one of her sudden furious outbreaks, told everybody what she liked, and didn't like. A schooner had been unexpectedly sighted, and Kane and Lind were busy writing letters and making preparation for possible guests when Dorothy burst out of her room.

"I've been packing up," she said. "I'm going. I wouldn't stay in this horrible place for a ton of gold— or for any cold-blooded fish of a man that owns it!"

"Gold?" cried Lind, amazed. Kane, putting down his pen, remarked: "I didn't want you to tell—"

"Tell whom? What?" she demanded, breathing hard. "Tell Lind that Finch discovered gold here— I found that out when you spilled the parcel of nuggets on the floor. And that the Nor-West people didn't like it, and that they employed the Yela men to get rid of Finch and Mrs. Finch and your unlucky husband, and anyone else they could get hold of, who came to settle here. Wanted the island to themselves, I reckon; knew, poor cows, what gold mining would do to it; had been on Woodlark and Misima, you see. One could almost sympathise with them."

"Why," she demanded, "did you not want me to tell Lind?"

"Because," he said straightly, "I've a prejudice against being married. if there's marrying going on, for what I'm supposed to have."

She did not flush. "What do you mean by 'supposed'?"

"The laws," he said evenly, "don't happen to give the gold to the owner of the land. They give the discoverer a reward claim, ten times that of anyone else. To me they give just what I can find in the area of one ordinary claim. And Nor-West generally they give to the devil. So that's that."

"I have ten times what you have?" she asked, eyes glittering.

"You have."

"Then," she said cheerfully, "you may go to the devil yourself. Where's Lind? I want her to help me with my packing."

LlND was in the sitting-room, looking very hard at something on the wall. How much she had heard— when she had slipped away— Kane did not know; nor did she ever tell him. Her hand was on the huge map of the New Guinea Territories, where, spread like stars in the Milky Way of heaven, lay islands upon islands, hundreds, thousands; all about the long tail of Papua and the indented coasts of the Mandated Territory and the great block of the unknown Dutch side.

"Look," she said, "there's no end to them. One could go on and on."

"We could," he said, his chin bent down, touching her shoulder.

And, as if unconsciously, her hand slipped into his.

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## 4: Caged

***Ethel Lina White***

1879-1944

*The Herald*, Montana, 11 and 18 July 1940

*Courtesy Roy Glashan's Library*

WHEN the wind was in a certain quarter, Kathy could hear the roaring of the lions in Lord Hammersmith's private zoo.

The sound was faint and fitful— little more than an ominous mutter in the distance. She strained her ears to catch it, for she welcomed it even as a sleepless person greets the first cock-crow. To her, also, it was a symbol of hope— telling her that no night could last forever.

Sometime, somewhere, another day would dawn.

Alan— who was superintendent of his uncle's collection of wild animals— was there in the darkness, localized by that snarling cough which throbbed like a nerve in the air. It linked them together in a wireless wave. So long as he was in her life, some glimmer of happiness remained.

Yet when she listened to the steady blast of snores from the other bed, she had to admit the truth. Like the caged lions, she too was behind bars. While her second husband— Hector Mint— lived, she could never be free.

As she lay sleepless, she wondered whether she were being punished for her youthful folly during her first year in a woman's college at Oxford. She had grasped life too adventurously and too greedily. Impatient of the future, she had eloped with a fellow undergraduate.

While she was an orphan, with no one to consider over her marriage, her husband came of a poorish family that resented the wreck of his academic prospects. Therefore, when they flaunted authority, they were left to face the consequences alone.

They took them on the chin, gaily and recklessly. They snaffled odd jobs, loved a little, starved a little and laughed through everything. Una was born without christening mugs or press announcements and was accepted as part of the joke. Eventually, just as Dick was beginning to shape as a promising freelance Journalist, he was killed in a road smash.

In order to provide a home for Una, Kathy started a guest house, which was foredoomed to failure through lack of capital. As she tried to do the work of a staff, she was on the verge of complete collapse when Hector Mint arrived with his offer of a home.

She had known him at Oxford where he was a figure of civic importance whom she regarded as a sort of benevolent uncle. It was not until she married him that she realized the dark jungle of his heart. She discovered that she had

always been his secret obsession and that his mind was twisted with jealousy of her first husband.

It was their youth he envied and those mad adventurous years of young love. He could not forget those or forgive the past. Although he gained possession of Dick's widow, the undergraduate triumphed from the grave, because Una was his child. From the first, Kathy had been completely honest with Mint. She made it plain that Una's welfare was her chief consideration, but in return for it, she tried to fulfill her part of the bargain cheerfully and generously. She refused to regard herself as a martyr, for her joyous and elastic spirit persisted. So long as the sun burst through the clouds, or one daisy cropped up in the lawn, she could smile and keep her chin up.

Like her mother, Una could take punishment— and there was plenty of a mean kind for her to take. Although her stepfather provided her with a technically good home, she never had pocket money, parties, presents or pets Fortunately, she was a vigorous, fearless chilc, possessed of a special radiance— probably the heritage of her hearted birth. As Kathy thought of her she tried to forget the snores as they rose in an elephantine trumpet from the other bed.

"I've kept Una," she reminded herself. "I didn't have to lose her to an orphanage. She's worth it all."

SHE came down to breakfast in a gallant mood. There was a rare treat store for Una and herself as Lord Hammersmith had invited them to visit his zoo, that morning.

As she seated herself, she noticed that Una was struggling to eat her porridge without sugar, in token of punishment. Although she boiled inwardly, she never fought Una's battles, as she felt it was better for the child's happiness not to poison the atmosphere with constant quarrels which could do no good.

"Been bad again?" she remarked cheerfully. "Little silly. Well, sailors don't care, do they? I won't have sugar either. If we are too fat, the lions may want to make a meal of us. I heard them roaring in the night. That means fine weather."

"They kept me awake," complained her husband. "That zoo's a scandal. It's a rich man's hobby, or it would be made illegal. It's a source of danger to the district. Eventually one of the wild beasts is bound to escape."

"Escape." The word echoed in Kathy's mind as she gazed at Mint. He was a big burly man with a broad florid face and grizzled curly hair which grew low on his forehead. Twinkling blue eyes gave him a misleading air of geniality which tempered an imposing personality. He looked a model householder and British

taxpayer as he read the newspaper and ate the conventional breakfast or bacon and eggs.

The house was family property which had descended through several generations, so the room had the fine proportions and solidity of an earlier age. The old-fashioned furniture was good— the Georgian table sliver shone. Outside the huge windows were lilacs, laburnams and maytrees, tossing in the breeze.

Kathy suppressed a sigh. When nature was so lavish, life could be beautiful, if only one had freedom to enjoy it. Then she thought of Alan whom she was going to see within a few hours— and the smile returned to her lips.

As though he could read her thoughts, Mint spoke.

"Lucky for that young Easter that his line is zoology. He's his uncle's heir on condition that he carries on the zoo. He's made for life. If he doesnt muck about with women. Hammersmith would never stand for a scandal."

His words sounded so suspiciously like a warning that Kathy wondered whether Mint were also Jealous of Alan. She thought she had concealed this new love of hers which was so different from that first selfish rapture of youth. Then, she had wanted to take and share— but now she gave her heart without thought or hope of return.

"No woman who cared for him would let him ruin his life for her," she said.

"You should know how it works out."

As her husband's eyes drilled her face. In an effort to interpret its expression, Una broke the silence.

"Molly Dean's daddy has bought her a lovely big Alsatian dog. May I have a dog, Minty?"

"What did you call me?" asked her stepfather.

" 'Daddy'... Can I have a dog, daddy? It needn't be a rich Alsatian. I could find a poor little hungry puppy and bring it home."

"If you do, it will be drowned at once. Animals are dirty and unhealthy. I won't have one in my house."

Una stared at her stepfather with puzzled eyes, as though unable to credit such brutality; but she made no attempt to press her claim.

At that moment, Kathy saw red. Biting her lips to control her anger, she snatched up the newspaper and began to read it mechanically. Mint wiped his mouth and rose from his chair with a jocular warning.

"Keep your eye on Una. There have been ugly accidents at zoos. Remember the lady of Riga who went for a ride on a tiger?"

"What happened to her?" asked Una curiously.

"They returned from the ride with the lady inside— and a smile on the face of the tiger."

Mint grinned like a great feline, while Una joined in his laughter to show that she approved the tiger's sense of humor.

KATHY drove the car over to Lord Hammersmiths estate by way of lanes and secondary roads, so as to enjoy the beauty of the countryside. The memory of that morning would have to be stretched out over so many dreary routine hours, that she wanted to make it nearly perfect. Buttercup-meadows were sheets of gold, glittering in the sunlight— the beechwoods were in new leaf and carpeted with bluebells. Larks sang as they soared and the air held the fragrance of May.

When they reached the lodge gates of Lord Hammersmith's park. Alan was waiting for them on the road. Their greetings were formal— the conventional meeting of any casual young man, on his best behavior, and a married lady who was chaperoned by her small daughter. But no social code could disguise the revealing light in his eyes or the glow in her face.

Freed from domestic tyranny, Kathy reveled in her brief spell of liberty; she felt joyous and reckless of the future as they walked up the chestnut drive.

"Lions, first," commanded Una. "I love cats."

The zoo was a comprehensive collection of wild animals, although their numbers were limited. The specimens were housed in beautiful surroundings, while the beasts were in perfect health and condition as a tribute to Alan's expert knowledge.

The lions lived in semi-natural quarters. At the back of their huge cages were low openings leading to the dens scooped In the sides of a ravine which was guarded with spiked bars. When they reached it, all the animals had withdrawn to the gloom of their lairs, with the exception of one majestic lion who lay close to the bars of the outer cage, blinking in the sunlight.

"May I speak to him?" asked Una eagerly.

As she ran towards the lion house where the keeper was standing, Alan lowered his voice.

"What's the matter with her?" he asked. "Has she been crying?"

Kathy's heart sank at this further proof of a visible change In Una.

"No," she replied, trying to speak lightly. "Una doesn't cry. She's a tough guy and can take it. But there was a spot of bother at breakfast. She wants a dog."

"I'll give her one."

"No. My husband wouldn't let her keep It."

"Why not?"

"I suppose he doesnt like animals."

His lips tightened as he looked down at her. It seemed to him that she had shrunk since their last meeting. Flyweight— instead of featherweight. Her dark hair which she wore in a long curling bob, framed a pale face, now too small for her gray-blue Irish eyes.

"I wish she were mine," he said impulsively.

She knew that he was really thinking of herself. The same instinctive feeling told her that both she and Una could be safe and happy in Alan's care. As she felt herself slipping out to deep waters, she floundered desperately back to the shallows.

"You don't know your luck," she assured him. "Una's like me at her age, and I was a little devil on wheels. I— "

She broke off as Alan gripped her wrist.

"Don't speak or move," he said in a low, strained voice.

Looking up she saw that he was staring at the lion house. The keeper. too. was gazing in the same direction. Their eyes were fixed on Una.

She had slipped her hand between the bars and was scratching the lion between his eyes.

THAT moment seemed to draw itself out to an eternity. Everyone stood as though petrified. The landscape appeared frozen to flat dead shades of blue and green— the trees ceased to wave In the breeze. Kathy felt that the scene could not be real but that they were all confined inside some incredible painting.

Then Una withdrew her hand— and the spell which bound them was snapped. The lion who had been blinking benevolently, became aware of his audience. Turning his head he broke out into a shattering roar as Una scampered back to her mother.

"Cats like being tickled," she explained nonchalantly.

"Yes," agreed Kathy faintly, "but the animals are very shy and nervous. Don't touch them again, or you will frighten them."

"Oh, poor little things." Una's voice was compassionate, "I guess I seem terrible to them, 'cause I've got boots to kick with and they've only got bare feet."

"Go and see the sea lions fed," suggested Alan.

As Una dashed away with the keeper, Kathy spoke to Alan.

"Is that a savage lion?"

"No," replied Alan. "Jupiter's on the tame side. He will let both me and the keeper stroke him. But he wouldn't let a stranger take a liberty."

"He never touched Una."

"I know. I'm still knocked sideways. The whole thing is incredible.... I suppose it was her complete confidence. She must have a natural power over animals. I saw the whole thing. She slipped her hand in between the bars so quietly that she was rubbing him before he realized that it was there. He liked her touch, so he kept quiet. But if we'd startled him, there would have been a ghastly accident. As it was, I expected every second to see him snap her arm off."

"Don't. It was all my fault. I should have watched her. I was warned."

Reaction had set in as she began to feel the effect of her recent shock. While she fought her emotion, Alan's self-control suddenly slipped like a sandbank undermined by the suction of flood water.

"Darling," he said roughly, "you must leave that man. Don't pretend any more. I know it's hell. He's eating you up. You and Una must come with me."

She pushed him away as he tried to take her in his arms.

"No," she said, "my husband would not divorce me, so we could not get married. The scandal would finish you. I won't let another man ruin his prospects for me."

"I have my profession. I can get a job,"

"A job? So did Dick. And he lost it again. Over and over, Oh. my dear, you don't know what it means."

ALL around them was a rolling expanse of park where the zoo buildings were erected. Kathy could see the domed roof of the elephant house in the distance and the glitter of an enormous aviary shining through a belt of trees. Although the house was hidden, its approach was indicated by a vista of shaven turf leading to a square of fountains. Yellow irises fringed the margin of a lake whose glassy surface reflected patches of blue sky.

This vast estate would belong to Alan, in the future, provided he did not blot his copybook. To save him from his own generous impulse, she tried to appear hard and calculating.

"It's a matter of finance, baby. I'm 28, but I'm far older than you in experience. I've been through all this before. I can't risk poverty again, for Una's sake. When I married again, I deliberately chose security, In her interests. We must not meet again. It's not fair to you."

She shuddered involuntarily at a familiar trumpet from the elephant house— reminding her of duty.

"It's not fair either to my husband," the said firmly, staring miserably at a huge leaden statue of Pan, playing inaudible pipes to a greened unicorn. "I made a bargain— and I must keep it."

"You're mad," protested Alan. "You can't go on with it."

"Hush— here's Lord Hammersmith."

IN other circumstances Kathy would have shrunk from the ordeal of meeting the formidable uncle. The peer wore a disreputable hat— burred with fishing flies— and a linen coat with a tangerine rosebud in his buttonhole. His features— verging on the nutcracker— were beakjly aristocratic and his eyes arrogant. Kathy received the imoression that if his family honor were reatened he would cheerfully feed the source of danger to the lions.

When he heard of Una's escapade, he did not conceal his anger.

"Gross negligence," he fumed. "Suppose this child's arm had to be amputated. There would have been an outcry in the press and fools would have howled for a beautiful creature to be destroyed, when he only obeyed his natural instinct."

"So did Una," said Kathy. "She really loves animals."

"Hum. She certainly has the magic touch. I must meet this hypnotic young lady."

As they neared the sea lion's pool, Una ran up with a request,

"I've seen the lions, now I want to see the unicorns."

Kathy was thrilled to remark how her radiance gradually melted Lord Hammersmith's resentment. He made the round with his visitors and at the end of the tour, invited them to stay to lunch.

She declined the invitation for herself, but consented to let Una stay.

"Please send her home when she's demoralized the whole zoo," she said. "I can drive myself back."

After Lord Hammersmith made it clear to his nephew that his duties would not permit him to act as deputy chauffeur to their guest, he did Kathy the honor of acting as her personal escort to the lodge.

"When will you pay us another visit?" he asked.

"Not for a long time," she replied. "I don't like zoos."

"I agree." His worldly old eyes approved her. "They can be dangerous."

She resented the meaning In his voice.

"There is no danger here for me," she said proudly. "Especially when all the poor animals are confined in cages."

"Unhappily, caged animals have been known to escape," remarked Lord Hammersmith grimly.

KATHY drove home recklessly, her eyes blind to the beauty of the apple blossom in cottage gardens and the hedges powdered white with May. After she had garaged the car, she approached the solid gray stone house slowly and

reluctantly. The slam of the front door, as it closed behind her, reminded her of the clang of iron bars.

Once again she was caged. The hall was dark after the sunshine as the blind was drawn over the stained glass window. She was about to go up to her bedroom, when she was arrested by an unusual noise.

It was a cross between a rattle and a gasp and sounded somewhat as though a kettle were boiling over. As It appeared to come from her husband's study, she hurried to the door and flung it open.

Mint was slumped back in his chair, fighting lor breath. His face was gray and dripped with sweat— his mouth gaped open like a gasping fish

"He's dying."

As the thought flashed through Kathy's brain, she rushed into the dining room and snatched up the whisky decanter. Supporting her husband's head, she managed to dribble some of the spirit down his throat, drop by drop. It was a slow business, for most of it slopped down his neck, but gradually his heart began to respond to treatment.

After he regained consciousness he recovered rapidly from his fainting fit. By the time the doctor arrived, he was almost normal, although his face was still a bad color. Feeling limp and shaken after her second shock, Kathy left the men together, at her husband's request, and went into the drawing room.

The reek of whisky was still in her nostrils, as, for the first time, she was able to realize the situation, together with its possibilities.

"If I had stayed for lunch— "

She dared not dwell on the consequences, lest she should be compelled to admit the horror of her own regret. As she tried to wrench the thought from her mind, Mint entered the room.

"What did the doctor say?" she asked.

"The verdict is satisfactory," he replied. "My condition is static. I have the family heart. I thought I had escaped. It was an unpleasant experience, but I've had my warning."

"I thought your family were all long-lived."

"That is true. We have iron constitutions, but we suffer from valvular disease. It is chiefly dangerous in case of ignorance. When one knows one's vulnerable, one is naturally careful to avoid violent exertion or shock. All my father's family lived to be 90 or more."

It was in vain that Kathy struggled to force her concern and show a decent interest. She knew that she could not speak naturally, when she thought of the years that stretched ahead. Years and years of dissension and misery. As though he guessed her thoughts, her husband probed her face with his bright little eyes.

"If you had not come in at this minute, you would be a widow," he reminded her.

Suddenly she found courage to make an appeal;

"Hector," she said, "you say you owe your life to me. I am going to ask for something in return for it. A very little thing."

"What?*

"A dog for Una."

"Certainly not. You couldn't have done less than you did, without being a murderess. Are you going to use a normal instinct as a bargain basis?"

"No... but Hector, if we are to have a long life together, it won't be worth living if we cannot put more happiness into it. I must be to blame, too. Will you tell me where I have failed you?"

Mint's smile was add.

"You failed me before you married me," he replied. "You cared more for that wretched youth's little finger than for my whole body. You can't undo the past."

THE following days were charged with misery for Kathy. She knew that If she were to avoid an inevitable crash, her future meetings with Alan must be mere casual encounters, in the presence of others. Such a ban meant that loss of much of her remaining happiness. She suffered as acutely from the sudden deprivation as a drug addict from the abrupt cessation of his source of supply.

Although she tried to appear bright for Una's sake, she felt like a butterfly trying to soar with sodden wings. To add to her depression, the weather changed overnight. A heavy downpour of rain was followed by damp days with a drift of almost invisible moisture. Indoors, every surface was sticky to the touch, while the humidity converted open air exercise into punishment.

Her spirits had sunk to zero on one unusually dark day when the sky was covered with layers of black clouds. The weather was so unnatural and the atmosphere of the house so repressive, that she felt almost suicidal as she glanced at the paper. Its headlines announced the verdict on a woman who was on trial for poisoning her husband. It found her "Guilty"— but owing to the brutality of the man— recommended her to mercy.

Kathy found herself hoping that the woman would get off scot-free. She mooned about in a kind of bad dream where she was only partially conscious of her surroundings. When she paid her morning visit to the kitchen she displayed none of her usual warm humanity which her husband criticized as lack of dignity. As a rule, she took an interest in the maids' remarks, but that day she scarcely heard what they said.

She was also blind to the signs of suppressed excitement in Una during tea-time. The child's face was flushed and her eyes were bright with defiant exultation.

Kathy started nervously when the telephone rang in the hall.

"Expecting a call?" asked Mint.

"No," she replied indifferently.

A MINUTE later the parlor maid appeared to tell her that she was wanted "on the phone." She almost ran from the room, her heart leaping in anticipation. Directly she recognized Alan's voice, it seemed to her, in her strung up condition, to be a prelude to disaster. She felt certain that he was about to rush over and force an issue with Mint

"That you, Kathy?" He spoke breathlessly, as though he shared her excitement. "I'm coming over. At once."

"No." she cried, "you must not come. I don't want you. I—"

"But it's urgent. I've something to tell you."

He rang off before she could protest further. As she laid down the receiver, she looked up to see her husband standing beside her.

"Who was that?" he asked.

"Alan Easter. He says he's coming over."

"And you tried to stop him. Why? Your manner was most odd. Almost vehement. One would think he had designs on our valuables. Is there anything in this house that he covets?"

"Yes," she replied recklessly. "Una."

"Really? Only Una? When this young man arrives. I must have a little enlightening chat with him."

She read the threat underlying his jocose voice. When Alan came he meant to provoke a distressing scene. Indifferent to the drizzle, she rushed from the house and walked up and down the sodden red gravel and squelching lawn.

"I must warn him," she thought. "I must send him away."

As she pushed open the heavy front gate, to see whether the car were in sight she heard footsteps behind her. She turned to see the parlor maid who was holding a newspaper over her head te protect her starched frills from the rain.

"Please madam," she said primly, "Cook wants to know what you've done with the joint?"

"Joint?" repeated Kathy blankly. "Why?"

"It's gone, madam. The whole of it— ribs and sirloin together. And Cook wants to know what's for dinner."

The last sentence recalled Kathy to her domestic responsibility. Her husband was a heavy eater and she knew that there would be pandemonium if an inadequate meal were provided.

She must ring up the butcher and arrange for an express delivery, she said. "Perhaps I had better drive over myself. I'll speak to her."

DIRECTLY she opened the front door she became aware that her husband had been informed already of the mystery. He seemed to be holding a kind of furious investigation in the hall, where the staff was colleoted. Una was hiding behind the cook and appeared terrified by his questions.

Kathy flew to her defense.

"Don't be silly, Hector," she said, trying to speak lightly. "Why have you picked on poor Una? She's not responsible for everything that goes wrong. A stray dog must have stolen it.

"Dogs don't open frigidaires," stormed Mint. "Una, did you steal the joint? Now— no lies."

Kathy stared at the child incredulously. To her dismay, Una's face was scarlet and her lids drooped to hide her guilty eyes.

"Yes," she admitted in a shaky voice. "I took it for my dog."

As they all stared at her, she burst into tears.

"I don't care," she sobbed. "He's my dog. I found him. I saw him from the staircase window crawling over the back garden. He's all muddy, but he's a lovely big Alsatian when he's clean. I took the joint out to him— and he was so glad.

"Where is he?" shouted Mint.

"In the woodshed. I brought him a pan of water and some straw and I left him in the dark. He's asleep and you're not to disturb him. He's too tired."

Mint's face was livid with rage as he snatched a heavy stick from the hall stand.

"I'll soon have him out," he said to Una. "I warned you I'll have no dog here."

Kathy caught his arm as he strode towards the side door.

"For pity's sake, let the poor creature rest," she said. "Tomorrow we can decide what to do with it."

Without speaking, he flung her aside and went out of the house. As Una rushed after him, the cook caught her up in her arms, where she struggled in a passion of anger and grief. The other well-trained maids looked on in an uncomfortable silence which was broken by the parlor maid.

"Excuse me, madam, there's a car in the drive. Shall I say 'Not at home?'"

Looking up, Kathy saw Alan standing at the open front door. He seemed an answer to prayer as she ran towards him and panted out her tale. He was quick to catch its drift, for he broke into her explanation.

"A big dog? Where?"

"The woodshed in the back garden. That way."

He shouted to her as he sprinted around the side of the house.

"Everyone stay indoors."

Kathy returned to the drawing room and dropped limply down on the divan. For the present, she had forgotten the complications of the situation. She merely accepted the fact that her troubles were over because Alan was there....

Suddenly she opened her eyes at the sound of a long-drawn howl in the distance.

IT was followed by silence. As she waited— listening— her scalp tightened and her temples grew cold. Then the room seemed to break apart and the fragments to whirl around her. Sometimes she knew she was staring at the cream wallpaper— at others her surroundings were blacked out.

After a long while, she became conscious of Alan kneeling beside her and chafing her hands.

"Did you hear?" he whispered.

She nodded.

"Yes, I know. It was a wolf. Is Hector dead?"

"Dead from shock. It never mauled him. I was at his heels and I saw the whole thing. It sprang, but he collapsed first. I called it off at once, but he was dead.... Was his heart weak?"

"Yes."

IN imagination Kathy reconstructed the grim tragedy. The big bully bursting into the shed to drive out an exhausted starving dog, only to be confronted by a nightmare vision; green eyes glowing like points of fire through the gloom and a dark shape reared up to spring.

Then she vaguely realized that Alan was speaking.

"The wolf escaped from our zoo some days ago. I was away on the continent and knew nothing about it until I returned today. I came out to warn you about it, for I was afraid it might be a shock if I told you over the wire. But I suppose you heard the rumors?"

"No... Yes." answered Kathy. "I remember now the maids were excited over something this morning, but I didn't listen."

She broke off with a faint scream.

"Where's Una?"

"In the kitchen with the cook," Alan told her. "I've just been talking to her."

"She might have been killed," shuddered Kathy. "She went in to that wolf. She thought he was an Alsatian dog. Why didn't he attack her?"

"Because he was gorged with meat, besides being exhausted. He was probably glad to be back in shelter. He's used to captivity."

"He sprang at Hector— yet he never touched her?"

Her eyes were awed as though she glimpsed a miracle. Although he did not share her exaltation, Alan felt he could not drag her down to a commonplace level.

"Do you remember how Una stroked the lion?" he asked. "She has a certain quality which wins the instinctive confidence of animals. She is fearless and she loves them. They know that. All the same"— his voice sank to a mutter— "I'm thankful she threw Pluto the joint first."

Then he rose to his feet.

"I must ring up the zoo and have the motor lorry sent out with his cage," he said. My uncle will be glad there was no tragedy. Pluto is an unusually fine specimen and he would have been upset if I had been forced to shoot him."

"No tragedy?" Kathys eye reproached him. "You forget— Hector is—"

As they looked at each other in silence, Una burst into the room. She was transformed with her old radiance which lit up her whole face. Her cheeks were flushed— her eyes beamed with happiness.

"Cook says Minty's dead," she cried Joyously. "I can have a puppy now."

Before Kathy could protest, Alan took the child in his arms.

"Why should we be hypocrites?" he asked. "We can learn from Una. She sees only the truth. You are free."

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## 5: Grey Brothers

***Andrew Caldecott***

1884-1951

In: *Fires Burn Blue*, 1948

COLLINSON'S *KONGEA*, published in 1883, stated the highlands of that Colony to be 'well suited for coffee or spice gardens: excepting the Nywedda valley, which is rendered unfit for human habitation by the miasma exhaled from its marshland.' Present-day passengers, who watch their ship being loaded at Takeokuta wharves with case after case, and crate after crate, all stencilled 'Nywedda Produce', might guess Collinson to have been misinformed. He was right, however, according to the terminology and medical science of his day; the habitability of the valley began only with the completion of a great drainage scheme round about 1908. Until then it was devoid of population, save for one solitary individual, of whom and whose fate the pages that follow will give some account.

Of Hilary Hillbarn's origin and history before his arrival in Kongea, at the end of 1895, there is no record. The papers dealing with his appointment as Assistant Entomologist to the Takeokuta Museum must have been lost in the fire that later destroyed the curator's office. He was not a Colonial Office recruit, or there would have been despatches about him in the Secretariat record room. His contemporaries in the museum remember him as reticent, secretive, unsocial and pedantic. The incoming mails brought no letters for him, and he made no friends in Kongea.

The work which he was set to do was that of a field collector, many of the museum specimens standing at that time in need of amplification or replacement. The consequent expeditions into the jungle proved most congenial to Hillbarn. His brief periodical returns to Takeokuta and civilisation were dictated by the necessity of replenishing provisions and handing over his collections. He never stayed long. As a collector he had great success. His specimens included not only some much-needed lepidoptera, but also a number of interesting arachnids hitherto unrepresented. The only cause of concern to the Director of Museums lay in a growing unwillingness on the part of Kongean assistant collectors and camp carriers to accompany Hillbarn on his explorations. This unwillingness culminated in point-blank refusal after the death in mid-jungle of an assistant collector. A formal departmental enquiry had to be instituted.

Complaint against Hillbarn at this enquiry was on two main grounds. First that all his collections were being made in the Nywedda valley, notoriously the home of devils and disease; secondly that all the work of collection was being done by Hillbarn himself, his assistants and subordinates being forced by him

to spend their whole time in felling trees, and in building a large timber hut in the middle of the forest. To these charges Hillbarn replied that the Nywedda valley was of all Kongean regions the richest in insect life, hence his choice of it for his expeditions; and that a weatherproof hut was necessary for the treatment and conservation of his specimens.

The Kongeans being a not unreasonable folk, the Director was disinclined to accept these quite plausible replies without some degree of verification. He decided, therefore, wet season though it was, to go and see for himself. It was not a journey that he was to remember with pleasure. His party had to spend two nights in rain-sodden, leech-ridden scrub; was bogged twice; and had to make circuitous detours, hacking their way through dense and spiny undergrowth. This effort and labour was, however, rewarded on the second morning by the disclosure, in a small clearing on rising ground, not of a small hut but of a commodious two-roomed timber shed, walled with bamboo wattles and thatched with palmleaf.

'What else did you expect?' Hillbarn replied to the Director's expostulations, 'it's no use doing anything by halves: I shall need every inch of this space when I get the big specimens.'

*'Big* specimens?' asked the Director angrily. 'What the devil do you mean? Specimens of what.'

'Arachnids, you old fool,' Hillbarn barked back. 'You're blind if you didn't see them against the sunrise this morning. Just you wait till I bag one.'

The homeward journey was less physically arduous, for they followed the trail that they had hacked on the way up. It was, however, rendered even more uncomfortable for the Director by a growing conviction that he had to deal, not merely with an insubordinate officer, but with a mental case. He had been called an old fool in the hearing of English-speaking Kongean staff: well, he felt himself big enough to forget that; for Hillbarn was the best collector that he'd had. But this talk of arachnids against the sunrise and sunset (for Hillbarn affected to see them again that evening before they made camp) he could not bring himself to forget. Perhaps the young man, who boasted of being malaria-proof, had contracted it in some unusual form detrimental to mental stability. He would send him for medical examination as soon as they got back to Takeokuta.

It was not Hillbarn, however, but the Director who shortly underwent medical examination. He, with three others of the party, succumbed to a severe attack of malaria within a few days of their return, and before he had completed his notes of enquiry or recorded the findings. He lay in hospital a whole fortnight. On his return to duty, the Director found among the letters awaiting his personal attention a short memorandum from Hillbarn.

*DIRECTOR OF MUSEUMS*

*I return herewith my salary cheque for April, having decided to terminate my service on forfeit of a month's pay as provided by clause 12 of my agreement.*

*H. HILLBARN*

*May 5th, 1897*

Nobody in Takeokuta could tell the Director where the signatory had gone. He had indeed become known to very few. Enquiry at shipping offices made it certain that he had not left the Colony: the Director therefore concluded that he must have taken up some job on an up-country plantation. A month or more later, however, he was reported by a headman to have been seen buying provisions in the little shop near Kechoba, which lies at the foot of the Nywedda valley. There were no plantations in the vicinity at that time, so the Director knew at once that he must have returned to that jungle shed. Well; he was no longer a Government servant, and the Department bore no responsibility for his movements. All that need or could be done was to inform the Commissioner of Police of his recent behaviour and of his present whereabouts. This the Director duly did.

ii

THE NYWEDDA VALLEY is incorrectly so called. It is not a depression between two ranges of hills but an oval marshy basin, some three thousand feet above sea level, and roughly fifty square miles in area. There are high hills along seven-eighths of its circumference; the remaining eighth consists of a narrow ridge or saddle-back, at the western foot of which lies the small hamlet of Kechoba. This ridge is of granite, and unbroken by any watercourse. Were the rainfall more than it is, the basin would soon become a mountain lake instead of damp jungle interspersed with bogs and shallow meres.

More than one authority claimed parentage of a scheme to drain it by tunnelling through the ridge. The idea was, indeed, likely to occur to any engineer who inspected the terrain, or studied a contour map of the district. To finance such a project was a more difficult problem. Its cost was finally allocated, in equal shares, between the Colonial Government and a newly formed plantation company, to which the basin was appropriated under a ninety-nine year concession. This concession was instrumented and promulgated by special ordinance in I goo; an incidental effect of which was to alter the status of the region's solitary inhabitant from squatter to trespasser. He no longer camped on Crown land but on private property.

The necessity for Hillbarn's eviction might not have arisen, at any rate in the initial stages of the tunnel scheme, had it not been for his reputation among the local Kongeans. To them he had become the familiar, if not an impersonation, of evil spirits of the mountains. He was seen only when he emerged to obtain provisions at the Kechoba shop. These appearances became fewer as he gradually accustomed his digestion to a diet of jungle herbs and berries. His clothing diminished with each visit, and was finally standardised in a loincloth. His hair grew long and shaggy, covering not only his head and chin but also his legs, chest, arms and backs of the hands. It was a rusty grey. He walked barefoot; and the surface of his skin, where it was not covered by hair, was blotched with sores. The steel-blue eyes seemed set in a challenging stare; he answered neither greeting nor question.

When his stock of currency notes and coin had run out, Hillbarn traded upon the Kechoba shopkeeper's fear of him by taking goods without payment. The second time that he did so the shopman had summoned up courage to ask for it; but Hillbarn pointed menacingly to the hills, crooked his arms, moved them backwards and forwards like a crab, and blew a thin grey froth of saliva through tightly closed lips. This, to the Kongeans, was a sure sign of demoniacal possession. Hillbarn indeed may have intended such an interpretation.

The upshot was that, when the Survey and Public Works Departments received instructions to take levels and measurements for the tunnel scheme, not a single coolie could be induced to set foot in the valley so long as Hillbarn was at large.

The Surveyor-General appealed to the Commissioner of Police; but the latter professed powerlessness in the matter until Hillbarn should have received and acknowledged a formal notice to evacuate. But how serve such a notice on a man hiding in thick jungle? Both officers sought escape from this quandary by explaining their predicament to the Attorney-General.

'Well, well!' was his reply, 'it's a lucky thing that, in drafting the special ordinance, I had in mind that there might be nomad aborigines on whom notices could not be served. So I inserted a provision that notice can be given by proclamation. I'll draft one right away, and have it sent up for the Governor's signature. It'll have to be gazetted, of course, and posted conspicuously at Kechoba. When that's been done, your man will have ten days' grace in which to clear out.'

'But suppose he doesn't?'

'Ah! That's quite another matter. I never advise on hypothetical cases. We must first wait and see.'

The proclamation was duly issued. Its posting attracted quite a crowd of villagers outside the Kechoba shop. None of them could read it, being in English, but the Royal Arms at its top evoked their curiosity and admiration. It was, they supposed, some potent hieroglyphic that would strike terror into the man-devil. But of such comfortable doctrine they were rudely disillusioned next morning, when Hillbarn appeared at the shop-front, bent as usual on loot. He read the proclamation; slashed it into shreds with his jungle knife and, dashing into the shop, seized on one of the ledgers and tore from it some two dozen pages. These he set on the counter, and began writing on them with the shopman's pen and ink. He scribbled fiercely for more than an hour, every now and again savagely tearing into small scraps what he had just written. The shopman, in fear for his life, joined the gaping crowd outside.

Having at last produced a manifesto to his satisfaction he strode with it to where the proclamation had been posted, and pinned it up. Then, having made a larger rape of goods than usual from the shop, he made off into the jungle. Again nobody could read what was written; but a Kongean sub-magistrate, passing by on his return from circuit, declared it to be a bad sort of writing, unpinned it, and took it away with him to Takeokuta.

To the Commissioner of Police next morning it appeared a very had sort of writing. This is how it ran:

*WE, HILARY HILLBARN, of Nywedda*
*KING By conquest,*
*LORD PROTECTOR of the Hills,*
*DEFENDER of the Forests,*
*EMPEROR of all that lives or lies within this vale,*
*Give by these presents to Our subjects*
*GREETING.*
*WHEREAS by proclamation of a recent date*
*A governor of Kongea has presumed*
*That WE shall quit Our rightful Realm and Throne:*
*NOW KNOW YE that the said presumption WE*
*Do utterly contemn and set at nought.*
*WE shall continue here to reign and rule,*
*And peradventure he attempt by force*
*Our Person to evict, let him BEWARE:*
*For WE upon his emissaries*
*With unrelenting hand will quick unleash*
*The Hounds of Death, high-kennelled in the hills.*
*HILARY R.I.*

The Commissioner of Police grunted and frowned. He would have to show this disloyal nonsense to the Chief Secretary; perhaps to the Governor himself.

At noon, therefore, we find him in the former's office, and at a quarter past the hour both officers are walking together towards Government House.

Sir Wilfrid Narrowgate prided himself on being able to see a thing quickly and state it shortly. 'Madman, rebel, or both,' he said, 'the fellow has got to be got out. We won't bring the Attorney-General in on it at this stage: it's easier to act in charity than in law. You've satisfied me that there's a sick man in the jungle; so I shall send a search party to bring him safely out. Here's my specification for the party; you two must settle its personnel. First, a Civil Servant of magisterial rank; second, a young medical officer; third, a gazetted police officer; fourth, a government surveyor who knows the lie of the land. All four must be good men in the jungle: we can't send natives with them if they are as scared as you say of Hillbarn. So the party must travel light: sandwiches and flasks in their haversacks; enough for two days. They must be prepared for violence, but not use it unless forced to. They must get the fellow out without injury to him or to themselves. We needn't prescribe methods now, or probe too curiously into them afterwards. Arrange for a wagonette to meet them at Kechoba on the return journey; and tell the P.M.O. to have accommodation ready at the Tenekka Asylum. That's all for the present; but let me know as soon as they've got their man and handed him over. That's when we may have to call in the Attorney-General.'

The Chief Secretary and Commissioner of Police discussed personnel for the expedition as they walked down from Government House. 'What I like about the Governor,' the Commissioner remarked, 'is the way he relieves one of responsibility.'

'Yes,' dryly assented the Chief Secretary, 'but not of work.'

## iii

THE NEXT DAY but one the search party set out for Kechoba. Its senior member, Hugh Milversom, Assistant District Officer of Karatta, was well known as a hunter of pig and big game: he knew his jungle well. Medical Officer Leonard Hatley, also from Karatta, and Frank Nearwell, Assistant Commissioner of Police, were next in age and official standing. The youngest was Tasman Copworth, a surveyor on agreement from Australia. All four were as physically fit and mentally spry as the purpose of their present expedition demanded.

They had discussed strategy over whiskies and soda the night before. If Hillbarn had any inkling of their search for him he would, Milversom thought, make off into the jungle and elude discovery. Their only hope of speedy contact lay in finding him at his hut. On this point they all agreed; and Nearwell, arguing from police experience, declared that it would be necessary

for them to separate a mile downstream of the hut, and later converge on it simultaneously from the four points of the compass. This plan, Copworth objected, postulated the possibility of four men making an efficient cordon, which he felt to be absurd. They must keep together, and manage somehow to surprise their quarry.

At this Dr Hatley, who was making patterns with his forefinger on the marble-top table out of a splash of spilled soda water, began speaking in a low meditative tone. 'This fellow Hillbarn,' he said, 'has long been an enigma to us doctors. He ought to have died years ago. Malaria completely blotted out the local aborigines; so how has he, a soft-bred European, managed to survive? From all accounts he suffers from emaciation and scurvy; but just think of his dietary! In this hot-house climate, of course, nudity is not injurious, except...'

Hatley here making a premonitory pause, the others impatiently cut in with 'Except what?'

'Except that he can't possibly wander about naked at night at that altitude. As you know, the wind blows hard for eight out of the twelve months; and for an hour or so before dawn it is positively icy. It gets unpleasantly cool soon after sundown. Wait and see for yourselves tomorrow. It's particularly bad this season. We've a score of pneumonia cases in the Karatta hospital. Take my word for it, Hillbarn must keep to his hut of a night, and use blankets too. That's where we shall find him, if we time our arrival after dusk: a hundred to one on that.' The bet was not taken; for the others, though they had not thought of it before, agreed. So they planned their timetable accordingly. They could take things easily on the way up, clearing a path, wherever necessary, in order to facilitate their journey back with Hillbarn.

Their progress up the valley proved uneventful. It was dry underfoot, the weather fine and, owing to the wind, not oppressively hot. At about half-past five in the afternoon they found themselves on rising ground, from which Copworth's trained eyes were able to descry a small clearing, not more than a quarter of a mile away, and in its middle a brown patch which could be nothing but a hut or shed. The scrub round about them was now only breast-high, its branches and twigs bearded with tufts of a grey-green lichen. They decided, therefore, to sit down for a smoke and rest; for Hillbarn might not repair to his hut before sunset. They had not, however, sat long before there broke on their ears the clang of a pan or tin being struck six times.

'Six o'clock,' Nearwell laughed, 'Fancy the fellow beating the hours in deserted jungle!'

'I might do it myself,' mused Hatley. 'His mind may be travelling back to some old church clock striking across a village green. Even lunatics occasionally escape into the past.'

Milversom, who on hearing the clangs had made his way further up the rise, returned at this point to suggest that they might use what remained of daylight to get as near to the clearing as they could without being seen. This they proceeded to do; walking half-bent, and speaking only in undertones. Creeping, thus silently forward they came before very long up against the prostrate trunk of a felled tree, on the edge of the clearing. Peeping from behind it they could see the hut, a few chains distant, and its surround of half-grown coconuts, bread-fruit trees, plantains and chillies. From a slanting bamboo pole there hung by a piece of cord an inverted kerosene tin. A stick, lying on the ground below, evidenced its use as a gong. East and west of the pole two large stones had been set into the ground, each as big as a man could carry unaided.

Milversom was considering whether his party had better wait for complete darkness to veil their approach, or go forthwith to the hut, when they beheld Hillbarn hobbling feebly towards them. He had clearly injured his right leg; for he dragged it laboriously, using a stick. There was no chance, Milversom realised with relief, of his bolting into the jungle. As usual he wore a kind of loin-cloth, but supplemented this evening by a blanket hung down his back from the shoulders like an academic hood. Behind him slunk a very lean black cat, which, on reaching the bamboo pole, he hit at with his stick and drove away. Muttering something which his watchers could not overhear he then began to beat the tin, as though in imitation of the ringing of a bell for church. Indeed when the tolling had ceased it was plain to the four who spied on him that they were witnessing some sort of religious ritual; for he advanced to the large stone on the west side, made signs of beckoning towards the hills, and began to chant words which Milversom afterwards thus reconstructed from memory:

*Creep down, creep down, grey spiders of the sky*
*And leave the cobweb clouds that ye have spun*
*Across the face of day;*
*For day now dies.*

*Creep down, creep down the brazen chain of rays*
*Flung by the sun aslant the western hills;*
*It shall not burn you,*
*For the sun now dies.*

*Creep down, creep down to weave a pall of mist*
*From hill to hill; so hide me from the stars,*
*Until the morrow dawn*
*And they too die.*

*Creep down, creep down; there is no moon to thwart*
*The workings of the night; and I have called*
*All shapes of Hell*
*To keep me company.*

*But none so dear to me, O spiders grey,*
*As beady belly slung from eight lean legs*
*Poised for a pounce*
*Or crouching low to spin.*

*What if you be invisible to such*
*As see not what I see, live not my life,*
*Have other thoughts than mine,*
*Act otherwise?*

*This makes you the more mine, me yours;*
*So do I bide the promised time when I*
*Grey spider shall become,*
*My manhood shed.*

*Creep down, Creep down, entoil the trespasser*
*In grey cocoon of death; so keep me free,*
*My dark soliloquy*
*Inviolate.*

At the close of this incantation Hillbarn limped back to the pole; gave the tin a loud bang and, peering this way and that, cried out 'I smell white men!'

'Your nose doesn't deceive you,' Milversom said, climbing over the tree trunk and signalling the others to follow. 'There are four of us here. How do you do?'

Hillbarn glared angrily at the extended hand. 'I do not know you,' he said, 'or what brings you here.'

'We've come to take you home with us tomorrow. The Governor's sent for you. He can't allow you to die here in the jungle, you know. You already look half-dead.'

'You must be brave men to venture here; but bravery kills more people than it saves. If you are alive, I will come with you tomorrow; but you will not be. They have already marked you.'

'Who have?'

'My grey brothers. Come inside the hut. The sun is down.'

The inside of the hut was bare of furniture; but in a corner on top of a pile of leaves and rushes lay a heap of discoloured blankets. The floor was of trampled earth. In the middle of it a few logs smouldered, yielding little heat or

light but emitting an acrid smoke, for which the palm-thatched roof offered no vent. It was consequently sooted over, and the fumes hung in layers below it.

The party had brought candles in their haversacks and now proceeded to light them, as the last of the twilight faded from the doorway. The resultant glimmer revealed only one thing of interest. There was a closed door in the wall or partition on the right-hand side of the entrance; presumably therefore a second room beyond. In front of it Hillbarn stood shivering, for the evening was already cold. Or was it from excitement? His eyes, now burning with defiance, were certainly those of a madman, and perhaps of a dangerous one.

'They are hungry,' he snarled, 'and will leap on you swiftly, but softly and silently. There may be worse deaths than yours, but none more noiseless. I bid you goodbye.'

At this he wrenched the shut door open.

Milversom afterwards confessed that his heart was in his mouth. Nearwell whipped out his service revolver, and Copworth had a hand on his jungle knife. Only Dr Hatley kept his eyes away from the opened door. They were focused keenly on Hillbarn.

Nothing emerged from the door, and they could see nothing but blackness beyond it.

'They invite you to see them first,' Hillbarn said; 'take your candles and look inside.'

They did so. In various positions crouched a large number of huge spiders; the body of each about the size of a coconut, the legs covered with a grey-green inch-long hairiness. They were not grouped on one level; some were on the floor, others clung to racks against the walls, yet others hung from the rafters. All were motionless.

Again Milversom's heart was in his mouth, and Copworth's fear broke out chokingly with 'God help us! Just look at the bloody things!' Nearwell pointed his revolver at the nearest of them. The doctor's gaze, however, was still riveted on Hillbarn, as though that were the quarter from which danger might come. He had in fact noticed, what the others had not, that since their entry into the hut Hillbarn had picked up from somewhere, and now held in his hand, a heavy chopper.

This atmosphere of apprehension and suspense was all of a sudden dispelled by a happening that in the recollection, but not at the time, appeared ludicrous. The lean black cat must have passed unnoticed through the door when Hillbarn opened it. It now sprang across the floor at some mouse or rat, and in doing so knocked over three or four of the spiders. The bodies, that had looked the size of coconuts, were now revealed *as* coconuts; the legs as twigs with lichen on them. Hillbarn had modelled them into spiders so realistically

that they would have deceived in a stronger light than that of the candles. Dr Hatley, on a considered review of the case, had no doubt that the wretched man believed himself to have endowed them with life.

There was no time for thought at the moment, for a horrible scene ensued. Hillbarn lurched savagely forward; his injured leg gave way beneath him, and he crashed headlong to the floor, knocking over more of the spiders and pinning the cat under his left elbow. With the chopper in his right hand he hacked at its protruding forelegs; and then, grabbing its tail with his left, half-decapitated it. Twistily struggling to a kneeling posture he held the shuddering animal above his head, its blood dripping on to his hair and forehead, and hurled it against the wall. With a circular swing of the chopper he next smashed a couple of the spiders that lay nearest to him, and then giddily attempted to regain his feet.

'Get that chopper from him,' shouted Hatley; and Milversom, with a kick at his right wrist, sent it clattering to the ground. In an instant Nearwell and Copworth had closed with him, hauled him erect and propped him against the wall. It needed their full strength to hold him upright, for he seemed suddenly to have gone limp and inarticulate.

'Lay him down on the blankets, please,' the doctor ordered in a professional tone, 'I rather fancy he's finished.'

He was. Whatever store of vitality there may have been in his underfed, underclothed body, it had been squandered in that final paroxysm of rage and violence. As Hatley examined it now upon the bed of leaves and rushes there was neither breath nor heartbeat. Hilary Hillbarn was dead.

There was nothing more that they could do that night; so, having pulled palm fronds from the roof and laid them as mats before the fire, they lay down, ate some sandwiches, drank from their flasks, and talked themselves into such sleep as they managed to get.

## iv

THE PRESENCE at Hillbarn's passing of a magistrate, doctor and senior officer of police would, without doubt or question under Kongean law, have enabled immediate interment. Milversom, however, reminded his colleagues of the Kongean proverb that 'every planting makes a haunting'. To leave the corpse in that valley would be to make an evil reputation worse. They slung it, therefore, in a blanket from a long bamboo and, shouldering it, marvelled at the lightness of their burden. It was little heavier than a child.

Starting at dawn they reached the Kechoba shop by three o'clock. The wagonette was there; and the body was duly taken to the Takeokuta mortuary.

Next day the four members of the search party were summoned to the Secreta.

'The Governor wishes me to thank you for your services,' the Chief Secretary told them, 'having heard the main gist of your report from the Commissioner of Police. His Excellency was greatly distressed about the cat. He has come across a passage in an old *Museum Journal* which he thinks might interest you. You will find it on the writing-table in the waiting-room, in case any of you would like to take a note. His Excellency has marked the passage in pencil on page thirty-seven.'

The *Museum Journal* was that of the third quarter of 1893, and the marked passage read as follows:

...but the Kongean *araneae* have been insufficiently collected, and many of the museum specimens are not in a condition to ensure correct identification. One of the *avicularia* appears to be of a size hitherto unreported from any tropical region; but the specimen is too disintegrated to admit of exact measurement. It may have been this species that gave rise to the legend, current within living memory among the aborigines, of man-hunting spiders. The legend is no longer heard, but there survives in some districts a superstition of mountain spirits that assume a visible but impalpable arachnid form. Medicine men and warlocks are still alluded to in such districts as 'those who behold the eight-legged ones', and a popular but fanciful derivation of the name Nywedda is from nyiva (leg) and edda (eight). For its true derivation the reader is referred to the Rev Josiah Hughson's monograph on *Some Place Names in Western Kongea.*

Milverson, who had been holding the book, suddenly dropped it. There had crept out on to his hand, from the hollow back-cloth, a small but seemingly vicious grey spider.

———————————

## 6: The God Shoo Shan.

***Dy Edwardson***

Edward Dyson, 1865-1931
*Punch* (Melbourne) 3 July 1913

*One of the series "The Hobbies of Austin Porteus".*

THE SHOP of Mr. Austin Porteus was a peculiar shop, and Mr. Austin Porteus was a peculiar man; a man of medium height, very broad-shouldered, somewhat corpulent, with a large head, made much larger to the view by a plenteous growth of curling white hair and a handful of curling white whiskers on either cheek. Out of this snowy fleece Mr. Austin Porteus peered through a pair of steel-rimmed glasses with thick lenses.

He had chubby, red, round cheeks, and a chubby, red, round, clean-shaven chin. His upper lip was shaven, too, and it was a perfect Cupid's bow of an upper lip. Mr. Porteus had a mouth like a baby. In fact, his whole face suggested Cupid grown elderly and run to whiskers, without having lost his peculiar interest in men, women and affairs.

Mr. Porteus sat behind the small counter in his small, rather dusty shop, and peered closely at a bronze cist, evidently an antique, beautifully chased, and embossed with charming figures. Mr. Porteus was, in fact, an archaeologist— a collector of antiques. His curious little shop was well stocked with objects of quaint interest— some delightful, others ugly, all strange and unusual. The shop was situated in a narrow, out-of-the-way street in a little-frequented corner of the city. It had one small window, not very carefully attended, through the dusty glass of which you might discover— if you were quite determined about it— a few articles of pottery, some scraps of South Sea ornament, such as armlets, anklets, necklaces and feathered head-dresses, and several aboriginal weapons. Mr. Austin Porteus seemed to trouble little about customers. If you. called to deal you were as likely as not to find the little shop closed light, and Mr. Porteus away. This might make you angry— but Mr. Porteus was never upset. He knew that his customers would come again.

It was early in the afternoon of a warm day in October, Mr. Austin Porteus chuckled over the ancient metal chest, flipped it with his thumb-nail, and chuckled again.

"A forgery!" he said, and giggled like a happy child. "A lovely forgery!"

Then Mr. Henry Brain looked in.

Mr. Brain was an entirely different type of man— tall, lean, clean-Shaven, dressed in a neat blue sac suit; shrewd of face, not more than 'forty-five— a man of the world in every twitch and crease of him. He might have been an eminent lawyer; he was actually a successful detective.

"Lord, I'm lucky," said Mr. Brain. He took off his hat, and wiped his square brow. "Was afraid to death you wouldn't be in."

"What is it ?"' asked Mr. Porteus quietly, wrapping his fictitious antique in tissue paper with loving care. "Something very much in your line. Will you come? We can talk as we travel. It's at Riverton, and it's serious."

"Dear me," said Mr. Austin Porteus. "Dear, dear me." He locked his cist in a large, iron-lined cupboard, and followed Brain out, locking the door after him. Brain had a cab at the door, and a moment later the two were being bowled at a smart pace in the direction of Kiverton, a suburb priding itself on its exclusiveness and its aristocratic inconveniences. In the daylight between the shop door and the cab the contrast between the two men was flashed upon us with glaring emphasis'— the rather shabby, somewhat dusty black suit of Mr. Porteus looking particularly seedy and unkempt alongside Mr. Brain's gentlemanly neatness. It was noted, too, that Mr. Porteus wore carpet slippers, rather down at the heel, and that his tie had not been knotted.

"Murder?" said Mr. Porteus in the cab.

"Why that guess?"

"You have your murderous air, my friend."

The detective smiled. "I suppose I had. I am very much at a loss. Here are the details as closely as possible. It's either suicide or murder, and Mr. John Pride is the victim.''

"John Pride!" ejaculated Mr. Porteus. "Bless my soul! I knew him. He was a bit of a collector himself; now and then a customer of mine."

"Good, you will be doubly interested. He was found at about half-past two this afternoon stabbed and dead on the floor of his room in most extraordinary circumstances.

"He was a bachelor, you know," Brain continued, "and lived in rather a fine house in River-street, Riverton. He intended leaving the house, and two people called at about a quarter past two to look over the place. While the housekeeper was showing these people through the back premises, they having already seen the front, of the house, a shriek was heard from the drawing-room, and the general servant— a girl of about seventeen— rushed into the kitchen, white with horror, and crying murder. She had found her master lying upon the drawing room floor, with a knife through his heart."

"There was nobody with him in the interval between the strangers leaving, the room and the discovery of his body?"

"Nobody we know of. It hardly seems possible that anybody could have reached him unobserved."

"And this servant girl?"

"A timid, rather foolish, country-bred creature. She is almost dead with terror. Quite out of the question."

"In affairs of this kind, my dear Brain, nobody is quite out of the question. What of the visitors— these people looking over the house?"

"They are Americans, a Mr. and Mrs. Decken. He is a member of a his Chicago firm of packers, a rich man, and has been in Melbourne about five months. They have a servant with them, a Chinese boy, Won Yen."

"And these people were under observation during the whole of the time?"

"Practically. They had just been through the conservatory, which is a very fine one, had entered the kitchen, when the alarm and was given. The housekeeper was with them all that time."

"Then if the man were alone the whole of the time there is no escape from the certainty that he suicided."

"I cannot quite reconcile myself to that. There is no discoverable reason. Pride was a man comfortably off, a man of cheerful disposition, and it seems to me— and here the doctor supports my opinion— that the blow that drove this curious weapon clean through the man's body was not self-delivered. Then again I admit that in falling, the weight of his body may have driven the knife further. He was lying on his face."

"There is one thing quite certain, Brain, that if a man is found stabbed, and no living; soul has been near him. he has stabbed himself. Detective science eliminates miracles. Are all the people of the house accounted for?"

"One curious incident remains. The Chinese boy who followed the Deckens over the house carrying Mrs. Decken's wraps was left in the conservatory."

"Oh, oh ! This is quite another story."

"Wait. He was not with the party in the kitchen when the body was found, and was not thought of till ten minutes later, when the hubbub had subsided somewhat, and the Police had arrived. Then he alone was missing. A hurried search was made. Telephone messages were sent in all directions advising the police of the adjacent suburbs to look out for him. Our friend John Hop imagined he had a soft thing, and that Won Yen was the guilty man.

"But," said Brain, "Won Yen came to light a few minutes' later. He was heard calling in the garden, and the constable himself found him in the conservatory."

"Where he had been hiding?"

"Where he was securely locked up. Mrs. Camden, the housekeeper, had locked the conservatory securely on leaving. It was a precaution her master had always insisted upon. Won Yen, who had loitered behind the others, examining the peculiar flowers, was overlooked for the time. He was not,

liberated till the policeman himself unlocked the door in the presence of four witnesses, all of whom are positive that the door was locked."

Not another word passed between Mr. Austin Porteus and Brain, during the remainder of the ride. Mr. Porteus sat in his corner, twiddling two fat thumbs, and murmuring at intervals, "Bless my soul! God bless my soul!" Detective Brain had taken all necessary precautions.

The body remained on a couch in the drawing room, the witnesses were all detained. Mr. Porteus looked down at the mortal remains of the late John Pride, without a trace of emotion. He examined the weapon with which the deed was done, and recognised it immediately. as a valuable sample of an old art peculiar, to one notoriously martial Burmese tribe.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Porteus. He walked slowly round the room, and halted before an art object here and there. Mr. Pride had been a judicious collector of curios. He knew a good thing, and had purchased many.

Austin Porteus paused finally before a remarkable object standing on a fine carven, black-wood bureau in one corner of the room. It was a gross sample of Asiatic fancy, a monstrous conception, half-human,. half-frog, marvellously wrought in three metals— brass, silver and gold— touched with a pearl-like enamel in green and red, chased with exquisite art. Its large, blood-red eyes were twin stones having extraordinary fire. Its teeth were true pearls, and a great crystal was embedded in its breast.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Porteus. He polished his glasses, and looked more closely, and lingered so long that presently Brain ventured to remind him.

"After all, my old friend, we are not here to study curiosities, are we?"

"Aren't we?" replied Mr. Porteus, beaming over his steel-rimmed glasses. "Aren't we, though, really?" Porteus went back, to the body, and pondered that as he had pondered the graven image.

Then he took up John Pride's right hand.

"Bless my soul," he said. "Now I should like to see these people— the Deckens. I would prefer to see them alone for a minute, if you don't mind."

Mr. Porteus spent only five minutes with the Deckens, eliciting nothing of any importance, it would seem. The case troubled him, apparently. He went into the garden to ponder it. He drifted in and out of the conservatory, and round the left wall of the house. He spent a minute or two under the window of the drawing-room, then startled the people in with the body by suddenly appearing among them. He had accomplished this by pushing up the window and clambering nimbly into the room. For a stout, elderly man he did it remarkably well.

"You did not hear me," he said. "You saw me, of course, but you did not hear me." "What of it?" asked Brain. "Just to show that it was possible for a

man to get in from the garden, stab John Pride, and get out again, as Won Yen did."

"The Chinaman?"

"Won Yen is not a Chinaman."

"You have seen him? He has confessed?"

"I have not seen him; but you had better put him under arrest at once, I think."

Brain signalled to a constable, who hastened from the room.

"Then you do not uphold the idea of suicide?" Brain said, turning to Mr. Porteus.

"John Pride was murdered as he stood at this table!" Mr. Porteus took the dead man's right hand in his, and pulled aside the clenched fingers. "See," he said.

Brain looked closely. Under the fingers, against the palm, was a small object like a beetle carved in stone.

"What is it ?" he asked.

"That is a scarab. It is genuine."

"But what does it prove?"

"Only that a man does not stab himself whilst holding another article than the knife in his right hand, unless he, is a left-handed man, which John Pride was not."

"But if it is a murder what is the object— the motive?"

"There is the object and the motive." Austin Porteus pointed to the squat metal monster on the black bureau.

"That appears only the fantastical work of some decadent sculptor to a casual observer— it is really Shoo Shan, a very venerable object to you if you happen to be a Burmese, an object of absolute sanctity for which you would happily lay down your earthly life in the certain hope of celestial glory if you happened to be a Twoi Burmese, of the Pakoi hills, where the pure Buddhism of Lower Burma is mixed with the hideous superstitions of Assam and Tibet. Shoo Shin was stolen from a Twoi pagoda temple seven years ago. Pride bought it in China, and brought it here. Won Yen is a Burmese, a Twoi of the Pakoi heights, and no Chinaman. He killed John Pride to restore Shoo Shan to that Twoi Pagoda out from Manchi. I know the history of Shoo Shan. I expected trouble for the owner while I envied him the treasure, but I did not know Pride was that man."

"But Won Yen was locked in the conservatory."

"Where he locked himself after killing John Pride."

"Where the housekeeper locked him before the killing of John Pride."

"The conservatory is practically a hot-house. It is built of glass. There is a loose pane in the wall near the door. This pane slides in its leaden setting. Won Yen, your Chinese boy, is a Twoi priest of forty. He has a subtle mind and a keen eye. He discovered the loose pane, or he made it loose. Slipping the pane aside, he put his head through, unlocked the padlock, let himself out, stole through the window, and killed Pride with the knife he had seen lying on the table when he went through the loom with his master and mistress. He saw Shoo Shan at the same time; but it is a thousand to one he had long known it was in Pride's possession, and was only waiting and plotting for a chance to recover it. When he had killed Pride, he escaped through the window, closed the window, relocked himself in the conservatory, and waited with celestial stoicism to be found there by the first silly policeman who might be called in."

"But, confound it all, he didn't steal the idol."

"That was not necessary. John Pride was a single man. His collection will be sold under the hammer. The god, Shoo Shan, will be bought, by an emissary, from the Twoi, and returned to its temple."

"Thank God, we have Won Yen hard and fast."

"Don't be too sure. He. is probably dead by this," said Porteus, sweetly.

Brain uttered an exclamation of amazement, and darted from the room. He was too late. He found a horrified policeman standing over Won Yen, who lay convulsed upon the kitchen floor.

"Why didn't you warn me earlier?" Brain complained when next he met his friend, the archaeologist.

"It did not occur to me sooner that he would kill himself when arrested. However, the chances are it would not have been prevented. Won Yen was prepared for any emergency, be sure of that."

HENRY BRAIN and Austin Porteus were present at the sale of Pride's belongings a few months later. Porteus bid high for the marvellous idol, Shoo Shan, but was outbid by a small, quiet, dark-skinned man who looked extremely odd in his European setting— a black frock coat, white linen, and a high silk hat.

"That," said Porteus, "is Won Yen's confederate."

Brain jerked a short oath. "Can nothing he done?" he said.

"Nothing," answered Austin Porteus. "You wouldn't work up a conviction in a thousand years."

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## 7: The Bath-Chair

***E. F. Benson***

1867-1940

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EDMUND FARADAY, at the age of fifty, had every reason to be satisfied with life: he had got all he really wanted, and plenty of it. Health was among the chief causes of his content, and he often reflected that the medical profession would have a very thin time of it, if everyone was as fortunate as he. His appreciation of his good fortune was apt at times to be a little trying: he ate freely, he absorbed large (but in no way excessive) quantities of mixed alcoholic liquors, pleasantly alluding to his immunity from any disagreeable effects, and he let it be widely known that he had a cold bath in the morning, spent ten minutes before an open window doing jerks and flexings, and had a fine appetite for breakfast. Not quite so popular was his faint contempt for those who had to be careful of themselves. It was not expressed in contemptuous terms, indeed he was jovially sympathetic with men perhaps ten years younger than himself who found it more prudent to be abstemious. "Such a bore for you, old man," he would comment, "but I expect you're wise."

In addition to these physical advantages, he was master of a very considerable income, derived from shares in a very sound company of general stores, which he himself had founded, and of which he was chairman: this and his accumulated savings enabled him to live precisely as he pleased. He had a house near Ascot, where he spent most week-ends from Friday to Monday, playing golf all day, and another in Massington Square, conveniently close to his business. He might reasonably look forward to a robust and prosperous traverse of that table-land of life which with healthy men continues till well after they have passed their seventieth year. In London he was accustomed to have a couple of hours' bridge at his club before he went back to his bachelor home where his sister kept house for him, and from morning to night his life was spent in enjoying or providing for his own pleasures.

Alice Faraday was, in her own department, one of the clues of his prosperous existence, for it was she who ran his domestic affairs for him. He saw little of her, for he always breakfasted by himself, and encountered her in the morning only for a moment when he came downstairs to set out for his office, and told her whether there would be some of his friends to dinner, or whether he would be out; she would then interview the cook and telephone to the tradesmen, and make her tour of the house to see that all was tidy and speckless. At the end of the day again it was but seldom that they spent a domestic evening together: either he dined out leaving her alone, or three friends or perhaps seven were his guests and made up a table or two tables of

bridge. On these occasions Alice was never of the party. She was no card player, she was rather deaf, she was silent and by no means decorative, and she was best represented by the admirable meal she had provided for him and his friends. At the house at Ascot she performed a similar role, finding her way there by train on Friday morning, so as to have the house ready for him when he motored down later in the day.

Sometimes he wondered whether he would not be more comfortable if he married and gave Alice a modest home of her own with an income to correspond, for, though he saw her but seldom, her presence was slightly repugnant to him. But marriage was something of a risk, especially for a man of his age who had kept out of it so long, and he might find himself with a wife who had a will of her own, and who did not understand, as Alice certainly did, that the whole reason of her existence was to make him comfortable. Again he wondered whether perfectly-trained servants like his would not run the house as efficiently as his sister, in which case she would be better away; he would, indefinably, be more at his ease if she were not under his roof. But then his cook might leave, or his housemaid do her work badly, and there would be bills to go through, and wages to be paid, and catering to be thought of. Alice did all that, and his only concern was to draw her a monthly cheque, with a grumble at the total. As for his occasional evenings with her, though it was a bore to dine with this rather deaf, this uncouth and bony creature, such evenings were rare, and when dinner was over, he retired to his own den, and spent a tolerable hour or two over a book or a crossword puzzle. What she did with herself he had no idea, nor did he care, provided she did not intrude on him. Probably she read those gruesome books about the subconscious mind and occult powers which interested her. For him the conscious mind was sufficient, and she had little place in it. A secret unsavoury woman: it was odd that he, so spick and span and robust, should be of the same blood as she.

This regime, the most comfortable that he could devise for himself, had been practically forced on Alice. Up till her father's death she had kept house for him, and in his old age he had fallen on evil days. He had gambled away in stupid speculation on the Stock Exchange a very decent capital, and for the last five years of his life he had been entirely dependent on his son, who housed them both in a dingy little flat just around the corner from Massington Square. Then the old man had had a stroke and was partially paralysed, and Edmund, always contemptuous of the sick and the inefficient, had grudged every penny of the few hundred pounds which he annually allowed him. At the same time he admired the powers of management and economy that his sister manifested in contriving to make her father comfortable on his meagre pittance. For instance, she even got him a second-hand bath-chair, shabby and

shiny with much usage, and on warm days she used to have him wheeled up and down the garden in Massington Square, or sit there reading to him. Certainly she had a good idea of how to use money, and so, on her father's death, since she had to be provided for somehow, he offered her a hundred pounds a year, with board and lodging, to come and keep house for him. If she did not accept this munificence she would have to look out for herself, and as she was otherwise penniless, it was not in her power to refuse. She brought the bath-chair with her, and it was stored away in a big shed in the garden behind her brother's house. It might come into use again some day.

Edmund Faraday was an exceedingly shrewd man, but he never guessed that there was any psychical reason, beyond the material necessity, why Alice so eagerly accepted his offer. Briefly, this reason was that his sister regarded him with a hatred that prospered and burned bright in his presence. She hugged it to her, she cherished and fed it, and for that she must be with him: otherwise it might die down and grow cold. To hear him come in of an evening thrilled her with the sense of his nearness, to sit with him in silence at their rare solitary meals, to watch him, to serve him was a feast to her. She had no definite personal desire to injure him, even if that had been possible, but she must be near him, waiting for some inconjecturable doom, which, long though it might tarry, would surely overtake him, provided only that she kept the dynamo of her hatred ceaselessly at work. All vivid emotion, she knew, was a force in the world, and sooner or later it worked out its fulfilment. In her solitary hours, when her housekeeping work was accomplished, she directed her mind on him like a searchlight, she studied books of magic and occult lore that revealed or hinted at the powers which concentration can give. Witches and sorcerers, in the old days, ignorant of the underlying cause, made spells and incantations, they fashioned images of wax to represent their victims, and bound and stabbed them with needles in order to induce physical illness and torturing pains, but all this was child's play, dealing with symbols: the driving force behind them, which was much better left alone to do its will in its own way without interference, was hate. And it was no use being impatient: it was patience that did its perfect work. Perhaps when the doom began to shape itself, a little assistance might be given: fears might be encouraged, despair might be helped to grow, but nothing more than that. Just the unwearied waiting, the still intense desire, the black unquenchable flame....

Often she felt that her father's spirit was in touch with her, for he, too, had loathed his son and when he lay paralysed, without power of speech, she used to make up stories about Edmund for his amusement, how he would lose all his money, how he would be detected in some gross dishonesty in his business, how his vaunted health would fail him, and how cancer or some crippling

ailment would grip him; and then the old man's eyes would brighten with merriment, and he cackled wordlessly in his beard and twitched with pleasure. Since her father's death, Alice had no sense that he had gone from her, his spirit was near her, and its malevolence was undiminished. She made him partner of her thoughts: sometimes Edmund was late returning from his work, and as the minutes slipped by and still he did not come, it was as if she still made stories for her father, and told him that the telephone bell would soon ring, and she would find that she was being rung up from some hospital where Edmund had been carried after a street accident. But then she would check her thoughts; she must not allow herself to get too definite or even to suggest anything to the force that was brewing and working round him. And though at present all seemed well with him, and the passing months seemed but to endow him with new prosperities, she never doubted that fulfilment would fail, if she was patient and did her part in keeping the dynamo of hate at work.

Edmund Faraday had only lately moved into the house he now occupied. Previously he had lived in another in the same square, a dozen doors off, but he had always wanted this house: it was more spacious, and it had behind it a considerable plot of garden, lawn and flower-beds, with a high brick wall surrounding it. But the other house was still unlet, and the house agent's board on it was an eyesore to him: there was money unrealized while it stood empty. But to-night, as he approached it, walking briskly back from his office, he saw that there was a man standing on the balcony outside the drawing-room windows: evidently then there was someone seeing over it. As he drew nearer, the man turned, took a few steps towards the long open window and passed inside. Faraday noticed that he limped heavily, leaning on a stick and swaying his body forward as he advanced his left leg, as if the joint was locked. But that was no concern of his, and he was pleased to think that somebody had come to inspect his vacant property. Next morning on his way to business he looked in at the agent's, in whose hands was the disposal of the house, and asked who had been enquiring about it. The agent knew nothing of it: he had not given the keys to anyone.

"But I saw a man standing on the balcony last night," said Faraday. "He must have got hold of the keys."

But the keys were in their proper place, and the agent promised to send round at once to make sure that the house was duly locked up. Faraday took the trouble to call again on his way home, only to learn that all was in order, front door locked, and back door and area gate locked, nor was there any sign that the house had been burglariously entered.

Somehow this trumpery incident stuck in Faraday's mind, and more than once that week it was oddly recalled to him. One morning he saw in the street

a little ahead of him a man who limped and leaned on his stick, and instantly he bethought himself of that visitor to the empty house for his build and his movement were the same, and he quickened his step to have a look at him. But the pavement was crowded, and before he could catch him up the man had stepped into the roadway, and dodged through the thick traffic, and Edmund lost sight of him. Once again, as he was coming up the Square to his own house, he was sure that he saw him walking in the opposite direction, down the other side of the Square, and now he turned back in order to come round the end of the garden and meet him face to face. But by the time he had got to the opposite pavement there was no sign of him. He looked up and down the street beyond; surely that limping crippled walk would have been visible a long way off. A big man, broad-shouldered and burly in make: it should have been easy to pick him out. Faraday felt certain he was not a householder in the Square, or surely he must have noticed him before. And what had he been doing in his locked house: and why, suddenly, should he himself now catch sight of him almost every day? Quite irrationally, he felt that this obtrusive and yet elusive stranger had got something to do with him.

He was going down to Ascot to-morrow, and to-night was one of those rare occasions when he dined alone with his sister. He had little appetite, he found fault with the food, and presently the usual silence descended. Suddenly she gave her little bleating laugh. "Oh, I forgot to tell you," she said. "There was a man who called to-day— didn't give any name— who wished to see you about the letting of the other house. I said it was in the agent's hands: I gave him the address. Was that right, Edmund?"

"What was he like?" he rapped out.

"I never saw his face clearly at all. He was standing in the hall with his back to the window, when I came down. But a big man, like you in build, but crippled. Very lame, leaning heavily on his stick."

"What time was this?"

"A few minutes only before you came in."

"And then?"

"Well, when I told him to apply to the agent, he turned and went out, and, as I say, I never saw his face. It was odd somehow. I watched him from the window, and he walked round the top of the Square and down the other side. A few minutes afterwards I heard you come in."

She watched him as she spoke, and saw trouble in his face.

"I can't make out who the fellow is," he said. "From your description he seems like a man I saw a week ago, standing on the balcony of the other house. Yet when I enquired at the agent's, no one had asked for the keys, and

the house was locked up all right. I've seen him several times since, but never close. Why didn't you ask his name, or get his address?"

"I declare I never thought of it," she said.

"Don't forget, if he calls again. Now if you've finished you can be off. You'll go down to Ascot to-morrow morning, and let us have something fit to eat. Three men coming down for the week-end."

Faraday went out to his morning round of golf on Saturday in high good spirits: he had won largely at bridge the night before, and he felt brisk and clear-eyed. The morning was very hot, the sun blazed, but a bastion of black cloud coppery at the edges was pushing up the sky from the east, threatening a downpour, and it was annoying to have to wait at one of the short holes while the couple in front delved among the bunkers that guarded the green. Eventually they holed out, and Faraday waiting for them to quit saw that there was watching them a big man, leaning on a stick, and limping heavily as he moved. "That's he," he thought to himself, "so now I'll get a look at him." But when he arrived at the green the stranger had gone, and there was no sign of him anywhere. However, he knew the couple who were in front, and he could ask them when he got to the clubhouse who their friend was. Presently the rain began, short in duration but violent, and his partner went to change his clothes when they got in. Faraday scorned any such precaution: he never caught cold, and never yet in his life had he had a twinge of rheumatism, and while he waited for his less robust partner he made enquiries of the couple who had been playing in front of him as to who their lame companion was. But they knew nothing of him: neither of them had seen him.

Somehow this took the edge off his sense of well-being, for indeed it was a queer thing. But Sunday dawned, bright and sparkling, and waking early he jumped out of bed with the intention of a walk in the garden before his bath. But instantly he had to clutch at a chair to save himself a fall. His left leg had given way under his weight, and a stabbing pain shot through his hip-joint. Very annoying: perhaps he should have changed his wet clothes yesterday. He dressed with difficulty, and limped downstairs. Alice was there arranging fresh flowers for the table.

"Why, Edmund, what's the matter?" she asked.

"Touch of rheumatism," he said. "Moving about will put it right."

But moving about was not so easy: golf was out of the question, and he sat all day in the garden, cursing this unwonted affliction, and all day the thought of the lame man, in build like himself, scratched about underground in his brain, like a burrowing mole.

Arrived back in London Faraday saw a reliable doctor, who, learning of his cold baths and his undisciplined use of the pleasures of the cellar and the

table, put him on a regime which was a bitter humiliation to him, for he had joined the contemptible army of the careful. "Moderation, my dear sir," said his adviser. "No more cold baths or port for you, and a curb on your admirable appetite. A little more quiet exercise, too, during the week, and a good deal less on your week-ends. Do your work and play your games and see your friends. But moderation, and we'll soon have you all right."

It was in accordance with this distasteful advice that Faraday took to walking home if he had been dining out in the neighbourhood, or, if at home, took a couple of turns round the Square before going to bed. Contrary to use, he was without guests several nights this week, and on the last of them, before going down into the country again, he limped out about eleven o'clock feeling ill at ease and strangely apprehensive of the future. Though the violence of his attack had abated, walking was painful and difficult, and his halting steps, he felt sure, must arrest a contemptuous compassion in all who knew what a brisk, strong mover he had been. The night was cloudy and sweltering hot, there was a tenseness and an oppression in the air that matched his mood. All pleasure had been sucked out of life for him by this indisposition, and he felt with some inward and quaking certainty that it was but the shadow of some more dire visitant who was drawing near. All this week, too, there had been something strange about Alice. She seemed to be expecting something, and that expectation filled her with a secret glee. She watched him, she took note, she was alert....

He had made the complete circuit of the Square, and now was on his second round, after which he would turn in. A hundred yards of pavement lay between him and his own house, and it and the roadway were absolutely empty. Then, as he neared his own door, he saw that a figure was advancing in his direction; like him it limped and leaned on a stick. But though a week ago he had wanted to meet this man face to face, something in his mind had shifted, and now the prospect of the encounter filled him with some quaking terror. A meeting, however, was not to be avoided, unless he turned back again, and the thought of being followed by him was even more intolerable than the encounter. Then, while he was still a dozen yards off, he saw that the other had paused opposite his door, as if waiting for him.

Faraday held his latchkey in his hand ready to let himself in. He would not look at the fellow at all, but pass him with averted head. When he was now within a foot or two of him, the other put out his hand with a detaining gesture, and involuntarily Faraday turned. The man was standing close to the street lamp, and his face was in vivid light. And that face was Faraday's own: it was as if he beheld his own image in a looking-glass.... With a gulping breath he

let himself into his house, and banged the door. There was Alice standing close within, waiting for him surely.

"Edmund," she said— and just as surely her voice trembled with some secret suppressed glee— "I went to post a letter just now, and that man who called about the other house was loitering outside. So odd."

He wiped the cold dews from his forehead.

"Did you get a look at him?" he asked. "What was he like?"

She gave her bleating laugh, and her eyes were merry.

"A most extraordinary thing!" she said. "He was so like you that I actually spoke to him before I saw my mistake. His walk, his build, his face: everything. Most extraordinary! Well, I'll go up to bed now. It's late for me, but I thought you would like to know that he was about, in case you wanted to speak to him. I wonder who he is, and what he wants. Sleep well!"

In spite of her good wishes, Faraday slept far from well. According to his usual custom, he had thrown the windows wide before he got into bed, and he was just dozing off, when he heard from outside an uneven tread and the tap of a stick on the pavement, his own tread he would have thought, and the tap of his own stick. Up and down it went, in a short patrol, in front of his house. Sometimes it ceased for a while, but no sooner did sleep hover near him than it began again. Should he look out, he asked himself, and see if there was anyone there? He recoiled from that, for the thought of looking again on himself, his own face and figure, brought the sweat to his forehead. At last, unable to bear this haunted vigil any longer, he went to the window. From end to end, as far as he could see, the Square was empty, but for a policeman moving noiselessly on his rounds, and flashing his light into areas.

Dr. Inglis visited him next morning. Since seeing him last, he had examined the X-ray photograph of the troublesome joint, and he could give him good news about that. There was no sign of arthritis; a muscular rheumatism, which no doubt would yield to treatment and care, was all that ailed him. So off went Faraday to his work, and the doctor remained to have a talk to Alice, for, jovially and encouragingly, he had told him that he suspected he was not a very obedient patient, and must tell his sister that his instructions as to food and tabloids must be obeyed.

"Physically there's nothing much wrong with him, Miss Faraday," he said, "but I want to consult you. I found him very nervous and I am sure he was wanting to tell me something, but couldn't manage it. He ought to have thrown off his rheumatism days ago, but there's something on his mind, sapping his vitality. Have you any idea— strict confidence, of course— what it is?"

She gave her little bleat of laughter.

"Wrong of me to laugh, I know, Dr. Inglis," she said, "but it's such a relief to be told there's nothing really amiss with dear Edmund. Yes: he has something on his mind— dear me, it's so ridiculous that I can hardly speak of it."

"But I want to know."

"Well, it's a lame man, whom he has seen several times. I've seen him, too, and the odd thing is he is exactly like Edmund. Last night he met him just outside the house, and he came in, well, really looking like death."

"And when did he see him first? After this lameness came upon him, I'll be bound."

"No: before. We both saw him before. It was as if— such nonsense it sounds!— it was as if this sort of double of himself showed what was going to happen to him."

There was glee and gusto in her voice. And how slovenly and uncouth she was with that lock of grey hair loose across her forehead, and her uncared-for hands. Dr. Inglis felt a distaste for her: he wondered if she was quite right in the head.

She clasped one knee in her long bony fingers.

"That's what troubles him— oh, I understand him so well," she said. "Edmund's terrified of this man. He doesn't know *what* he is. Not *who* he is, but *what* he is."

"But what is there to be afraid about?" asked the doctor. "This lame fellow, so like him, is no disordered fancy of his own brain, since you've seen him too. He's an ordinary living human being."

She laughed again, she clapped her hands like a pleased child. "Why, of course, that must be so!" she said. "So there's nothing for him to be afraid of. That's splendid! I must tell Edmund that. What a relief! Now about the rules you've laid down for him, his food and all that. I will be very strict with him. I will see that he does what you tell him. I will be quite relentless."

For a week or two Faraday saw no more of this unwelcome visitor, but he did not forget him, and somewhere deep down in his brain there remained that little cold focus of fear. Then came an evening when he had been dining out with friends: the food and the wine were excellent, they chaffed him about his abstemiousness, and loosening his restrictions he made a jolly evening of it, like one of the old days. He seemed to himself to have escaped out of the shadow that had lain on him, and he walked home in high good humour, limping and leaning on his stick, but far more brisk than was his wont. He must be up betimes in the morning, for the annual general meeting of his company was soon coming on, and to-morrow he must finish writing his speech to the shareholders. He would be giving them a pleasant half-hour; twelve per cent

free of tax and a five per cent bonus was what he had to tell them about Faraday's Stores.

He had taken a short cut through the dingy little thoroughfare where his father had lived during his last stricken years, and his thoughts flitted back, with the sense of a burden gone, to the last time he had seen him alive, sitting in his bath-chair in the garden of the Square, with Alice reading to him. Edmund had stepped into the garden to have a word with him, but his father only looked at him malevolently from his sunken eyes, mumbling and muttering in his beard. He was like an old monkey, Edmund thought, toothless and angry and feeble, and then suddenly he had struck out at him with the hand that still had free movement. Edmund had given him the rough side of his tongue for that; told him he must behave more prettily unless he wanted his allowance cut down. A nice way to behave to a son who gave him every penny he had!

Thus pleasantly musing he came out of this mean alley, and crossed into the Square. There were people about to-night, motors were moving this way and that, and a taxi was standing at the house next his, obstructing any further view of the road. Passing it, he saw that directly under the lamp-post opposite his own door there was drawn up an empty bath-chair. Just behind it, as if waiting to push it, when its occupant was ready, there was standing an old man with a straggling white beard. Peering at him Edmund saw his sunken eyes and his mumbling mouth, and instantly came recognition. His latchkey slipped from his hand, and without waiting to pick it up, he stumbled up the steps, and, in an access of uncontrollable panic, was plying bell and knocker and beating with his hands on the panel of his door. He heard a step within, and there was Alice, and he pushed by her, collapsing on to a chair in the hall. Before she closed the door and came to him, she smiled and kissed her hand to someone outside.

It was with difficulty that they got him up to his bedroom, for though just now he had been so brisk, all power seemed to have left him, his thigh-bones would scarce stir in their sockets, and he went up the stairs crab-wise or corkscrew-wise sidling and twisting as he mounted each step. At his direction, Alice closed and bolted his windows and drew the curtains across them; not a word did he say about what he had seen, but indeed there was no need for that.

Then leaving him she went to her own room, alert and eager, for who knew what might happen before day? How wise she had been to leave the working out of this in other hands: she had but concentrated and thought, and, behold, her thoughts and the force that lay behind them were taking shape of their own in the material world. Fear, too, that great engine of destruction, had

Edmund in its grip, he was caught in its invisible machinery, and was being drawn in among the relentless wheels. And still she must not interfere: she must go on hating him and wishing him ill. That had been a wonderful moment when he battered at the door in a frenzy of terror, and when, opening it, she saw outside the shabby old bath-chair and her father standing behind it. She scarcely slept that night, but lay happy and nourished and tense, wondering if at any moment now the force might gather itself up for some stroke that would end all. But the short summer night brightened into day, and she went about her domestic duties again, so that everything should be comfortable for Edmund.

Presently his servant came down with his master's orders to ring up Dr. Inglis. After the doctor had seen him, he again asked to speak to Alice. This repetition of his interview was lovely to her mind: it was like the re-entry of some musical motif in a symphony, and now it was decorated and amplified, for he took a much graver view of his patient. This sudden stiffening of his joints could not be accounted for by any physical cause, and there accompanied it a marked loss of power, which no bodily lesion explained. Certainly he had had some great shock, but of that he would not speak. Again the doctor asked her whether she knew anything of it, but all she could tell him was that he came in last night in a frightful state of terror and collapse. Then there was another thing. He was worrying himself over the speech he had to make at this general meeting. It was highly important that he should get some rest and sleep, and while that speech was on his mind, he evidently could not. He was therefore getting up, and would come down to his sitting-room where he had the necessary papers. With the help of his servant he could manage to get there, and when his job was done, he could rest quietly there, and Dr. Inglis would come back during the afternoon to see him again: probably a week or two in a nursing home would be advisable. He told Alice to look in on him occasionally, and if anything alarmed her she must send for him. Soon he went upstairs again to help Edmund to come down, and there were the sounds of heavy treads, and the creaking of banisters, as if some dead weight was being moved. That brought back to Alice the memory of her father's funeral and the carrying of the coffin down the narrow stairs of the little house which his son's bounty had provided for him.

She went with her brother and the doctor into his sitting-room and established him at the table. The room looked out on to the high-walled garden at the back of the house, and a long French window, opening to the ground, communicated with it. A plane-tree in full summer foliage stood just outside, and on this sultry overcast morning the room was dim with the dusky green light that filters through a screen of leaves. His table was strewn with his

papers, and he sat in a chair with its back to the window. In that curious and sombre light his face looked strangely colourless, and the movements of his hands among his papers seemed to falter and stumble.

Alice came back an hour later and there he sat still busy and without a word for her, and she turned on the electric light, for it had grown darker, and she closed the open window, for now rain fell heavily. As she fastened the bolts, she saw that the figure of her father was standing just outside, not a yard away. He smiled and nodded to her, he put his finger to his lips, as if enjoining silence; then he made a little gesture of dismissal to her, and she left the room, just looking back as she shut the door. Her brother was still busy with his work, and the figure outside had come close up to the window. She longed to stop, she longed to see with her own eyes what was coming, but it was best to obey that gesture and go. The hall outside was very dark, and she stood there a moment, listening intently. Then from the door which she had just shut there came, unmistakably, the click of a turned key, and again there was silence but for the drumming of the rain, and the splash of overflowing gutters. Something was imminent: would the silence be broken by some protest of mortal agony, or would the gutters continue to gurgle till all was over?

And then the silence within was shattered. There came the sound of Edmund's voice rising higher and more hoarse in some incoherent babble of entreaty, and suddenly, as it rose to a scream, it ceased as if a tap had been turned off. Inside there, something fell with a thump that shook the solid floor, and up the stairs from below came Edmund's servant.

"What was that, miss?" he said in a scared whisper, and he turned the handle of the door. "Why, the master's locked himself in."

"Yes, he's busy," said Alice, "perhaps he doesn't want to be disturbed. But I heard his voice, too, and then the sound of something falling. Tap at the door and see if he answers."

The man tapped and paused, and tapped again. Then from inside came the click of a turned key, and they entered.

The room was empty. The light still burned on his table but the chair where she had left him five minutes before was pushed back, and the window she had bolted was wide. Alice looked out into the garden, and that was as empty as the room. But the door of the shed where her father's bath-chair was kept stood open, and she ran out into the rain and looked in. Edmund was lying in it with head lolling over the side.

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## 8: The Overcrowded Iceberg

***Morley Roberts***

1857-1942

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THERE WAS A DEAL OF ICE ABOUT, and it came streaming south, in all kinds of shapes, right into the track of ships. There were flat-topped bergs and ice-fields, and there were all kinds of pinnacled danger-traps which were obviously ready to turn turtle and load up any unwary steamer with more ice than she would ever require to make cocktails with. That year ice was reported in great quantities as far south as latitude 40°, and there is every reason to believe that there was more ice run into than was ever reported by one unlucky liner and five tramps which were posted at Lloyd's as 'Missing.' The Western Ocean is no-peace-at-any-price body of water, and it tries those who sail it as high as any sea in the world, but when the Arctic turns itself loose and empties its refrigerator into the ocean fairway it becomes what seamen call 'a holy terror.' For ice brings fog, and fog is the real sea-devil, worse than any wind that blows. It was a remarkable thing in such circumstances that Captain Harry Sharpness Spink of Glo'ster preserved his equanimity. As Ward, the mate of the *Swan of Avon*, said, he wasn't likely to preserve the *Swan*.

"Dry up, Ward," said his commanding officer, "be so good as to dry up. When I require your advice to run the *Swan* I'll let you know, but in the meantime any uncalled-for jaw on that or any other subject will make me very cross."

"Do you think you can lick me since you went to see that swab at the Foreign Office?" asked Ward, as he edged towards Spink. "Don't you savvy, Spink, that I'm just as able as I was before to pick you up and sling you off of this bridge on to the main-deck?"

"That's as may be," said Spink, "and I don't deny by any means that you are a truculent and insubordinate beast. That's why I shipped you. But it don't follow by no means that because my unfortunate disposition compels me to have officers that can lick me, that I should let 'em navigate the *Swan* on the high lonesome principle. As I said before, you will be so good as to shut your head. Ice or no ice, I'm going at my speed, not yours. Do you think you are out yachting that I should look after your precious carcase?"

"I believe you are ready to cast her away," said Ward. "Are the bally owners going shares with you?"

Spink shook his bullet head.

"They ain't, and you know it, Ward. There are men would take such an insinuation as an insult, and if I could lick you perhaps I would. But you know as well as I do that if I wanted to cast her away I'd not do it here. There's no kind

of fun that I so despise as open boats in cold weather, and the Western Ocean in ice-time isn't my market for a regatta. I ain't called on to explain to a subordinate my idea in running full speed through this fog and ice, but out of more regard for your feelings than you ever show for mine I don't mind revealing to you that I'm trusting to my luck."

"Your luck!"

"Yes, my luck," replied Spink with great firmness; "for luck I have and no fatal error. I've been thinking of it a lot this trip, and come to the conclusion that I've more solid luck than any man I know intimate. To say nothing of my commanding a rust and putty kerosine can like this old tramp at the age of thirty, when you, that can lick me in a scrap, have to be my mate though you're older, didn't I come out of that little affair at Aguilas with flying colours?"

"You came out with a hole in the funnel that you had to pay for yourself," said Ward. "I don't see where your luck came in."

"Don't you see it might have been worse, you ass?" cried Spink irritably. "But that's nothing. What I've been pondering over chiefly is my very remarkable luck in never having been caught, for a permanency, by any of the ladies that have been after me."

"They haven't lost much," said Ward discourteously. "And I reckon that you are mistook when you think you're that enticing that women hankers to drag you in by the hair of your head and kiss you by force."

"I never said so," replied Spink; "but the fact remains that I'm not married."

"You're a selfish beast, Spink, and I sincerely hope you'll be married before you're through," said Ward.

"You are the most insolent mate I ever had," replied Spink, "and the most unfeeling. Did you hear a fog-horn?"

Though it was in the middle of the forenoon watch it was pretty nearly as dark off the Banks as it would have been inside a dock warehouse, for the fog was as thick as a blanket. The rail and the decks were slimy with it, and the skipper and his mate were as wet as if it had been raining. The fog came swirling in thick wreaths, and sometimes half choked them. The wind from the north-east was light but very cold, as if it blew off the face of an iceberg, as it probably did. The *Swan* had an air of thorough discomfort, and in spite of it was steaming into the west at her best speed of nine knots an hour.

It is no wonder that Spink and Ward quarrelled; there was hardly a soul on board who was not in a bad temper. Nothing disturbs seamen as much as fog, and the fact that Spink refused to be disturbed by it made it all the worse for the others. Ward was distinctly nervous, and let the fog play on his nerves. He

saw steamers ahead that had no existence, and heard fog-horns that were nothing but the sound of his own blood in his ears.

"Yes, I do hear a fog-horn. It's on the starboard bow," he said anxiously.

"Not a bit of it, Ward, it's on the port bow. It's some darned old wind-jammer. I'll give her a friendly hoot."

He made the whistle give a melancholy wail, which was not answered by the ship for which it was intended, but by a gigantic liner which burst through the fog looking like high land, and booming at the rate of at least twenty knots. She loomed over them in the obscurity, and Ward gave an involuntary howl which fetched the *Swan's* crowd out on deck in time to see that there was no need to kick their boots off and swim for it. They were also in time to answer the insulting remarks of the liner's two officers on the bridge, as she scraped past them with about the length of a handspike to spare.

"You miserable, condemned tramp," said the liner as she swept by.

"Oh, you man-drowning dogs," replied the crowd of the *Swan*.

And everything else that was said never reached its mark. The liner was swallowed up, and resumed her attempt to make a good passage in spite of what she logged as 'hazy' weather.

"What did I tell you about my luck?" asked Spink coolly, and Ward very naturally had nothing to say till he got his breath. What he said then could only have been said to a skipper who had so unfortunate a disposition towards violence that he had to ship officers who could lick him.

"You are a wonder," said Ward, "and I wish you had been dead before I saw you. Ain't you thinking of others' lives if you ain't of your own?"

"What's the use of arguing with a thick-head like you, Ward?" asked Spink. "If that blamed express packet slowed down to our jog-trot her skipper would feel as sick as if he had anchored, and he'd log it 'dead slow,' and the rotters that judge divorces and collisions would call him the most praiseworthy swine that ever ran another ship down. What's the logic of it? Why should I daunder along at five knots? I might be lingering just where I'd be caught by such another or by a berg. I trust in Providence and my luck, and if you don't like it you can get out and walk."

At this moment a bellow was heard for'ard, 'Ice on the starboard bow,' and Spink, who for all his talk had the eyes of a cat, motioned to the man at the wheel to starboard the helm a few spokes. The *Swan* ground past a small berg, and had a narrower shave than with the liner.

"If we'd been going a trifle slower, Ward," said the skipper, "I might have plugged that lump plump in the middle, and you would have been down on the main-deck seeing the boats put over the side."

"There's no arguing with you," growled the mate, "you'd sicken a hog, and I wish it was Day's watch instead of mine. If he has the same temper when he wakes that he went below with, you'll have a dandy time with him."

He relapsed into a silence which Spink found more trying than open insubordination, for Spink was a cheerful soul.

"Here, I can't stand this, Ward—"

"What can't you stand?" asked Ward sulkily.

"Not being spoken to, of course," replied the skipper. "I order you to be more cheerful. I don't ask you to be polite, for I know you can't be; but you can talk when you aren't wanted to, so you just talk now."

"I won't unless you slow down," said Ward. "I don't see why I should talk and be cheerful with a sea-lunatic."

"Well," said Spink, "I'll slow her down to half speed to please you, for the Lord knows there's enough ice about without my having a lump of it for a mate. Ring her down to half speed, and be damned to you!"

Ward rang her to half speed without any second order.

"And I sincerely hope I shan't regret bein' weak enough to give way," said Spink, "for I'm a deal too easy-going and reasonable."

He lighted his pipe and smoked steadily. As both Ward and Day admitted, he might be hard to get along with, but he had nerves which would have done credit to a bull. Most skippers in the Western Ocean get into the state of mind which sees disaster before it is in sight, and if they don't take to drink it is because they die of continued scares. Spink feared nothing under heaven, and though he sometimes drank more than was good for him, it was not because he wanted it, but because he liked it. There is a great distinction between these two ways of drinking. After a few minutes of silence he turned to Ward.

"Do you feel easier in your mind, Ward?"

"I do," said Ward. "I own it freely."

Spink snorted.

"As sure as ice is ice when you get a command of your own you'll take to drink," said Spink. "And now, as you're satisfied at getting your own way, I'll go below and have a snooze."

About six bells in the forenoon watch the *Swan* ran out of 'Bank weather' into beautiful sunlight, and Ward rang her up to full speed. All about them were icebergs small and large, which sparkled like jewels in the sun. There was one long, low berg right ahead of them, there was one to the south'ard which was peaked and scarped and pinnacled into the semblance of a mediaeval castle. Ward, as Spink said, had no soul for beauty unless it wore petticoats, and to him, as to all seamen, ice in any shape was ugly.

"If he'd had his way she'd have come a mucker on that beggar ahead," said Ward, as he passed to windward of the big, table-topped berg. "I wish we was out of it. This fine spell won't last long, and there is more thick weather ahead of us or I'm a Dago."

He gave her up to Day at noon with pleasure, and took his grub alone as the skipper was fast asleep. When he turned out again at four o'clock he found the fog as thick as ever, and Bill Day as cross as he could stick at having to yank the whistle lanyard every minute or so. As soon as Ward showed his nose on the bridge Bill let out at him.

"What kind of a relief do you call this?" he demanded savagely. "I wish I'd had this lanyard round your neck, I'd have had you out of your bunk in good time, I swear."

As a matter of fact, Ward was only three minutes behind time, and always prided himself on giving a good relief.

"Has Double Glo'ster been worrying you that you're so sick?" he asked. "You know damn well that you owe me hours. Oh, don't talk, go below and die, as you always do when you see blankets. Has there been much ice?"

"It's blinking all round the bally shop," returned the second mate. "Didn't you wake when I stopped her dead?"

"No," said Ward.

"And you talk of my dying when I get below," retorted Day. He slid off the bridge, and proceeded to justify the mate's accusation by falling asleep before his head touched the pillow, in spite of the melancholy hootings of the *Swan* as she picked her way delicately in the fog and ice. It was very nearly eight bells again before Captain Harry Sharpness Spink of Glo'ster showed on deck. As he meant to stay on deck all night he had really been very moderate.

"So I've missed Newcastle?" he said.

"Lucky for you," returned Ward; "his temper was horrid."

Spink sighed.

"I'm the most unfortunate man that ever commanded any blasted hooker that ever sailed the seas," he said. "Day tries me more than you do, Ward. There are times I regret I ever knew him. I must have been brought up badly to have such a disposition as I have. Well, well, it can't be helped, a man is what he was meant to be, there is no get-away from that. But I should admire to see you plug him. Oh, I say, it's fairly thick, ain't it?"

It was a deal thicker than much of the pea-soup served up in the *Swan*, though Spink rather prided himself on the way the men were fed in her.

"Are you nervous?" asked Spink.

"I ain't by any means happy," said Ward; "and no seaman worthy of the name can be happy on the Banks in weather like this."

"That's a slur on me, I know," said Spink, "but I look over it."

"What would you do if you didn't?" asked Ward.

Spink did not reply to this challenge, and inside of a minute both he and Ward had something to think of besides quarrelling about nothing. The fog lifted for a moment, and showed ice all about them. The air grew bitterly cold, and was soon close on the freezing point, Spink slowed her down again, and almost literally felt his way through the obstacles. Once he touched a small berg, but when he did so he was going dead slow. Ward stood by and saw the 'old man' handle the *Swan* with admiration. When they were once more through the thick of it he spoke.

"I wish I could understand you, Spink," he said, with far more respect than he often showed. "You're the most reckless skipper I ever sailed with, and now you're more careful than I should be."

"I don't trust in my luck till I can't see," said Spink, and he turned her over to Ward, saying, "Go your own pace, my son. It's most agreeable when you are civil."

And next minute the catastrophe happened, for at half speed the old *Swan* bunted her nose into a low but very solid berg, and the result was very much the same as if she had tried conclusions head on with a dock wall. She crumpled up like a bandbox when it is inadvertently sat on, and it would have been obvious to the least instructed observer that her chance of going much farther was a very small one indeed. She trembled and was jarred to her vitals, her iron decks lifted up like a carpet with the wind underneath it, one of the funnel stays parted with a loud twang, and the crowd forward came out on deck as if the devil was behind them. And the fog was still so thick that it was impossible to see them from the bridge. But they soon saw Bill Day, for even his ability to sleep through most things could not stand being thrown out of his bunk.

"What's up now?" roared the second mate. And the skipper showed at his very best.

"Ward would have her at half speed," said Spink coolly, "and that gave the southerly drift time to bring that blasted berg just where it could do its work."

And poor Ward hadn't a word to say. Spink had plenty. He spoke to the crew below.

"Keep quiet there you," he snapped, without the least sign of a disturbed mind. And up came the chief engineer, M'Pherson, in pyjamas and a blue funk.

"What's happened, captain? Oh, what's gone wrang the noo?" he cried.

"She's hit more than a penn'orth of ice, Mr. M'Pherson," replied the skipper, "and if I were you I'd get my clothes on. Tell me what water she is

making, and look slippy. Mr. Ward, see to the boats. Mr. Day, take the steward and a couple of hands and get some stores up on deck."

He was so cool that he inspired unlimited confidence, although it was now obvious to them all that the *Swan's* very minutes were numbered. It did not require old Mac's report that the water was coming on board like a millstream to show them that. The engineers and firemen came on deck, and Spink addressed them in what he considered suitable and encouraging terms.

"Now then, you stokehold scum, less jaw there, you won't get drowned this trip."

They were exceedingly glad to hear it, for a lot of them were of a different opinion and said so. There was no time to waste, and indeed none was lost. The real trouble began when it was found that one boat wouldn't swim, after the manner and custom of boats in the Mercantile Marine, and when another was staved in by a swinging lump of ice the moment it took the water. This lump was a small 'calf' of the larger berg which they had struck on, and the next moment the original obstacle swung alongside and ground heavily against the steamer.

"There ain't enough boats," said the skipper. "Mr. Ward, d'ye think you could hook on to that berg? We'll have to board it and make out as best we can."

As the *Swan* was a vessel of close on fourteen hundred tons, her kedge anchor ought to have weighed something like four and a half hundredweight. As a matter of fact it had once belonged to something in the shape of a tug, and it weighed barely two. Ward picked it up as if it was a toy and hove it on the berg, and followed it with a warp.

"Bully for you," said the skipper, and as he spoke the *Swan* gave forth a noise very much like a hiccup. "Down on the ice the port watch, and the others get the stores over the side. Steward, all the blankets you can get. Mr. Day, put over the side anything to make a raft of; we may want one if the berg melts."

Spars and hencoops and everything that would float went over the side, some of it on the ice and some of it into the water. A couple of hands in the only sound boat kept her clear of the berg and the *Swan*, and shoved the floating dunnage to those on the new vessel, which had promptly been christened 'The Sailors' Home.' Their late home was about to disappear, and said so in terms that were quite unmistakable by the initiated.

"Now then," said Spink, "when the rest of you are over the side I'm ready. Ward, take the chronometer as I lower it down. And be careful with this bag, there's the ship's papers and my sextant in it."

"Now boom her off," said Spink, "for the *Swan's* going."

There was a tremendous crack on board.

"The fore bulkhead," said Spink, and then the poor old *Swan* cocked her stern in the air. A furious gush of steam came up from the engine-room and all the stokehold ventilators, until the sea came almost level with the after hatch.

"She's going down head-foremost," said the crew, "poor old *Swan*."

And then there was a mighty shivaree on board. The whole of the cargo in No. 1 and No. 2 holds fetched away, and evidently shot right out at the bows. All this mixture of cargo must have been followed by the engines slipping from their beds, for instead of doing a dive head-foremost, the *Swan's* stern, which had been high in air, went under with a big splash, and she lifted her ragged bows in the fog before she went down with a long-drawn, melancholy gurgle.

"She warn't such a bad old packet after all," said the sad crew. And for at least a minute no one said another word. Then Ward spoke.

"Where the hell's your luck now, Spink?"

"What's become of your theory that half speed in a fog is any better than going at it at my rate?" asked Spink. "You haven't a leg to stand on, and I don't propose to take advice from you again. You've disappointed me sadly! My luck is where it was, except in the matter of my officers, and it's notorious that I have no luck with them. We're out of the *Swan* without a life lost, we've got heaps of grub, plenty of blankets, and a fine comfortable iceberg under us. There's many this hour in the Western Ocean that might envy us, and don't you make any error about that. I come from Glo'ster, and my name is Captain Harry Sharpness Spink, and drunk or sober it's as good as havin' your life insured to sail with me. Oh, I'm all right, and I propose to plug the first man that growls, if he's as big as the side of a house."

None of them was in trim to take up the challenge, and Spink lighted his pipe.

"Three cheers for the captain," said the crew; and they cheered him heartily, for which he thanked them almost regally, though he somewhat spoilt the effect of it afterwards by telling them to go to hell out of that and pick a place to camp in at a little distance.

"So far as I can see in this fog there's plenty of room for everyone," said Spink, as the night grew dark. That was where he was wrong, for they soon discovered, by falling into the water on the far side, that they were on no great ice island, but had picked a very small berg indeed. Spink consoled them by telling them that they wouldn't be on it long, and they could hardly help believing him as he seemed so certain of it.

"And after all," he said to Day and Ward, "the old *Swan* was insured for more than she was worth, and I shouldn't be surprised if the owners were pleased with the catastrophe."

He wrapped himself in blankets and lay down. In five minutes he was breathing like a child.

"I tell you," said the second mate, "the 'old man' is a wonder, for all we have to treat him like a kid. I say, Ward, let's be kind to him to-morrow and say Glo'ster is just as good as any other county."

"I don't mind," said Ward; "but if we do he'll take advantage of it."

"Oh, let him," said Day. "He's a fair scorcher, and if he gets too rowdy we can always put him down. On my soul I'm gettin' to like him. He's got the pluck of a bull-dog. Where's old Mac?"

They found Mac sitting in a puddle of melting ice-water, weeping about his family at Glasgow. The second engineer, whose name was Calder, was trying to console his chief by saying it might have been worse.

"It canna be waur, man," said old Mac. "What can be waur than bein' wreckit, and on a wee sma' bit o' ice that's veesibly meltin' as I sit on it? The cauld is strikin' through to my very banes, and in the hurry I've had the sair misfortune to come away wi'out the medicine for my rheumatics. To-morrow I'll be i' a knot wi' 'em, and nothing for it but cauld water, which I couldna abide sin' I was a bairn. And all my work on the engines wasted. I'm a mournful man this hour."

He drank something out of a bottle. As he had left his medicine behind it could not have been that. It certainly did him no good, for he wept all the more after taking it, and throwing himself in Calder's arms he insisted that the second engineer was his mother, and begged her not to insist on his having a cold bath.

"He's a puir silly buddy," said Calder, "and I've no great opeenion of him as an engineer, though he's no' the fool he seems the noo."

And the night wore away while Mac wept and Spink slept the sleep of the righteous, and Ward and Day smoked in silence. As for the crew, they lay huddled up together, and only woke to swear at the new kind of 'doss.' On the whole, everyone but the chief engineer was not unhappy, and even he, by reason of the attention he paid to the bottle which did not contain medicine, fell fast asleep and snored like a very appropriate fog-horn. The dawn broke very early, at about three, and it found most of the inhabitants of the berg still unconscious. In the night the fog had lifted, and the sea was almost as calm as a duck-pond. What wind there was now blew from the west, and was much warmer than it had been. Within a mile there were two or three other small bergs, but when Spink grunted and yawned and crawled out of his blankets there was nothing else in sight.

"Humph," said Spink, "this is a rummy go, and if I didn't come from Glo'ster I should be in a blue funk. I must keep up my spirits, and show 'em

what my luck's like. I've been in worse fixes than this many a time, and after all, with a good seaworthy berg underfoot, and lashings of grub, I don't see why anyone should growl. If anyone does I'll knock his head off. Now, which of these jokers is the cook?"

He found the steward, and booted him gently in the ribs. At least he said it was gently, whatever the aggrieved steward thought of it.

"Now then, Cox," said the skipper, "turn out and find me the cook,— he's one of this pile of snorin' hogs,— and let's have some breakfast."

By the time the grub was ready, Ward and Day were 'on deck,' and the sun was beginning to think of doing the same. The two mates looked round the horizon and saw nothing to comfort them. The only cheerful thing in sight was the skipper, and for very shame the more pessimistic Ward screwed up a smile.

"Not so bad, is it?" asked Spink.

"It might be worse, I own," replied the mate. "What course are you steerin', Spink?"

"Straight for Glo'ster," replied Spink cheerfully. "How did you chaps sleep?"

Ward said he hadn't slept at all, but Day averred that he had dreamt he had been locked in a refrigerator belonging to some cold-meat steamer from Australia. And just then the steward said that breakfast was ready. It consisted of cold tinned beef, iced biscuit, and melted berg. There were signs of a mutiny among the crew at once.

"Say, cook, where's the cawfy?" they asked, and they were only reduced to a proper sense of the situation by a few strong remarks from Captain Spink. The riot subsided before it really began, and all the 'slop-built, greedy sons of corby crows,' as Spink called them, sat down meekly and ate what they were given. And then the sun came up and warmed them, and they soon began to feel well and happy. But now the real trouble of the situation began to develop. The heat of the summer sun when it once got high enough to do some work began to melt the berg. It was rather higher in the middle than it was on the edges, and it was most amazingly slippery. The water ran off it in streams, and as it was barely big enough to start with, it looked as if they would shortly be crowded.

"I never thought of this," said Spink. "I tell you, Ward, she'll turn turtle before we know where we are. We must put all the stores in the boat, and have a man in her to keep her clear if the berg capsizes."

"Your luck ain't what you let on," said Ward gloomily; "the thing fair melts under us, and we'll have to swim."

"To thunder with your croaking," said Spink. "Oh, do dry up."

"I wish the berg would," said Ward, as he superintended the shipment of the stores. When it was done he put a cockney deck-hand into her and made him shove off.

"Blimy," said Lim'us, "I'm likely to be the on'y dry of the 'ole shoot."

The word 'shoot' soon threatened to become highly appropriate, for about noon the berg was distinctly cranky. However fast it melted above, it was obviously melting much faster down below, for they had apparently struck a streak of comparatively warm water, and when ice does go it goes fast. The 'crowd' got very uneasy, and Spink got very cross as he arranged them so as to trim his craft.

"Sit still, you swine," said Spink. "Do you want to capsize us?"

"But we're so cold be'ind, sittin' still, sir," said one bolder than the rest.

"I'll warm you if I have to come over and speak to you," said Spink, and he presently undertook to do it. The moment he rose to carry out his threat the iceberg wobbled in the most dreadful manner, and so encouraged the offender that he laughed.

"If you come to 'it me, captain, she'll go over," he said with a malicious grin.

"So she will," said Ward, laying hold of the skipper to prevent his moving. But Spink was not to be baulked. He spoke to another of the men sitting near the mutineer.

"Jackson, you come here while I go over there and dress Billings down."

"Don't you go, Jackson, for if you do I'll dress you down to a proper tune arterwards," said the insubordinate Billings, as he grabbed hold of Jackson, who looked at the skipper appealingly.

"What am I to do, sir?" he asked.

"You're to obey orders," said Spink.

"Don't you forgit I'll plug you if you do," said Billings.

Poor Jackson was obviously in serious difficulties, for Billings was the boss and bully of the fo'c'sle. He could even lick any of the firemen, and there were some very tough gentry among that gang.

"If I don't come over to you, sir, what will you do?" Jackson asked the skipper nervously.

"I'll come over to you, if we're in the drink the next moment," replied Spink firmly. "Don't any of you Johnnies think you can best me. Are you coming or are you not?"

Jackson shook his shock head.

"This is very hard lines on a peaceable cove like me," said Jackson; "but if I am to catch toko, I'd much rather take it from Billings than from you, sir."

And as he spoke, he smote Billings very violently on the nose. Billings, who expected nothing less, let a horrid bellow out of him and promptly slipped on the ice. He fell, and slid overboard with a howl, and the berg came near to capsizing then and there.

"Well done, Jackson," said Spink approvingly, as Billings disappeared in the sea, "very well done indeed." And then Billings rose to the surface.

"Can you swim, Billings?" asked Spink with an air of kindly curiosity. "Oh, yes, I see you can, so keep on doing it till you feel a little less mutinous."

It took Billings rather less than a minute to become obedient, for though the sea was warm enough to melt the berg it was by no means so warm as a swimming bath, and he presently howled for mercy and was dragged upon the ice once more.

It was lucky for Billings that the sun by now was really hot. He stripped off his clothes and squeezed them as dry as he could, while he threatened to kill Jackson as soon as he could. His threats were interrupted by the sound of a large crack, and presently there were obvious signs that the berg was about to capsize. Lim'us got quite excited as they discussed the situation, and came in close, till Ward ordered him to get farther away. As he rowed off reluctantly he encouraged them by yelling, "She's goin' over! May the Lord look sideways at me if she ain't."

"Oh, oh!" said poor old Mac, "I'm a puir meeserable sinner wi' a sore head and no medicine, and I'll be wet in a crack, and I'll die wi'out a wee drappie. Oh, oh, oh!"

And the berg stopped cracking but took on an ugly cant. A big lump of ice broke off it down below and came up to the surface with a leap.

"Steady, you swine," said Spink politely to his unhappy crew; and Ward asked him where his luck was. Whatever answer he was to get he never knew, for with a curious heave the berg started on a roll, and with a suddenness which took them all with surprise she bucked them into the Atlantic, together with what materials they had for a raft. It was a lucky thing for at least half of them that there had been time to save such dunnage from the *Swan*, for half the crowd, including M'Pherson and Day, could not swim a stroke. Ward grabbed Day and helped him to a spar, and Spink did the same for old Mac. And in the meantime Lim'us made everyone furious by squealing with laughter in the boat. Billings threatened him with death when he got hold of him, and Spink had no mind or breath to rebuke the horrid and bloodthirsty language with which the late mutineer reinforced his threats.

"Oh, oh!" squealed old Mac when the skipper laid hold of him; "oh, oh, I'm drooned, I'm drooned! and I've the rheumatism bad in a' my joints."

And Spink said he was the howling and illegitimate descendant of three generations without any character whatever, as he dragged him to a floating oar alongside the capsized berg. Now it was not so high out of water, and there was far more space on it. For some time it would be comparatively stable, and when Spink scrambled on it the first of anyone he congratulated himself on his never failing luck. He helped the rest on board, and the whole space was soon occupied by an unclad crowd wringing the Atlantic out of their clothes, and trying to get warm in the sun. It was quite astonishing how cheerful everyone was, with the single exception of that confirmed pessimist the chief engineer. At their end of the berg the men took to skylarking, and Billings actually forgave Jackson.

"You done what I'd ha' done myself," said Billings, "for I owns now I'd a'most as soon take on that big brute Ward as 'ave the skipper get about me. But when I give 'im that back-talk I was that icy be'ind that I was like froze Haustralian mutting, and as cross as if my old woman 'ad been relatin' what 'er mother thought of me. I furgives you, Jackson, I furgives you this once. But don't you hever 'it me on the smeller agin, or a penny peep-show won't be in it for the sight you'll be."

It was considered by the crowd that Billings by this act of nobility had shown himself a 'gent,' and Billings swaggered greatly on the strength of it.

The crew, of course, did not think. They were not paid to do so. All that was the officers' business. It hardly occurred to them that the ice on which they stood wasn't likely to last for ever. In the warmth of the sun they forgot the discomforts of the past night, and did not think of the night to come. But Ward did, and he was still very gloomy on the situation.

"Just as she spilt us," said Ward, "I was askin' you your opinion of your luck. What do you think of it now? Perhaps you'll use that regal authority of a skipper to get us out of the hole you've got us in."

If ever any skipper had the right to be justly indignant, Spink thought he was that man.

"The hole I got you in! I like that, oh, I do like that. Who was it, I ask, that pestered me to go half speed, and almost wept till I said 'Have your own way, you cross-eyed swine'?"

"You never addressed them words to me," said Ward truculently, "or I'd have given you what for, and well you know it."

Spink shook his head.

"I ain't sayin' that I used them very words," he urged, "all I mean is that that was what I meant when I let you have your own silly way, which has landed me and Day, to say nothin' of the rest, on a penn'orth of ice in mid-Atlantic, more or less."

"Don't bring me into the argument," said Day. "You're a cunning sort of a chap, Spink, but you needn't try to raise ructions between me and Ward, for I won't have it. I know you, Spink."

"I'm a very unfortunate man," said poor Spink, "for at this very moment I'd give three months' pay to be able to lick the pair of you. I did think after what the Chief Foreign Officer said of my authority that I should be more civilly treated by my officers, even if I have an unfortunate disposition which compels me to lick them if I can. I shipped you two because I can't, but that ain't any reason for makin' me miserable, or at anyrate more miserable than bein' in the position of not bein' able to."

"Oh, all right," said Day, "go ahead and moan. Nobody's stoppin' you, is he? Let him alone, Ward. He's all right; and as for fightin', I believe I could teach him to be too much for myself in a month with the boxin' gloves."

"I wish you would," said Spink. "Oh, Day, you've no notion how I should enjoy pastin' you."

He fell into contemplation of such a joy, and did not speak till Ward clapped him on the back and said he was a very good sort after all.

"And if it's any use to you, I own that my havin' gone half speed that time may have put us here. But sayin' so much don't mean that I now approve of buttin' headlong into an ice-pack at twenty knots an hour. But to go back to what I was sayin' before you started this row, where's your luck, Spink? To my mind it don't look so healthy a breed of luck as you let on, and it's my notion that old Mac is of my opinion, to judge by the sad expression of his countenance."

"To blazes with the old fool!" said Spink. "Who cares what he thinks? My luck is where it was, and I reckon to get out of this with flyin' colours, and never a man short, and nothin' against the certificates of any of us. I've noticed all my life that I seem to be under the especial care of Providence, and I don't believe Providence will go back on me after plantin' me here all safe and sound on an iceberg. Day, rake up that cook, and give the cockney in the boat a hail. We'll have some grub. I've a twist on me like a machine-made hawser."

They went to dinner, and the sun did something of the same sort. At anyrate it went out of sight, and a thick fog came down on the castaways.

"We 'opes no bloomin' packet 'll come and run us pore blighters down," said the men as they fell to work on the grub, "for accordin' to the 'old man,' who is the cheerfulest bloke in difficulties we ever struck, we're right in the track of the ole shoot of 'em, and may be picked up or scooted into the sea again any minute."

As a matter of fact, they were then on the southern tail of the Bank, for when the *Swan* bunted her nose into the berg, she was pretty well at the

locality on the Grand Bank where the usual 'lane' to New York is left for the lane to Halifax. The very watch before the collision they had verified their position by flying the 'blue pigeon,' as seamen call the deep-sea lead, and ever since then they had been floating in the Labrador current to the south and east. To locate them exactly, they were just about where the Great Circle Track of steamers from the English Channel to the Gulf of Mexico crosses the tail of the Bank. There was every chance of something coming along there, even if it was getting late enough in the season for the big liners to take the route to the south'ard for fear of the very ice which had brought them to grief.

"Oh, yes," said the crowd, when they were full up with food, "we're all right."

Nevertheless the fog did not cheer them up to any great extent, and when it showed signs of lasting all day they grew less happy.

"A hundred vessels might pass us in this," said Ward, who for all his bigness had much less endurance than the skipper, and was now hardly more cheerful than old Mac. "I wish I was out of it."

"Oh, wish again," retorted Spink contemptuously. "Do you know, Ward, that you make me tired? What do you get by howlin' and growlin'? I know this is goin' to come out all right, and I won't be discouraged by any silly jaw of a man that ought to know better. Shut up."

And to Day's surprise Ward shut up. At that very moment there came a bellow from Billings, who had relieved Lim'us in the boat.

"Berg, ahoy!" roared Billings.

"Hallo!" replied the skipper. "What's the matter now?"

"I 'ears a steamer, so help me Dick!" bellowed Billings joyfully. "I 'ears 'er plain. Don't none of you blokes 'ear 'er too?"

There was such a buzz among the crowd that it would have been hard to hear a fog-horn, and it was not until Spink had hit three, kicked half a dozen, and used at least ten pounds worth of bad language, according to 19 Geo. II. cap. 21, that anything like silence was restored. Then it was obvious that Billings had made no mistake. The sea was fairly calm, the breeze from the west was light, and any sound carried long and far.

"She's coming from the westward," said Spink, as he consulted a toy compass on his watch-chain.

"No," said Day, "she's bound west, or I'm a Dutchman."

"Then you come from Amsterdam for a certainty," said the 'old man' crossly. "Now, men, shout all together when I say three. One, two, three."

And just as the men yelled there was a hoot-too-oot from the steamship, which for a moment made them believe she had heard them. But Spink knew better, and when there was another hoot he grabbed Day by the arm.

"By Jemima," said Spink, "we're both right, Day. There are two of 'em; that second squeal never came out of the same whistle that the first one did!"

Now the nature of fog is something that no fellow can understand. Seamen must not think they are a long way off if they hear a sound faintly, or even if they do not hear it at all. That's bad enough, but there is worse behind. They are not to reckon they are near because they hear it plainly, or that it isn't to be heard farther away at some other spot if they cease to hear it at all. And, furthermore, any notion that a sound comes from any particular direction is the biggest trap of the lot. Now the uninitiated can understand that they do not understand, and that seamen are in the same awkward fix whenever a fog comes down to cheer them on their weary way. The two steamers coming out of nothingness and butting into it were commanded by men who trusted to the evidence of their senses, as if they were police magistrates trusting to policemen. They hooted and bellowed in the most wonderful manner, and said with one short blast that they were directing their course to starboard. And as neither knew where the other was, or where he was himself, they directed their courses with the most marvellous precision to the exact spot on the tail of the Grand Bank in the Western Ocean where they could collide. And they did so with a most horrid grinding crash, and with one long, last, fearful and hopeless wail on their steam-whistles.

"Holy sailor," said the iceberg's crew, "this time they've been and gone and done it!"

Ward asked Spink sickly if he had any remarks to make about his luck. Spink hadn't, but he had some remarks to make about Ward, which in other circumstances would have led to war. While he was relieving his overcharged mind there was a horrid uproar coming out of the fog, for both the steamships were blowing off steam, and everyone on board of them appeared to be running the entire show at the top of his voice. And just as it was all at its extreme point of interest the fog played one of its commonest tricks, and with an anacoustic wall shut off the whole dreadful play in one single moment.

The castaways turned to each other in alarm, and Billings, who had nearly lost himself in the fog, rowed in close.

"I think they've both foundered," said Billings, and it certainly looked as if he were right, in spite of what Spink said to him.

"I believe the josser is right," said Day; and old Mac wept and said he was sure of it, and that he had the rheumatics badly, and that he was very cold. And to add to Spink's joy, once more Ward asked if he still thought he was under the especial protection of Providence. Then for the first time Spink lost his temper and went for Ward, and by dint of taking him by surprise served him as Jackson had served Billings.

"Take that, you swab," said the enraged skipper. "I'll teach you to be so discouraging and so blasphemous as to cast a slur on Providence."

And when Ward climbed upon the ice again all he said was—

"All right, Spink, you wait till we're on board that beastly packet you and Providence have up your sleeves."

And everyone sat down and smoked, and said how grieved they were for the poor unfortunate beggars who had been drowned through having no nice comfortable iceberg to take refuge on. Then they had their supper and went to sleep, leaving all their cares in the faithful hands of poor Spink.

"Ah," he sighed, "my unfortunate disposition cuts me off from all real sympathy. I've no one to confide in at sea or ashore, and as if bein' a ship-master wasn't solitary enough I must plug Ward and make him hostile. I wish I'd been brought up better and licked more before I got into this fatal habit of fighting."

He couldn't go to sleep, and took to walking as far as the narrow limits at his disposal would allow him. When he found that he was in for a restless night he told the man on the lookout that he could turn in. Jackson, who happened to be the look-out, lingered a little before he did as he was told.

"Do you think, sir," he asked with some trepidation at his daring to speak to the skipper, "do you think, sir, that we shall ever get out o' this?"

"Of course we shall," said Spink. "What do you suppose I'm here for? Go to sleep, Jackson, and mind your own business. You'll be all right."

And Jackson, who was a simple-minded seaman of the real old sort, fell asleep feeling that the 'old man' was to be relied on even on an iceberg in the Western Ocean and in a fog as thick as number one canvas.

For by now the fog was thick and no mistake. As Spink walked the ice, and squelched with his sea-boots in the melted puddles, he could hardly see his hand before his face, and more than once he nearly walked overboard. At midnight it was even thicker, and he was obliged to give up walking and come to an anchor on a tin of corned beef, and though he was on watch it has to be owned that he dozed for a few minutes, just as Lim'us did in the boat which lay a little way off the berg. When Spink woke he found it just about as dark as their prospects. When his eyes cleared, he sighed and looked about him, with a mind which took some of its tone from the fog and from the dull dead hour of two o'clock in the morning.

"I wonder if my luck is out," he sighed, and he stared solidly into the solidest darkness. It was certainly monstrously dark in one direction. He rubbed his eyes and grunted. Then he lighted a match and looked at his little compass. His mind went back to the lady in Bristol who had given it to him.

"She was a very pretty piece," said Spink thoughtfully. "But I'm damned if I can see why it should be darkest towards the east."

He rose up and peered into the fog. Again he rubbed his eyes, and then stood staring.

"Perhaps another berg," he said, "but—"

He stood as still as if his figure had been turned into stone, and presently he looked to the sleeping crowd, who were all as solid with sleep as if they were dead, and nodded in the strangest way.

"Oh, oh, if it is; if it only isn't a horrid delusion," he murmured. He turned to the darkness again and shook his fist at it and the fog. At that very moment the fog rolled up like a curtain. Right in front of Spink, and not farther than a man could chuck a biscuit, there lay the strange and almost monstrous apparition of a silent, lightless, and derelict steamer!

"What did I say to Ward about Providence?" asked Spink of the whole Atlantic Ocean. "Ward cast a nasty and uncalled-for slur on its ways when he said what he did. But now I've got the bulge on him, and no fatal error about it."

He rubbed his hands together and smiled very happily.

"There'll be fine pickings in this and no mistake," he murmured. "Oh, this'll be something like salvage. And I'll lay dollars to cents that I can tell how it ever happened. Ah, here comes the fog again!"

The fog dropped down in a thin veil, till the dim and ghostly derelict looked still less substantial than it had done. Then it heaved and rolled in, and the deserted packet could be seen no more. Spink sighed but was happy.

"I'll give Ward the biggest surprise he ever had in his life," he said, as he turned to the boat in which young Lim'us was doing a very solid caulk. Spink kicked some ice into small lumps, and at the third attempt he hit the sleeper on the side of his head. Lim'us woke with a start, and heard the captain's voice just in time to prevent him threatening to eviscerate the swab who was slinging things at him.

"Hold your infernal jaw," said Spink in a savage whisper, "and pull in here quiet, or I'll murder you."

Lim'us obeyed instantly, though he had doubts as to whether it was wise to come within arm's length of the skipper after having been caught asleep.

"I warn't asleep, sir; stri'my blind if I was," he began as he came up to the berg.

"Dry up and say nothin'," said Spink. "If you wake anyone I'll see you don't sleep again for a week. Hand up some of that truck and get the stern sheets clear, I want to get in myself."

There was more than a chance of not finding the derelict and of losing the iceberg, and Spink knew it. Just as he was about to chance it he remembered that he had a couple of balls of strong twine in the bag into which he had dumped all his belongings, including the precious ship's papers, when he left the *Swan*. As he recalled this lucky fact a heavenly smile overspread his handsome features.

"It's a splendid notion," said Spink. "I feel as proud of it as a dog with two tails! I wish those chaps at the Foreign Office were here now; they would enjoy it better than a play."

He stepped to his bag as lightly as a Polar bear after a sleeping seal, and when he found the twine he tied the end of it to Ward's leg.

"Ward at one end and Providence at the other," said Spink with a grin. "Oh, won't he be surprised!"

And the skipper went back to the boat, paying out the twine as he went. He was chuckling in the merriest way, and poor Lim'us, who was cold, and very sick of the whole affair, thought that the strain had been too much for him.

"'E's balmy on the crumpet, that's what's the matter wiv 'im," said Lim'us as he obeyed orders reluctantly, and pulled into the solid fog with a mad and grinning skipper, who would probably scupper him as soon as they were out of earshot of the crew.

"I wish I was in Lim'us," said he. "I'd give all my wyges to see Commercial Rowd agin."

And still Spink chuckled and paid out the twine, until suddenly the boat ran into a still deeper darkness.

"Easy, boy," said the skipper, with a strange note of exultation in his voice. "Easy, we're there now."

As he spoke the boat ground up against the side of the derelict, and Lim'us turned about on the thwart and touched the iron plates with his hand.

"If you let a yell out of you," said the captain, "I'll cut your throat from ear to ear."

But indeed Lim'us was incapable of yelling. All he could do was to gasp, and he did that as effectively as if he was a bonito with the grains in him. And the boat drifted towards the vessel's bows, while Spink looked for the easiest way on board.

"They ran like rats," said Spink. "Oh, I know the way they ran. They got on board the other boat, and think this one is now surprisin' the codfish."

They reached the bows at last, and came round on the port side, and there Spink found what he looked for. The vessel had been cut down to within six inches of the water's edge about forty feet aft from the bow.

"Just as I laid it out in my mind," said Spink. "Catch hold you, while I get on board."

He dropped about ten fathoms of the twine into the water, and with the rest of the ball in his pocket he scrambled up the horrid gash in the derelict's side and got on deck. He walked for'ard and got the twine clear out on the starboard side, pointing for the unconscious mate. Then he made it fast and took a look at his new command. In spite of the fog it was not difficult to see that she was a fine new boat of about two thousand tons, built and fitted, as was pretty obvious from her derricks, for a fast freight boat. It was equally obvious that the whole crew had evacuated her in a panic, for Spink found the skipper's berth with the bed-clothes on the floor, along with a sad and derelict pair of trousers. The 'old man' had evidently been in his bunk instead of being on the bridge, and, so far as Spink could see, he had stayed to grab nothing but the ship's papers, without which there can be no maritime salvation.

"This will be a very valuable salvage job," said Spink, as he licked his lips after taking a pull at a bottle of whisky which he found only too handy to the lips of the former skipper. "There's money in this, oh, lots of it. And now I'll show Ward where my luck comes in. And I'll have old Mac and Calder patch up that rent in her before it comes on to blow again."

He put the bottle in his pocket and went for'ard, feeling a deal more proud than if he owned a fleet. For the deserted steamer, the name of which was the *Winchelsea* of Liverpool, was a direct proof that his luck was still what it had been. He found the end of the twine, and hauled in the slack very cautiously.

"I wish I could see his face," said Spink, as he gave the twine a yank which made Ward sit up suddenly and wonder what had happened to him.

"Oh, oh, oh!" said Ward. The ice was nearer than it had been, and what he said was quite audible on board the *Winchelsea*.

"Eh, what?" said Ward. And then Spink gave the line another yank which almost started Ward on an ice run for the water. But this time he found out what was the matter, and laid hold of the twine.

"Who the devil's pulling my leg?" he roared in such stentorian tones that the whole crowd woke up instantly.

"I am," said Spink. "And I'll thank you to pay attention, and not lie there snoring while I do all the work."

"Where are you?" asked Ward. "I can't see you."

"Where d'ye think I am?" asked Spink. "While you were asleep I went out and looked for a new job and found it."

As he spoke there were sudden signs of dawn, and once more the curtain of the mist rolled away, and the late crew of the *Swan* saw a big steamer

within fifty feet of them, with the late skipper of the *Swan* leaning over her side smoking his morning pipe.

"Jerusalem!" said the crew, and they shook their heads with amazement, while Ward scratched his. Day whistled, old Mac burst into joyful tears, and Billings used some awful language to show his gratitude. And Spink said—

"When you have washed and shaved and put on clean collars, I should be much obliged by your coming on board and doing enough work to melt the hoar-frost that's on you. Limehouse, scull over to the berg, and look slippy about it."

In ten minutes they all found themselves on board, and Mac and Calder set to work before breakfast to patch her up. The engines and furnaces were still warm, and it took little time to get up steam. But Ward took some to get up his. As he said, it was a fair knock-out, and it seemed like some black magic on the part of the skipper, who walked the bridge after breakfast as if he owned the whole North Atlantic.

"She was bound for England, and we'll go home," said Spink. "And as soon as may be we'll find out what's in her. This is my first salvage, and it's goin' to be a good one."

"You're a wonder," said Ward.

"Didn't I always say so?" replied Spink modestly. "And now I hope that you and Day will behave yourselves, and not trade on any weaknesses that I may have, for I won't put up with it if you do."

"How do you propose to stop it?" asked Day. "You can't plug me or Ward any better now than you could before. Why don't you behave? Then there would be no trouble. I'm fair sick of hearin' about your unfortunate disposition."

"So am I," said Ward.

Spink shook his head with disgust.

"And this kind of talk after what I've done," he said. "I wish you would read old Kelly's little book on the *Mate and His Duties*, Ward. It would teach you how to behave."

"I had it in the *Swan*," said Ward, "but though it had a lot in it about land-saints and sea-devils, there was nothin' in it that fitted a man like you."

"Perhaps not," said Spink thoughtfully. "I own I'm rare, I'm very rare."

The fog cleared right off, and the sun shone and the calm sea sparkled. In such circumstances everyone ought to have been happy, but Spink said he wasn't.

"I wish I wasn't so rare," said Spink.

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## 9: The Double Cross

***Mark Hellinger***

1903-1947

*The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney) 20 Jan 1937

IT OFTEN happens that two men who start out as casual acquaintances become friendlier and friendlier. And before either one knows it, they have become bosom companions.

That was the case with Tom and Bill, who would run into each other in their daily business. A simple business it, was— running handbooks for rival bookmakers. With the informality that exists around race tracks, the two men didn't find it hard to become acquainted intimately with each other.

And it didn't surprise any of the other racetrack habitués— and sons of habitués— when Tom and Bill wound up as partners. It wasn't a bad partnership either. They started with a small handbook on Broadway and finally saved enough to go into operation at the tracks. For years these two men went from one racecourse to another.

Their success wasn't the meteoric kind you read about. It wasn't easy travelling. There were many occasions when they missed a meal, and there were four or five when they arrived at the track in a first-class box car. All in all, though, they found it a swell racket. When the tough days were over, the good days certainly were a grand living.

As time wore on, the boys grew a little more settled in their ways. Money was now the big object, and the novelty of travelling from track to track was beginning to wear off. It wasn't a bad partnership, either, they make their headquarters in New York and enter the racket of selling information on the horses to the suckers who wished to buy.

"How can we miss, Tom?" he asked his partner. "We both know the race game from top to bottom. We know form and past performances as well as any two birds in the business. What's more, we have plenty of friends among the players— and It should be a cinch to get up a sucker list that would bring in business.

"I'm getting tired of batting around the country, and I guess you are, too. After all, what can we lose if we make a stab at this new racket? If we don't click, we can always go back to the old game. What do you say?"

Tom was perfectly agreeable. They clasped hands. The bargain was sealed.

THE NEW venture was a success from the start. Since most of their clients were out-of-towners, practically all of their business was transacted by wire and telephone. And before a week was up, It was necessary for them to hire a shrewd girl who could act as stenographer, telephone girl, and general

manager. They found an excellent young lady for the job— and then the trouble started.

It began with the fact that May was entirely too attractive. More, she spoke the same language as Bill and Tom. Still more, she was a very efficient little manager. The office routine was fairly simple. Bill and Tom pretended to have all types of inside Information on the horses. They advertised themselves as the best tipsters in the business, and urged folks all over the nation to send anything from five dollars to 100 dollars for the names of their "sure winners." The amounts they asked depended entirely upon the customer. Needless to say, the list of these customers was for ever changing. If Bill and Tom happened to send out a winner, the customer was always good for two or three more tries. If their tip proved a dud, the customer was half-gone and had to be coaxed back into line. And so it went.

During her first hour at work May was told to watch the transactions of a Mrs. Clarke, of Chicago, and watch them carefully. This Mrs. Clarke was the answer to a tipster's prayer. Regardless of how the tip turned out, she was always back for more. Neither Bill nor Tom had ever seen her, but they spoke of her with reverence. Whenever they asked Mrs. Clarke for a special fee in exchange for a special tip, she sent the money without question. She alone provided enough cash to run the business at a profit every week. Who could ask for a more perfect set-up? We have Bill. And Tom. And Mrs. Clarke. And May. Not bad at these prices.

I told you that May spelled trouble for the firm, and I wasn't kidding, either. In less time than it takes to cash a tote ticket, both Bill and Tom were in love with her. To make matters worse, May didn't seem to have any particular preference. If she went out with Bill one night, it was Tom's turn the next. The boys began to go in for little tricks in order to spy on each other.

All of which was very bad. For when love flies in through the window, partnerships depart through the door. It was Bill who first came to his senses.

While May was out of the office one morning, he smiled ruefully at Tom. "There's no use kidding ourselves, old pal," he said, "and we might as well come to an understanding right now. We're both in love with May! Am I right?"

Tom sighed. "You can say it again. Bill. How right you are!"

Bill shrugged his shoulders. "There's only one thing we can do, then," he went on, "and that's to leave it all up to May herself. Suppose you and I shake on a bargain. When she— gets back, we'll ask her to choose. If you're the lucky guy, I'll step right out of the picture. But if I am,. I'll expect you to do the same.

"In other words, it's six, two, and I even for both of us. Are you willing to settle it that way?"

Tom thought for a moment and then agreed. When May returned, they asked her the question Immediately. Her reply came just as swiftly. Without the slightest hesitation, she picked Bill.

"I thought you knew it all the time, Tom," she said. "I've been in love with Bill ever since I came to work for you two. The only thing that worried me was that he was going to wait five or ten years to tell me.

"I like you lots, Tom, but liking isn't loving. Now why can't the three of us always be the same pals that you and Bill were before we met? Bill and I are going to be married, but we can't let that interfere with our friendship, can we?"

The blow hit Tom harder than you might imagine. Strange as it may seem, he didn't even attempt to take it good-naturedly. He stood up, clenched his fists, looked from Bill to May, grabbed! his hat, and rushed from the office. And he left behind him two lovers who were just a trifle worried.

A few days later Tom phoned Bill and arranged to meet him in a nearby restaurant. As soon as they were seated, Tom came right to the point.

"I don't have to tell you, Bill, that I'm sorry for the way I acted the other day. But the thing hit me right between the eyes. I knew she liked you, but I always thought I had the edge. When I found out how wrong I was, I just couldn't take it standing up— like I should have." Bill attempted to say something, but the other man stopped him quickly.

"Let me say what I have to say, Bill," he continued, "and then you can talk. I've got to get this off my chest— and the quicker the better.

"The way things stand now, I can't go on with our partnership. I'd be thinking of you and May all the time, and it would be just a little too tough. I simply can't go on with it.

"I hope you and May get all the breaks you deserve. But without me. Count me out. We'll figure the best way to split the business; we'll shake hands — and we'll call It a go."

Naturally, Bill attempted to argue. He pointed out this fact and he pointed out that one. But Tom could not be shaken. So Bill finally gave it up.

"As long as you feel that way, Tom, I suppose there's no use arguing with you. But I really think you're making a big mistake."

They turned to a discussion of the split. There were plenty of good customers on their list, but Mrs. Clarke was their best bet. They began to talk about her, and Bill finally offered a definite proposition.

"Tell you what I'll do, Tom," he proposed. "You lost out with May, and I'm willing to lose out on this angle. Give me Mrs. Clarke as my starting point, and I'll turn over all the other customers to you. I'll have to develop an entirely new list, which means that I'm practically giving you the business. But with Mrs.

Clarke on the line, I imagine I can get along until the new customers roll in. How does it strike you?"

Tom liked the proposition. There was little reason why he shouldn't have liked it. In Mrs. Clarke, of course, he was losing their best customer. But the remainder of the list was far more important — and far more profitable — than just one name. So, when they parted, they did it on the terms arranged before.

About a week after the partnership was dissolved, Tom deliberately double-crossed his old pal. He did something that would occur only to a very jealous man. Knowing that Mrs. Clarke was now Bill's only meal ticket, he hopped a train and went to the distant city where she lived.

You must remember now that Mrs. Clarke had never met either Bill or Tom. All of her business had been carried on by telegraph, and she knew neither what they looked like nor anything about their lives. So when Tom presented himself to her as Bill, she accepted him as Bill. And while posing as Bill, Tom gave her the strangest line in the world.

"You may think it odd of me, my dear Mrs. Clarke," he confided, "but I might as well tell you that I have decided to reform. I split with my partner, Tom, about a week ago— which is something you already know. And I have come to the conclusion that I should get out of the game entirely.

"The racket is crooked from beginning to end. Oh. I know what you're going to tell me. You're going to say that you invested plenty of money in my tips and that I might have warned you before. And you'd be right. But I feel now as though I'm making a confession. And I owe it to you to tell you to stop betting at this late date rather than to go on as you have."

Tom went on In that vein for the better part of thirty minutes. When he was through, Mrs. Clarke was looking at him with grateful eyes. And before he left, she had given him her promise that she would never again place a bet on a horse. The impostor returned to New York with a song in his heart. He knew he had done a dirty thing by posing as Bill— but he also felt that he had squared accounts with May for picking the wrong man.

SOME four months later Tom was sitting in his office when he received the first phone call from Bill since they had parted. Bill seemed very much excited.

"I've got to tell you about this, Tom," he cried excitedly. "You've got to be one of the first to know. You remember that Mrs. Clarke, from Chicago?"

Tom grinned.

"Yeah, Bill. What about her?"

"She died a short time ago," was Bill's amazing reply, "and what do you think happened? Even though I don't know what she had in mind and even

though I never spoke to her in my life, she willed me $50,000. She said I had given her the most honest advice site had ever received."

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## 10: A True Relation of the Apparition of Mrs Veal

***Daniel Defoe***

Daniel Foe, 1660-1731

First published uncredited in 1706; much reprinted

THIS THING is so rare in all its circumstances, and on so good authority, that my reading and conversation has not given me anything like it: it is fit to gratify the most ingenious and serious inquirer. Mrs Bargrave is the person to whom Mrs Veal appeared after her death; she is my intimate friend, and I can avouch for her reputation, for these last fifteen or sixteen years, on my own knowledge; and I can confirm the good character she had from her youth, to the time of my acquaintance. Though, since this relation, she is calumniated by some people, that are friends to the brother of this Mrs Veal, who appeared; who think the relation of this appearance to be a reflection, and endeavour what they can to blast Mrs Bargrave's reputation, and to laugh the story out of countenance. But by the circumstances thereof, and the cheerful disposition of Mrs Bargrave, notwithstanding the ill-usage of a very wicked husband, there is not yet the least sign of dejection in her face; nor did I ever hear her let fall a desponding or murmuring expression; nay, not when actually under her husband's barbarity; which I have been witness to, and several other persons of undoubted reputation.

Now you must know, Mrs Veal was a maiden gentlewoman of about thirty years of age, and for some years last past had been troubled with fits; which were perceived coming on her, by her going off from her discourse very abruptly to some impertinence. She was maintained by an only brother, and kept his house in Dover. She was a very pious woman, and her brother a very sober man to all appearance; but now he does all he can to null or quash the story. Mrs Veal was intimately acquainted with Mrs Bargrave from her childhood. Mrs Veal's circumstances were then mean; her father did not take care of his children as he ought, so that they were exposed to hardships; and Mrs Bargrave, in those days, had as unkind a father, though she wanted neither for food nor clothing, whilst Mrs Veal wanted for both; insomuch that she would often say, Mrs Bargrave, you are not only the best, but the only friend I have in the world, and no circumstance of life shall ever dissolve my friendship. They would often condole each other's adverse fortunes, and read together Drelincourt upon Death, and other good books; and so, like two Christian friends, they comforted each other under their sorrow.

Some time after, Mr Veal's friends got him a place in the custom-house at Dover, which occasioned Mrs Veal, by little and little, to fall off from her intimacy with Mrs Bargrave, though there was never any such thing as a quarrel; but an indifferency came on by degrees, till at last Mrs Bargrave had

not seen her in two years and a half; though above a twelvemonth of the time Mrs Bargrave hath been absent from Dover, and this last half year has been in Canterbury about two months of the time, dwelling in a house of her own.

In this house, on the 8th of September, 1705, she was sitting alone in the forenoon, thinking over her unfortunate life, and arguing herself into a due resignation to providence, though her condition seemed hard. And, said she, I have been provided for hitherto, and doubt not but I shall be still; and am well satisfied that my afflictions shall end when it is most fit for me: and then took up her sewing-work, which she had no sooner done, but she hears a knocking at the door. She went to see who was there, and this proved to be Mrs Veal, her old friend, who was in a riding-habit. At that moment of time the clock struck twelve at noon.

Madam, says Mrs Bargrave, I am surprised to see you, you have been so long a stranger; but told her, she was glad to see her, and offered to salute her; which Mrs Veal complied with, till their lips almost touched; and then Mrs Veal drew her hand across her own eyes, and said, I am not very well; and so waived it. She told Mrs Bargrave, she was going a journey, and had a great mind to see her first. But, says Mrs Bargrave, how came you to take a journey alone? I am amazed at it, because I know you have a fond brother. Oh! says Mrs Veal, I gave my brother the slip, and came away because I had so great a desire to see you before I took my journey. So Mrs Bargrave went in with her, into another room within the first, and Mrs Veal sat her down in an elbow-chair, in which Mrs Bargrave was sitting when she heard Mrs Veal knock. Then says Mrs Veal, My dear friend, I am come to renew our old friendship again, and beg your pardon for my breach of it; and if you can forgive me, you are the best of women. O, says Mrs Bargrave, do not mention such a thing; I have not had an uneasy thought about it; I can easily forgive it. What did you think of me? said Mrs Veal. Says Mrs Bargrave, I thought you were like the rest of the world, and that prosperity had made you forget yourself and me. Then Mrs Veal reminded Mrs Bargrave of the many friendly offices she did her in former days, and much of the conversation they had with each other in the times of their adversity; what books they read, and what comfort, in particular, they received from Drelincourt's Book of Death, which was the best, she said, on that subject ever written. She also mentioned Dr Sherlock, the two Dutch books which were translated, written upon death, and several others. But Drelincourt, she said, had the clearest notions of death, and of the future state, of any who had handled that subject. Then she asked Mrs Bargrave, whether she had Drelincourt. She said, Yes. Says Mrs Veal, Fetch it. And so Mrs Bargrave goes up stairs and brings it down. Says Mrs Veal, Dear Mrs Bargrave, if the eyes of our faith were as open as the eyes of our body, we should see numbers of

angels about us for our guard. The notions we have of heaven now, are nothing like what it is, as Drelincourt says; therefore be comforted under your afflictions, and believe that the Almighty has a particular regard to you; and that your afflictions are marks of God's favour; and when they have done the business they are sent for, they shall be removed from you. And, believe me, my dear friend, believe what I say to you, one minute of future happiness will infinitely reward you for all your sufferings. For, I can never believe, (and claps her hand upon her knee with great earnestness, which indeed ran through most of her discourse,) that ever God will suffer you to spend all your days in this afflicted state; but be assured, that your afflictions shall leave you, or you them, in a short time. She spake in that pathetical and heavenly manner, that Mrs Bargrave wept several times, she was so deeply affected with it.

Then Mrs Veal mentioned Dr Kenrick's Ascetick, at the end of which he gives an account of the lives of the primitive Christians. Their pattern she recommended to our imitation, and said, their conversation was not like this of our age: For now, says she, there is nothing but frothy, vain discourse, which is far different from theirs. Theirs was to edification, and to build one another up in faith; so that they were not as we are, nor are we as they were: but, says she, we ought to do as they did. There was an hearty friendship among them; but where is it now to be found? Says Mrs Bargrave, It is hard indeed to find a true friend in these days. Says Mrs Veal, Mr Norris has a fine copy of verses, called Friendship in Perfection, which I wonderfully admire. Have you seen the book? says Mrs Veal. No, says Mrs Bargrave, but I have the verses of my own writing out. Have you? says Mrs Veal, then fetch them. Which she did from above stairs, and offered them to Mrs Veal to read, who refused, and waived the thing, saying, holding down her head would make it ache; and then desired Mrs Bargrave to read them to her, which she did. As they were admiring friendship, Mrs Veal said, Dear Mrs Bargrave, I shall love you for ever. In these verses there is twice used the word Elysian, Ah! says Mrs Veal, these poets have such names for heaven. She would often draw her hand across her own eyes, and say, Mrs Bargrave, do not you think I am mightily impaired by my fits? No, says Mrs Bargrave, I think you look as well as ever I knew you. After all this discourse, which the apparition put in much finer words than Mrs Bargrave said she could pretend to, and as much more than she can remember, (for it cannot be thought, that an hour and three quarters' conversation could all be retained, though the main of it she thinks she does,) she said to Mrs Bargrave, she would have her write a letter to her brother, and tell him, she would have him give rings to such and such; and that there was a purse of gold in her cabinet, and that she would have two broad pieces given to her cousin Watson.

Talking at this rate, Mrs Bargrave thought that a fit was coming upon her, and so placed herself in a chair just before her knees, to keep her from falling to the ground, if her fits should occasion it: for the elbow-chair, she thought, would keep her from falling on either side. And to divert Mrs Veal, as she thought, took hold of her gown-sleeve several times, and commended it. Mrs Veal told her, it was a scowered silk, and newly made up. But for all this, Mrs Veal persisted in her request, and told Mrs Bargrave, she must not deny her: and she would have her tell her brother all their conversation, when she had opportunity. Dear Mrs Veal, says Mrs Bargrave, this seems so impertinent, that I cannot tell how to comply with it; and what a mortifying story will our conversation be to a young gentleman? Why, says Mrs Bargrave, it is much better, methinks to do it yourself. No, says Mrs Veal, though it seems impertinent to you now, you will see more reason for it hereafter. Mrs Bargrave then, to satisfy her importunity, was going to fetch a pen and ink; but Mrs Veal said, Let it alone now, but do it when I am gone; but you must be sure to do it: which was one of the last things she enjoined her at parting; and so she promised her.

Then Mrs Veal asked for Mrs Bargrave's daughter; she said, she was not at home: But if you have a mind to see her, says Mrs Bargrave, I'll send for her. Do, says Mrs Veal. On which she left her, and went to a neighbour's to see for her; and by the time Mrs Bargrave was returning, Mrs Veal was got without the door in the street, in the face of the beast-market, on a Saturday, which is market-day, and stood ready to part, as soon as Mrs Bargrave came to her. She asked her, why she was in such haste. She said she must be going, though perhaps she might not go her journey till Monday; and told Mrs Bargrave, she hoped she should see her again at her cousin Watson's, before she went whither she was going. Then she said, she would take her leave of her, and walked from Mrs Bargrave in her view, till a turning interrupted the sight of her, which was three quarters after one in the afternoon.

Mrs Veal died the 7th of September, at twelve o'clock at noon, of her fits, and had not above four hours' senses before her death, in which time she received the sacrament. The next day after Mrs Veal's appearing, being Sunday, Mrs Bargrave was mightily indisposed with a cold, and a sore throat, that she could not go out that day; but on Monday morning she sent a person to captain Watson's, to know if Mrs Veal was there. They wondered at Mrs Bargrave's inquiry; and sent her word, that she was not there, nor was expected. At this answer Mrs Bargrave told the maid she had certainly mistook the name, or made some blunder. And though she was ill, she put on her hood, and went herself to captain Watson's though she knew none of the family, to see if Mrs Veal was there or not. They said, they wondered at her asking, for

that she had not been in town; they were sure, if she had, she would have been there. Says Mrs Bargrave, I am sure she was with me on Saturday almost two hours. They said, it was impossible; for they must have seen her if she had. In comes Capt. Watson, while they were in dispute, and said, that Mrs Veal was certainly dead, and her escutcheons were making. This strangely surprised Mrs Bargrave, when she sent to the person immediately who had the care of them, and found it true. Then she related the whole story to captain Watson's family, and what gown she had on, and how striped; and that Mrs Veal told her, it was scowered. Then Mrs Watson cried out, You have seen her indeed, for none knew, but Mrs Veal and myself, that the gown was scowered. And Mrs Watson owned, that she described the gown exactly: For, said she, I helped her to make it up. This Mrs Watson blazed all about the town, and avouched the demonstration of the truth of Mrs Bargrave's seeing Mrs Veal's apparition. And captain Watson carried two gentlemen immediately to Mrs Bargrave's house, to hear the relation of her own mouth. And when it spread so fast, that gentlemen and persons of quality, the judicious and sceptical part of the world, flocked in upon her, it at last became such a task, that she was forced to go out of the way. For they were, in general, extremely satisfied of the truth of the thing, and plainly saw that Mrs Bargrave was no hypocondriac; for she always appears with such a cheerful air, and pleasing mien, that she has gained the favour and esteem of all the gentry; and it is thought a great favour, if they can but get the relation from her own mouth. I should have told you before, that Mrs Veal told Mrs Bargrave, that her sister and brother-in-law were just come down from London to see her. Says Mrs Bargrave, How came you to order matters so strangely? It could not be helped, says Mrs Veal. And her brother and sister did come to see her, and entered the town of Dover just as Mrs Veal was expiring. Mrs Bargrave asked her, whether she would drink some tea. Says Mrs Veal, I do not care if I do; but I'll warrant you, this mad fellow, (meaning Mrs Bargrave's husband,) has broke all your trinkets. But, says Mrs Bargrave, I'll get something to drink in for all that; but Mrs Veal waived it, and said, It is no matter, let it alone; and so it passed.

All the time I sat with Mrs Bargrave, which was some hours, she recollected fresh sayings of Mrs Veal. And one material thing more she told Mrs Bargrave, that old Mr Breton allowed Mrs Veal ten pounds a year; which was a secret, and unknown to Mrs Bargrave, till Mrs Veal told it her.

Mrs Bargrave never varies in her story; which puzzles those who doubt of the truth, or are unwilling to believe it. A servant in the neighbour's yard, adjoining to Mrs Bargrave's house, heard her talking to somebody an hour of the time Mrs Veal was with her. Mrs Bargrave went out to her next neighbour's the very moment she parted with Mrs Veal, and told her what

ravishing conversation she had with an old friend, and told the whole of it. Drelincourt's Book of Death is, since this happened, bought up strangely. And it is to be observed, that notwithstanding all the trouble and fatigue Mrs Bargrave has undergone upon this account, she never took the value of a farthing, nor suffered her daughter to take anything of anybody, and therefore can have no interest in telling the story.

But Mr Veal does what he can to stifle the matter, and said, he would see Mrs Bargrave; but yet it is certain matter of fact that he has been at captain Watson's since the death of his sister, and yet never went near Mrs Bargrave; and some of his friends report her to be a liar, and that she knew of Mr Breton's ten pounds a year. But the person who pretends to say so, has the reputation of a notorious liar, among persons whom I know to be of undoubted credit. Now Mr Veal is more of a gentleman than to say she lies; but says, a bad husband has crazed her. But she needs only present herself, and it will effectually confute that pretence. Mr Veal says he asked his sister on her death-bed, whether she had a mind to dispose of anything? And she said, No. Now, the things which Mrs Veal's apparition would have disposed of, were so trifling, and nothing of justice aimed at in their disposal, that the design of it appears to me to be only in order to make Mrs Bargrave so to demonstrate the truth of her appearance, as to satisfy the world of the reality thereof, as to what she had seen and heard; and to secure her reputation among the reasonable and understanding part of mankind. And then again, Mr Veal owns, that there was a purse of gold; but it was not found in her cabinet, but in a comb-box. This looks improbable; for that Mrs Watson owned, that Mrs Veal was so very careful of the key of the cabinet, that she would trust nobody with it. And if so, no doubt she would not trust her gold out of it. And Mrs Veal's often drawing her hand over her eyes, and asking Mrs Bargrave whether her fits had not impaired her, looks to me as if she did it on purpose to remind Mrs Bargrave of her fits, to prepare her not to think it strange that she should put her upon writing to her brother to dispose of rings and gold, which looked so much like a dying person's request; and it took accordingly with Mrs Bargrave, as the effects of her fits coming upon her; and was one of the many instances of her wonderful love to her, and care of her, that she should not be affrighted; which indeed appears in her whole management, particularly in her coming to her in the day-time, waiving the salutation, and when she was alone; and then the manner of her parting, to prevent a second attempt to salute her.

Now, why Mr Veal should think this relation a reflection, as it is plain he does, by his endeavouring to stifle it, I cannot imagine; because the generality believe her to be a good spirit, her discourse was so heavenly. Her two great errands were to comfort Mrs Bargrave in her affliction, and to ask her

forgiveness for the breach of friendship, and with a pious discourse to encourage her. So that, after all, to suppose that Mrs Bargrave could hatch such an invention as this from Friday noon till Saturday noon, supposing that she knew of Mrs Veal's death the very first moment, without jumbling circumstances, and without any interest too; she must be more witty, fortunate, and wicked too, than any indifferent person, I dare say, will allow. I asked Mrs Bargrave several times, if she was sure she felt the gown? She answered modestly, If my senses be to be relied on, I am sure of it. I asked her, if she heard a sound when she clapped her hand upon her knee? She said, she did not remember she did; but said she appeared to be as much a substance as I did, who talked with her. And I may, said she, be as soon persuaded, that your apparition is talking to me now, as that I did not really see her: for I was under no manner of fear, and received her as a friend, and parted with her as such. I would not, says she, give one farthing to make any one believe it: I have no interest in it; nothing but trouble is entailed upon me for a long time, for aught I know; and had it not come to light by accident, it would never have been made public. But now, she says, she will make her own private use of it, and keep herself out of the way as much as she can; and so she has done since. She says, she had a gentleman who came thirty miles to her to hear the relation; and that she had told it to a room full of people at a time. Several particular gentlemen have had the story from Mrs Bargrave's own mouth.

This thing has very much affected me, and I am as well satisfied, as I am of the best-grounded matter of fact. And why we should dispute matter of fact, because we cannot solve things of which we can have no certain or demonstrative notions, seems strange to me. Mrs Bargrave's authority and sincerity alone, would have been undoubted in any other case.

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## 11: Rain to Order

***Ernest George Henham***

1870-1946

*Cassell's Magazine*, June 1903

*British author of novels and short stories, often of horror and supernatural, who after about 1907 wrote using the pen name John Trevena.*

A DROUGHT had prevailed over the Silver Stream district from July up to the second week in September. The baked earth of the settlement's single street smoked with dust the surrounding plains were parched a dead brown, the fields were burnt, the bluff shrivelled. Around the particular homestead of Eli M'Cannel a few yellow apples glared like spheres of hot metal among the sun-dried foliage, and the dry blades of corn could be heard beyond railing upon their stalks when ever the suffocating wind passed.

The owner of the farm stood in the yard, and rubbed a misshapen hat over his dusty hair.

'Reckon the sun must have lost the main track, and been switched inter some siding mighty near the yearth,' he grumbled, watching the scorching hues of heat haze waving across the fields.

'What's that, father?' called a pleasant voice, as a fresh-looking girl turned from the house, a pail swinging at the end of each arm.

'Calling this here place Silver Stream,' went on the angry farmer. 'Dried Mud, they should a-called it, or Yaller Dust, or— or Parched Corn. Calling it Silver Stream!'

'Well I didn't name the place,' said his pretty daughter, heating the flies from her

'I guess not,' growled M'Cannel. 'Some Jim-dandy of an Englishman named this place, some smart Alec of an Englishman same as young Forester?'

'You leave Mr. Forester alone, father,' interrupted Molly M'Cannel with unusual severity. 'You are always down upon him, just— just because he beat you at the Agricultural Show last fall. I'm very glad he did beat you, and I hope he will do so again this year— if this drought leaves anything to make a show.'

With that Miss Molly gathered up her pails and swung into the house, leaving her father watching the grey-blue sky, where not a sign of cloud drifted.

Carlo, the stock dog, came panting up the yard, and the farmer aimed a kick at the inoffensive beast, not with any idea of hurting it, but merely desiring to vent his ill-humour upon some living creature. The kick was accidentally well placed, and Carlo promptly packed one leg and ran away yelping upon three.

A young man on horseback proceeded up the trail, lifting clouds of dust in his progress. When near the M'Cannel residence he raised his voice, and immediately one of the green jalousies swung back and a handkerchief waved. At precisely the same moment the owner of the place raced round the stables and barred the way with a hay-fork.

'Huh!' exclaimed M'Cannel, spitting out the bitter willow dust. 'Thought I was out on the fields, I reckon. Didn't count on popper answerin' of you. Dog my cats! If you come a step more inter my yard I'll stick the fork inter yer.'

Forester, the Englishman, removed himself slowly from the saddle, slipped his arm through the bridle rein, pulled oft his hat, and began to fan himself with the wide brim.

'Morning. M'Cannel,' he said. 'Is there any water left in your dam? If there is, I should like to give my horse a drink.

'Water!' shouted M'Cannel, driving the tines of his fork upon the adamantine ground, narrowly missing his boot. 'You have a lovely gall, young man, askin' for water, when there ain't hardly two gallons left in all Silver Stream, an' me thinkin' of waterin' the stock on lager-beer. There ain't enough in all my dam for one horse-fly to commit sooicide in, and there ain't enough in yonder well to damp the belly of a toad. I wouldn't give not one drop of water, not if me dam was ready to bust for it.''

The Englishman laughed quietly, and loosened the girths of his sweating horse.

'How is Miss Molly to-day?' he asked gently.

'Molly's my darter,' said the farmer indignantly.

'There is no blame to be attached to her for that,' said Forester.

M'Cannel was a slow-witted man, and the humour of this statement was therefore lost upon him. His mind ran along its own narrow groove, and his tongue went on as though Forester had not spoken.

'She's never a-goin' to be any gal of yours. Molly's a-goin' to marry no Englishman. She's a-goin' to marry a gentleman.'

'All right,' said Forester, unmoved. 'Look here, M'Cannel, I haven't come around this morning to speak to Molly. I have come to see you. You want rain, I guess?'

'Want rain!' spluttered the angry farmer. 'Course I want rain. We'll all he ruined if we don't have it mighty quick.'

A cloud of smoke sprang like a balloon above the settlement, and a dull roar followed, vibrating along the ground, and jarring the dust from the wine-coloured foliage of the apple trees.'

'That there fool rain-maker at work again!' exclaimed M'Cannel, slewing round on his heel to watch the motionless body of vapour.

'Shootin' half yesterday he was— shootin' the sky, an' the sun, an' the moon, an' all the blame stars, but if he shoots from now till Judgment Day he won't shoot not one drop of water outer Heaven, the city council have promised to pay him two hunderd an' fifty dollars if he shoots 'em down water. Might as well be tryin' to shoot down angels. What you grinnin' at, you Englishman?'

'Listen to me, M'Cannel—' Forester gravely approached the farmer, adding mysteriously. 'Shooting won't change the weather, but there are other methods. What will you give me if I bring rain before midnight?'

The Englishman knew that M'Cannel was one of the more ignorant settlers, absolutely untaught in the ways of civilization; and, though he would never have owned to it, steeped in superstition up to the ears. The farmer forgot his indignation because he thought that the long spell of heat had acted injuriously upon the young mans brain. He was sure of it when Forester went on:

'I know something that nobody around here dreams of. I know what none of yonder rammakers know.'

His manner became more and more mysterious. He dropped hns voice to a whisper. 'You make it worth my while, and the rain shall come. Rain means more to you than it does to me. My farm is clear. You have your machine bills falling due before Christmas. '

'Man!' spluttered M'Cannel. 'What's yer trick? Sayin' you can bring water, or keep it away! I guess there's an awful leak somewheres' in yer head. Do yer take me for a domed fool?'

'If you promise to give me what I ask there will be rain upon Silver Stream before midnight,' said 'Forester in the same reserved manner.

'An' I say you're a liar.'

'If that's your best word, I'm done,' said the Englishman carelessly. 'If you don t know a genuine rain-maker when you see him you are no better than the rest of the men in Silver Stream.'

'Wait a while,' muttered M'Cannel. 'You have 'mazed me.'

In spite of his dislike for the Englishman, M'Cannel unwillingly believed that the young man possessed considerable ability. Rain meant everything to him, as it did to many another settler; and an absurd idea took possession of his ignorant mind that the clever Englishman was actually withholding he rain to meet some private ends. If there were men who made a profession by bringing rain. there might possibly be others who could by some similarly inexplicable process, I keep it off.

M'Cannel was shrewd enough to ] u-gue that he could not possibly be a, loser i jy humouring this clerk of the wealther.

'You say you can fetch down rain if I pay for the job?' he demanded.

'If you give me what I ask for, your farm shall be soaked to-night,' said Forester coolly.

'I guess you ain't right,' said M'Cannel pityingly. 'But there, I never met an Englishman what was. What do you want?'

'You have a daughter,' Forester reminded him, nodding towards the door, which by a coincidence was opened by Molly herself as he spoke.

'Ay. I hev a darter.' agreed M'Cannel. 'An' ef I had a million you shouldn't hev none of them.'

'You must take that back if you want to save your farm. Promise me Molly, and you shall have rain,' said Forester, with the same calm assurance.

'It's foolin' you are,' cried M'Cannel hotly. 'An' ef it ain't foolin' it's dirty black blasphemy.'

'Give me an answer, one way or the other,' went on the calm Englishman.

'Look at yon sky,' the farmer shouted, throwing out his long arms. 'Clear as it's been for a month. There ain't a sign of rain.'

'The rain is my business. All you have to do is to promise me Molly.'

'An' we'll hev rain?'

Forester nodded with splendid gravity. 'I don't believe yer— course I don't,' said M'Cannol doggedly. 'No man can make rain to order. It ain't nat'ral. An' I don't want to seem to make no fool of meself either. But if it makes yer happy to get a promise outer me why, you can hev it. But you don't want to go around an' talk about it.'

'I can marry Molly if it rains before midnight ?'

'You can,' replied M'Cannel, adding, with conviction, 'That's a promise what can hurt no one, 'cause it's never a-goin' to rain.'

In an instant Forester was at the door of the farmhouse, where Molly welcomed him with a face of sunshine. He took her arm and led her out into the dusty yard.

'Just you repeat that promise for Molly's benefit,' said the Englishman. 'She is as much interested in it as I am.'

'It's makin' a fool of me ye are,' the farmer retorted sulkily. But he had gone too far to draw back, so he repeated the promise, adding morosely, 'You step aside quite a piece, an' quit that familiarity, young man.'

Forester led his horse away, while Molly blew him a kiss from her finger-tips behind her father's back. That gentleman suddenly cantered up to the rain-maker's stirrup.

'Say, Englishman, if so be you can bring this rain which I don't believe not for one second— but, if so be you can, just fix it so as old man Roberts yonder don't have none. See?'

When Molly drove that afternoon into Silver Stream she found the settlement in the hands of the weather-changers.

Professor Hyman S. Goggin, qualified rain-maker from Aristophanes. Miss., stood upon an elevation, wearing an array of bright medals upon his coat, his mortar beside him gaping at the cloudless sky, a group of rain-provoking shells scattered at the foot of the knoll. The mortar boomed monotonously, the shells exploded with irritating persistency, the fungus-shaped puffs of smoke lingered in the upper haze of heat; but the sun continued to in laze unconcernedly, and the serenity of the grey-blue vault of sky remained unbroken. The professor did not look like a man who was earnin the promised reward.

At the end of the street, where the frame houses gave way to grass flats, a tent, the property of the agricultural commissioners, had been erected; and beneath the scorched canvas representaives of the various local religious denominations, their differences forgotten during the present distress, were assembled to appeal for rain. As the M'Cannel buckboard jolted down the trail Molly heard the wheze of the Episcopalian harmonium, assisted at intervals by the ear-breaking blare of the Methodist cornet, and the thud of the Salvation Army drum.

Professor Goggin was regarding the tent, which closed down upon these noisy amateurs, with distinct disapprobation. A visible and picturesque band of Indians, under the leadership of the celebrated medicine men, Jim Drive-the-Clouds and Paul Split-the-Wind, raised a hideous din beneath a smoky lodge at the edge of a bluff. Their dance was a very powerful medicine, which they conceived could not possibly fail to produce an abundance of rain, unless it so happened that the gods should be offended at the presence of the white men, and on that account withhold the desired supply of water. Professor Goggin muttered anathemas upon the heathen riotings, spat upon his hands, and grasped another shell.

When Molly was leaving the general store she met her lover. Her first thought was that he looked exceedingly anxious.

'Hugh,' she exclaimed, 'what have you been saying to father?'

'I promised him rain before midnight on the condition that he withdraws his opposition to our marrying,' said the Englishman.

'How could you!' cried the girl. 'We shall be worse, off than ever. There isn't a sign of the drought breaking.'

'Trust me, Molly. The rain will come, but neither the professor, nor the Indians, nor yonder tent meeting are going to hurry it. The storm will begin between nine and ten.'

Molly regarded the rash speaker, large-eyed and incredulous.

'I want to believe you.' she said impulsively. 'But— however can you bring rain?'

'Has it not occurred to you that, if it is coming; I cannot possibly prevent it?' said Forester with a laugh. 'Now, little girl, I must get back home. Remember thait I have a storm to make,' he added slyly, as he pulled himself into the saddle. 'See you again this evening— when the rain begins.'

He trotted away in a whirl of dust.

Upon reaching his house Forester put up his horse, hurried indoors, and consulted a long object, shaped like a telescope, which was hanging in a box upon the wall. The result of his observation he set down upon a sheet, which was already closely covered with figures. He next paid a visit to the roof, where he had erected a little windmill vane, its spindle passing through the axis of a narrow cylinder, the shaft communicating with a diail placed in the room below. The motion of the shaft was geared to a marker, which made a motion proportionate to that of the wind, and traced a line upon a paper caused to move by clock-work in a direction perpendicular to the marker.

Forester bent his head over the spidery curve, and a smile broke upon his face.

'Changing,' he muttered; 'changing rapidly.'

The night came, close and full of insects. Professor Goggin went to his supper at the hotel, undismayed by failure; the tent meeting stood adjourned; but the indomitable Indians still danced and howled by the scarlet glow of a wood fire. Darkness, in their eyes, was more potent than daylight.

Shortly before 10 M'Cannel went out to feed and bed-up his horses. Not a breath of air stirred the withered trees, and the bleached grass stood motionless. The heat was so great that perspiration dropped from the farmer's beard as he entered the stable and groped his way to the oat-bin.

While in the act of bending to find the nail a stunning explosion occurred, and M'Cannel straightened himself very suddenly with a scared expletive. The horses were plunging, and he could hear the lowing of oxen in the adjacent shed. A sheet of blue light shivered through the stables, and M'Cannel heard a whisper as of faraway water playing in the wind.

'That Englishman is just a hoodoo.' the superstitious farmer muttered. 'Ain't got no business monkeyin' wi' the weather. Jerusalem!'

Another explosion shivered the building, and the noise which had been a whisper became a hissing.

'He's overdone it,' cried M'Cannel, feeling for the door. 'He's tried for rain, an' brought a cyclone.'

The clouds were piled into indigo masses, cut through by pale lightning. The settlement might have marked the site of a huge blast furnace. A few

heavy drops rattled noisily as M'Cannel crossed the yard, and had he been an educated man he might have said, *'Apres moi le deluge*.'

A hot rain was frothing upon the shingles, and all the prospect had become hidden behind a blurred veil of descending water when Forester arrived. The yard was already cross-hatched with miniature rivulets; the soil ran in loose mud; the foliage streamed and dripped like seaweed; and all the country exhaled a freshening fragrance.

'I guess it's rainin',' said M'Cannel, when the visitor entered the homestead.

'I rather believe it is,' said Forester.

'I'm a man of me word,' went on M'Cannel. Then he retired grumbling, because his native prejudice against Englishmen remained as strong as ever. While Forester stood and steamed beside the stove, as wet and as jolly as a porpoise, Molly urgently demanded an explanation of his conduct.

'It so happens,' he said, 'that I have what nobody else in the district possesses, a Vernier barometer, the first instrument in the world for notifying gradual weather changes. I have also fixed up an anemometer, which records every alteration in the wind currents. Before coming up here I served for a time upon a government meteorological station, and there I discovered that, by continual observations, I could foretell, often down to the hour, when rain might confidently be expected. I saw this storm approaching some few days ago, and since then I have been taking observations hourly, day and night, until I found myself able to fix the time when the rain would probably begin. I saw my chance I for working upon your father's credulity, and I made the most of it.'

The following day Professor Goggin encountered the Mayor of Silver Stream, and hastily ran him into a muddy corner, to observe that he found himself prepared to immediately sign a receipt for 250 dollars, moneys due to him for heavy rain, supplied as per contract. The Mayor demurred, stating as grounds for refusal that the deluge had been indubitably provided by the indefatigable exertions of the great tent meeting. Then Jim Drive-the-Clouds came up, to explain at length that the rainfall which had saved the district was entirely owing to the endeavour of himself and partner. Paul Split-the-Wind followed, and concurred in this opinion of his learned brother; and the two old men proceeded to shamelessly demand inexhaustible supplies of tobacco and clothing.

Finally, M'Cannel rattled up in his old buckboard, to mystify the assembly, which had by that time gathered upon Main-street, with the statement:

'That Englishman Forester made the rain up at his place wi' some derned little machine what he won't sell nor show to no-one.'

A meeting extraordinary of the town council was thereupon hastily convened to consider the claims of the rival rain-makers. After a lengthy discussion Professor Goggin was paid in full, the town clerk being at the same time censured for having been so blind to the public interest as to have given a promise in writing; an inexpensive, and therefore hearty, vote was passed thanking the ministers of the various denominations who had contributed their moral and physical support to the convention; and Jim and Paul were remunerated by the gifts of second-hand blankets and a few stale plugs of tobacco.

Forester put in no claim, but he was probably the best rewarded of all the rain-makers.

'Say,' exclaimed M'Cannel to his prospective son-in-law, as the young man was about to leave his house on the following night, 'what d'yer call this here machine what makes the rain?'

'A barometer,' replied Forester gravely.

'Huh!' muttered M'Cannel learnedly. 'Cost a lot, I reckon? Most as much as a hay-cutter?'

'They run cheaper than that,' said Forester, without a trace of a smile.

'Seems a spry sorter machine,' the farmer went on reflectively. 'Easy to work? Want horse-power to run it?'

'You just hang the thing up on the wall and it works by itself.'

'My!' said M'Cannel. 'Ain't that ridiculous? What's the name again?'

'Barometer,' said Forester, spelling the word slowly.

'Thankye,' said M'Cannel. 'I'm sorry you're an Englishman. Otherwise you'll do.'

A week later the firm of Anderson, Mernt ,ym and Co., makers of binders, ploughs, and other agricultural implements, of the town of Grand Forks, found among their morning mail the following order:

*'Please send by freight (C.O.D.) to Big Coulee station one latest-model Barometer. Eli M'Cannel. Silver Stream.'*

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## 12: The House of Terror

***A. E. W. Mason***

1865-1948

*The Saturday Evening Post*, 22 May 1909

THERE ARE EAGER spirits who enter upon each morning like adventurers upon an unknown sea. Mr. Rupert Glynn, however, was not of that company. He had been christened "Rupert" in an ironical moment, for he preferred the day to be humdrum. Possessed of an easy independence, which he had never done a stroke of work to enlarge, he remained a bachelor, not from lack of opportunity to become a husband, but in order that his comfort might not be disarranged.

"A hunting-box in the Midlands," he used to say, "a set of chambers in the Albany, the season in town, a cure in the autumn at some French spa where a modest game of baccarat can be enjoyed, and a five- pound note in my pocket at the service of a friend— these conditions satisfy my simple wants, and I can rub along."

Contentment had rounded his figure, and he was a little thicker in the jaw and redder in the face than he used to be. But his eye was clear, and he had many friends, a fact for which it was easy to account. For there was a pleasant earthliness about him which made him restful company. It seemed impossible that strange startling things could happen in his presence; he had so stolid and comfortable a look, his life was so customary and sane. "When I am frightened by queer shuffling sounds in the dead of night," said a nervous friend of his, "I think of Rupert Glynn and I am comforted." Yet just because of this atmosphere of security which he diffused about him, Mr. Glynn was dragged into mysteries, and made acquainted with terrors.

In the first days of February Mr. Glynn found upon his breakfast-table at Melton a letter which he read through with an increasing gravity. Mr. Glynn being a man of method, kept a file of the *Morning Post.* He rang the bell for his servant, and fetched to the table his pocket diary. He turned back the pages until he read in the space reserved for November 15th, "My first run of the year."

Then he spoke to his servant, who was now waiting in the room:

"Thompson, bring me the *Morning Post* of November 16th."

Mr. Glynn remembered that he had read a particular announcement in the paper on the morning after his first run, when he was very stiff. Thompson brought him the copy for which he had asked, and, turning over the pages, he soon lighted upon the paragraph.

"Mr. James Thresk has recovered from his recent breakdown, and left London yesterday with Mrs. Thresk for North Uist."

Glynn laid down his newspaper and contemplated the immediate future with gloom. It was a very long way to the Outer Hebrides, and, moreover, he had eight horses in his stable. Yet he could hardly refuse to take the journey in the face of that paragraph. It was not, indeed, in his nature to refuse. For the letter written by Linda Thresk claimed his presence urgently. He took it up again. There was no reason expressed as to why he was needed. And there were instructions, besides, which puzzled him, very explicit instructions. He was to bring his guns, he was to send a telegram from Loch Boisdale, the last harbour into which the steamer from Oban put before it reached North Uist, and from no other place. He was, in a word, to pretend that he had been shooting in a neighbouring island to North Uist, and that, since he was so near, he ventured to trespass for a night or two on Mrs. Thresk's hospitality. All these precautions seemed to Glynn ominous, but still more ominous was the style of the letter. A word here, a sentence there— nay, the very agitation of the handwriting, filled Glynn with uneasiness. The appeal was almost pitiful. He seemed to see Linda Thresk bending over the pages of the letter which he now held in his hand, writing hurriedly, with a twitching, terrified face, and every now and then looking up, and to this side and to that, with the eyes of a hunted animal. He remembered Linda's appearance very well as he held her letter in his hand, although three years had passed since he had seen her— a fragile, slender woman with a pale, delicate face, big dark eyes, and masses of dark hair— a woman with the look of a girl and an almost hot-house air of refinement.

Mr. Glynn laid the letter down again, and again rang for his servant.

"Pack for a fortnight," he said. "And get my guns out. I am going away."

Thompson was as surprised as his self-respect allowed him to be.

"Your guns, sir?" he asked. "I think they are in town, but we have not used them for so long."

"I know," said Mr. Glynn impatiently. "But we are going to use them now."

Thompson knew very well that Mr. Glynn could not hit a haystack twenty yards away, and had altogether abandoned a sport in which he was so lamentably deficient. But a still greater shock was to be inflicted upon him.

"Thompson," said Mr. Glynn, "I shall not take you with me. I shall go alone."

And go alone he did. Here was the five-pound note, in a word, at the service of a friend. But he was not without perplexities, to keep his thoughts busy upon his journey.

Why had Linda Thresk sent for him out of all her friends?

For since her marriage three years before, he had clean lost sight of her, and even before her marriage he had, after all, been only one of many. He

found no answer to that question. On the other hand, he faithfully fulfilled Mrs. Thresk's instructions. He took his guns with him, and when the steamer stopped beside the little quay at Loch Boisdale he went ashore and sent off his telegram. Two hours later he disembarked at Lochmaddy in North Uist, and, hiring a trap at the inn, set off on his long drive across that flat and melancholy island. The sun set, the swift darkness followed, and the moon had risen before he heard the murmurous thunder of the sea upon the western shore. It was about ten minutes later when, beyond a turn of the road, he saw the house and lights shining brightly in its windows. It was a small white house with a few out-buildings at the back, set in a flat peat country on the edge of a great marsh. Ten yards from the house a great brake of reeds marked the beginning of the marsh, and beyond the reeds the bog stretched away glistening with pools to the low sand-hills. Beyond the sand-hills the Atlantic ran out to meet the darkness, a shimmering plain of silver. One sapling stood up from the middle of the marsh, and laid a finger across the moon. But except that sapling, there were not any trees.

To Glynn, fresh from the meadowlands of Leicestershire with their neat patterns of hedges, white gates and trees, this corner of the Outer Hebrides upon the edge of the Atlantic had the wildest and most desolate look. The seagulls and curlews cried perpetually above the marsh, and the quiet sea broke upon the sand with a haunting and mournful sound. Glynn looked at the little house set so far away in solitude, and was glad that he had come. To his southern way of thinking, trouble was best met and terrors most easily endured in the lighted ways of cities, where companionship was to be had by the mere stepping across the threshold.

When the trap drove up to the door, there was some delay in answering Glynn's summons. A middle-aged man-servant came at last to the door, and peered out from the doorway in surprise.

"I sent a telegram," said Glynn, "from Loch Boisdale. I am Mr. Glynn."

"A telegram?" said the man. "It will not come up until the morning, sir."

Then the voice of the driver broke in.

"I brought up a telegram from Lochmaddy. It's from a gentleman who is coming to visit Mrs. Thresk from South Uist."

In the outer islands, where all are curious, news is not always to be had, and the privacy of the telegraph system is not recognised. Glynn laughed, and the same moment the man-servant opened an inner door of the tiny hall. Glynn stepped into a low-roofed parlour which was obviously the one living-room of the house. On his right hand there was a great fireplace with a peat fire burning in the grate, and a high-backed horsehair sofa in front of it. On his left at a small round table Thresk and his wife were dining.

Both Thresk and his wife sprang up as he entered. Linda advanced to him with every mark of surprise upon her face.

"You!" she cried, holding out her hand. "Where have you sprung from?"

"South Uist," said Glynn, repeating his lesson.

"And you have come on to us! That is kind of you! Martin, you must take Mr. Glynn's bag up to the guest-room. I expect you will be wanting your dinner."

"I sent you a telegram asking you whether you would mind if I trespassed upon your hospitality for a night or so."

He saw Linda's eyes fixed upon him with some anxiety, and he continued at once:

"I sent it from Loch Boisdale."

A wave of relief passed over Linda's face.

"It will not come up until the morning," she said with a smile.

"As a matter of fact, the driver brought it up with him," said Glynn. And Martin handed to Mrs. Thresk the telegram. Over his shoulder, Glynn saw Thresk raise his head. He had been standing by the table listening to what was said. Now he advanced. He was a tall man, powerfully built, with a strongly-marked, broad face, which was only saved from coarseness by its look of power. They made a strange contrast, the husband and wife, as they stood side by side— she slight and exquisitely delicate in her colour, dainty in her movements, he clumsy and big and masterful. Glynn suddenly recalled gossip which had run through the town about the time of their marriage. Linda had been engaged to another— a man whose name Glynn did not remember, but on whom, so the story ran, her heart was set.

"Of course you are very welcome," said Thresk, as he held out his hand, and Glynn noticed with something of a shock that his throat was bandaged. He looked towards Linda. Her eyes were resting upon him with a look of agonised appeal. He was not to remark upon that wounded throat. He took Thresk's hand.

"We shall be delighted if you will stay with us as long as you can," said Thresk. "We have been up here for more than three months. You come to us from another world, and visitors from another world are always interesting, aren't they, Linda?"

He spoke his question with a quiet smile, like a man secretly amused. But on Linda's face fear flashed out suddenly and was gone. It seemed to Glynn that she was at pains to repress a shiver.

"Martin will show you your room," said Thresk. "What's the matter?"

Glynn was staring at the table in consternation. Where had been the use of all the pretence that he had come unexpectedly on an unpremeditated visit?

His telegram had only this minute arrived— and yet there was the table laid for three people. Thresk followed the direction of his visitor's eyes.

"Oh, I see," he said with a laugh.

Glynn flushed. No wonder Thresk was amused. He had been sitting at the table; and between himself and his wife the third place was laid.

"I will go up and change," said Glynn awkwardly.

"Well, don't be long!" replied Thresk.

Glynn followed Martin to the guest-room. But he was annoyed. He did not, under any circumstances, like to look a fool. But he had the strongest possible objection to travelling three hundred miles in order to look it. If he wanted to look a fool, he grumbled, he could have managed it just as well in the Midlands.

But he was to be more deeply offended. For when he came down into the dining-room he walked to the table and drew out the vacant chair. At once Thresk shot out his hand and stopped him.

"You mustn't sit there!" he cried violently. Then his face changed. Slowly the smile of amusement reappeared upon it. "After all, why not?" he said. "Try, yes, try," and he watched Glynn with a strange intentness.

Glynn sat down slowly. A trick was being played upon him— of that he was sure. He was still more sure when Thresk's face relaxed and he broke into a laugh.

"Well, that's funny!" he cried, and Glynn, in exasperation, asked indignantly:

"What's funny?"

But Thresk was no longer listening. He was staring across the room towards the front door, as though he heard outside yet another visitor. Glynn turned angrily towards Linda. At once his anger died away. Her face was white as paper, and her eyes full of fear. Her need was real, whatever it might be. Thresk turned sharply back again.

"It's a long journey from London to North Uist," he said pleasantly.

"No doubt," replied Glynn, as he set himself to his dinner. "But I have come from South Uist. However, I am just as hungry as if I had come from London."

He laughed, and Thresk joined in the laugh.

"I am glad of that," he said, "for it's quite a long time since we have seen you."

"Yes, it is," replied Glynn carelessly. "A year, I should think."

"Three years," said Thresk. "For I don't think that you have ever come to see us in London."

"We are so seldom there," interrupted Linda.

"Three months a year, my dear," said Thresk. "But I know very well that a man will take a day's journey in the Outer Islands to see his friends, whereas he wouldn't cross the street in London. And, in any case, we are very glad to see you. By the way," and he reached out his hand carelessly for the salt, "isn't this rather a new departure for you, Glynn? You were always a sociable fellow. A hunting-box in the Midlands, and all the lighted candles in the season. The Outer Islands were hardly in your line." And he turned quickly towards him. "You have brought your guns?"

"Of course," said Glynn, laughing as easily as he could under a cross-examination which he began to find anything but comfortable. "But I won't guarantee that I can shoot any better than I used to."

"Never mind," said Thresk. "We'll shoot the bog to-morrow, and it will be strange if you don't bring down something. It's full of duck. You don't mind getting wet, I suppose? There was once a man named Channing—" he broke off upon the name, and laughed again with that air of secret amusement. "Did you ever hear of him?" he asked of Glynn.

"Yes," replied Glynn slowly. "I knew him."

At the mention of the name he had seen Linda flinch, and he knew why she flinched.

"Did you?" exclaimed Thresk, with a keen interest. "Then you will appreciate the story. He came up here on a visit."

Glynn started.

"He came here!" he cried, and could have bitten out his tongue for uttering the cry.

"Oh, yes," said Thresk easily, "I asked him," and Glynn looked from Thresk to Thresk's wife in amazement. Linda for once did not meet Glynn's eyes. Her own were fixed upon the tablecloth. She was sitting in her chair rather rigidly. One hand rested upon the tablecloth, and it was tightly clenched. Alone of the three James Thresk appeared at ease.

"I took him out to shoot that bog," he continued with a laugh. "He loathed getting wet. He was always so very well dressed, wasn't he, Linda? The reeds begin twenty yards from the front door, and within the first five minutes he was up to the waist!" Thresk suddenly checked his laughter. "However, it ceased to be a laughing matter. Channing got a little too near the sapling in the middle."

"Is it dangerous there?" asked Glynn.

"Yes, it's dangerous." Thresk rose from his chair and walked across the room to the window. He pulled up the blind and, curving his hands about his eyes to shut out the light of the room, leaned his face against the window-frame and looked out. "It's more than dangerous," he said in a low voice. "Just

round that sapling, it's swift and certain death. You would sink to the waist," and he spoke still more slowly, as though he were measuring by the utterance of the syllables the time it would take for the disaster to be complete — "from the waist to the shoulders, from the shoulders clean out of sight, before any help could reach you."

He stopped abruptly, and Glynn, watching him from the table, saw his attitude change. He dropped his head, he hunched his back, and made a strange hissing sound with his breath.

"Linda!" he cried, in a low, startling voice, "Linda!"

Glynn, unimpressionable man that he was, started to his feet. The long journey, the loneliness of the little house set in this wild, flat country, the terror which hung over it and was heavy in the very atmosphere of the rooms, were working already upon his nerves.

"Who is it?" he cried.

Linda laid a hand upon his arm.

"There's no one," she said in a whisper. "Take no notice."

And, looking at her quivering face, Glynn was inspired to ask a question, was wrought up to believe that the answer would explain to him why Thresk leaned his forehead against the window-pane and called upon his wife in so strange a voice.

"Did Channing sink— by the sapling?"

"No," said Linda hurriedly, and as hurriedly she drew away in her chair. Glynn turned and saw Thresk himself standing just behind his shoulder. He had crept down noiselessly behind them.

"No," Thresk repeated. "But he is dead. Didn't you know that? Oh, yes, he is dead," and suddenly he broke out with a passionate violence. "A clever fellow — an infernally clever fellow. You are surprised to hear me say that, Glynn. You underrated him like the rest of us. We thought him a milksop, a tame cat, a poor, weak, interloping, unprofitable creature who would sidle obsequiously into your house, and make his home there. But we were wrong— all except Linda there."

Linda sat with her head bowed, and said not a word. She was sitting so that Glynn could see her profile, and though she said nothing, her lips were trembling.

"Linda was right," and Thresk turned carelessly to Glynn. "Did you know that Linda was at one time engaged to Channing?"

"Yes, I knew," said Glynn awkwardly.

"It was difficult for most of us to understand," said Thresk. "There seemed no sort of reason why a girl like Linda should select a man like Channing to fix her heart upon. But she was right. Channing was a clever fellow— oh, a very

clever fellow," and he leaned over and touched Glynn upon the sleeve, "for he died."

Glynn started back.

"What are you saying?" he cried.

Thresk burst into a laugh.

"That my throat hurts me to-night," he said.

Glynn recovered himself with an effort. "Oh, yes," he said, as though now for the first time he had noticed the bandage. "Yes, I see you have hurt your throat. How did you do it?"

Thresk chuckled.

"Not very well done, Glynn. Will you smoke?"

The plates had been cleared from the table, and the coffee brought in. Thresk rose from his seat and crossed to the mantelshelf on which a box of cigars was laid. As he took up the box and turned again towards the table, a parchment scroll which hung on a nail at the side of the fireplace caught his eye.

"Do you see this?" he said, and he unrolled it. "It's my landlord's family tree. All the ancestors of Mr. Robert Donald McCullough right back to the days of Bruce. McCullough's prouder of that scroll than of anything else in the world. He is more interested in it than in anything else in the world."

For a moment he fingered it, and in the tone of a man communing with himself, he added:

"Now, isn't that curious?"

Glynn rose from his chair, and moved down the table so that he could see the scroll unimpeded by Thresk's bulky figure. Thresk, however, was not speaking any longer to his guest. Glynn sat down again. But he sat down now in the chair which Thresk had used; the chair in which he himself had been sitting between Thresk and Linda was empty.

"What interests me," Thresk continued, like a man in a dream, "is what is happening now— and very strange, queer, interesting things are happening now— for those who have eyes to see. Yes, through centuries and centuries, McCulloughs have succeeded McCulloughs, and lived in this distant, little corner of the Outer Islands through forays and wars and rebellions, and the oversetting of kings, and yet nothing has ever happened in this house to any one of them half so interesting and half so strange as what is happening now to us, the shooting tenants of a year."

Thresk dropped the scroll, and, coming out of his dream, brought the cigar-box to the table.

"You have changed your seat!" he said with a smile, as he offered the box to Glynn. Glynn took out of it a cigar, and leaning back, cut off the end. As he

stooped forward to light it, he saw the cigar-box still held out to him. Thresk had not moved. He seemed to have forgotten Glynn's presence in the room. His eyes were fixed upon the empty chair. He stood strangely rigid, and then he suddenly cried out:

"Take care, Linda!"

There was so sharp a note of warning in his voice that Linda sprang to her feet, with her hand pressed upon her heart. Glynn was startled too, and because he was startled he turned angrily to Thresk.

"Of what should Mrs. Thresk take care?"

Thresk took his eyes for a moment, and only for a moment, from the empty chair.

"Do you see nothing?" he asked, in a whisper, and his glance went back again. "Not a shadow which leans across the table there towards Linda, darkening the candle-light?"

"No; for there's nothing to cast a shadow."

"Is there not?" said Thresk, with a queer smile. "That's where you make your mistake. Aren't you conscious of something very strange, very insidious, close by us in this room?"

"I am aware that you are frightening Mrs. Thresk," said Glynn roughly; and, indeed, standing by the table, with her white face and her bosom heaving under her hand, she looked the very embodiment of terror. Thresk turned at once to her. A look of solicitude made his gross face quite tender. He took her by the arm, and in a chiding, affectionate tone he said very gently:

"You are not frightened, Linda, are you? Interested— yes, just as I am. But not frightened. There's nothing to be frightened at. We are not children."

"Oh, Jim," she said, and she leaned upon his arm. He led her across to the sofa, and sat down beside her.

"That's right. Now we are comfortable." But the last word was not completed. It seemed that it froze upon his lips. He stopped, looked for a second into space, and then, dropping his arm from about his wife's waist, he deliberately moved aside from her, and made a space between them.

"Now we are in our proper places— the four of us," he said bitterly.

"The three of us," Glynn corrected, as he walked round the table. "Where's the fourth?"

And then there came to him this extraordinary answer given in the quietest voice imaginable.

"Between my wife and me. Where should he be?"

Glynn stared. There was no one in the room but Linda, Thresk, and himself— no one. But— but— it was the loneliness of the spot, and its silence, and its great distance from his world, no doubt, which troubled him. Thresk's

manner, too, and his words were having their effect. That was all, Glynn declared stoutly to himself. But— but— he did not wonder that Linda had written so urgently for him to come to her. His back went cold, and the hair stirred upon his scalp.

"Who is it, then?" he cried violently.

Linda rose from the sofa, and took a quick step towards him. Her eyes implored him to silence.

"There is no one," she protested in a low voice.

"No," cried Glynn loudly. "Let us understand what wild fancy he has! Who is the fourth?"

Upon Thresk's face came a look of sullenness.

"Who should he be?"

"Who is he?" Glynn insisted.

"Channing," said Thresk. "Mildmay Channing." He sat for a while, brooding with his head sunk upon his breast. And Glynn started back. Some vague recollection was stirring in his memory. There had been a story current amongst Linda's friends at the time of her marriage. She had been in love with Channing, desperately in love with him. The marriage with Thresk had been forced on her by her parents— yes, and by Thresk's persistency. It had been a civilised imitation of the Rape of the Sabine Women. That was how the story ran, Glynn remembered. He waited to hear more from James Thresk, and in a moment the words came, but in a thoroughly injured tone.

"It's strange that you can't see either."

"There is some one else, then, as blind as I am?" said Glynn.

"There was. Yes, yes, the dog," replied Thresk, gazing into the fire. "You and the dog," he repeated uneasily, "you and the dog. But the dog saw in the end, Glynn, and so will you— even you."

Linda turned quickly, but before she could speak, Glynn made a sign to her. He went over to her side. A glance at Thresk showed him that he was lost in his thoughts.

"If you want me to help you, you must leave us alone," he said.

She hesitated for a moment, and then swiftly crossed the room and went out at the door. Glynn, who had let his cigar go out, lit it again at the flame of one of the candles on the dining-table. Then he planted himself in front of Thresk.

"You are terrifying your wife," he said. "You are frightening her to death."

Thresk did not reply to the accusation directly. He smiled quietly at Glynn.

"She sent for you."

Glynn looked uncomfortable, and Thresk went on:

"You haven't come from South Uist. You have come from London."

"No," said Glynn.

"From Melton, then. You came because Linda sent for you."

"If it were so," stammered Glynn, "it would only be another proof that you are frightening her."

Thresk shook his head.

"It wasn't because Linda was afraid that she sent for you," he said stubbornly. "I know Linda. I'll tell you the truth," and he fixed his burning eyes on Glynn's face. "She sent for you because she hates being here with me."

"Hates being with you!" cried Glynn, and Thresk nodded his head. Glynn could hardly even so believe that he had heard aright. "Why, you must be mad!" he protested. "Mad or blind. There's just one person of whom your wife is thinking, for whom she is caring, for whose health she is troubled. It has been evident to me ever since I have been in this house— in spite of her fears. Every time she looks at you her eyes are tender with solicitude. That one person is yourself."

"No," said Thresk. "It's Channing."

"But he's dead, man!" cried Glynn in exasperation. "You told me so yourself not half an hour ago. He is dead."

"Yes," answered Thresk. "He's dead. That's where he beat me. You don't understand that?"

"No, I don't," replied Glynn.

He was speaking aggressively; he stood with his legs apart in an aggressive attitude. Thresk looked him over from head to foot and agreed.

"No," he said, "and I don't see why you should. You are rather like me, comfortable and commonplace, and of the earth earthy. Before men of our gross stamp could believe and understand what I am going to tell you, they would have to reach— do you mind if I say a refinement?— by passing through the same fires which have tempered me."

Glynn made no reply. He shifted his position so that the firelight might fall upon Thresk's face with its full strength. Thresk leaned forward with his hands upon his knees, and very quietly, though now and then a note of scorn rang in his voice, he told his story.

"You tell me my wife cares for me. I reply that she would have cared, if Channing had not died. When I first met Linda she was engaged to him. You know that. She was devoted to him. You know that too. I knew it and I didn't mind. I wasn't afraid of Channing. A poor, feeble creature— heaps of opportunities, not one of them foreseen, not one of them grasped when it came his way. A grumbler, a bag of envy, a beggar for sympathy at any woman's lap! Why should I have worried my head about Channing? And I didn't. Linda's people were all for breaking off their engagement. After all, I

was some good. I had made my way. I had roughed it in South America; and I had come home a rich man— not such a very easy thing, as the superior people who haven't the heart even to try to be rich men are inclined to think. Well, the engagement was broken off, Channing hadn't a penny to marry on, and nobody would give him a job. Look here!" And he suddenly swung round upon Glynn.

"I gave Channing his chance. I knew he couldn't make any use of it. I wanted to prove he wasn't any good. So I put a bit of a railway in Chili into his hands, and he brought the thing to the edge of bankruptcy within twelve months. So the engagement was broken off. Linda clung to the fellow. I knew it, and I didn't mind. She didn't want to marry me. I knew it, and I didn't mind. Her parents broke her down to it. She sobbed through the night before we were married. I knew it, and I didn't mind. You think me a beast, of course," he added, with a look at Glynn. "But just consider the case from my point of view. Channing was no match for Linda. I was. I wanted time, that was all. Give me only time, and I knew that I could win her."

Boastful as the words sounded, there was nothing aggressive in Thresk's voice. He was speaking with a quiet simplicity which robbed them quite of offence. He was unassumingly certain.

"Why?" asked Glynn. "Why, given time, were you sure that you could win her?"

"Because I wanted enough. That's my creed, Glynn. If you want enough, want with every thought, and nerve, and pulse, the thing you want comes along all right. There was the difference between Channing and me. He hadn't the heart to want enough. I wanted enough to go to school again. I set myself to learn the small attentions which mean so much to women. They weren't in my line naturally. I pay so little heed to things of that kind myself that it did not easily occur to me that women might think differently. But I learnt my lesson, and I got my reward. Just simple little precautions, like having a cloak ready for her, almost before she was aware that she was cold. And I would see a look of surprise on her face, and the surprise flush into a smile of pleasure. Oh, I was holding her, Glynn, I can tell you. I went about it so very warily," and Thresk laughed with a knowing air. "I didn't shut my door on Channing either. Not I! I wasn't going to make a martyr of him. I let him sidle in and out of the house, and I laughed. For I was holding her. Every day she came a step or two nearer to me."

He broke off suddenly, and his voice, which had taken on a tender and wistful note, incongruous in so big a creature, rose in a gust of anger.

"But he died! He died and caught her back again."

Glynn raised his hands in despair.

"That memory has long since faded," he argued, and Thresk burst out in a bitter laugh.

"Memory," he cried, flinging himself into a chair. "You are one of the imaginative people after all, Glynn." And Glynn stared in round-eyed surprise. Here to him was conclusive proof that there was something seriously wrong with Thresk's mind. Never had Mr. Glynn been called imaginative before, and his soul revolted against the aspersion. "Yes," said Thresk, pointing an accusing finger.

"Imaginative! I am one of the practical people. I don't worry about memories. Actual real things interest me— such as Channing's presence now— in this house." And he spoke suddenly, leaning forward with so burning a fire in his eyes and voice that Glynn, in spite of himself, looked nervously across his shoulder. He rose hastily from the sofa, and rather in order to speak than with any thought of what he was saying, he asked:

"When did he die?"

"Four months ago. I was ill at the time."

"Ah!"

The exclamation sprang from Glynn's lips before he could check it. Here to him was the explanation of Thresk's illusions. But he was sorry that he had not kept silent. For he saw Thresk staring angrily at him.

"What did you mean by your 'Ah'?" Thresk asked roughly.

"Merely that I had seen a line about your illness in a newspaper," Glynn explained hastily.

Thresk leaned back satisfied.

"Yes," he resumed. "I broke down. I had had a hard life, you see, and I was paying for it. I am right enough now, however," and his voice rose in a challenge to Glynn to contradict him.

Nothing was further from Glynn's thoughts.

"Of course," he said quickly.

"I saw Channing's death in the obituary column whilst I was lying in bed, and, to tell you the truth, I was relieved by it."

"But I thought you said you didn't mind about Channing?" Glynn interrupted, and Thresk laughed with a little discomfort.

"Well, perhaps I did mind a little more than I care to admit," Thresk confessed. "At all events, I felt relieved at his death. What a fool I was!" And he stopped for a moment as though he wondered now that his mind was so clear, at the delusion which had beset him.

"I thought that it was all over with Channing. Oh, what a fool I was! Even after he came back and would sidle up to my bedside in his old fawning style, I couldn't bring myself to take him seriously, and I was only amused."

"He came to your bedside!" exclaimed Glynn.

"Yes," replied Thresk, and he laughed at the recollection. "He came with his humble smirk, and pottered about the room as if he were my nurse. I put out my tongue at him, and told him he was dead and done for, and that he had better not meddle with the bottles on my table. Yes, he amused me. What a fool I was! I thought no one else saw him. That was my first mistake. I thought he was helpless.... That was my second."

Thresk got up from his chair, and, standing over the fireplace, knocked the ash off his cigar.

"Do you remember a great Danish boar-hound I used to have?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Glynn, puzzled by the sudden change of subject. "But what has the boar-hound to do with your story?"

"A good deal," said Thresk. "I was very fond of that dog."

"The dog was fond of you," said Glynn.

"Yes. Remember that!" Thresk cried suddenly. "For it's true." Then he relapsed again into a quiet, level voice.

"It took me some time to get well. I was moved up here. It was the one place where I wanted to be. But I wasn't used to sitting round and doing nothing. So the time of my convalescence hung pretty heavily, and, casting about for some way of amusing myself, I wondered whether I could teach the dog to see Channing as I saw him. I tried. Whenever I saw Channing come in at the door, I used to call the dog to my side and point Channing out to him with my finger as Channing moved about the room."

Thresk sat down in a chair opposite to Glynn, and with a singular alertness began to act over again the scenes which had taken place in his sick room upstairs.

"I used to say, 'Hst! Hst!' 'There! Do you see? By the window!' or if Channing moved towards Linda I would turn the dog's head and make his eyes follow him across the room. At first the dog saw nothing. Then he began to avoid me, to slink away with his tail between his legs, to growl. He was frightened. Yes, he was frightened!" And Thresk nodded his head in a quick, interested way.

"He was frightened of you," cried Glynn, "and I don't wonder."

For even to him there was something uncanny and impish in Thresk's quick movements and vivid gestures.

"Wait a bit," said Thresk. "He was frightened, but not of me. He saw Channing. His hair bristled under my fingers as I pointed the fellow out. I had to keep one hand on his neck, you see, to keep him by me. He began to yelp in a queer, panicky way, and tremble— a man in a fever couldn't tremble and

shake any more than that dog did. And then one day, when we were alone together, the dog and I and Channing — the dog sprang at my throat."

"That's how you were wounded!" cried Glynn, leaping from his sofa. He stood staring in horror at Thresk. "I wonder the dog didn't kill you."

"He very nearly did," said Thresk. "Oh, very nearly."

"You had frightened him out of his wits."

Thresk laughed contemptuously.

"That's the obvious explanation, of course," he said. "But it's not the true one. I have been living amongst the subtleties of life. I know about things now. The dog sprang at me because— "He stopped and glanced uneasily about the room. When he raised his face again, there was a look upon it which Glynn had not seen there before— a look of sudden terror. He leaned forward that he might be the nearer to Glynn, and his voice sank to a whisper— "well, because Channing set him on to me."

It was no doubt less the statement itself than the crafty look which accompanied it, and the whisper which uttered it, that shocked Glynn. But he *was* shocked. There came upon him— yes, even upon him, the sane, prosaic Glynn— a sudden doubt whether, after all, Thresk was mad. It occurred to him as a possibility that Thresk was speaking the mere, bare truth. Suppose that it were the truth! Suppose that Channing were here! In this room! Glynn felt the flesh creep upon his bones.

"Ah, you are beginning to understand," said Thresk, watching his companion. "You are beginning to get frightened, too." And he nodded his head in comprehension. "I used not to know what fear meant. But I knew the meaning well enough as soon as I had guessed why the dog sprang at my throat. For I realised my helplessness."

Throughout their conversation Glynn had been perpetually puzzled by something unexpected in Thresk's conclusions. He followed his reasoning up to a point, and then came a word which left him at a loss. Thresk's fear he understood. But why the sense of helplessness? And he asked for an explanation.

"Because I had no weapons to fight Channing with," Thresk replied. "I could cope with the living man and win every time. But against the dead man I was helpless. I couldn't hurt him. I couldn't even come to grips with him. I had just to sit by and make room. And that's what I have been doing ever since. I have been sitting by and watching— without a single resource, without a single opportunity of a counter-stroke. Oh, I had my time— when Channing was alive. But upon my word, he has the best of it. Here I sit without raising a hand while he recaptures Linda."

"There you are wrong," cried Glynn, seizing gladly, in the midst of these subtleties, upon some fact of which he felt sure. "Your wife is yours. There has been no recapture. Besides, she doesn't believe that Channing is here."

Thresk laughed.

"Do you think she would tell me if she did?" he asked. "No."

He rose from his chair and, walking to the window, thrust back the curtains and looked out. So he stood for the space of a minute. Then he came back and, looking fixedly at Glynn, said with an air of extraordinary cunning:

"But I have a plan. Yes, I have a plan. I shall get on level terms with Mr. Channing again one of these fine days, and then I'll prove to him for a second time which of us two is the better man."

He made a sign to Glynn, and looked towards the door. It was already opening. He advanced to it as Linda came into the room.

"You have come back, Linda! I have been talking to Glynn at such a rate that he hasn't been able to get a word in edgeways," he said, with a swift change to a gaiety of voice and manner. "However, I'll show him a good day's sport to-morrow, Linda. We will shoot the bog, and perhaps you'll come out with the luncheon to the sand-hills?"

Linda Thresk smiled.

"Of course I will," she said. She showed to Glynn a face of gratitude. "It has done you good, Jim, to have a man to talk to," and she laid a hand upon her husband's arm and laughed quite happily. Glynn turned his back upon them and walked up to the window, leaving them standing side by side in the firelight. Outside, the moon shone from a clear sky upon the pools and the reeds of the marsh and the low white sand-hills, chequered with their tufts of grass. But upon the sea beyond, a white mist lay thick and low.

"There's a sea-fog," said Glynn; and Thresk, at the fire, suddenly lifted his head, and looked towards the window with a strange intensity. One might have thought that a sea-fog was a strange, unusual thing among the Outer Islands.

"Watch it!" he said, and there was a vibration in his voice which matched the intensity of his look. "You will see it suddenly creep through the gaps in the sand-hills and pass over the marsh like an army that obeys a command. I have watched it by the hour, time and time again. It gathers on the level of the sea and waits and waits until it seems that the word is given. Then it comes swirling through the gaps of the sand-hills and eats up the marsh in a minute."

Even as he spoke Glynn cried out:

"That's extraordinary!"

The fog had crept out through the gaps. Only the summits of the sand-hills rose in the moonlight like little peaks above clouds; and over the marsh the fog

burst like cannon smoke and lay curling and writhing up to the very reeds twenty yards from the house. The sapling alone stood high above it, like the mast of a wreck in the sea.

"How high is it?" asked Thresk.

"Breast high," replied Glynn.

"Only breast high," said Thresk, and there seemed to be a note of disappointment in his voice. However, in the next moment he shook it off. "The fog will be gone before morning," he said. "I'll go and tell Donald to bring the dogs round at nine to-morrow, and have your guns ready. Nine is not too early for you, I suppose?"

"Not a bit," said Glynn; and Thresk, going up to the door which led from the house, opened it, went out, and closed it again behind him.

Glynn turned at once towards Linda Thresk. But she held up a warning hand, and waited for the outer door to slam. No sound, however, broke the silence. Glynn went to the inner door and opened it. A bank of white fog, upon which he saw his own shadow most brightly limned by the light behind him, filled the outer passage and crept by him into the room. Glynn closed the latch quickly.

"He has left the outer door open," he said, and, coming back into the room he stood beside the fire looking down into Linda's face.

"He has been talking to me," said Glynn.

Linda looked at him curiously.

"How much did he tell you?"

"There can be little he left unsaid. He told me of the dog, of Channing's death "

"Yes?"

"Of Channing's return."

"Yes?"

"And of you."

With each sentence Glynn's embarrassment had increased. Linda, however, held him to his story.

"What did he say of me?"

"That but for Channing's death he would have held you. That since Channing died— and came back — he had lost you."

Linda nodded her head. Nothing in Glynn's words surprised her— that was clear. It was a story already familiar to her which he was repeating.

"Is that all?" she said.

"I think so. Yes," replied Glynn, glad to get the business over. Yet he had omitted the most important part of Thresk's confession— the one part which

Linda did not already know. He omitted it because he had forgotten it. There was something else which he had in his mind to say.

"When Thresk told me that Channing had won you back, I ventured to say that no one watching you and Thresk, even with the most indifferent eyes, could doubt that it was always and only of him that you were thinking."

"Thank you," said Linda, quietly. "That is true."

"And now," said Glynn, "I want, in my turn, to ask you a question. I have been a little curious. I want, too, to do what I can. Therefore, I ask you, why did you send for me? What is it that you think I can do? That other friends of yours can't?"

A slight colour came into Linda's cheeks; and for a moment she lowered her eyes. She spoke with an accent of apology.

"It is quite true that there are friends whom I see more constantly than you, Mr. Glynn, and upon whom I have, perhaps, greater claims."

"Oh, I did not mean you to think that I was reluctant to come," Glynn exclaimed, and Linda smiled, lifting her eyes to his.

"No," she said. "I remembered your kindness. It was that recollection which helped me to appeal to you," and she resumed her explanation as though he had never interrupted her.

"Nor was there any particular thing which I thought you could do. But— well, here's the truth— I have been living in terror. This house has become a house of terror. I am frightened, and I have come almost to believe "and she looked about her with a shiver of her shoulders, sinking her voice to a whisper as she spoke— "that Jim was right— that *he is* here after all."

And Glynn recoiled. Just for a moment the same fancy had occurred to him.

"You don't believe that— really!" he cried.

"No— no," she answered. "Once I think calmly. But it is so difficult to think calmly and reasonably here. Oh "and she threw up her arms suddenly, and her whole face and eyes were alight with terror— "the very air is to me heavy with fear in this house. It is Jim's quiet certainty."

"Yes, that's it!" exclaimed Glynn, catching eagerly at that explanation because it absolved him to his own common sense for the inexplicable fear which he had felt invade himself. "Yes, Jim's quiet, certain, commonplace way in which he speaks of Channing's presence here. That's what makes his illusion so convincing."

"Well, I thought that if I could get you here, you who— " and she hesitated in order to make her description polite— "are not afflicted by fancies, who are pleasantly sensible"— thus did Linda express her faith that Mr. Glynn was of the earth, earthy— "I myself should lose my terror, and Jim, too, might lose his illusion. But now," she looked at him keenly, "I think that Jim is affecting you—

that you, too— yes" — she sprang up suddenly and stood before him, with her dark, terror-haunted eyes fixed upon him— "that you, too, believe Mildmay Channing is here."

"No," he protested violently— too violently unless the accusation were true.

"Yes," she repeated, nodding her head quietly. "You, too, believe that Mildmay Channing is here."

And before her horror-stricken face the protest which was on the tip of his tongue remained unuttered. His eyes sought the floor. With a sudden movement of despair Linda turned aside. Even the earthliness of Mr. Glynn had brought her no comfort or security. He had fallen under the spell, as she had done. It seemed that they had no more words to speak to one another. They stood and waited helplessly until Thresk should return.

But that return was delayed.

"He has been a long time speaking to the keeper," said Linda listlessly, and rather to break a silence which was becoming intolerable, than with any intention in the words. But they struck a chord of terror in Glynn's thoughts. He walked quickly to the window, and hastily tore the curtain aside.

The flurry of his movements aroused Linda's attention. She followed him with her eyes. She saw him curve his hands about his forehead and press his face against the pane, even as Thresk had done an hour before. She started forward from the fireplace and Glynn swung round with his arms extended, barring the window. His face was white, his lips shook. The one important statement of Thresk's he now recalled.

"Don't look!" he cried, and as he spoke, Linda pushed past him. She flung up the window. Outside the fog curled and smoked upon the marsh breast high. The moonlight played upon it; above it the air was clear and pure, and in the sky stars shone faintly. Above the mist the bare sapling stood like a pointing finger, and halfway between the sapling and the house Thresk's head and shoulders showed plain to see. But they were turned away from the house.

"Jim! Jim!" cried Linda, shaking the windowframe with her hand. Her voice rang loudly out on the still air. But Thresk never so much as turned his head. He moved slowly towards the sapling, feeling the unstable ground beneath him with his feet.

"Jim! Jim!" again she cried. And behind her she heard a strange, unsteady whispering voice.

"'On equal terms!' That's what he said— I did not understand. He said, 'On equal terms.'"

And even as Glynn spoke, both Linda and he saw Thresk throw up his arms and sink suddenly beneath the bog. Linda ran to the door, stumbling as she ran, and with a queer, sobbing noise in her throat.

Glynn caught her by the arm.

"It is of no use. You know. Round the sapling— there is no chance of rescue. It is my fault, I should have understood; He had no fear of Channing— if only he could meet him on equal terms."

Linda stared at Glynn. For a little while the meaning of the words did not sink into her mind.

"He said that!" she cried. "And you did not tell me." She crept back to the fireplace and cowered in front of it, shivering.

"But he said he would come back to me," she said in the voice of a child who has been deceived. "Yes, Jim said he would come back to me."

Of course it was a chance, accident, coincidence, a breath of wind— call it what you will, except what Linda Thresk and Glynn called it. But even as she uttered her complaint, "He said he would come back to me," the latch of the door clicked loudly. There was a rush of cold air into the room. The door swung slowly inwards and stood wide open.

Linda sprang to her feet. Both she and Glynn turned to the open door. The white fog billowed into the room. Glynn felt the hair stir and move upon his scalp. He stood transfixed. Was it possible? he asked himself. Had Thresk indeed come back to fight for Linda once more, and to fight now as he had fought the first time— on equal terms? He stood expecting the white fog to shape itself into the likeness of a man. And then he heard a wild scream of laughter behind him. He turned in time to catch Linda as she fell.

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## 13: The Mark of Honor

***Arthur Gask***

1869-1951

*Mail* (Adelaide) 3 June 1944

IN the year after the end of the Much Greater War, Dr. Julius Revire was upon a visit to his compatriot, Count Bornski. One of the few members of the Polish aristocracy to have survived the war with any means at all, the count was living in Devonshire. He was married to a beautiful young girl still in her teens, and they had been blessed with as lovely a little son as ever gladdened any parents' hearts.

YET, after only a few hours with them, the doctor realised there was a shadow over the house. Certainly it was obvious the count worshipped his young wife and that she was devoted to him. Also, the wife's mother, who lived with them, was held in affecionate regard. Still, they were not a happy family, they seldom smiled, and in repose their faces were grave and solemn. The glorious little son, too, seemed to have brought them no happiness, and they received the doctor's praises of the child's beauty with no pride or enthusiasm.

One night at dinner the count opened a bottle of fine old French Burgundy, and, as it were, forced himself into an appearance of gaiety. He related to his wife and her mother how the doctor had once saved his life.

"It was in a jungle in the heart of the Belgian Congo," he said, "and I was literally sick unto death. Two days before I had trodden on a scorpion and it had bitten me in the sole of the foot. I had no one by me except an incapable native bearer. I was in agony and could do nothing to the wound, because of its position and my leg being enormously swollen right up to the hip: I am sure I was about to shoot myself, for I had my loaded revolver in my hand— when lo and behold! out into the clearing marched the doctor, with a whole army of bearers, carrying stores." He shuddered. "Oh, he was cruel, this doctor here! He lanced me every five minutes with his wicked little knife."

"But I had to," laughed the doctor, "or you wouldn't have been here now." He made a grimace. "Never have I seen such a dreadful foot, before or since. It was swollen as big as a bison's head, and in the night it used to haunt me in my dreams. For months I couldn't get it out of my mind, and I have always thought since that it was one of the best remembered objects of that long journey of mine."

THE air of gloom over the house continuing to be so depressing, the doctor taxed his friend about it.

"What's the matter with you all, Edmond?" he asked sharply. "You all seem as if you were in some great trouble. What is it?"

The Count started.

"You've noticed it?" he asked.

"Noticed it!" exclaimed the doctor. "Why, you are all going about as if you were under sentence of death. Tell me what it means? Don't forget I'm a medical man as well as your friend."

"Ah, so you are!" exclaimed the count. "I had forgotten that." He hesitated a moment and then burst out, "Listen, Julius. I'll tell you as terrible a story as any husband could ever tell."

He went on slowly: "Now, you know something of the part I played in that army raised among us prisoners by the Soviet Union. Well, I had been given my regiment, and, about two months before the war ended, was in the advance, as part of a battalion driving back the Huns. One evening we arrived at a little town which had been evacuated by the enemy a few days previously. They had not gone far away, but, with a broad river running between us and all the bridges blown up, were considering themselves safe, at any rate for the moment. The wretches had left the usual trail of blood and torture behind them, with women and children butchered and a score or so of old men banged in the market-place.

"Darkness had fallen, and I had just finished my last meal in the ruined house I was occupying, when an orderly came in to tell me a peasant woman wanted to speak to me. She wouldn't state her business, but said it was private and important. I had her brought in, and she stood before me. Though she was roughly dressed, I was impressed by her bearing.

"Monsieur," she said, "will you do a very unhappy woman a favor? In the chivalry of your great country will you help me?"

"I asked her what she wanted, and she told me a harrowing story. It appeared that when in possession of the town some German officers had taken her daughter away and subjected her to horrible ill-treatment. The girl, however, had managed to escape from them and hidden herself in the forest until she had seen them drive away. Then she had returned home.

" 'But she will not believe they are gone for good. Monsieur,' choked the woman, 'and is terrified they will come for her again. She will not eat or sleep, and she will go mad unless we can convince her she is safe. If you will come and speak to her and let her see you, as the colonel in your uniform, she will realise everything is all right.' "

THE Count shrugged his shoulders.

"I was good-natured and I went. She led me to a little house and took me into a room where her daughter was in bed."

The Count heaved a big sigh. "My friend, I was astounded. Never had I seen such a beautiful young creature before! Certainly she looked ill, and her expression was of one haunted by a great fear. Nothing however, could hide the loveliness which was hers, the perfect features, the glorious eyes, the exquisitely moulded lips, and the beautifully poised little head I knew she could be only about seventeen.

"I sat down and talked to her. I stroked her hair and I patted her hands. I told her she had nothing to be afraid of now, for never would the vile Hun pollute that sacred soil again, except as a slave. She was very brave and choked back her tears, thanking me so prettily for having come to reassure her. She said she would be able to sleep, now she knew I was near her. I bade her good-bye, and her mother led me outside. Then I got another surprise.

" 'Monsieur, le Conte,' said the mother, and her voice was hard as steel, 'will you do me another favor? Will you avenge my daughter's shame?"

"She went on fiercely, 'I want those men killed. There are five of them, and they lie tonight not seven miles from here. They are in a house by themselves on the outskirts of a village. I have a man ready who will guide you across the river by a secret ford. Oh, go and kill them!' she pleaded. 'You are brave and I know adventure will not frighten you.'

"I liked the idea, and, after a few moments' consideration, asked, 'But this guide of yours, how do you know he can be trusted?'

" 'Trusted!' she scoffed. Her eyes blazed. 'Why, he would as soon betray his God as be false to me! He has served my family all his life.' Well, to make a long story short, I did as she asked me. We took the five German officers prisoners without arousing the village. One by one, bound and gagged, I had them led out behind the house. I whispered a few words into the ear of each, so that he should know for what he was being killed, and then butchered him with my dagger like a sheep. The next morning I sent the girl's mother five blood-fouled swastikas cut from the wretches' uniforms, so that she should know that her daughter's shame had been avenged."

THE Count went on with a frown: "The next night the mother came to me again. 'Monsieur,' she said, 'you have done me two favors and I want you to do me a third, a greater one this time,' and then, to my amazement, she asked me to marry her daughter.

" 'I know you are not married or even affianced,' she said quickly, seeing I was too dumbfounded to speak, for I have ways of learning many things in this

unhappy country, and I have made inquiries. So, if you are heartwhole, Monsieur, take pity, for it is probably a matter of life or death for my child.'

" 'But she is in no danger now!' I exclaimed in bewilderment. 'Then what is she afraid of?'

" 'She is afraid, Monsieur'—she hesitated—'she is afraid that, as a girl unwed, she may become—'

" 'Good God!' I exclaimed, 'it is most improbable.

" 'Improbable, but not impossible,' said the mother, 'and it has become the only thought in her mind. She does not eat, she does not sleep, and I hear her sobbing in the night. Remember, she is convent-reared, Monsieur, and is fearing Heaven will be denied her if what she so dreads should happen, when her motherhood has not been sanctified by the rites of the Church.'

" 'But Madame,' I remonstrated, 'however beautiful your daughter may be, and I admit I cannot conceive anyone more lovely, I could not bring into a proud family such as mine a bride of whom I know so little.

"Instantly she smiled, and bending over to me whispered who she was. It is not necessary for me to give you her name, but I assure you, Julius, she was not very far from the steps of a throne. She went on quickly, 'With you. Monsieur, I know it will make no difference, but another might be influenced by learning that her dowry will be a hundred thousand crowns. We have property in England and it cannot be taken from us.'

"I STILL hesitated, and she urged pleadingly, 'Oh, do have pity on the child! If you do not wish it you can leave her at the church door and never see her again.' She raised her hand wamingly. 'And don't forget, Monsieur, a soldier's life is never sure. You may be killed in the next battle, even in the next few hours, and then at the Day of Judgment you will stand blessed by this crowning act of pity.'

The Count nodded. "She had touched the right chord. Any hour we might be hurled against the Hun again and my good fortune might not always hold. Yes, I would bring comfort to this child, and one man should, in part at all events, atone for the wrong done by others. I told the mother I would do as she wished, and, thanking me tearfully, she said Anna would be at the church in twenty minutes."

" 'Anna!' exclaimed the doctor. 'The Countess! But I thought it must be she!'

"The Count nodded and went on: "It was a strange wedding in that ruined church, and the only lights were the candles on the altar. He smiled.

"I would not swear the priest was not our guide of the previous night, as both in figure and voice they were very similar. Well, the service over, I

reverently kissed my bride. 'Good-bye, little one,' I whispered, 'and the best of fortune to you.'

" 'Good-bye!' she laughed, 'but it is not going to be good-bye yet. There's our wedding supper to be eaten and a bottle of rare wine to toast ourselves with. No, my husband, you are coming home with me. The good things are all laid out and ready.'

"The Count shrugged his shoulders and smiled. "What could I do? Of course, I went and— stayed. We had a week's honeymoon before my regiment was sent forward again, and during those few days I came to love my child-wife devotedly. Every hour I seemed to find more endearing qualities in her. She reciprocated my affection, too, and hated me to be out of her sight. When we parted she was heart-broken, but we had the hope the war would end soon and that then I should join them in England, to which they were expecting to escape any day. They had great influence.

"YOU know most of the rest. Shortly afterwards I was wounded, and lay in hospital for nearly two months. Then one day I received a letter from my wife, written from here, and imploring me to come to her as soon as I possibly could. Her mother enclosed a short note, explaining everything.

"A fortnight later I arrived, and then, notwithstanding all the happiness of reunion, began an anxious time for us all. We never dared to speak our thoughts, but you can realise what was always in our minds. Oh, how we prayed the child would be like me! It was agony to think—"

"I know, I know, my poor friend," broke in the doctor. "You need not put it into words."

The Count heaved a big sigh.

"And you see what has happened— a perfect child, a most beautiful baby, but exactly like his mother, all his mother and with no features of mine. We all want to love him, to snatch him up and cover him with caresses. We long to give him the fondness which every little child should have, and yet every time I take him in my arms I have to repress a shudder. And I can see it is the same with my poor wife and her mother. They dare not let their feelings go." He gripped the doctor by the arm.

"And the tragedy is it will go on for ever. We shall never be certain. We shall never know. We are a stricken family and our unhappiness is without end."

THE doctor was most grieved at his friends distress, but, seeing he could give no consolation, privately determined to make his visit as short as possible. The following afternoon the child was lying on a rug, stretched out upon the

lawn, gurgling and cooing and kicking out his little legs as all babies do. The Count was kneeling on the rug, by his side. The mother, the grandmother, and the doctor were seated near, watching all that was going on. The expressions upon the faces of the two women were inscrutable. Suddenly the doctor started, he frowned heavily, and then, rising quickly to his feet, moved over and picked up the baby.

"Now that's funny!" he exclaimed, and his voice rose in excitement as he held out one little pink foot for them all to inspect. "You've all noticed that haven't you?" he went on, pointing to a small, star-shaped mole on the outer edge of the sole, just in front of the heel.

"I should say we have," commented the grandmother, rather irritably. "One doesn't bath a baby every day for nearly six months and not notice every mark he's got."

"Well," smiled the doctor, "it's exactly the same shape as the mole his father has on the sole of *his* foot, and, funnily enough it's exactly in the same place." He chuckled gleefully. "There's a wonderful case of heredity, if you like, the child being stamped with his father's seal! Really, I've never seen anything so exactly similar before!"

A STUNNED silence followed. The two women were pale as death and stared saucer-eyed, first at the doctor and then at the baby's foot. The Count stammered incredulously: "Have I a mole there, too? I've never seen it."

"I don't suppose you have," laughed the doctor, "for you couldn't without a looking-glass. But I've seen it hundreds of times. It was part of those dreadful dreams! your awful foot gave me after you had been bitten by that scorpion." He thrust the baby into his mother's arms. "Here, Edmond, off with that left shoe and sock. I'll show everybody I've not forgotten those dreadful nightmares. Pushing the Count down on to his back upon the lawn, in a trice Dr. Revire was holding up his friend's naked foot.

"There it is, as plain as a pikestaff!" he exclaimed triumphantly, "and exactly where the baby's got his. I knew my recollection was good, even after all these years. See, too, where I was, as he says, so cruel with my wicked little knife?"

The Countess and her mother had darted forward, for a few seconds to stare down open-mouthed at the upturned sole of the Count's foot. Then, with a loud cry, the young wife clutched the baby tightly to her and began covering him with fierce and passionate kisses. The grandmother tottered back, half-fainting, and sank into her chair.

"Here, Edmond," called out the doctor, laughingly, "if you want your shoe you'll have to come and catch me for it," and he ran across the lawn and pretended to hide among the trees. He thought it kindest to leave the family to recover their composure by themselves.

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## 14: Young Man Axelbrod

***Sinclair Lewis***

1885-1951

*The Century Magazine*, June 1917

THE COTTONWOOD is a tree of a slovenly and plebeian habit. Its woolly wisps turn gray the lawns and engender neighborhood hostilities about our town. Yet it is a mighty tree, a refuge and an inspiration; the sun flickers in its towering foliage, whence the tattoo of locusts enlivens our dusty summer afternoons. From the wheat country out to the sagebrush plains between the buttes and the Yellowstone it is the cottonwood that keeps a little grateful shade for sweating homesteaders.

In Joralemon we call Knute Axelbrod "Old Cottonwood." As a matter of fact, the name was derived not so much from the quality of the man as from the wide grove about his gaunt white house and red barn. He made a comely row of trees on each side of the country road, so that a humble, daily sort of a man, driving beneath them in his lumber wagon, might fancy himself lord of a private avenue.

And at sixty-five Knute was like one of his own cottonwoods, his roots deep in the soil, his trunk weathered by rain and blizzard and baking August noons, his crown spread to the wide horizon of day and the enormous sky of a prairie night.

This immigrant was an American even in speech. Save for a weakness about his j's and w's, he spoke the twangy Yankee English of the land. He was the more American because in his native Scandinavia he had dreamed of America as a land of light. Always through disillusion and weariness he beheld America as the world's nursery for justice, for broad, fair towns, and eager talk; and always he kept a young soul that dared to desire beauty.

As a lad Knute Axelbrod had wished to be a famous scholar, to learn the ease of foreign tongues, the romance of history, to unfold in the graciousness of wise books. When he first came to America he worked in a sawmill all day and studied all evening. He mastered enough book-learning to teach district school for two terms; then, when he was only eighteen, a great-hearted pity for faded little Lena Wesselius moved him to marry her. Gay enough, doubtless, was their hike by prairie schooner to new farmlands, but Knute was promptly caught in a net of poverty and family. From eighteen to fifty-eight he was always snatching children away from death or the farm away from mortgages.

He had to be content— and generously content he was— with the second-hand glory of his children's success and, for himself, with pilfered hours of reading— that reading of big, thick, dismal volumes of history and economics

which the lone mature learner chooses. Without ever losing his desire for strange cities and the dignity of towers he stuck to his farm. He acquired a half-section, free from debt, fertile, well-stocked, adorned with a cement silo, a chicken-run, a new windmill. He became comfortable, secure, and then he was ready, it seemed, to die; for at sixty-three his work was done, and he was unneeded and alone.

His wife was dead. His sons had scattered afar, one a dentist in Fargo, another a farmer in the Golden Valley. He had turned over his farm to his daughter and son-in-law. They had begged him to live with them, but Knute refused.

"No," he said, "you must learn to stand on your own feet. I vill not give you the farm. You pay me four hundred dollars a year rent, and I live on that and vatch you from my hill."

ON A RISE beside the lone cottonwood which he loved best of all his trees Knute built a tar-paper shack, and here he "bached it"; cooked his meals, made his bed, sometimes sat in the sun, read many books from the Joralemon library, and began to feel that he was free of the yoke of citizenship which he had borne all his life.

For hours at a time he sat on a backless kitchen chair before the shack, a wide-shouldered man, white-bearded, motionless; a seer despite his grotesquely baggy trousers, his collarless shirt. He looked across the miles of stubble to the steeple of the Jackrabbit Forks church and meditated upon the uses of life. At first he could not break the rigidity of habit. He rose at five, found work in cleaning his cabin and cultivating his garden, had dinner exactly at twelve, and went to bed by afterglow. But little by little he discovered that he could be irregular without being arrested. He stayed abed till seven or even eight. He got a large, deliberate, tortoise-shell cat, and played games with it; let it lap milk upon the table, called it the Princess, and confided to it that he had a "sneaking idee" that men were fools to work so hard. Around this coatless old man, his stained waistcoat flapping about a huge torso, in a shanty of rumpled bed and pine table covered with sheets of food-daubed newspaper, hovered all the passionate aspiration of youth and the dreams of ancient beauty. He began to take long walks by night. In his necessitous life night had ever been a period of heavy slumber in close rooms. Now he discovered the mystery of the dark; saw the prairies wide-flung and misty beneath the moon, heard the voices of grass and cottonwoods and drowsy birds. He tramped for miles. His boots were dew-soaked, but he did not heed. He stopped upon hillocks, shyly threw wide his arms, and stood worshiping the naked, slumbering land.

These excursions he tried to keep secret, but they were bruited abroad. Neighbors, good, decent fellows with no sense about walking in the dew at night, when they were returning late from town, drunk, lashing their horses and flinging whisky bottles from racing democrat wagons, saw him, and they spread the tidings that Old Cottonwood was "getting nutty since he give up his farm to that son-in-law of his and retired. Seen the old codger wandering around at midnight. Wish I had his chance to sleep. Wouldn't catch me out in the night air."

Any rural community from Todd Center to Seringapatam is resentful of any person who varies from its standard, and is morbidly fascinated by any hint of madness. The countryside began to spy on Knute Axelbrod, to ask him questions, and to stare from the road at his shack. He was sensitively aware of it, and inclined to be surly to inquisitive acquaintances. Doubtless that was the beginning of his great pilgrimage.

As a part of the general wild license of his new life— really, he once roared at that startled cat, the Princess: "By gollies! I ain't going to brush my teeth tonight. All my life I've brushed 'em, and alvays wanted to skip a time vunce"— Knute took considerable pleasure in degenerating in his taste in scholarship. He wilfully declined to finish *The Conquest of Mexico,* and began to read light novels borrowed from the Joralemon library. So he rediscovered the lands of dancing and light wines, which all his life he had desired. Some economics and history he did read, but every evening he would stretch out in his buffalo-horn chair, his feet on the cot and the Princess in his lap, and invade Zenda or fall in love with Trilby.

Among the novels he chanced upon a highly optimistic story of Yale in which a worthy young man "earned his way through" college, stroked the crew, won Phi Beta Kappa, and had the most entertaining, yet moral, conversations on or adjacent to "the dear old fence."

As a result of this chronicle, at about three o'clock one morning, when Knute Axelbrod was sixty-four years of age, he decided that he would go to college. All his life he had wanted to. Why not do it?

When he awoke he was not so sure about it as when he had gone to sleep. He saw himself as ridiculous, a ponderous, oldish man among clean-limbed youths, like a dusty cottonwood among silver birches. But for months he wrestled and played with that idea of a great pilgrimage to the Mount of Muses; for he really supposed college to be that sort of place. He believed that all college students, except for the wealthy idlers, burned to acquire learning. He pictured Harvard and Yale and Princeton as ancient groves set with marble temples, before which large groups of Grecian youths talked gently about astronomy and good government. In his picture they never cut classes or ate.

With a longing for music and books and graciousness such as the most ambitious boy could never comprehend, this thick-faced farmer dedicated himself to beauty, and defied the unconquerable power of approaching old age. He sent for college catalogues and school books, and diligently began to prepare himself for college.

He found Latin irregular verbs and the whimsicalities of algebra fiendish. They had nothing to do with actual life as he had lived it. But he mastered them; he studied twelve hours a day, as once he had plodded through eighteen hours a day in the hayfield. With history and English literature he had comparatively little trouble; already he knew much of them from his recreative reading. From German neighbors he had picked up enough Platt-deutsch to make German easy. The trick of study began to come back to him from his small school teaching of forty-five years before. He began to believe that he could really put it through. He kept assuring himself that in college, with rare and sympathetic instructors to help him, there would not be this baffling search, this nervous strain.

But the unreality of the things he studied did disillusion him, and he tired of his new game. He kept it up chiefly because all his life he had kept up onerous labor without any taste for it. Toward the autumn of the second year of his eccentric life he no longer believed that he would ever go to college.

Then a busy little grocer stopped him on the street in Joralemon and quizzed him about his studies, to the delight of the informal club which always loafs at the corner of the hotel.

Knute was silent, but dangerously angry. He remembered just in time how he had once laid wrathful hands upon a hired man, and somehow the man's collar bone had been broken. He turned away and walked home, seven miles, still boiling. He picked up the Princess, and, with her mewing on his shoulder, tramped out again to enjoy the sunset.

He stopped at a reedy slough. He gazed at a hopping plover without seeing it. Suddenly he cried:

"I am going to college. It opens next veek. I t'ink that I can pass the examinations."

Two days later he had moved the Princess and his sticks of furniture to his son-in-law's house, had bought a new slouch hat, a celluloid collar and a solemn suit of black, had wrestled with God in prayer through all of a star-clad night, and had taken the train for Minneapolis, on the way to New Haven.

While he stared out of the car window Knute was warning himself that the millionaires' sons would make fun of him. Perhaps they would haze him. He bade himself avoid all these sons of Belial and cleave to his own people, those who "earned their way through."

At Chicago he was afraid with a great fear of the lightning flashes that the swift crowds made on his retina, the batteries of ranked motor cars that charged at him. He prayed, and ran for his train to New York. He came at last to New Haven.

Not with gibing rudeness, but with politely quizzical eyebrows, Yale received him, led him through entrance examinations, which, after sweaty plowing with the pen, he barely passed, and found for him a roommate. The roommate was a large-browed soft white grub named Ray Gribble, who had been teaching school in New England and seemed chiefly to desire college training so that he might make more money as a teacher. Ray Gribble was a hustler; he instantly got work tutoring the awkward son of a steel man, and for board he waited on table.

He was Knute's chief acquaintance. Knute tried to fool himself into thinking he liked the grub, but Ray couldn't keep his damp hands off the old man's soul. He had the skill of a professional exhorter of young men in finding out Knute's motives, and when he discovered that Knute had a hidden desire to sip at gay, polite literature, Ray said in a shocked way:

"Strikes me a man like you, that's getting old, ought to be thinking more about saving your soul than about all these frills. You leave this poetry and stuff to these foreigners and artists, and you stick to Latin and math, and the Bible. I tell you, I've taught school, and I've learned by experience."

With Ray Gribble, Knute lived grubbily, an existence of torn comforters and smelly lamp, of lexicons and logarithm tables. No leisurely loafing by fireplaces was theirs. They roomed in West Divinity, where gather the theologues, the lesser sort of law students, a whimsical genius or two, and a horde of unplaced freshmen and "scrub seniors."

Knute was shockingly disappointed, but he stuck to his room because outside of it he was afraid. He was a grotesque figure, and he knew it, a white-polled giant squeezed into a small seat in a classroom, listening to instructors younger than his own sons. Once he tried to sit on the fence. No one but "ringers" sat on the fence any more, and at the sight of him trying to look athletic and young, two upper-class men snickered, and he sneaked away.

He came to hate Ray Gribble and his voluble companions of the submerged tenth of the class, the hewers of tutorial wood. It is doubtless safer to mock the flag than to question that best-established tradition of our democracy—that those who "earn their way through" college are necessarily stronger, braver, and more assured of success than the weaklings who talk by the fire. Every college story presents such a moral. But tremblingly the historian submits that Knute discovered that waiting on table did not make lads more heroic than did football or happy loafing. Fine fellows, cheerful and fearless,

were many of the boys who "earned their way," and able to talk to richer classmates without fawning; but just as many of them assumed an abject respectability as the most convenient pose. They were pickers up of unconsidered trifles; they toadied to the classmates whom they tutored; they wriggled before the faculty committee on scholarships; they looked pious at Dwight Hall prayer-meetings to make an impression on the serious minded; and they drank one glass of beer at Jake's to show the light minded that they meant nothing offensive by their piety. In revenge for cringing to the insolent athletes whom they tutored, they would, when safe among their own kind, yammer about the "lack of democracy of college today." Not that they were so indiscreet as to do anything about it. They lacked the stuff of really rebellious souls. Knute listened to them and marveled. They sounded like young hired men talking behind his barn at harvest time.

This submerged tenth hated the dilettantes of the class even more than they hated the bloods. Against one Gilbert Washburn, a rich esthete with more manner than any freshman ought to have, they raged righteously. They spoke of seriousness and industry till Knute, who might once have desired to know lads like Washburn, felt ashamed of himself as a wicked, wasteful old man.

Humbly though he sought, he found no inspiration and no comradeship. He was the freak of the class, and aside from the submerged tenth, his classmates were afraid of being "queered" by being seen with him.

As he was still powerful, one who could take up a barrel of pork on his knees, he tried to find friendship among the athletes. He sat at Yale Field, watching the football try-outs, and tried to get acquainted with the candidates. They stared at him and answered his questions grudgingly— beefy youths who in their simple-hearted way showed that they considered him plain crazy.

The place itself began to lose the haze of magic through which he had first seen it. Earth is earth, whether one sees it in Camelot or Joralemon or on the Yale campus— or possibly even in the Harvard yard! The buildings ceased to be temples to Knute; they became structures of brick or stone, filled with young men who lounged at windows and watched him amusedly as he tried to slip by.

The Gargantuan hall of Commons became a tri-daily horror because at the table where he dined were two youths who, having uncommonly penetrating minds, discerned that Knute had a beard, and courageously told the world about it. One of them, named Atchison, was a superior person, very industrious and scholarly, glib in mathematics and manners. He despised Knute's lack of definite purpose in coming to college. The other was a play-boy, a wit and a stealer of street signs, who had a wonderful sense for a subtle jest; and his references to Knute's beard shook the table with jocund mirth three

times a day. So these youths of gentle birth drove the shambling, wistful old man away from Commons, and thereafter he ate at the lunch counter at the Black Cat.

Lacking the stimulus of friendship, it was the harder for Knute to keep up the strain of studying the long assignments. What had been a week's pleasant reading in his shack was now thrown at him as a day's task. But he would not have minded the toil if he could have found one as young as himself. They were all so dreadfully old, the money-earners, the serious laborers at athletics, the instructors who worried over their life work of putting marks in class-record books.

Then, on a sore, bruised day, Knute did meet one who was young.

Knute had heard that the professor who was the idol of the college had berated the too-earnest lads in his Browning class, and insisted that they read *Alice in Wonderland.* Knute floundered dustily about in a second-hand bookshop till he found an "Alice," and he brought it home to read over his lunch of a hot-dog sandwich. Something in the grave absurdity of the book appealed to him, and he was chuckling over it when Ray Gribble came into the room and glanced at the reader.

"Huh!" said Mr. Gribble.

"That's a fine, funny book," said Knute.

"Huh! *Alice in Wonderland!* I've heard of it. Silly nonsense. Why don't you read something really fine, like Shakespeare or *Paradise Lost?*"

"Vell—" said Knute, all he could find to say.

With Ray Gribble's glassy eye on him, he could no longer roll and roar with the book. He wondered if indeed he ought not to be reading Milton's pompous anthropological misconceptions. He went unhappily out to an early history class, ably conducted by Blevins, Ph.D.

Knute admired Blevins, Ph.D. He was so tubbed and eyeglassed and terribly right. But most of Blevins' lambs did not like Blevins. They said he was a "crank." They read newspapers in his class and covertly kicked one another.

In the smug, plastered classroom, his arm leaning heavily on the broad tablet-arm of his chair, Knute tried not to miss one of Blevins' sardonic proofs that the correct date of the second marriage of Themistocles was two years and seven days later than the date assigned by that illiterate ass, Frutari of Padua. Knute admired young Blevins' performance, and he felt virtuous in application to these hard, unnonsensical facts.

He became aware that certain lewd fellows of the lesser sort were playing poker just behind him. His prairie-trained ear caught whispers of "Two to dole," and "Raise you two beans." Knute revolved, and frowned upon these mockers of sound learning. As he turned back he was aware that the offenders

were chuckling, and continuing their game. He saw that Blevins, Ph.D., perceived that something was wrong; he frowned, but he said nothing. Knute sat in meditation. He saw Blevins as merely a boy. He was sorry for him. He would do the boy a good turn.

When class was over he hung about Blevins' desk till the other students had clattered out. He rumbled:

"Say, Professor, you're a fine fellow. I do something for you. If any of the boys make themselves a nuisance, you yust call on me, and I spank the son of a guns."

Blevins, Ph.D., spake in a manner of culture and nastiness:

"Thanks so much, Axelbrod, but I don't fancy that will ever be necessary. I am supposed to be a reasonably good disciplinarian. Good day. Oh, one moment. There's something I've been wishing to speak to you about. I do wish you wouldn't try quite so hard to show off whenever I call on you during quizzes. You answer at such needless length, and you smile as though there were something highly amusing about me. I'm quite willing to have you regard me as a humorous figure, privately, but there are certain classroom conventions, you know, certain little conventions."

"Why, Professor!" wailed Knute, "I never make fun of you! I didn't know I smile. If I do, I guess it's yust because I am so glad when my stupid old head gets the lesson good."

"Well, well, that's very gratifying, I'm sure. And if you will be a little more careful—"

Blevins, Ph.D., smiled a toothy, frozen smile, and trotted off to the Graduates' Club, to be witty about old Knute and his way of saying "yust," while in the deserted classroom Knute sat chill, an old man and doomed. Through the windows came the light of Indian summer; clean, boyish cries rose from the campus. But the lover of autumn smoothed his baggy sleeve, stared at the blackboard, and there saw only the gray of October stubble about his distant shack. As he pictured the college watching him, secretly making fun of him and his smile, he was now faint and ashamed, now bull-angry. He was lonely for his cat, his fine chair of buffalo horns, the sunny doorstep of his shack, and the understanding land. He had been in college for about one month.

Before he left the classroom he stepped behind the instructor's desk and looked at an imaginary class.

"I might have stood there as a prof if I could have come earlier," he said softly to himself.

Calmed by the liquid autumn gold that flowed through the streets, he walked out Whitney Avenue toward the butte-like hill of East Rock. He

observed the caress of the light upon the scarped rock, heard the delicate music of leaves, breathed in air pregnant with tales of old New England. He exulted: "'Could write poetry now if I yust— if I yust could write poetry!"

He climbed to the top of East Rock, whence he could see the Yale buildings like the towers of Oxford, and see Long Island Sound, and the white glare of Long Island beyond the water. He marveled that Axelbrod of the cottonwood country was looking across an arm of the Atlantic to New York state. He noticed a freshman on a bench at the edge of the rock, and he became irritated. The freshman was Gilbert Washburn, the snob, the dilettante, of whom Ray Gribble had once said: "That guy is the disgrace of the class. He doesn't go out for anything, high stand or Dwight Hall or anything else. Thinks he's so doggone much better than the rest of the fellows that he doesn't associate with anybody. Thinks he's literary, they say, and yet he doesn't even heel the 'Lit,' like the regular literary fellows! Got no time for a loafing, mooning snob like that."

As Knute stared at the unaware Gil, whose profile was fine in outline against the sky, he was terrifically public-spirited and disapproving and that sort of moral thing. Though Gil was much too well dressed, he seemed moodily discontented.

"What he needs is to vork in a threshing crew and sleep in the hay," grumbled Knute almost in the virtuous manner of Gribble. "Then he vould know when he vas vell off, and not look like he had the earache. Pff!" Gil Washburn rose, trailed toward Knute, glanced at him, sat down on Knute's bench.

"Great view!" he said. His smile was eager.

That smile symbolized to Knute all the art of life he had come to college to find. He tumbled out of his moral attitude with ludicrous haste, and every wrinkle of his weathered face creased deep as he answered:

"Yes: I t'ink the Acropolis must be like this here."

"Say, look here, Axelbrod; I've been thinking about you."

"Yas?"

"We ought to know each other. We two are the class scandal. We came here to dream, and these busy little goats like Atchison and Giblets, or whatever your roommate's name is, think we're fools not to go out for marks. You may not agree with me, but I've decided that you and I are precisely alike."

"What makes you t'ink I come here to dream?" bristled Knute.

"Oh, I used to sit near you at Commons and hear you try to quell old Atchison whenever he got busy discussing the reasons for coming to college. That old, moth-eaten topic! I wonder if Cain and Abel didn't discuss it at the

Eden Agricultural College. You know, Abel the mark-grabber, very pious and high stand, and Cain wanting to read poetry."

"Yes," said Knute, "and I guess Prof. Adam say, 'Cain, don't you read this poetry; it von't help you in algebry.' "

"Of course. Say, wonder if you'd like to look at this volume of Musset I was sentimental enough to lug up here today. Picked it up when I was abroad last year."

From his pocket Gil drew such a book as Knute had never seen before, a slender volume, in a strange language, bound in hand-tooled crushed levant, an effeminate bibelot over which the prairie farmer gasped with luxurious pleasure. The book almost vanished in his big hands. With a timid forefinger he stroked the levant, ran through the leaves.

''I can't read it, but that's the kind of book I alvays t'ought there must be some like it," he sighed.

"Listen!" cried Gil. "Ysaye is playing up at Hartford tonight. Let's go hear him. We'll trolley up. Tried to get some of the fellows to come, but they thought I was a nut."

What an Ysaye was, Knute Axelbrod had no notion; but "Sure!" he boomed.

When they got to Hartford they found that between them they had just enough money to get dinner, hear Ysaye from gallery seats, and return only as far as Meriden. At Meriden Gil suggested:

"Let's walk back to New Haven, then. Can you make it?"

Knute had no knowledge as to whether it was four miles or forty back to the campus, but "Sure!" he said. For the last few months he had been noticing that, despite his bulk, he had to be careful, but tonight he could have flown.

In the music of Ysaye, the first real musician he had ever heard, Knute had found all the incredible things of which he had slowly been reading in William Morris and "Idylls of the King." Tall knights he had beheld, and slim princesses in white samite, the misty gates of forlorn towns, and the glory of the chivalry that never was.

They did walk, roaring down the road beneath the October moon, stopping to steal apples and to exclaim over silvered hills, taking a puerile and very natural joy in chasing a profane dog. It was Gil who talked, and Knute who listened, for the most part; but Knute was lured into tales of the pioneer days, of blizzards, of harvesting, and of the first flame of the green wheat. Regarding the Atchisons and Gribbles of the class both of them were youthfully bitter and supercilious. But they were not bitter long, for they were atavisms tonight. They were wandering minstrels, Gilbert the troubadour with his man-at-arms.

They reached the campus at about five in the morning. Fumbling for words that would express his feeling, Knute stammered:

"Vell, it vas fine. I go to bed now and I dream about— "

"Bed? Rats! Never believe in winding up a party when it's going strong. Too few good parties. Besides, it's only the shank of the evening. Besides, we're hungry. Besides— oh, besides! Wait here a second. I'm going up to my room to get some money, and we'll have some eats. Wait! Please do!"

Knute would have waited all night. He had lived almost seventy years and traveled fifteen hundred miles and endured Ray Gribble to find Gil Washburn.

Policemen wondered to see the celluloid-collared old man and the expensive-looking boy rolling arm in arm down Chapel Street in search of a restaurant suitable to poets. They were all closed.

"The Ghetto will be awake by now," said Gil. "We'll go buy some eats and take 'em up to my room. I've got some tea there."

Knute shouldered through dark streets beside him as naturally as though he had always been a nighthawk, with an aversion to anything as rustic as beds. Down on Oak Street, a place of low shops, smoky lights and alley mouths, they found the slum already astir. Gil contrived to purchase boxed biscuits, cream cheese, chicken-loaf, a bottle of cream. While Gil was chaffering, Knute stared out into the street milkily lighted by wavering gas and the first feebleness of coming day; he gazed upon Kosher signs and advertisements in Russian letters, shawled women and bearded rabbis; and as he looked he gathered contentment which he could never lose. He had traveled abroad tonight.

THE ROOM of Gil Washburn was all the useless, pleasant things Knute wanted it to be. There was more of Gil's Paris days in it than of his freshmanhood: Persian rugs, a silver tea service, etchings, and books. Knute Axelbrod of the tar-paper shack and piggy farmyards gazed in satisfaction. Vast bearded, sunk in an easy chair, he clucked amiably while Gil lighted a fire.

Over supper they spoke of great men and heroic ideals. It was good talk, and not unspiced with lively references to Gribble and Atchison and Blevins, all asleep now in their correct beds. Gil read snatches of Stevenson and Anatole France; then at last he read his own poetry.

It does not matter whether that poetry was good or bad. To Knute it was a miracle to find one who actually wrote it.

The talk grew slow, and they began to yawn. Knute was sensitive to the lowered key of their Indian-summer madness, and he hastily rose. As he said good-by he felt as though he had but to sleep a little while and return to this unending night of romance.

But he came out of the dormitory upon day. It was six-thirty of the morning, with a still, hard light upon redbrick walls.

"I can go to his room plenty times now; I find my friend," Knute said. He held tight the volume of Musset, which Gil had begged him to take.

As he started to walk the few steps to West Divinity Knute felt very tired. By daylight the adventure seemed more and more incredible.

As he entered the dormitory he sighed heavily:

"Age and youth, I guess they can't team together long." As he mounted the stairs he said: "If I saw the boy again, he vould get tired of me. I tell him all I got to say." And as he opened his door, he added: "This is what I come to college for— this one night. I go avay before I spoil it."

He wrote a note to Gil, and began to pack his telescope. He did not even wake Ray Gribble, sonorously sleeping in the stale air.

At five that afternoon, on the day coach of a westbound train, an old man sat smiling. A lasting content was in his eyes, and in his hands a small book in French.

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## 15: The Song of Mehitabel

***Don Marquis***

1878-1937

In: archy and mehitabel, 1927

*In 1916 Don Marquis introduced a column in the New York* Evening Sun*, supposedly written by a cockroach names archy, in a former life a free-verse poet, who sneaks in at night and types by diving headfirst onto the typewriter keys. Since archy can't work the shift lever, the stories are always in lower case; and since he was a former* vers libre *poet, they are naturally free verse poems. I still have the family copy of the first volume of archy and mehitabel tales, albeit in a mid-century Faber UK edition  For those who wish to read the whole book, it is available free online from MobileRead. (TW)*

the song of mehitabel

this is the song of mehitabel
of mehitabel the alley cat
as i wrote you before boss
mehitabel is a believer
in the pythagorean
theory of the transmigration
of the soul and she claims
that formerly her spirit
was incarnated in the body
of cleopatra
that was a long time ago
and one must not be
surprised if mehitabel
has forgotten some of her
more regal manners

i have had my ups and downs
but wotthehell wotthehell
yesterday sceptres and crowns
fried oysters and velvet gowns
and today i herd with bums
but wotthehell wotthehell
i wake the world from sleep
as i caper and sing and leap

when i sing my wild free tune
wotthehell wotthehell
under the blear eyed moon
i am pelted with cast off shoon
but wotthehell wotthehell

do you think that i would change
my present freedom to range
for a castle or moated grange
wotthehell wotthehell
cage me and i d go frantic
my life is so romantic
capricious and corybantic
and i m toujours gai toujours gai

i know that i am bound
for a journey down the sound
in the midst of a refuse mound
but wotthehell wotthehell
oh i should worry and fret
death and i will coquette
there s a dance in the old dame yet
toujours gai toujours gai

i once was an innocent kit
wotthehell wotthehell
with a ribbon my neck to fit
and bells tied onto it
o wotthehell wotthehell
but a maltese cat came by
with a come hither look in his eye
and a song that soared to the sky
and wotthehell wotthehell
and i followed adown the street
the pad of his rhythmical feet
o permit me again to repeat
wotthehell wotthehell

my youth i shall never forget
but there s nothing i really regret

wotthehell wotthehell
there s a dance in the old dame yet
toujours gai toujours gai

the things that i had not ought to
i do because i ve gotto
wotthehell wotthehell
and i end with my favorite motto
toujours gai toujours gai

boss sometimes i think
that our friend mehitabel
is a trifle too gay

archy

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## 16: Maytime in Marlow

***Booth Tarkington***

1869-1946

*Everybody's Magazine*, Nov 1916

*Celebrated author, twice winner of the Pulitzer Prize, whose most famous work was "The Magnificent Ambersons", set in his native Indianapolis, and filmed by Orson Welles.*

IN MAY, when the maple leaves are growing large the Midland county seat and market town called Marlow so disappears into the foliage that travellers, gazing from Pullman windows, wonder why a railroad train should stop to look at four or five preoccupied chickens in a back yard. On the other hand, this neighbourly place is said to have a population numbering more than three thousand. At least, that is what a man from Marlow will begin to claim as soon as he has journeyed fifteen or twenty miles from home; but to display the daring of Midland patriotism in a word, there have been Saturdays (with the farmers in town) when strangers of open-minded appearance have been told, right down on the Square itself, that Marlow consisted of upwards of four thousand mighty enterprising inhabitants.

After statistics so dashing, it seems fairly conservative to declare that upon the third Saturday last May one idea possessed the minds and governed the actions of all the better bachelors of Marlow who were at that time between the ages of seventeen and ninety, and that the same idea likewise possessed and governed all the widowers, better and worse, age unlimited.

She was first seen on the Main Street side of the Square at about nine o'clock in the morning. To people familiar with Marlow this will mean that all the most influential business men obtained a fair view of her at an early hour, so that the news had time to spread to the manufacturers and professional men before noon.

Mr. Rolfo Williams, whose hardware establishment occupies a corner, was the first of the business men to see her. He was engaged within a cool alcove of cutlery when he caught a glimpse of her through a window; but in spite of his weight he managed to get near the wide-spread front doors of his store in time to see her framed by the doorway as a passing silhouette of blue against the sunshine of the Square. His clerk, a young married man, was only a little ahead of him in reaching the sidewalk.

"My goodness, George!" Mr. Williams murmured. "Who is that?"

"Couldn't be from a bit more'n half a mile this side o' New York!" said George, marvelling. "Look at the clo'es!"

"No, George," his employer corrected him gently. "To me it's more the figger."

The lady was but thirty or forty feet away, and though she did not catch their words, the murmur of the two voices attracted her attention. Not pausing in her light stride forward, she looked back over her shoulder, and her remarkable eyes twinkled with recognition. She smiled charmingly, then nodded twice-first, unmistakably to Mr. Williams, and then, with equal distinctness, to George.

These dumfounded men, staring in almost an agony of blankness, were unable to return the salutation immediately. The attractive back of her head was once more turned to them by the time they recovered sufficiently to bow, but both of them did bow, in spite of that, being ultimately conscientious no matter how taken aback. Even so, they were no more flustered than was old Mr. Newton Truscom (Clothier, Hatter, and Gents' Furnisher), just emerging from his place of business next door for Mr. Truscom was likewise sunnily greeted.

"My goodness!" Mr. Williams gasped. "I never saw her from Adam!"

Mr. Truscom, walking backward, joined the hardware men. "Seems like fine-lookin' girls liable to take considerable of a fancy to us three fellers," he said; "whether they know us or not!"

"Shame on you, Newt!" George returned, "didn't you see her give me the eye? Of course, after that, she wanted to be polite to you and Mr. Williams. Thought him and you were prob'ly my pappy and gran'daddy!"

"Look!" said Mr. Truscom. "She's goin' in Milo Carter's drug-store. Sody-water, I shouldn't wonder!"

"It just this minute occurred to me how a nectar and pineapple was what I needed," said George. "Mr. Williams, I'll be back at the store in a few min—"

"No, George," his employer interrupted. "I don't mind your lollin' around on the sidewalk till she comes out again, because that's about what I'm liable to do myself, but if you don't contain yourself from no nectar and pineapple, I'm goin' to tell your little bride about it—and you know what Birdie will say!"

"Rolfo, did you notice them shoes?" Mr. Truscom asked, with sudden intensity. "If Baker and Smith had the enterprise to introduce a pattern like that in our community—"

"No, Newt, I didn't take so much notice of her shoes. To me," said Mr. Williams dreamily, "to me it was more the whole figger, as it were."

The three continued to stare at the pleasing glass front of Milo Carter's drug-store; and presently they were joined by two other men of business who had perceived from their own doorways that something unusual was afoot; while that portion of Main Street lying beyond Milo Carter's also showed signs of being up with the times. Emerging from this section, P. Borodino Thompson and Calvin Burns partners in Insurance, Real Estate, Mortgages and Loans,

appeared before the drug-store, hovered a moment in a non-committal manner that was really brazen, then walked straight into the store and bought a two-cent stamp for the firm.

Half an hour later, Mortimer Fole was as busy as he could be. That is to say, Mortimer woke from his first slumber in a chair in front of the National House, heard the news, manoeuvred until he obtained a view of its origin, and then drifted about the Square exchanging comment with other shirt-sleeved gossips. (Mortimer was usually unemployed; but there was a Mexican War pension in the family.)

"Heard about it?" he inquired, dropping into E. Fuller's (E. J. Fuller & Co., Furniture, Carpets and Wall-Paper).

"Yes, Mortimore," E. J. Fuller replied. "Anybody know anything?"

"Some of 'em claim they do," said Mortimer. "Couple fellers I heard says she must belong with some new picture theatre they claim an out-o'-town firm's goin' to git goin' here, compete with the Vertabena. Howk, he says thinks not; claims it's a lady he heard was coming' to settle here from Wilkes-Barry, Pennsylvania, and give embroidery lessons and card-playin'. Cousin of the Ferrises and Wheelers, so Howk claims. I says, 'She is, is she?' 'Well,' he says, 'that's the way I look at it.' 'Oh, you do, do you?' I says. 'Then what about her speakin' to everybody?' I ast him, right to his face; and you'd ought to seen him! Him and all of 'em are wrong."

"How do you know, Mortimore?" asked Mr. Fuller. "What makes you think so?"

"Listen here, Ed," said Mortimer. "What'd she do when she went into Charlie Murdock's and bought a paper o' pins? You heard about that, yet?"

"No."

"She went in there," said Mr. Fole, "and spoke right to Charlie. 'How are you, Mister Murdock?' she says. Charlie like to fell over backwards! And then, when he got the pins wrapped up and handed 'em to her she says, 'How's your wife, Mr. Murdock?' Well, sir, Charlie says his wife was just about the last woman in the world he had in his mind right they then!"

"Where's she supposed to be now?" Mr. Fuller inquired, not referring to Mrs. Murdock. "Over at the hotel?"

"Nope," Mortimer replied. "She ain't puttin' up there. Right now she's went upstairs in the Garfield Block to Lu Allen's office. Haven't heard what Lu's got to say or whether she's come out. You git to see her yet?"

"No, sir," Mr. Fuller returned, rather indifferently. "What's she look like, Mortimore?"

"Well, sir, I can give you a right good notion about that," said Mortimer. "I expect I'm perty much the only man in town that could, too. You remember

the time me and you went over to Athens City and took in the Athens City lodge's excursion to Chicago? Well, remember somebody got us to go to a matinée show without any much cuttin' up or singin' in it, but we got so we liked it anyhow— and went back there again same night?"

"Yes, sir. Maude Adams."

"Well, sir, it ain't her, but that's who she kind o' put me in mind of. Carryin' a blue parasol, too."

Mr. Fuller at once set down the roll of wall-paper he was measuring, and came out from behind his counter.

"Where goin', Ed?" Mortimer inquired, stretching himself elaborately, though somewhat surprised at Mr. Fuller's abrupt action— for Mortimer was indeed capable of stretching himself in a moment of astonishment.

"What?"

"Where goin'?"

Mr. Fuller, making for the open, was annoyed by the question. "Out!" he replied.

"I got nothin' much to do right now," said the sociable Mortimer. "I'll go with you. Where'd you say you was goin', Ed?"

"Business!" Mr. Fuller replied crossly.

"That suits me, Ed. I kind o' want to see Lu Allen, myself!"

Thereupon they set forth across the Square, taking a path that ran through the courthouse yard; but when they came out from behind the old, red brick building and obtained a fair view of the Garfield Block, they paused. She of the blue parasol was disappearing into the warm obscurity of Pawpaw Street; and beside her sauntered Mr. Lucius Brutus Allen, Attorney at Law, his stoutish figure and celebrated pongee coat as unmistakable from the rear as from anywhere. In the deep, congenial shade of the maple trees her parasol was unnecessary, and Lucius dangled it from his hand, or poked its ferule idly at bugs in shrubberies trembling against the picket fences that lined the way.

At any distance it could be seen that his air was attentive and gallant— perhaps more than that, for there was even a tenderness expressed in the oblique position of his shoulders, which seemed to incline toward his companion. Mr. Rolfo Williams, to describe this mood of Lucius Allen's, made free use of the word "sag." Mr. Williams stood upon the corner with his wife, that amiable matron, and P. Borodino Thompson, all three staring unaffectedly. "That's Lu Allen's lady-walk," said Rolfo, as E. J. Fuller and Mortimer joined them. "He always kind o' sags when he goes out walkin' with the girls. Sags toe-ward 'em. I'll say this much: I never see him sag deeper than what he is right now. Looks to me like he's just about fixin' to lean on her!"

"Don't you worry!" his wife said testily. "Lucy'd slap him in a minute! She always was that kind of a girl."

"'Lucy!'" Mortimer echoed. "Lucy who?"

"Lucy Cope."

"What on earth are you talkin' about, Miz Williams? That ain't Lucy Cope!"

Mrs. Williams laughed. "Just why ain't it?" she asked satirically. "I expect some o' the men in this town better go get the eye-doctor to take a look at 'em! Especially"— she gave her husband a compassionate glance— "especially the fat, old ones! Mrs. Cal Burns come past my house 'while ago; says, 'Miz Williams, I expect you better go on up-town look after your husband,' she says. 'I been huntin' fer mine,' she says, 'but I couldn't locate him, because he knows better than to let me to,' she says, 'after what P. Borodino Thompson's just been tellin' me about him! Lucy Cope Ricketts is back in town,' she says, 'and none the men reckanized her yet,' she says, 'and you better go on up to the Square and take a look for yourself how they're behavin'! I hear,' she says, 'I hear hasn't anybody been able to get waited on at any store-counter in town so far this morning, except Lucy herself.'"

"Well, sir," Mr. Williams declared. "I couldn't hardly of believed it, but it certainly is her." He shook his head solemnly at Mrs. Williams, and, gently detaching her palm-leaf fan from her hand, used it for his own benefit, as he continued: "Boys, what I'm always tellin' ma here is that there ain't nothin' on earth like bein' a widow to bring out the figger!"

"You hush up!" she said, but was constrained to laugh and add, "I guess you'd be after me all right if I was a widow!"

"No, Carrie," he said, "I wouldn't be after no body if you was a widow."

"I mean if I was anybody else's," Mrs. Williams explained. "Look how George says you been actin' all morning about this one!"

Mr. Fuller intervened in search of information. He was not a native, and had been a citizen of Marlow a little less than four years. "Did you say this lady was one of the Ricketts family, Mrs. Williams?" he inquired.

"No. She married a Ricketts. She's a Cope; she's all there is left of the Copes."

"Did I understand you to say she was a widow?"

"I didn't say she was one," Mrs. Williams replied. "She is one now, though. Her and Tom Ricketts got married ten years ago and went to live in California. He's been dead quite some time— three-four years maybe— and she's come back to live in the Copes' ole house, because it belongs to her, I expect. Everybody knew she was coming' some time this spring— everybody'd heard all about it — but none you men paid any attention to it. I'll have to let you off, Mr. Fuller. You're a widower and ain't lived here long, and you needn't take

what I'm sayin' to yourself. But the rest of all you rag-tag and bobtail aren't goin' to hear the last o' this for some time! Mr. Fuller, if you want to know why they never took any interest up to this morning in Lucy Cope Ricketts' goin' to come back and live here again, it's because all they ever remembered her she was kind of a peakid girl; sort of thin, and never seemed to have much complexion to speak of. You wouldn't think it to look at her now, but that's the way she was up to when she got married and went away. Now she's back here, and a widow, not a one of 'em reckanized her till Mrs. Cal Burns come up-town and told 'em— and look how they been actin'!"

"It all goes to show what I say," said Rolfo. "She always did have kind of a sweet-lookin' face, but I claim that there's nothin' in the world like being a happy widow to bring out the complexion and the—"

"Listen to you!" his wife interrupted. "How you do keep out o' jail so long I certainly don't know!" She turned to the others. "That man's a born bigamist," she declared. "And at that I don't expect he's so much worse'n the rest of you!"

"You ought to leave me out along with E. J. Fuller, Mrs. Williams," Mr. Thompson protested. "I've never even been married at all."

But this only served to provoke Rolfo's fat chuckle, and the barbed comment: "It is a heap cheaper at mealtimes, Bore!"

"How's it happen Lu Allen's so thick with Mrs. Ricketts?" E. J. Fuller inquired. "How's it come that he—"

"He's her lawyer," Mrs. Williams informed him, "and he was executor of the Cope will, and all. Besides that, he used to be awful attentive to her, and nobody was hardly certain which she was goin; to take, Lu Allen or Tom Ricketts, right up to a year or two before she got married. Looks like Lu was goin' to get a second chance, and money throwed in!"

"Well, Lu's a talker, but he'll have to talk some now!" P. Borodino Thompson announced thoughtfully. "I used to know her, too, but I never expected she was going to turn out like this!"

"You and I been gettin' to be pretty fair friends, Bore," said Mr. Fuller, genially, as the group broke up, "Think you could kind of slide me in along with you when you go up there to call?"

"No, sir!" Mr. Thompson replied emphatically. "Red-headed Lu Allen isn't much of a rival, but he's enough for me. If you think of starting in, first thing I do I'm going to tell her you're an embezzler. I'm going home now to get out my cutaway suit and white vest, and you can tell 'em all to keep out of my road! I'm going calling this evening, right after supper!"

"Never mind!" Fuller warned him. "I'll get up there some way!"

Meanwhile, in the sun-checkered shadow of a honeysuckle vine that climbed a green trellis beside an old doorway, Mr. Lucius Brutus Allen was taking leave of his lovely friend.

"Will you come this evening, Lucius, and help me decide on some remodeling for the house?" she asked; and probably no more matter-of-fact question ever inspired a rhapsody in the bosom of a man of thirty-five.

"No, thanks," said Mr. Allen. "I never could decide which I thought your voice was like, Lucy: a harp or a violin. It's somewhere between, I suspect; but there are pictures in it, too. Doesn't make any difference what you say, whenever you speak a person can't help thinking of wild roses shaking the dew off of 'em in the breezes that blow along about sunrise. You might be repeating the multiplication table or talking about hiring a cook, but the sound of your voice would make pictures like that, just the same. I had to hear it again to find out how I've been missing it. I must have been missing it every single day of these ten years whether I knew it or not. It almost makes me sorry you've come back, because if you hadn't I'd never have found out how I must have been suffering."

Mrs. Ricketts looked at him steadily from within the half-shadow of the rim of her pretty hat. "When will you come and help me with the plans?" she asked.

"I don't know," Mr. Allen returned absently; and he added with immediate enthusiasm: "I never in my life saw any girl whose hair made such a lovely shape to her head as yours, Lucy! It's just where you want a girl's hair to be, and it's not any place you don't want it to be. It's the one thing in the world without any fault at all— the only thing the Lord made just perfect— except your nose and maybe the Parthenon when it was new."

That brought a laugh from her, and Lucius, who was pink naturally and pinker with the warm day, grew rosy as he listened to Lucy's laughter. "By George!" he said. "To hear you laugh again!"

"You always did make me laugh, Lucius."

"Especially if I had anything the matter with me," he said. "If I had a headache or toothache I'd always come around to get you to laugh. Sometimes if the pain was pretty bad, it wouldn't go away till you laughed two or three times!"

She laughed the more; then she sighed. "Over ten years, almost eleven— and you saying things like this to every girl and woman you met, all the time!"

"Well," Mr. Allen said thoughtfully, "nobody takes much notice what a chunky kind of man with a reddish head and getting a little bald says. It's quite a privilege."

She laughed again, and sighed again. "Do you remember how we used to sit out here in the evenings under the trees, Lucius? One of the things I've often thought about since then was how when you were here, papa and mamma would bring their chairs and join us, and you'd talk about the moon, and astronomy, and the Hundred Years War, and—"

"Yes!" Lucius interrupted ruefully. "And then some other young fellow would turn up— some slim, dark-haired Orlando— and you'd go off walking with him while I stayed with the old folks. I'd be talking astronomy with them, but you and Orlando were strolling under the stars— and didn't care what they were made of!"

"No," she said. "I mean what I've thought about was that papa and mamma never joined us unless you were here. It took me a long while to understand that, Lucius; but finally I did." She paused, musing a moment; then she asked: "Do the girls and boys still sit out on front steps and porches, or under the trees in the yard in the evenings the way we used to? Do you remember how we'd always see old Doctor Worley jogging by in his surrey exactly as the courthouse bell rang nine, every night; his wife on the back seat and the old doctor on the front one, coming home from their evening drive? There are so many things I remember like that, and they all seem lovely now— and I believe they must be why I've come back here to live— though I didn't think much about them at the time. Do the girls and boys still sit out in the yards in the evening, Lucius?"

Lucius dangled the ferule of the long-handled blue parasol over the glowing head of a dandelion in the grass. "Not so much," he answered. "And old Doc Worley and his wife don't drive in their surrey in the summer evenings any more. They're both out in the cemetery now, and the surrey's somewhere in the air we breathe, because it was burnt on a trash-heap the other day, though I've seemed to see it driving home in the dusk a hundred times since it fell to pieces. Nowadays hardly any, even of the old folks, ride in surreys. These ten years have changed the world, Lucy. Money and gasoline. Even Marlow's got into the world; and in the evenings they go out snorting and sirening and blowing-out and smoking blue oil all over creation. Bore Thompson's about the only man in town that's still got any use for a hitching-post. He drives an old white horse to a phaeton, and by to-morrow afternoon at the latest you'll find that old horse and phaeton tied to the ring in the hand of that little old cast-iron stripe-shirted nigger-boy in front of your gate yonder."

Mrs. Ricketts glanced frowningly at the obsolete decoration he mentioned; then she smiled. "That's one of the things I want you to advise me about," she said. "I don't-know how much of the place to alter and how much to leave as it

is. And why will I find Mr. Thompson's horse tied to our poor old cast-iron darky boy?"

"He's seen you, hasn't he?"

"Yes, but he looked startled when I spoke to him. Besides, he used to see me when I was a girl, and he was one of the beaux of the town, and he never came then."

"He will now," said Lucius.

"Oh, surely not!" she protested, a little dismayed.

"He couldn't help it if he tried, poor thing!"

At that she affected to drop him a curtsey, but nevertheless appeared not over-pleased. "You seem to be able to help it, Lucius," she said; and the colour in his cheeks deepened a little as she went on: "Of course you don't know that the way you declined to come this evening is one of the things that make life seem such a curious and mixed-up thing to me. After I— when I'd gone away from here to live, you were what I always remembered when I thought of Marlow, Lucius. And I remembered things you'd said to me that I hadn't thought of at all when you were saying them. It was so strange! I've got to knowing you better and better all the long, long time I've been away from you— and I could always remember you more clearly than anybody else. It seems queer and almost a little wicked to say it, but I could remember you even more clearly than I could papa and mamma— and, oh! how I've looked forward to seeing you again and to having you talk to me about everything! Why won't you come this evening? Aren't you really glad I'm home again?"

"That's the trouble!" he said; and seemed to feel that he had offered a satisfactory explanation.

"What in the world do you mean?" she cried.

"I gather," he said slowly, "from what you've said, that you think more about me when I'm not around where you have to look at me! Besides—"

"Besides what?" she insisted, as he moved toward the gate.

"I'm afraid!" said Lucius; and his voice was husky and honest. "I'm afraid," he repeated seriously, as he closed the gate behind him. "I'm afraid to meet Maud and Bill."

She uttered half of a word of protest, not more than that; and it went unheard. Frowning, she compressed her lips, and in troubled silence stood watching his departure. Then, all at once, the frown vanished from her forehead, the perplexity from her eyes; and she pressed an insignificant handkerchief to a charming mouth overtaken by sudden laughter. But she made no sound or gesture that would check Lucius Brutus Allen or rouse him to the realization of what he was doing.

The sturdy gentleman was marching up Pawpaw Street toward the Square, unconscious that he had forgotten to return the long-handled blue parasol to its owner— and that he was now jauntily carrying it over his right shoulder after the manner of a musket. Above the fence, the blue parasol and the head of Lucius bobbed rhythmically with his gait, and Mrs. Ricketts, still with her handkerchief to her lips, watched that steady bobbing until intervening shrubberies closed the exhibition. Then, as she opened the door of the old frame house, she spoke half aloud:

"Nobody—not one— never anywhere!" she said; and she meant that Lucius was unparalleled.

WHEN Mr. Allen debouched upon Main Street from Pawpaw, he encountered Mortimer Fole, who addressed him with grave interest:

"Takin' it to git mended, I suppose, Lu?"

"Get what mended?" asked Lucius, pausing.

"Her parasol," Mr. Fole responded. "If you'll show me where it's out of order, I expect I could get it fixed up about as well as anybody. Frank Smith that works over at E. J. Fuller's store, he's considerable of a tinker, and I reckon he'd do it fer nothin' if it was me ast him to. I'd be willin' to carry it up to her house for you, too. I go by there anyhow, on my way home."

"No, Mortimore, thank you." Lucius brought the parasol down from his shoulder and stood regarding it seriously. "No; it isn't out of order. I— I just brought it with me. What's the news?"

"Well, I don't know of much," said Mortimer, likewise staring attentively at the parasol. "Some wall-paperin' goin' on here and there over town, E. J. Fuller says. Ed says P. Borodino Thompson told him he was goin' to drop round and call this evening, he says; but afterwards I was up at the hardware store, and Bore come in there and Rolfo Williams's wife talked him out o' goin'. 'My heavens!' she says, 'can't you even give her a couple days to git unpacked and straighten up the house?' So Bore says he guessed he'd wait till to-morrow afternoon and ast her to go buggy-ridin' in that ole mud-coloured phaeton of his. Milo Carter's fixin' to go up there before long, and I hear Henry Ledyard says he's liable to start in mighty soon, too. You and Bore better look out, Lu. Henry's some years younger than what you and Bore are. He ain't as stocky as what you are, nor as skinny as what Bore is, and he certainly out-dresses the both of you every day in the week an' twicet on Sunday!"

"Thank you, Mortimore," Lucius responded, nodding. "I'd been calculating a little on a new necktie— but probably it wouldn't be much use if Henry Ledyard's going to—"

"No, sir," Mortimer interrupted to agree. "Henry buys 'em a couple or more at a time. Newt Truscome's goin' to be a rich man if Henry don't quit. So long, Lu!"

Mr. Allen, turning in at the entrance to the stairway that led to his office, waved his left hand in farewell, his right being employed in an oddly solicitous protection of the parasol—though nothing threatens it. But Mortimer, having sauntered on a few steps, halted, and returned to the stairway entrance, whence he called loudly upward:

"Lu! Oh, Lu Allen!"

"What is it?"

"I forgot to mention it. You want to be lookin' out your window along around three o'clock or half-past, to-morrow afternoon."

"What for?"

"Why, P. Borodino was talkin' and all so much, about that buggy-ride, you know, so Rolfo Williams bet him a safety-razor against three dollars' worth of accident insurance that he wouldn't git her to go with him, and Bore's got to drive around the Square, first thing after they start, to prove it. There's quite a heap of interest around town in all this and that; and you better keep your eye out your window from three o'clock on!"

Thus, at three o'clock, the next afternoon, Mr. Allen was in fact looking—though somewhat crossly— out of his office window. Below, P. Borodino Thompson was in view, seated in his slowly moving phaeton, exuberantly clad for a man of his special reputation for "closeness," and with his legs concealed by a new dust-robe, brilliantly bordered; but he was as yet unaccompanied.

A loud and husky voice ascended to the window: "On his way!" And Lucius marked the form and suspender of Mortimer upon the sidewalk below; whereupon Mortimer, seeing that Lucius observed him, clapped hand to mouth, and simulated a jocular writhing in mockery of P. Borodino. "Hay, Bore!" he bellowed. "Floyd Kilbert's wife's got a sewin'-machine she wants you to move fer her in that empty seat you'll have in your phaeton when you git back here to the Square in a few minutes!"

Mr. Thompson waved his whip condescendingly, attempting no other retort; and turned into the maple shade of Pawpaw Street. Five minutes later, "General," the elderly white horse, was nosing the unyielding hand of the cast-iron darky boy, and the prophecy made by Mr. Allen on the preceding morning was fulfilled.

A neat young woman, descendant of vikings, but tamed in all except accent, showed Mr. Thompson into an Eighteen-Eighty parlour; went away, returned, and addressed him as "yentlemann." Mrs. Ricketts would be glad to see him, she reported, adding: "Yust wait some minute."

The visitor waited some minutes, then examined his reflection in the glass over the Eastlake mantel; and a slight rustling in the hall, near the doorway, failed to attract his attention, for he was engaged in a fundamental rearrangement of his tie.

"*Wookin' at himseff in the wookin'-gwass!*"

This unfavourable comment caused him to tuck his tie back into the neck of his white waistcoat in haste, and to face the doorway somewhat confusedly. Two pretty little children stood there, starchy and fresh, and lustrously clean, dressed in white: a boy about seven and a girl about five— and both had their mother's blue eyes and amber hair.

"He's dressin' himself," said the boy.

"Wookin' at himself in the wookin'-gwass!" the little girl repeated, and, pointing a curling forefinger, she asked: "Who? Who that man?"

"Well, tots," the visitor said, rather uncomfortably, but with proper graciousness, "who are you? What's your name, little girl?"

"Maud," the little girl replied, without any shyness.

"What's yours, little man?"

"Bill," said the boy. "Bill Ricketts. You got somep'm stickin' out of your vest at the top."

Mr. Thompson incautiously followed an impulse to turn again to the mirror, whereupon the child, Maud, instantly shouted:

"Wookin' at himseff in the wookin'-gwass!"

Her voice was so loud, and the information it imparted so discomfiting, that the visitor felt himself breaking out suddenly into a light perspiration. Foolishly, he attempted to defend himself against the accusation. "Why, no, I wasn't, little Maudie," he said, with an uneasy laugh.

To his horror, she responded by shouting at an even higher pitch than before:

"Wookin' at himseff in the wookin'-gwass!"

She did not stop at that, for children in such moods are terrible, and they have no pity. P. Borodino Thompson, substantial citizen, of considerable importance financially, not only in Marlow but throughout the county, and not without dignity to maintain, found himself at the mercy of this child who appeared to be possessed (for no reason whatever) by the old original Fiend of malice. She began to leap into the air repeatedly; leaping higher and higher, clapping her hands together, at arms'-length above her head, while she shrieked, squealed, and in all ways put pressure upon her lungs and vocal organs to distribute over the world the scandal that so horridly fascinated her:

"Caught him! Wookin' at himseff in the wookin'-gwass! Caught him wookin' at himseff in the wookin'-gwass! Wookin' at himseff in the wookin'-GWASS!"

Meanwhile, her brother did not escape infection. He, likewise, began to leap and to vociferate, so that it was not possible to imagine any part of the house, or of the immediate neighbourhood, to which the indictment was not borne.

"Stickin' out of his vest!" shouted Bill. "Got somep'n stickin' out of his vest! Out of his vest, vest, vest! Out of his vest, vest, *vest*!"

Then, without warning, he suddenly slapped his sister heartily upon the shoulder. "Got your tag!" he cried; darted away, and out through the open front door to the green sunshiny yard, whither Maud instantly pursued him.

Round and round the front yard they went, the two little flitting white figures, and round the house, and round and round the old back yard with its long grape-arbour and empty stable. By and by, when each had fallen separately four or five times, they collided and fell together, remaining prone, as by an unspoken agreement. Panting, they thus remained for several minutes; then Bill rose and walked into the stable, until now unexplored; and Maud followed him.

When they came out, two minutes later, Bill was carrying, to the extreme damage of his white blouse, a large can of red paint, while Maud was swinging a paint-brush that had been reposing in the can; and the look upon their two flushed faces was studious but inscrutable.

Maud applied the brush to the side of the house, leaving a broad red streak upon the gray weather-boarding; but Bill indignantly snatched the brush from her hand.

"Shame!" he said. "You know what you got once!"

"When?" Maud demanded. "When did I got it?"

"You know!" her brother responded darkly. "For markin' on the nurs'ry wall with my little box o' paints."

"She did not!"

"She did, too!"

"Not!"

"Did!" said Bill. "And you'll get one now if she finds out you stuck paint on the house. You will!"

"I won't!"

"Will, too! You know it's wrong to stick paint on a house."

"'Tisn't!" Maud insisted. "She spanks you more'n she spanks me."

"You wait an' see!"

He shook his head ominously, and for a moment Maud was depressed, but the signs of foreboding vanished from her angelic brow, and she made the natural inquiry:

"What we goin' to paint?"

To Bill also, it was evident that something had to be painted; but as he looked about him, the available material seemed sparse. As a being possessed of reason, he understood that a spanking applied to his sister in order to emphasize the immunity of houses, might well be thought to indicate that stables and fences were also morally unpaintable. Little appeared to remain at the disposal of a person who had just providentially acquired a can of red paint and a brush. Shrubberies were obviously impracticable, and Bill had his doubts about the trunks of trees: they were made of wood, he knew, like many houses and fences and stables.

As he stood, thinking profoundly, there came loudly through the still afternoon the sound of General, shaking his harness and stamping the ground, as a May fly persisted in annoying him.

Maud pointed with her curling forefinger. "Wet's paint that," she said.

"That" was the horse; Maud was pointing at General. And immediately Bill's eyes showed his relief from a great strain, and became eager and confident: nobody had ever told him not to paint a horse.

Hand-in-hand, the brother and sister approached General. The kind old horse, worried by the fly and the heat, was pleased to have the fly chased away; and after the first stroke of the cool wet brush on his right foreleg, he closed one eye in hushed ecstasy and stood motionless, lest he break the spell.

General's owner, meanwhile, in the quiet parlour, had not quite recovered his usual pallor; but the departure of the children mightily relieved him, and he found time to complete the bestowal of his tie. Thereafter, Mrs. Ricketts still not making her appearance, he had leisure to acquaint himself with the design of romantic musical instruments inlaid in pearl upon the top of the centre-table; and with the two tall alabaster pitchers upon the mantelpiece, each bearing the carved word "Souvenir;" and with the Toreador burnt upon a panel of wood and painted, but obscure with years of standing in an empty house— though nothing was dusty, for plainly the daughter of vikings had been "over" everything thoroughly. Altogether, Mr. Thompson considered the room (which spoke of Lucy Cope's mother rather than of Lucy) a pleasant and comfortable one— that is, if those children—

A step descending the stair, a whispering of silk— and Mr. Thompson, after a last settling of his neck into his collar, coughed reassuringly, and faced the door with a slight agitation. More would have been warranted by the vision that appeared there.

She came quickly toward him and gave him her hand. "How kind of you to remember me and come to see me!" she said. "And how inhospitable you're thinking me to have kept you waiting so long in such a stuffy room!" She turned to the nearest window as she spoke, and began to struggle delicately

with the catch of the old-fashioned "inside shutters." "We'll let some air in and some light, too; so that we can both see how little we've changed. The children were the reason I was so long: they were washed and dressed like little clean angels, but they're in rather high spirits— you know how children are for the first few days after coming to a new place— and they slipped down into the cellar, which we haven't had time to get put in order yet, and they found an old air-passage to the furnace, and crawled through it, and so they had to be all washed and dressed over again; and when I got through doing it, I had to be all washed and dressed over again! I hope they didn't annoy you, Mr. Thompson: I thought I heard them romping down here, somewhere. They're really not so wild as they must seem; it's only that coming to a place altogether strange to them has upset them a little, and— There!" The catch yielded, and she spread the shutters wide. "Now we can have a little more li—"

She paused in the middle of the word, gazing fixedly out of the window.

But the caller did not follow the direction of Mrs. Ricketts's gaze; he was looking at her with concentrated approval, and mentally preparing the invitation it was his purpose to extend. After coughing rather formally, "I have called," he said, "or, rather I have stopped by on my way to take a drive, because I thought, perhaps, as the weather was warm, it might be cooler than sitting indoors to take a turn around the Square first and then drive out toward the Athens City Pike, and return by way of—"

"Mercy!" exclaimed Mrs. Ricketts in a tone so remarkable that he stopped short; and then his eyes followed the direction of hers.

He uttered a stricken cry.

All four of General's legs had been conscientiously painted, and Maud, standing directly under his stomach, so to speak, was holding the can of paint clasped in her arms, while the older artist began work on the under side of General's ribs. General's expression was one of dreamy happiness, though his appearance, and that of the children's clothes, hands, cheeks, and noses suggested a busy day at the abattoir.

"Don't move!" Mrs. Ricketts called suddenly, but not alarmingly, as she raised the window. "Stand still, Maud! Now walk straight this way—walk toward me. Instantly!"

And as Maud obeyed, her mother jumped out of the window, a proceeding that both children recognized as extraordinary and ill-omened. Bill instinctively began to defend himself.

"You never told us we couldn't paint horses!" he said hotly. "We haven't painted him much, we've only—"

"March!" said his mother in the tone that meant the worst. "Round to the kitchen— not through the house! Both of you! Quick!"

Bill opened his mouth to protest further, but, almost to his own surprise, a wail came forth instead of an argument, and at that sound, Maud dropped the sanguinary can and joined him in loud dole. Shouting with woe, holding their unspeakable hands far from them, with fingers spread wide, they marched. Round the corner of the house went the dread pageant, and the green grass looked like murder where it passed. But when Mrs. Ricketts returned, after delivering Maud and Bill into the hands of a despairing servitress, General and the phaeton were gone.

"Oh, oh, oh!" she murmured, and, overcome by the dreadful picture that rose before her imagination, she went droopingly into the house. In her mind's eye she saw Mr. Thompson in all his special dressiness and lemon-yellow tie, driving through the street and explaining to people: "Yes, Lucy Ricketts has come back and her children did this!" She saw him telling Lucius-and she remembered what Lucius had said: "I'm afraid to meet Maud and Bill!"

She began to feel strickenly sure that Lucius would return her parasol by a messenger. If he did that (she thought) what was the use of coming all the way from California to live in a town like Marlow!

But the parasol was not sent, nor did Lucius bring it. It remained, as did Mr. Allen himself, obscured from her sight and from her knowledge. Nor was there brought to her any account of P. Borodino's making a dreadful progress through the town as she had imagined. Mr. Thompson had, in fact, led General as hastily as possible into the nearest alley— as Mortimer Fole explained to Lucius one week later, almost to the hour.

Mortimer had dropped into Mr. Allen's office and had expressed surprise at finding its tenant in town. "I been up here two three times a day fer a week, Lu," he said, seating himself. "Where on earth you been?"

"Argument before the Federal court in Spring-field," Lucius answered. "What did you want to see me about, Mortimore?"

"Well, they's been some talk about our pension goin' out the family," said Mortimer, "in case it happened my wife's step-mother was to die. It comes through that branch, you know, Lu."

"Is she ailing?"

"No," said Mortimer. "She gits the best of care. We were only talkin' it over, and some of 'em says, 'Suppose she was to go, what then?'"

"I wouldn't worry about it until she did," his legal adviser suggested. "Anything else?"

Mortimer removed his hat, and from the storage of its inner band took half of a cigar, which, with a reflective air, he placed in the corner of his mouth. Then he put his hat on again, tilted back against the wall, and hooked his heels over a rung of his chair. "Heard about Henry Ledyard yet?" he inquired.

"No."

"Well, sir, he went up there," said Mortimer. "He only went oncet!"

"What was the trouble?"

Mr. Fole cast his eyes high aloft, an ocular gesture expressing deplorable things.

"Maud and Bill," he said.

"What did they do?"

"Henry was settin' in the parlour talkin' to their mother, and, the way I heard it, all of a sudden they heard somep'n go 'Pop!' outside, in the hall, and when they come to look, it was that new, stiff, high-crowned straw hat he went and ordered from New York and had shipped out here by express. They got a woman up there cookin' and a Norwegian lady to do extra work, and I hear this here Norwegian tells some that the way it happened was Maud was settin' on it, kind of jouncin' around to see if it wouldn't bounce her up and down. Seems this Norwegian she says spankin' and shuttin' up in the closet don't do neither of 'em one little bit o' good. Says there ain't nothin' in the world'll take it out of 'em. Them two chuldern have just about got this town buffaloed, Lu!"

"Oh, only breaking a straw hat," said Lucius. "I don't see how that's—"

"The two of 'em come up-town," Mortimer interrupted firmly. "They come up-town to the Square, the next afternoon after they busted Henry's twelve-dollar hat, and they went into E. J. Fuller's store and Ed says they come mighty near drivin' him crazy, walkin' up and down behind him singin' 'Gran' mammy Tipsytoe.' Then they went on over to Milo Carter's, and they had a dollar and forty cents with 'em that they'd went and got out of their little bank. They et seven big ice-cream sodies apiece and got sick right in the store. Milo had to telephone fer their mother, and her and the Norwegian come and had to about carry 'em home. And that ain't half of it!"

"What's the other half?" Lucius asked gravely.

"Well, you heard about Bore, of course."

"No, I haven't."

Mortimer again removed his hat, this time to rub his head. "I reckon that might be so," he admitted.

"I guess you must of left town by the time it leaked out."

"By the time what leaked out?"

"Well, you remember how he started off, that day," Mortimer began, "to git her to go out buggy-ridin' in his phaeton with ole General?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, you know he was goin' to drive back here and around the Square to win that bet off o' Rolfo, and he never come. 'Stead o' that he turned up at

the hardware store about two hours later and settled the bet. Says he lost it because she wasn't feelin' too well when he got there, and so they just set around and talked, instead of ridin'. Bore never went back there, and ain't goin' to, you bet, any more than what Henry Ledyard is! There ain't hardly a man in town but what Maud and Bill's got buffaloed, Lu."

Mr. Allen occupied himself with the sharpening of a pencil. "What did they do to Thompson?" he asked casually.

"Well, sir, fer the first few days I expect I was the only man in town knowed what it was." Mr. Fole spoke with a little natural pride. "You see, after he went up there and wasn't no sign of him on the Square fer awhile, why I didn't have nothin' much to do just then, and thinks I, 'Why not go see what's come of him?' thinks I. So I walked around there the back way, by Copes's alley, and just as I was tunin' in one end the alley, by Glory! here come P. Borodino Thompson leadin' ole General and the phaeton in at the other end, and walkin' as fur away from him as he could and yet still lead him.

"Well, sir, I almost let out a holler: first thing I thought was they must of been in the worst accident this town had ever saw. Why, pore ole General—honest, he looked more like a slaughter-house than he did like a horse, Lu! 'What in the name of God is the matter, Bore!' I says, and you never hear a man take on the way he done.

"Seems Maud and Bill had painted ole General red, and they painted him thick, too, while Bore was u the house fixin' to take their mother out on this here buggy-ride. And, well, sir, to hear him take on, you'd of thought I was responsible for the whole business! Says it might as well be all over town, now he'd ran into me! Truth is, he talked like he was out of his mind, but I kind o' soothed him down, and last I fixed it up with him to give me credit fer a little insurance my wife's been wantin' to take out on her stepmother, if I'd put General and the phaeton in George Coles's empty barn, there in the alley, until after dark, and not say nothin' to George or anybody about it, and then drive him over to Bore's and unhitch him and wash him off with turpentine that night.

"Well, sir, we got it all fixed up, and I done everything I said I would, but of course you can't expect a thing like that not to leak out some way or other so I'm not breakin' any obligation by tellin' you about it, because it got all over town several days ago. If I've told Bore Thompson once I've told him a hunderd times, what's the use his actin' the fool about it! 'What earthly good's it goin' to do,' I says, 'to go around mad,' I says, 'and abusin' the very ones,' I says, 'that done the most to help you out? The boys are bound to have their joke,' I says to him, 'and if it hadn't been you, why, like as not they might of been riggin' somep'n on Lu Allen or Cal Burns, or even me,' I says, 'because they don't spare

nobody! Why, look,' I says. 'Ain't they goin' after Milo Carter almost as much as they are you and Henry I says, 'on account of what happened to Milo's store?' I says, 'And look at E. J. Fuller,' I says. 'Ain't the name o' Gran'-mammy Tipsytoe perty near fastened on, him fer good? He don't go all up and down pickin' at his best friend,' I says. 'E. J. Fuller's got a little common sense!' I says. Yes, sir, that's the I look at it, Lu."

Mortimer unhooked his heels, and, stretching himself, elevated his legs until the alternation thus effected in the position of his centre of gravity brought his tilted chair to a level— whereupon he rose, stretched again, sighed, and prepared to conclude the interview.

"Speakin' o' the devil, Lu," he said, as he moved to the door—"yes, sir, them two chuldern, Maud and Bill, have perty much got our whole little city buffaloed! They's quite some talk goin' on about the brain work you been showin' Lu. I expect your reputation never did stand no higher in that line than what it does right to-day. I shouldn't wonder it'd bring you a good deal extry law-practice, Lu: Mrs. Rolfo Williams says she always did know you were the smartest man in this town!"

"Now what are you talking about?" Lucius demanded sharply, but he was growing red to the ears, and over them.

"Goin' out o' town," said Mortimer admiringly. "Keepin' out the way o' them chuldern and lettin' other fellers take the brunt of 'em. Yes, sir; there isn't a soul raises the question but what their mother is the finest-lookin' lady that ever lived here, or but what she does every last thing any mortal could do in the line o' disciplinn; but much as everybody'd enjoy to git better acquainted with her and begin to see somep'n of her, they all think she's liable to lead kind of a lonesome life in our community unless—" Mortimer paused with his hand upon the door-knob— "unless somep'n happens to Maud and Bill!"

He departed languidly, his farewell coming back from the stairway: "So long, Lu!"

But the blush that had extended to include Mr. Allen's ears, at the sound of so much praise of himself, did not vanish with the caller; it lingered and for a time grew even deeper. When it was gone, and its victim restored to his accustomed moderate pink, he pushed aside his work and went to a locked recess beneath his book-shelves. Therefrom he took the blue parasol, and a small volume in everything dissimilar to the heavy, calf-bound legal works that concealed all the walls of the room; and, returning to his swivel-chair, placed the parasol gently upon the desk. Then, allowing his left hand to remain lightly upon the parasol, he held the little book in his right and read musingly.

He read, thus, for a long time— in fact, until the setting in of twilight; and, whatever the slight shiftings of his position, he always kept one hand in light

contact with the parasol. Some portions of the book he read over and over, though all of it was long since familiar to him; and there was one part of it in which his interest seemed quite unappeasable. Again and again he turned back to the same page; but at last, as the room had grown darker, and his eye-glasses tired him, he let the book rest in his lap, took off the glasses and used them to beat time to the rhythm of the cadences, as he murmured, half-aloud:

*"The lamplight seems to glimmer with a flicker of surprise,*
*As I turn it low to rest me of the dazzle in my eyes.*
*And light my pipe in silence, save a sigh that seems to yoke*
*Its fate with my tobacco and to vanish with the smoke.*
*'Tis a fragrant retrospection— for the loving thoughts that start*
*Into being are like perfume from the blossoms of the heart:*
*And to dream the old dreams over is a luxury divine—*
*When my truant fancy wanders with that old sweet-heart of mine."*

He fell silent; then his lips moved again:

*"And I thrill beneath the glances of a pair of azure eyes*
*As glowing as the summer and as tender as the skies.*
*I can see—"*

Suddenly he broke off, and groaned aloud: "My Lord!" he said all in a breath. "And thirty-five years old— blame near thirty-six!"

He needs interpretation, this unfortunate Lucius. He meant that it was inexplicable and disgraceful for a man of his age to be afraid of a boy of seven and a girl of five. He had never been afraid of anybody else's children. No; it had to be hers! And that was why he was afraid of them; he knew the truth well enough: he was afraid of them because they were hers. He was a man who had always "got on" with children beautifully; but he was afraid of Maud and Bill. He was afraid of what they would do to him and of what they would think of him.

There, in brief, is the overwhelming part that children can play in true romance!

"Lordy, Lordy!" sighed Lucius Brutus Allen. "Oh, Lordy!"

But at last he bestirred himself. He knew that Saruly, his elderly darky cook, must be waiting for him with impatience; she would complain bitterly of dishes overcooked because of his tardiness. Having glanced down into the Square and found it virtually devoid of life, for this was the universal hour of supper, he set his brown straw hat upon his head, and took the parasol under his arm— not because he meant to return it. He took it with him merely for the pleasure of its society.

Upon the bottom step of the flight of stairs that led down to the street, he found seated a small figure in a white "sailor suit." This figure rose and spoke politely.

"How do you do?" it said. "Are you Uncle Lucius?"

"Who— What's your name?"

"Bill. Bill Ricketts," said Bill.

Lucius made a hasty motion to reascend the stairs, but Bill confidingly proffered a small, clean hand that Mr. Allen was constrained to accept. Once having accepted it, he found himself expected to retain it.

"Mamma lef' me sittin' here to wait till you came downstairs," Bill explained. "That man that came out said he couldn't say but he was pretty sure you were up there. She told me to wait till either you came downstairs or she came back for me. She wants her parasol. Come on!"

"Come on where?"

"Up to your house," said Bill. "She lef' Maud waitin' up there for you."

It was the truth. And after a rather hurried walk, during which the boy spoke not once unless spoken to, but trotted contentedly at Lucius's side, confidingly hand-in-hand with him, when they came in sight of the small brick house in the big yard, where Lucius lived, a tiny white figure was discernible through the dusk, rocking patiently in a wicker rocking-chair on the veranda.

At sight of them she jumped up and came running to the gate to meet them. But there she paused, gravely.

She made a curtsey, formal but charming.

"How do do, Uncka Wucius?" she said. "Mamma would wike her paraso'."

Saruly, looming dark and large behind her, supplemented this information: "Miz Ricketts done lef' the little girl here to wait fer you, Mist' Allen. She tell me ask you please be so kine as to bring the chillun along home with you, an' her parasol with 'em. She tell me the chillun been a little upset, jest at first, 'count o' movin' to a new place, but they all quieted down now, an' she think it'll be safe fer you to stay to dinnuh. An' as ev'ything in my kitchen's plum done to a crisp 'count o' you bein' so late, Mist' Allen, if you leave it to me I think you bettuh."

"I'll leave it to you, Saruly," said Lucius, gently. "I think I'd better."

And then, with the parasol under his arm, and the hand of a child resting quietly in each of his, he turned with Bill and Maud, and, under the small, bright stars of the May evening, set forth from his own gate on this way to Lucy's.

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## 17: The Queen's Twin

***Sarah Orne Jewett***

1849-1909

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THE COAST OF MAINE was in former years brought so near to foreign shores by its busy fleet of ships that among the older men and women one still finds a surprising proportion of travelers. Each seaward-stretching headland with its high-set houses, each island of a single farm, has sent its spies to view many a Land of Eshcol; one may see plain, contented old faces at the windows, whose eyes have looked at far-away ports and known the splendors of the Eastern world. They shame the easy voyager of the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean; they have rounded the Cape of Good Hope and braved the angry seas of Cape Horn in small wooden ships; they have brought up their hardy boys and girls on narrow decks; they were among the last of the Northmen's children to go adventuring to unknown shores. More than this one cannot give to a young State for its enlightenment; the sea captains and the captains' wives of Maine knew something of the wide world, and never mistook their native parishes for the whole instead of a part thereof; they knew not only Thomaston and Castine and Portland, but London and Bristol and Bordeaux, and the strange-mannered harbors of the China Sea.

One September day, when I was nearly at the end of a summer spent in a village called Dunnet Landing, on the Maine coast, my friend Mrs. Todd, in whose house I lived, came home from a long, solitary stroll in the wild pastures, with an eager look as if she were just starting on a hopeful quest instead of returning. She brought a little basket with blackberries enough for supper, and held it towards me so that I could see that there were also some late and surprising raspberries sprinkled on top, but she made no comment upon her wayfaring. I could tell plainly that she had something very important to say.

"You haven't brought home a leaf of anything," I ventured to this practiced herb-gatherer. "You were saying yesterday that the witch hazel might be in bloom."

"I dare say, dear," she answered in a lofty manner; "I ain't goin' to say it wasn't; I ain't much concerned either way 'bout the facts o' witch hazel. Truth is, I've been off visitin'; there's an old Indian footpath leadin' over towards the Back Shore through the great heron swamp that anybody can't travel over all summer. You have to seize your time some day just now, while the low ground's summer-dried as it is to-day, and before the fall rains set in. I never thought of it till I was out o' sight o' home, and I says to myself, 'To-day's the day, certain!' and stepped along smart as I could. Yes, I've been visitin'. I did

get into one spot that was wet underfoot before I noticed; you wait till I get me a pair o' dry woolen stockings, in case of cold, and I'll come an' tell ye."

Mrs. Todd disappeared. I could see that something had deeply interested her. She might have fallen in with either the sea-serpent or the lost tribes of Israel, such was her air of mystery and satisfaction. She had been away since just before mid-morning, and as I sat waiting by my window I saw the last red glow of autumn sunshine flare along the gray rocks of the shore and leave them cold again, and touch the far sails of some coast-wise schooners so that they stood like golden houses on the sea.

I was left to wonder longer than I liked. Mrs. Todd was making an evening fire and putting things in train for supper; presently she returned, still looking warm and cheerful after her long walk.

"There's a beautiful view from a hill over where I've been," she told me; "yes, there's a beautiful prospect of land and sea. You would n't discern the hill from any distance, but 'tis the pretty situation of it that counts. I sat there a long spell, and I did wish for you. No, I did n't know a word about goin' when I set out this morning" (as if I had openly reproached her!); "I only felt one o' them travelin' fits comin' on, an' I ketched up my little basket; I didn't know but I might turn and come back time for dinner. I thought it wise to set out your luncheon for you in case I didn't. Hope you had all you wanted; yes, I hope you had enough."

"Oh, yes, indeed," said I. My landlady was always peculiarly bountiful in her supplies when she left me to fare for myself, as if she made a sort of peace-offering or affectionate apology.

"You know that hill with the old house right on top, over beyond the heron swamp? You'll excuse me for explainin'," Mrs. Todd began, "but you ain't so apt to strike inland as you be to go right along shore. You know that hill; there's a path leadin' right over to it that you have to look sharp to find nowadays; it belonged to the up-country Indians when they had to make a carry to the landing here to get to the out islands. I've heard the old folks say that there used to be a place across a ledge where they'd worn a deep track with their moccasin feet, but I never could find it. 'Tis so overgrown in some places that you keep losin' the path in the bushes and findin' it as you can; but it runs pretty straight considerin' the lay o' the land, and I keep my eye on the sun and the moss that grows one side o' the tree trunks. Some brook's been choked up and the swamp's bigger than it used to be. Yes; I did get in deep enough, one place!"

I showed the solicitude that I felt. Mrs. Todd was no longer young, and in spite of her strong, great frame and spirited behavior, I knew that certain ills

were apt to seize upon her, and would end some day by leaving her lame and ailing.

"Don't you go to worryin' about me," she insisted, "settin' still's the only way the Evil One'll ever get the upper hand o' me. Keep me movin' enough, an' I'm twenty year old summer an' winter both. I don't know why 'tis, but I've never happened to mention the one I've been to see. I don't know why I never happened to speak the name of Abby Martin, for I often give her a thought, but 'tis a dreadful out-o'-the-way place where she lives, and I haven't seen her myself for three or four years. She's a real good interesting woman, and we 're well acquainted; she's nigher mother's age than mine, but she's very young feeling. She made me a nice cup o' tea, and I don't know but I should have stopped all night if I could have got word to you not to worry."

Then there was a serious silence before Mrs. Todd spoke again to make a formal announcement.

"She is the Queen's Twin," and Mrs. Todd looked steadily to see how I might bear the great surprise.

"The Queen's Twin?" I repeated.

"Yes, she's come to feel a real interest in the Queen, and anybody can see how natural 'tis. They were born the very same day, and you would be astonished to see what a number o' other things have corresponded. She was speaking o' some o' the facts to me to-day, an' you'd think she'd never done nothing but read history. I see how earnest she was about it as I never did before. I've often and often heard her allude to the facts, but now she's got to be old and the hurry's over with her work, she's come to live a good deal in her thoughts, as folks often do, and I tell you 't is a sight o' company for her. If you want to hear about Queen Victoria, why Mis' Abby Martin'll tell you everything. And the prospect from that hill I spoke of is as beautiful as anything in this world; 't is worth while your goin' over to see her just for that."

"When can you go again?" I demanded eagerly.

"I should say to-morrow," answered Mrs. Todd; "yes, I should say to-morrow; but I expect 't would be better to take one day to rest, in between. I considered that question as I was comin' home, but I hurried so that there wa'n't much time to think. It's a dreadful long way to go with a horse; you have to go 'most as far as the old Bowden place an' turn off to the left, a master long, rough road, and then you have to turn right round as soon as you get there if you mean to get home before nine o'clock at night. But to strike across country from here, there's plenty o' time in the shortest day, and you can have a good hour or two's visit beside; 't ain't but a very few miles, and it's pretty all the way along. There used to be a few good families over there, but they've died and scattered, so now she's far from neighbors. There, she really cried,

she was so glad to see anybody comin'. You'll be amused to hear her talk about the Queen, but I thought twice or three times as I set there 'twas about all the company she'd got."

"Could we go day after to-morrow?" I asked eagerly.

" 'Twould suit me exactly," said Mrs. Todd.

## ii

One can never be so certain of good New England weather as in the days when a long easterly storm has blown away the warm late-summer mists, and cooled the air so that however bright the sunshine is by day, the nights come nearer and nearer to frostiness. There was a cold freshness in the morning air when Mrs. Todd and I locked the house-door behind us; we took the key of the fields into our own hands that day, and put out across country as one puts out to sea. When we reached the top of the ridge behind the town it seemed as if we had anxiously passed the harbor bar and were comfortably in open sea at last.

"There, now!" proclaimed Mrs. Todd, taking a long breath, "now I do feel safe. It's just the weather that's liable to bring somebody to spend the day; I've had a feeling of Mis' Elder Caplin from North Point bein' close upon me ever since I waked up this mornin', an' I didn't want to be hampered with our present plans. She's a great hand to visit; she'll be spendin' the day somewhere from now till Thanksgivin', but there's plenty o' places at the Landin' where she goes, an' if I ain't there she'll just select another. I thought mother might be in, too, 'tis so pleasant; but I run up the road to look off this mornin' before you was awake, and there was no sign o' the boat. If they had n't started by that time they wouldn't start, just as the tide is now; besides, I see a lot o' mackerel-men headin' Green Island way, and they'll detain William. No, we're safe now, an' if mother should be comin' in tomorrow we'll have all this to tell her. She an' Mis' Abby Martin's very old friends."

We were walking down the long pasture slopes towards the dark woods and thickets of the low ground. They stretched away northward like an unbroken wilderness; the early mists still dulled much of the color and made the uplands beyond look like a very far-off country.

"It ain't so far as it looks from here," said my companion reassuringly, "but we 've got no time to spare either," and she hurried on, leading the way with a fine sort of spirit in her step; and presently we struck into the old Indian footpath, which could be plainly seen across the long-unploughed turf of the pastures, and followed it among the thick, low-growing spruces. There the ground was smooth and brown under foot, and the thin-stemmed trees held a dark and shadowy roof overhead. We walked a long way without speaking;

sometimes we had to push aside the branches, and sometimes we walked in a broad aisle where the trees were larger. It was a solitary wood, birdless and beastless; there was not even a rabbit to be seen, or a crow high in air to break the silence.

"I don't believe the Queen ever saw such a lonesome trail as this," said Mrs. Todd, as if she followed the thoughts that were in my mind. Our visit to Mrs. Abby Martin seemed in some strange way to concern the high affairs of royalty. I had just been thinking of English landscapes, and of the solemn hills of Scotland with their lonely cottages and stone-walled sheepfolds, and the wandering flocks on high cloudy pastures. I had often been struck by the quick interest and familiar allusion to certain members of the royal house which one found in distant neighborhoods of New England; whether some old instincts of personal loyalty have survived all changes of time and national vicissitudes, or whether it is only that the Queen's own character and disposition have won friends for her so far away, it is impossible to tell. But to hear of a twin sister was the most surprising proof of intimacy of all, and I must confess that there was something remarkably exciting to the imagination in my morning walk. To think of being presented at Court in the usual way was for the moment quite commonplace.

## iii

MRS. TODD was swinging her basket to and fro like a schoolgirl as she walked, and at this moment it slipped from her hand and rolled lightly along the ground as if there were nothing in it. I picked it up and gave it to her, whereupon she lifted the cover and looked in with anxiety.

" 'Tis only a few little things, but I don't want to lose 'em," she explained humbly. " 'Twas lucky you took the other basket if I was goin' to roll it round. Mis' Abby Martin complained o' lacking some pretty pink silk to finish one o' her little frames, an' I thought I'd carry her some, and I had a bunch o' gold thread that had been in a box o' mine this twenty year. I never was one to do much fancy work, but we 're all liable to be swept away by fashion. And then there's a small packet o' very choice herbs that I gave a good deal of attention to; they'll smarten her up and give her the best of appetites, come spring. She was tellin' me that spring weather is very wiltin' an' tryin' to her, and she was beginnin' to dread it already. Mother's just the same way; if I could prevail on mother to take some o' these remedies in good season 'twould make a world o' difference, but she gets all down hill before I have a chance to hear of it, and then William comes in to tell me, sighin' and bewailin', how feeble mother is. 'Why can't you remember 'bout them good herbs that I never let her be

without?' I say to him— he does provoke me so; and then off he goes, sulky enough, down to his boat. Next thing I know, she comes in to go to meetin', wantin' to speak to everybody and feelin' like a girl. Mis' Martin's case is very much the same; but she's nobody to watch her. William's kind o' slow-moulded; but there, any William's better than none when you get to be Mis' Martin's age."

"Hadn't she any children?" I asked.

"Quite a number," replied Mrs. Todd grandly, "but some are gone and the rest are married and settled. She never was a great hand to go about visitin'. I don't know but Mis' Martin might be called a little peculiar. Even her own folks has to make company of her; she never slips in and lives right along with the rest as if 'twas at home, even in her own children's houses. I heard one o' her sons' wives say once she'd much rather have the Queen to spend the day if she could choose between the two, but I never thought Abby was so difficult as that. I used to love to have her come; she may have been sort o' ceremonious, but very pleasant and sprightly if you had sense enough to treat her her own way. I always think she'd know just how to live with great folks, and feel easier 'long of them an' their ways. Her son's wife 's a great driver with farm-work, boards a great tableful o' men in hayin' time, an' feels right in her element. I don't say but she's a good woman an' smart, but sort o' rough. Anybody that's gentle-mannered an' precise like Mis' Martin would be a sort o' restraint.

"There's all sorts o' folks in the country, same's there is in the city," concluded Mrs. Todd gravely, and I as gravely agreed. The thick woods were behind us now, and the sun was shining clear overhead, the morning mists were gone, and a faint blue haze softened the distance; as we climbed the hill where we were to see the view, it seemed like a summer day. There was an old house on the height, facing southward,—a mere forsaken shell of an old house, with empty windows that looked like blind eyes. The frost-bitten grass grew close about it like brown fur, and there was a single crooked bough of lilac holding its green leaves close by the door.

"We'll just have a good piece of bread-an'-butter now," said the commander of the expedition, "and then we'll hang up the basket on some peg inside the house out o' the way o' the sheep, and have a han'some entertainment as we 're comin' back. She'll be all through her little dinner when we get there, Mis' Martin will; but she'll want to make us some tea, an' we must have our visit an' be startin' back pretty soon after two. I don't want to cross all that low ground again after it's begun to grow chilly. An' it looks to me as if the clouds might begin to gather late in the afternoon."

Before us lay a splendid world of sea and shore. The autumn colors already brightened the landscape; and here and there at the edge of a dark tract of

pointed firs stood a row of bright swamp-maples like scarlet flowers. The blue sea and the great tide inlets were untroubled by the lightest winds.

"Poor land, this is!" sighed Mrs. Todd as we sat down to rest on the worn doorstep. "I've known three good hard-workin' families that come here full o' hope an' pride and tried to make something o' this farm, but it beat 'em all. There's one small field that's excellent for potatoes if you let half of it rest every year; but the land's always hungry. Now, you see them little peaked-topped spruces an' fir balsams comin' up over the hill all green an' hearty; they 've got it all their own way! Seems sometimes as if wild Natur' got jealous over a certain spot, and wanted to do just as she'd a mind to. You'll see here; she'll do her own ploughin' an' harrowin' with frost an' wet, an' plant just what she wants and wait for her own crops. Man can't do nothin' with it, try as he may. I tell you those little trees means business!"

I looked down the slope, and felt as if we ourselves were likely to be surrounded and overcome if we lingered too long. There was a vigor of growth, a persistence and savagery about the sturdy little trees that put weak human nature at complete defiance. One felt a sudden pity for the men and women who had been worsted after a long fight in that lonely place; one felt a sudden fear of the unconquerable, immediate forces of Nature, as in the irresistible moment of a thunderstorm.

"I can recollect the time when folks were shy o' these woods we just come through," said Mrs. Todd seriously. "The men-folks themselves never'd venture into 'em alone; if their cattle got strayed they'd collect whoever they could get, and start off all together. They said a person was liable to get bewildered in there alone, and in old times folks had been lost. I expect there was considerable fear left over from the old Indian times, and the poor days o' witchcraft; anyway, I've seen bold men act kind o' timid. Some women o' the Asa Bowden family went out one afternoon berryin' when I was a girl, and got lost and was out all night; they found 'em middle o' the mornin' next day, not half a mile from home, scared most to death, an' sayin' they'd heard wolves and other beasts sufficient for a caravan. Poor creatur's! they 'd strayed at last into a kind of low place amongst some alders, an' one of 'em was so overset she never got over it, an' went off in a sort o' slow decline. 'twas like them victims that drowns in a foot o' water; but their minds did suffer dreadful. Some folks is born afraid of the woods and all wild places, but I must say they 've always been like home to me."

I glanced at the resolute, confident face of my companion. Life was very strong in her, as if some force of Nature were personified in this simple-hearted woman and gave her cousinship to the ancient deities. She might have walked the primeval fields of Sicily; her strong gingham skirts might at that

very moment bend the slender stalks of asphodel and be fragrant with trodden thyme, instead of the brown wind-brushed grass of New England and frost-bitten goldenrod. She was a great soul, was Mrs. Todd, and I her humble follower, as we went our way to visit the Queen's Twin, leaving the bright view of the sea behind us, and descending to a lower country-side through the dry pastures and fields.

The farms all wore a look of gathering age, though the settlement was, after all, so young. The fences were already fragile, and it seemed as if the first impulse of agriculture had soon spent itself without hope of renewal. The better houses were always those that had some hold upon the riches of the sea; a house that could not harbor a fishing-boat in some neighboring inlet was far from being sure of every-day comforts. The land alone was not enough to live upon in that stony region; it belonged by right to the forest, and to the forest it fast returned. From the top of the hill where we had been sitting we had seen prosperity in the dim distance, where the land was good and the sun shone upon fat barns, and where warm-looking houses with three or four chimneys apiece stood high on their solid ridge above the bay.

As we drew nearer to Mrs. Martin's it was sad to see what poor bushy fields, what thin and empty dwelling-places had been left by those who had chosen this disappointing part of the northern country for their home. We crossed the last field and came into a narrow rain-washed road, and Mrs. Todd looked eager and expectant and said that we were almost at our journey's end. "I do hope Mis' Martin'll ask you into her best room where she keeps all the Queen's pictures. Yes, I think likely she will ask you; but 't ain't everybody she deems worthy to visit 'em, I can tell you!" said Mrs. Todd warningly. "She's been collectin' 'em an' cuttin' 'em out o' newspapers an' magazines time out o' mind, and if she heard of anybody sailin' for an English port she'd contrive to get a little money to 'em and ask to have the last likeness there was. She's most covered her best-room wall now; she keeps that room shut up sacred as a meetin'-house! 'I won't say but I have my favorites amongst 'em,' she told me t' other day, 'but they 're all beautiful to me as they can be!' And she's made some kind o' pretty little frames for 'em all— you know there's always a new fashion o' frames comin' round; first 'twas shell-work, and then 'twas pine-cones, and bead-work's had its day, and now she's much concerned with perforated cardboard worked with silk. I tell you that best room's a sight to see! But you mustn't look for anything elegant," continued Mrs. Todd, after a moment's reflection. "Mis' Martin's always been in very poor, strugglin' circumstances. She had ambition for her children, though they took right after their father an' had little for themselves; she wa'n't over an' above well married, however kind she may see fit to speak. She's been patient an' hard-

workin' all her life, and always high above makin' mean complaints of other folks. I expect all this business about the Queen has buoyed her over many a shoal place in life. Yes, you might say that Abby 'd been a slave, but there ain't any slave but has some freedom."

## iv

PRESENTLY I saw a low gray house standing on a grassy bank close to the road. The door was at the side, facing us, and a tangle of snowberry bushes and cinnamon roses grew to the level of the window-sills. On the doorstep stood a bent-shouldered, little old woman; there was an air of welcome and of unmistakable dignity about her.

"She sees us coming," exclaimed Mrs. Todd in an excited whisper. "There, I told her I might be over this way again if the weather held good, and if I came I'd bring you. She said right off she'd take great pleasure in havin' a visit from you; I was surprised, she's usually so retirin'."

Even this reassurance did not quell a faint apprehension on our part; there was something distinctly formal in the occasion, and one felt that consciousness of inadequacy which is never easy for the humblest pride to bear. On the way I had torn my dress in an unexpected encounter with a little thornbush, and I could now imagine how it felt to be going to Court and forgetting one's feathers or her Court train.

The Queen's Twin was oblivious of such trifles; she stood waiting with a calm look until we came near enough to take her kind hand. She was a beautiful old woman, with clear eyes and a lovely quietness and genuineness of manner; there was not a trace of anything pretentious about her, or high-flown, as Mrs. Todd would say comprehensively. Beauty in age is rare enough in women who have spent their lives in the hard work of a farmhouse; but autumn-like and withered as this woman may have looked, her features had kept, or rather gained, a great refinement. She led us into her old kitchen and gave us seats, and took one of the little straight-backed chairs herself and sat a short distance away, as if she were giving audience to an ambassador. It seemed as if we should all be standing; you could not help feeling that the habits of her life were more ceremonious, but that for the moment she assumed the simplicities of the occasion.

Mrs. Todd was always Mrs. Todd, too great and self-possessed a soul for any occasion to ruffle. I admired her calmness, and presently the slow current of neighborhood talk carried one easily along; we spoke of the weather and the small adventures of the way, and then, as if I were after all not a stranger, our hostess turned almost affectionately to speak to me.

"The weather will be growing dark in London now. I expect that you 've been in London, dear?" she said.

"Oh, yes," I answered. "Only last year."

"It is a great many years since I was there, along in the forties," said Mrs. Martin. " 'Twas the only voyage I ever made; most of my neighbors have been great travelers. My brother was master of a vessel, and his wife usually sailed with him; but that year she had a young child more frail than the others, and she dreaded the care of it at sea. It happened that my brother got a chance for my husband to go as supercargo, being a good accountant, and came one day to urge him to take it; he was very ill-disposed to the sea, but he had met with losses, and I saw my own opportunity and persuaded them both to let me go too. In those days they did n't object to a woman's being aboard to wash and mend, the voyages were sometimes very long. And that was the way I come to see the Queen."

Mrs. Martin was looking straight in my eyes to see if I showed any genuine interest in the most interesting person in the world.

"Oh, I am very glad you saw the Queen," I hastened to say. "Mrs. Todd has told me that you and she were born the very same day."

"We were indeed, dear!" said Mrs. Martin, and she leaned back comfortably and smiled as she had not smiled before. Mrs. Todd gave a satisfied nod and glance, as if to say that things were going on as well as possible in this anxious moment.

"Yes," said Mrs. Martin again, drawing her chair a little nearer, " 'twas a very remarkable thing; we were born the same day, and at exactly the same hour, after you allowed for all the difference in time. My father figured it out sea-fashion. Her Royal Majesty and I opened our eyes upon this world together; say what you may, 't is a bond between us."

Mrs. Todd assented with an air of triumph, and untied her hat-strings and threw them back over her shoulders with a gallant air.

"And I married a man by the name of Albert, just the same as she did, and all by chance, for I didn't get the news that she had an Albert too till a fortnight afterward; news was slower coming then than it is now. My first baby was a girl, and I called her Victoria after my mate; but the next one was a boy, and my husband wanted the right to name him, and took his own name and his brother Edward's, and pretty soon I saw in the paper that the little Prince o' Wales had been christened just the same. After that I made excuse to wait till I knew what she'd named her children. I did n't want to break the chain, so I had an Alfred, and my darling Alice that I lost long before she lost hers, and there I stopped. If I'd only had a dear daughter to stay at home with me, same's her youngest one, I should have been so thankful! But if only one of us could have

a little Beatrice, I'm glad 'twas the Queen; we've both seen trouble, but she's had the most care."

I asked Mrs. Martin if she lived alone all the year, and was told that she did except for a visit now and then from one of her grandchildren, "the only one that really likes to come an' stay quiet 'long o' grandma. She always says quick as she's through her schoolin' she's goin' to live with me all the time, but she's very pretty an' has taking ways," said Mrs. Martin, looking both proud and wistful, "so I can tell nothing at all about it! Yes, I've been alone most o' the time since my Albert was taken away, and that's a great many years; he had a long time o' failing and sickness first." (Mrs. Todd's foot gave an impatient scuff on the floor.) "An' I've always lived right here. I ain't like the Queen's Majesty, for this is the only palace I've got," said the dear old thing, smiling again. "I 'm glad of it too, I don't like changing about, an' our stations in life are set very different. I don't require what the Queen does, but sometimes I've thought 'twas left to me to do the plain things she don't have time for. I expect she's a beautiful housekeeper, nobody could n't have done better in her high place, and she's been as good a mother as she's been a queen."

"I guess she has, Abby," agreed Mrs. Todd instantly. "How was it you happened to get such a good look at her? I meant to ask you again when I was here t'other day."

"Our ship was layin' in the Thames, right there above Wapping. We was dischargin' cargo, and under orders to clear as quick as we could for Bordeaux to take on an excellent freight o' French goods," explained Mrs. Martin eagerly. "I heard that the Queen was goin' to a great review of her army, and would drive out o' her Buckin'ham Palace about ten o'clock in the mornin', and I run aft to Albert, my husband, and brother Horace where they was standin' together by the hatchway, and told 'em they must one of 'em take me. They laughed, I was in such a hurry, and said they could n't go; and I found they meant it and got sort of impatient when I began to talk, and I was 'most broken-hearted; 'twas all the reason I had for makin' that hard voyage. Albert could n't help often reproachin' me, for he did so resent the sea, an' I'd known how 't would be before we sailed; but I'd minded nothing all the way till then, and I just crep' back to my cabin an' begun to cry. They was disappointed about their ship's cook, an' I'd cooked for fo'c's'le an' cabin myself all the way over; 'twas dreadful hard work, specially in rough weather; we 'd had head winds an' a six weeks' voyage. They 'd acted sort of ashamed o' me when I pled so to go ashore, an' that hurt my feelin's most of all. But Albert come below pretty soon; I'd never given way so in my life, an' he begun to act frightened, and treated me gentle just as he did when we was goin' to be married, an' when I got over sobbin' he went on deck and saw Horace an' talked it over what they

could do; they really had their duty to the vessel, and could n't be spared that day. Horace was real good when he understood everything, and he come an' told me I'd more than worked my passage an' was goin' to do just as I liked now we was in port. He 'd engaged a cook, too, that was comin' aboard that mornin', and he was goin' to send the ship's carpenter with me— a nice fellow from up Thomaston way; he 'd gone to put on his ashore clothes as quick's he could. So then I got ready, and we started off in the small boat and rowed up river. I was afraid we were too late, but the tide was setting up very strong, and we landed an' left the boat to a keeper, and I run all the way up those great streets and across a park. 'Twas a great day, with sights o' folks everywhere, but 'twas just as if they was nothin' but wax images to me. I kep' askin' my way an' runnin' on, with the carpenter comin' after as best he could, and just as I worked to the front o' the crowd by the palace, the gates was flung open and out she came; all prancin' horses and shinin' gold, and in a beautiful carriage there she sat; 'twas a moment o' heaven to me. I saw her plain, and she looked right at me so pleasant and happy, just as if she knew there was somethin' different between us from other folks."

There was a moment when the Queen's Twin could not go on and neither of her listeners could ask a question.

"Prince Albert was sitting right beside her in the carriage," she continued. "Oh, he was a beautiful man! Yes, dear, I saw 'em both together just as I see you now, and then she was gone out o' sight in another minute, and the common crowd was all spread over the place pushin' an' cheerin'. 'twas some kind o' holiday, an' the carpenter and I got separated, an' then I found him again after I did n't think I should, an' he was all for makin' a day of it, and goin' to show me all the sights; he 'd been in London before, but I did n't want nothin' else, an' we went back through the streets down to the waterside an' took the boat. I remember I mended an old coat o' my Albert's as good as I could, sittin' on the quarter-deck in the sun all that afternoon, and 'twas all as if I was livin' in a lovely dream. I don't know how to explain it, but there hasn't been no friend I've felt so near to me ever since."

One could not say much— only listen. Mrs. Todd put in a discerning question now and then, and Mrs. Martin's eyes shone brighter and brighter as she talked. What a lovely gift of imagination and true affection was in this fond old heart! I looked about the plain New England kitchen, with its wood-smoked walls and homely braided rugs on the worn floor, and all its simple furnishings. The loud-ticking clock seemed to encourage us to speak; at the other side of the room was an early newspaper portrait of Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland. On a shelf below were some flowers in a little glass dish, as if they were put before a shrine.

"If I could have had more to read, I should have known 'most everything about her," said Mrs. Martin wistfully. "I've made the most of what I did have, and thought it over and over till it came clear. I sometimes seem to have her all my own, as if we 'd lived right together. I've often walked out into the woods alone and told her what my troubles was, and it always seemed as if she told me 'twas all right, an' we must have patience. I've got her beautiful book about the Highlands; 'twas dear Mis' Todd here that found out about her printing it and got a copy for me, and it's been a treasure to my heart, just as if 'twas written right to me. I always read it Sundays now, for my Sunday treat. Before that I used to have to imagine a good deal, but when I come to read her book, I knew what I expected was all true. We do think alike about so many things," said the Queen's Twin with affectionate certainty. "You see, there is something between us, being born just at the some time; 'tis what they call a birthright. She's had great tasks put upon her, being the Queen, an' mine has been the humble lot; but she's done the best she could, nobody can say to the contrary, and there's something between us; she's been the great lesson I've had to live by. She's been everything to me. An' when she had her Jubilee, oh, how my heart was with her!"

"There, 't would n't play the part in her life it has in mine," said Mrs. Martin generously, in answer to something one of her listeners had said. "Sometimes I think, now she's older, she might like to know about us. When I think how few old friends anybody has left at our age, I suppose it may be just the same with her as it is with me; perhaps she would like to know how we came into life together. But I've had a great advantage in seeing her, an' I can always fancy her goin' on, while she don't know nothin' yet about me, except she may feel my love stayin' her heart sometimes an' not know just where it comes from. An' I dream about our being together out in some pretty fields, young as ever we was, and holdin' hands as we walk along. I'd like to know if she ever has that dream too. I used to have days when I made believe she did know, an' was comin' to see me," confessed the speaker shyly, with a little flush on her cheeks; "and I'd plan what I could have nice for supper, and I was n't goin' to let anybody know she was here havin' a good rest, except I'd wish you, Almira Todd, or dear Mis' Blackett would happen in, for you 'd know just how to talk with her. You see, she likes to be up in Scotland, right out in the wild country, better than she does anywhere else."

"I'd really love to take her out to see mother at Green Island," said Mrs. Todd with a sudden impulse.

"Oh, yes! I should love to have you," exclaimed Mrs. Martin, and then she began to speak in a lower tone. "One day I got thinkin' so about my dear Queen," she said, "an' livin' so in my thoughts, that I went to work an' got all

ready for her, just as if she was really comin'. I never told this to a livin' soul before, but I feel you'll understand. I put my best fine sheets and blankets I spun an' wove myself on the bed, and I picked some pretty flowers and put 'em all round the house, an' I worked as hard an' happy as I could all day, and had as nice a supper ready as I could get, sort of telling myself a story all the time. She was comin' an' I was goin' to see her again, an' I kep' it up until nightfall; an' when I see the dark an' it come to me I was all alone, the dream left me, an' I sat down on the doorstep an' felt all foolish an' tired. An', if you'll believe it, I heard steps comin', an' an old cousin o' mine come wanderin' along, one I was apt to be shy of. She was n't all there, as folks used to say, but harmless enough and a kind of poor old talking body. And I went right to meet her when I first heard her call, 'stead o' hidin' as I sometimes did, an' she come in dreadful willin', an' we sat down to supper together; 'twas a supper I should have had no heart to eat alone."

"I don't believe she ever had such a splendid time in her life as she did then. I heard her tell all about it afterwards," exclaimed Mrs. Todd compassionately. "There, now I hear all this it seems just as if the Queen might have known and could n't come herself, so she sent that poor old creatur' that was always in need!"

Mrs. Martin looked timidly at Mrs. Todd and then at me. " 'twas childish o' me to go an' get supper," she confessed.

"I guess you wa'n't the first one to do that," said Mrs. Todd. "No, I guess you wa'n't the first one who 's got supper that way, Abby," and then for a moment she could say no more.

Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Martin had moved their chairs a little so that they faced each other, and I, at one side, could see them both.

"No, you never told me o' that before, Abby," said Mrs. Todd gently. "Don't it show that for folks that have any fancy in 'em, such beautiful dreams is the real part o' life? But to most folks the common things that happens outside 'em is all in all."

Mrs. Martin did not appear to understand at first, strange to say, when the secret of her heart was put into words; then a glow of pleasure and comprehension shone upon her face. "Why, I believe you 're right, Almira!" she said, and turned to me.

"Wouldn't you like to look at my pictures of the Queen?" she asked, and we rose and went into the best room.

THE MID-DAY VISIT seemed very short; September hours are brief to match the shortening days. The great subject was dismissed for a while after our visit to the Queen's pictures, and my companions spoke much of lesser persons until we drank the cup of tea which Mrs. Todd had foreseen. I happily remembered that the Queen herself is said to like a proper cup of tea, and this at once seemed to make her Majesty kindly join so remote and reverent a company. Mrs. Martin's thin cheeks took on a pretty color like a girl's. "Somehow I always have thought of her when I made it extra good," she said. "I've got a real china cup that belonged to my grandmother, and I believe I shall call it hers now."

"Why don't you?" responded Mrs. Todd warmly, with a delightful smile.

Later they spoke of a promised visit which was to be made in the Indian summer to the Landing and Green Island, but I observed that Mrs. Todd presented the little parcel of dried herbs, with full directions, for a cure-all in the spring, as if there were no real chance of their meeting again first. As we looked back from the turn of the road the Queen's Twin was still standing on the doorstep watching us away, and Mrs. Todd stopped, and stood still for a moment before she waved her hand again.

"There's one thing certain, dear," she said to me with great discernment; "it ain't as if we left her all alone!"

Then we set out upon our long way home over the hill, where we lingered in the afternoon sunshine, and through the dark woods across the heron-swamp.

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## 18: Major Wilbraham

***Hugh Walpole***

1884-1941

*The Chicago Tribune* 13 Nov 1921

I AM QUITE AWARE that in giving you this story, just as I was told it, I shall incur the charge of downright and deliberate lying.

Especially I shall be told this by anyone who knew Wilbraham personally. Wilbraham was not, of course, his real name, but I think that there are certain people who will recognise him from the description of him. I do not know that it matters very much if they do. Wilbraham himself would certainly not mind did he know. (Does he know?) It was the thing, above all, that he wanted those last hours before he died: that I should pass on my conviction of the truth of what he told me to others. What he did not know was that I was not convinced. How could I be? But when the whole comfort of his last hours hung on the simple fact that I was, of course I pretended to the best of my poor ability. I would have done more than that to make him happy.

Most men are conscious at some time in their lives of having felt for a member of their own sex an emotion that is something more than simple companionship. It is a queer feeling quite unlike any other in life, distinctly romantic, and the more so, perhaps, for having no sex feeling in it.

Wilbraham roused just that feeling in me I remember, with the utmost distinctness, at my first meeting with him. It was just after the Boer War, and old Johnny Beaminster gave a dinner-party to some men pals of his at the Phoenix.

There were about fifteen of us, and Wilbraham was the only man present I'd never seen before. He was only a captain then, and neither so red-faced nor so stout as he afterwards became. He was pretty bulky, though, even then, and, with his sandy hair cropped close, his staring blue eyes, his toothbrush moustache, and sharp, alert movements, looked the typical traditional British officer.

There was nothing at all to distinguish him from a thousand other officers of his kind, and yet, from the moment I saw him, I had some especial and personal feeling about him. He was not in type at all the man to whom at that time I should have felt drawn, but the fact remains that I wanted to know him more than any other man in the room, and, although I only exchanged a few words with him that night, I thought of him for quite a long time afterwards.

It did not follow from this, as it ought to have done, that we became great friends. That we never were, although it was myself whom he sent for, three days before his death, to tell me his queer little story. It was then, at the very last, that he confided to me that he, too, had felt something at our first

meeting 'different' from what one generally feels, that he had always wanted to turn our acquaintance into friendship and had been too shy. I also was shy— and so we missed one another, as I suppose, in this funny, constrained-traditional country of ours, thousands of people miss one another every day.

But although I did not see him very often, and was in no way intimate with him, I kept my ears open for any account of his doings. From one point of view— the club window outlook— he was a very usual figure, one of those stout, rubicund, jolly men, a good polo player, a good man in a house-party, genial-natured, and none-too-brilliantly brained, whom everyone liked and no one thought about. All this he was on one side of the report, but, on the other, there were certain stories that were something more than ordinary.

Wilbraham was obviously a sentimentalist and an enthusiast; there was the extraordinary case shortly after I first met him of his championship of X., a man who had been caught card-sharping and received a year's imprisonment for it. On X. leaving prison, Wilbraham championed and defended him, put him up for months in his rooms in Duke Street, walked as often as possible in his company down Piccadilly, and took him over to Paris. It says a great deal for Wilbraham's accepted normality, and his general popularity, that this championship of X. did him no harm. Some men, it is true, did murmur something about 'birds of a feather,' and one or two kind friends warned Wilbraham in the way kind friends have, and to them he simply said:

'If a feller's a pal he's a pal.'

There followed a year or two later the much more celebrated business of Lady C. I need not go into all that now, but here again Wilbraham constituted himself her defender, although she robbed, cheated and maligned him as she robbed, cheated and maligned everyone who was good to her. It was quite obvious that he was not in love with her; the obviousness of it was one of the things in him that annoyed her. He simply felt, apparently, that she had been badly treated— the very last thing she had been— gave her any money he had, put his rooms at the disposal of herself and her friends, and, as I have said, championed her everywhere.

This affair did very nearly finish him socially and in his regiment. It was not so much that they minded his caring for Lady C.— after all, any man can be fooled by any woman— but it was Lady C.'s friends who made the whole thing so impossible. Well, that affair luckily came to an end just in time. Lady C. disappeared to Berlin, and was no more seen.

There were other cases, into which I need not go, when Wilbraham was seen in strange company, always championing somebody who was not worth the championing. He had no 'social tact,' and for them, at any rate, no moral sense. In himself he was the ordinary normal man about town; no prude, but

straight as a man can be in his debts, his love affairs, his friendships, and his sport. Then came the war. He did brilliantly at Mons, was wounded twice, went out to Gallipoli, had a touch of Palestine, and returned to France again to share in Foch's final triumph.

No man can possibly have had more of the war than he had, and it is my own belief that he had just a little too much of it.

He had been always perhaps a little 'queer,' as we are most of us 'queer' somewhere, and the horrors of that horrible war undoubtedly affected him. Finally he lost, just a week before the Armistice, one of his best friends, Ross McLean, a loss from which he certainly never recovered.

I have now, I think, brought together all the incidents that can throw any kind of light upon the final scene.

IN THE middle of 1919 he retired from the Army, and it was from this time to his death that I saw something of him. He went back to his old rooms at Horton's in Duke Street, and as I was living at that time in Marlborough Chambers in Jermyn Street, we were within easy reach of one another. The early part of 1920 was a 'queer time.' People had become, I imagine, pretty well accustomed to realising that those two wonderful hours of Armistice Day had not ushered in the millennium, any more than those first marvellous moments of the Russian revolution produced it.

Everyone has always hoped for the millennium, but the trouble since the days of Adam and Eve has always been that people have such different ideas as to what exactly that millennium shall be. The plain facts of the matter simply were that during 1919 and 1920 the world changed from a war of nations to a war of classes, that inevitable change that history has always shown follows on great wars.

As no one ever reads history, it was natural enough that there should be a great deal of disappointment, and a great deal of astonishment. Wilbraham, being a sentimentalist and an idealist, suffered more from this general disappointment than most people. He had had wonderful relations with the men under him throughout the war. He was never tired of recounting how marvellously they had behaved, what heroes they were, and that it was they who would pull the country together.

At the same time he had a naïve horror of Bolshevism and anything unconstitutional, and he watched the transformation of his 'brave lads' into discontented and idle workmen with dismay and deep distress. He used sometimes to come round to my rooms and talk to me; he had the bewildered air of a man walking in his sleep.

During these months I came to love the man. The attraction that I had felt for him from the very first deeply underlay all my relations to him, but as I saw more of him, I found many very positive reasons for my liking. He was the simplest, bravest, purest, most loyal and most unselfish soul alive. He seemed to me to have no faults at all, unless it were a certain softness towards the wishes of those whom he loved. He could not bear to hurt anybody, but he never hesitated if some principle in which he believed was called in question.

He was the best human being I have ever known, or am ever likely to know.

Well, the crisis arrived with astonishing suddenness. About August 2nd or 3rd I went down to stay with some friends at the little fishing village of Rafiel in Glebeshire.

I saw him just before I left London, and he told me that he was going to stay in town for the first half of August; that he liked London in August, even though his club would be closed and Horton's delivered over to the painters.

I heard nothing about him for a fortnight, and then I received a most extraordinary letter from Box Hamilton, a fellow clubman of mine and of Wilbraham's. Had I heard, he said, that poor old Wilbraham had gone right off his 'knocker'? Nobody knew exactly what had happened, but suddenly one day at lunch-time Wilbraham had turned up at Grey's— the club to which our own club was a visitor during its cleaning— had harangued everyone about religion in the most extraordinary way, had burst out from there and started shouting in Piccadilly; had, after collecting a crowd, disappeared and not been seen until the next morning, when he had been found nearly killed after a hand-to-hand fight with the market men in Covent Garden.

It may be imagined how deeply this disturbed me, especially as I felt I was myself to blame. I had noticed that Wilbraham was ill when I had seen him in London, and I should either have persuaded him to come with me to Glebeshire, or stayed with him in London. I was just about to pack up and go to town when I received a letter from a doctor in a nursing-home in South Audley Street, saying that a certain Major Wilbraham was in the home, dying, and asking persistently for myself. I took a motor to Drymouth, and was in London by five o'clock.

I FOUND the South Audley Street nursing-home, and was at once surrounded with the hush, the shaded rooms, the scents of medicine and flowers, and some undefinable cleanliness that belongs to those places.

I waited in a little room, the walls decorated with sporting prints, the green baize centre table laden with volumes of Punch and the Tatler. Wilbraham's doctor came in to see me, a dapper, smart little man, efficient and impersonal. He told me that Wilbraham had at most only twenty-four hours to live, that his

brain was quite clear, and that he was suffering very little pain, that he had been brutally kicked in the stomach by some man in the Covent Garden crowd, and had there received the internal injuries from which he was now dying.

'His brain is quite clear,' the doctor said. 'Let him talk. It can do him no harm. Nothing can save him. His head is full of queer fancies; he wants everyone to listen to him. He's worrying because there's some message he wants to send— he wants to give it to you.'

When I saw Wilbraham he was so little changed that I felt no shock. Indeed, the most striking change in him was the almost exultant happiness in his voice and eyes.

It is true that after talking to him a little I knew that he was dying. He had that strange peace and tranquillity of mind that one saw so often with dying men in the war.

I will try to give an exact account of Wilbraham's narrative; nothing else is of importance in this little story but that narrative. I can make no comment. I have no wish to do so. I only want to pass it on as he begged me to do.

'If you don't believe me,' he said, 'give other people the chance of doing so. I know that I am dying. I want as many men and women to have a chance of judging this as is humanly possible. I swear to you that I am telling the truth, and the exact truth in every detail.'

I began my account by saying that I was not convinced.

How could I be convinced?

At the same time I have none of those explanations with which people are so generously forthcoming on these occasions. I can only say that I do not think Wilbraham was insane, nor drunk, nor asleep. Nor do I believe that someone played a practical joke.

Whether Wilbraham was insane between the hours when his visitor left him and his entrance into the nursing-home I must leave to my readers. I myself think he was not.

After all, everything depends upon the relative importance that we place upon ambitions, possessions, emotions— ideas.

Something then suddenly became of so desperate an importance to Wilbraham that nothing else at all mattered. He wanted everyone else to see the importance of it as he did. That is all.

IT HAD BEEN a hot and oppressive day; London had seemed torrid and uncomfortable. The mere fact that Oxford Street was 'up' annoyed him. After a slight meal in his flat he went to the promenade concert at Queen's Hall. It was the second night of the season— Monday night— Wagner night.

He had heard no Wagner since August 1914, and was anxious to discover the effect that hearing it again would have upon him. The effect was disappointing.

The 'Meistersinger' had always been a great opera for him. The third act music that the orchestra gave to him didn't touch him anywhere. He also discovered that six years' abstinence had not enraptured him any more deeply with the rushing fiddles in the '*Tannhäuser*' overture, nor with the spinning music in the '*Flying Dutchman*.' Then came suddenly the prelude to the third act of '*Tristan*.' That caught him, the peace and tranquillity that he needed lapped him round, he was fully satisfied and could have listened for another hour— a little strange, he told me, because the first half of the third act had always bored him with Tristan's eternal dying. He got up and went away, not caring to stay and listen to the efforts of an inadequate contralto to over-scream the orchestra in the last agonies of '*Götterdämmerung*.'

He walked home down Regent Street, the quiet melancholy of the pipe music accompanying him, pleasing him, and tranquillising him. As he reached his flat ten o'clock struck from St. James's Church. He asked the porter whether anyone had wanted him during his absence— whether anyone was waiting for him now. (Some friend has told him that he might come up and use his spare room one night that week.) No, no one had been. There was no one there waiting.

Great was his surprise, therefore, when opening the door of his flat he found someone standing there, one hand resting on the table. His face turned towards the open door. Stronger, however, than Wilbraham's surprise was his immediate conviction that he knew his visitor well, and this was curious, because the face was undoubtedly strange to him.

'I beg your pardon,' Wilbraham said, hesitating.

'I wanted to see you,' the stranger said, smiling.

When Wilbraham was telling me this part of his story he seemed to be enveloped— 'enveloped' is the word that best conveys my own experience of him— by some quite radiant happiness; he smiled at me confidentially as though he were telling me something that I had experienced with him, and that must give me the same happiness that it gave him.

'Ought I to have expected— ought I to have known?' he stammered.

'No, you couldn't have known,' the stranger answered. 'You're not late. I knew when you would come.'

Wilbraham told me that during these moments he was surrendering himself to an emotion of intimacy and companionship that was the most wonderful thing that he had ever known. It was that intimacy and companionship, he told me, for which all his days he had been searching. It

was the one thing that life never seemed to give; even in the greatest love, the deepest friendship, there was that seed of loneliness hidden. He had never found it in man or woman.

Now it was so wonderful that the first thing that he said was:

'And now you're going to stay, aren't you? You won't go away at once?'

'Of course I'll stay,' he answered, 'if you want me.'

His guest was dressed in some dark suit; there was nothing about him in any way odd or unusual. His face thin and pale. His smile kindly.

His English was without accent. His voice was soft and very melodious.

But Wilbraham could notice nothing but his eyes; they were the most beautiful, tender, gentle eyes that he had ever seen in any human being.

They sat down. Wilbraham's overwhelming fear was lest his guest should leave him. They began to talk, and Wilbraham took it at once as accepted that his friend knew all about him— everything.

He found himself eagerly plunging into details of scenes, episodes that he had long put behind him— put behind him for shame, perhaps, or for regret or for sorrow. He knew at once that there was nothing that he need veil nor hide— nothing. He had no sense that he must consider susceptibilities or avoid self-confession that was humiliating.

But he did find, as he talked on, a sense of shame from another side creep towards him and begin to enclose him. Shame at the smallness, meanness, emptiness of the things that he declared.

He had had always behind his mistakes and sins a sense that he was a rather unusual, interesting person; if only his friends knew everything about him they would be surprised at the remarkable man that he really was. Now it was exactly the opposite sense that came over him. In the gold-rimmed mirror that was over his mantelpiece he saw himself diminishing, diminishing, diminishing. First himself, large, red-faced, smiling, rotund, lying back in his chair: then the face shrivelling, the limbs shortening, then the face small and peaked, the hands and legs little and mean, then the chair enormous about and around the little trembling animal cowering against the cushion.

He sprang up.

'No, no! I can't tell you any more— and you've known it all so long. I am mean, small, nothing. I have not even great ambition— nothing.'

His guest stood up and put his hand on his shoulder. They talked, standing side by side, and he said some things that belonged to Wilbraham alone, that he would not tell me.

Wilbraham asked him why he had come— and to him.

'I will come now to a few of my friends,' he said. 'First one and then another. Many people have forgotten me behind my words. They have built up

such a mountain over me with the doctrines they have attributed to me, the things that they say that I did. I am not really,' he said, laughing, his hand on Wilbraham's shoulder, 'so dull and gloomy and melancholy as they have made me. I loved life; I loved men; I loved laughter and games and the open air. All things that they have forgotten. So from now I shall come back to one or two. I am lonely when they see me so solemnly.'

Another thing he said: 'They are making life complicated now. To lead a good life, to be happy, to manage the world, only the simplest things are needed— love, unselfishness, tolerance.'

'Can I go with you and be with you always?' Wilbraham asked.

'Do you really want that?' he said.

'Yes,' said Wilbraham, bowing his head.

'Then you shall come and never leave me again. In three days from now.'

Then he kissed Wilbraham on the forehead and went away.

I think that Wilbraham himself became conscious as he told me this part of his story of the difference between the seen and remembered figure and the foolish, inadequate reported words. Even now, as I repeat a little of what Wilbraham said, I feel the virtue and power slipping away. But on that day when I sat beside Wilbraham's bed the conviction in his voice and eyes held me so that, although my reason kept me back, my heart told me that he had been in contact with some power that was a stronger force than anything that I myself had ever known.

But I have determined to make no personal comment on this story. I am here simply as a narrator of fact.

Wilbraham told me that after his guest left him he sat there for some time in a dream. Then he sat up, startled as though some voice, calling, had wakened him, with an impulse that was like a fire suddenly blazing up and lighting the dark places of his brain. I imagine that all Wilbraham's impulses in the past, chivalrous, idealistic, foolish, had been of that kind— sudden, of an almost ferocious energy and determination, blind to all consequences. He must go out at once and tell everyone of what had happened to him.

I once read a story somewhere about some town that was expecting a great visitor. Everything was ready, the banners hanging, the music prepared, the crowds waiting in the street.

A man who had once been for some years at the court of the expected visitor, saw him enter the city, sombrely clad, on foot. Meanwhile, his chamberlain entered the town in full panoply with the trumpets blowing and many riders in attendance. The man who knew the real king ran to everyone telling the truth, but they laughed at him and refused to listen. And the real king departed quietly as he had come.

It was, I suppose, an influence of this kind that drove Wilbraham now.

What followed might, I think, have been to some extent averted, had his appearance been different. London is a home of madmen, and casually permits any lunacy, so that public peace is not endangered. Had poor Wilbraham looked a fanatic, with pale face, long hair, ragged clothes, much would have been forgiven him, but for a staid, middle-aged gentleman, well-dressed, well-groomed, what could be supposed but insanity, and insanity of a very ludicrous kind?

He put on his coat and went out. From this moment his account was confused. His mind, as he spoke to me, kept returning to that visitor. What happened after his guest's departure was vague and uncertain to him, largely because it was unimportant. He does not know what time it was when he went out, but I gather it must have been about midnight. There were still people in Piccadilly.

Somewhere near the Berkeley Hotel he stopped a gentleman and a lady. He spoke, I am sure, so politely that the man he addressed must have supposed that he was asking for a match, or an address, or something of the kind. Wilbraham told me that very quietly he asked the gentleman whether he might speak to him for a moment, that he had something very important to say; that he would not, as a rule, dream of interfering in any man's private affairs, but that the importance of his communication outweighed all ordinary conventions; that he expected that the gentleman had hitherto, as had been his own case, felt much doubt about religious questions, but that now all doubt was once and for ever over, that—

I expect that at that fatal word 'religious' the gentleman started as though he had been stung by a snake, felt that this mild-looking man was a dangerous lunatic and tried to move away. It was the lady with him, so far as I can discover, who cried out, 'Oh, poor man, he's ill!' and wanted at once to do something for him.

By this time a crowd was beginning to collect, and as the crowd closed around the central figures more people gathered upon the outskirts and, peering through, wondered what had happened, whether there was an accident, whether it was a 'drunk,' whether there had been a quarrel, and so on.

Wilbraham, I fancy, began to address them all, telling them his great news, begging them with a desperate urgency to believe him. Some laughed, some stared in wide-eyed wonder, the crowd was increasing, and then, of course, the inevitable policeman, with his 'move on, please,' appeared.

How deeply I regret that Wilbraham was not there and then arrested. He would be alive and with us now if that had been done. But the policeman

hesitated, I suppose, to arrest anyone as obviously a gentleman as Wilbraham, a man, too, as he soon perceived, who was perfectly sober, even though he was not in his right mind.

Wilbraham was surprised at the policeman's interference. He said that the last thing that he wished to do was to create any disturbance, but that he could not bear to let all these people go to their beds without giving them a chance of realising first that everything was now altered, that he had had the most wonderful news.

The crowd was dispersed, and Wilbraham found himself walking alone with the policeman beside the Green Park.

He must have been a very nice policeman, because, before Wilbraham's death, he called at the nursing-home and was very anxious to know how the poor gentleman was getting on.

He allowed Wilbraham to talk to him, and then did all he could to persuade him to walk home and go to bed. He offered to get him a taxi. Wilbraham thanked him, said he would do so himself, and bade him good-night, and the policeman, seeing that Wilbraham was perfectly composed and sober, left him.

After that the narrative is more confused. Wilbraham apparently walked down Knightsbridge and arrived at last somewhere near the Albert Hall. He must have spoken to a number of different people. One man, a politician apparently, was with him for a considerable time, but only because he was so anxious to emphasise his own views about the Government. Another was a journalist, who continued with him for a while because he scented a story for his newspaper. Some people may remember that there was a garbled paragraph about a 'Religious Army Officer' in the Daily Record.

He stayed at a cabman's shelter for a time and drank a cup of coffee and told the little gathering there his news. They took it very calmly. They had met so many queer things in their time that nothing seemed odd to them.

His account becomes clearer again when he found himself a little before dawn in the park and in the company of a woman of the town and a drunken, broken-down pugilist. I saw both these persons afterwards and had some talk with them. The pugilist had only the vaguest sense of what had happened. Wilbraham was a 'proper old bird,' and had given him half-a-crown to get his breakfast with. They had all slept together under a tree, and he had made some rather voluble protests because the other two would talk so continuously and prevented his sleeping. It was a warm night and the sun had come up behind the tree 'surprisin' quick.'

The woman was another story. She was quiet and reserved, dressed in black with a neat little black hat with a green feather in it. She had yellow, fluffy hair, and bright, childish, blue eyes, and a simple, innocent expression.

She spoke very softly and almost in a whisper. She spoke of her life quite calmly as though she had been a governess or a waitress at a tea-shop. So far as I could discover, she could see nothing odd in Wilbraham, nor in anything that he had said. She was the one person in all the world who had understood him completely and found nothing out of the way in his talk. Strange when you come to think of it. The one person in the world.

She had liked him at once, she said. 'I could see that he was kind,' she added earnestly, as though to her that was the most important thing in all the world. No, his talk had not seemed odd to her. She had believed every word that he had said. Why not? You could not look at him and not believe what he said.

Of course, it was true. And why not? She had known lots of things funnier than that in her sordid life. What was there against it? She had always thought that there was something in what the parsons said, and now she knew it. It had been a great help to her, what the gentleman had told her. Yes, and he had gone to sleep with his head in her lap— and she had stayed awake all night thinking— and he had woken up just in time to see the sunrise. Some sunrise that was, too!

That was a curious little fact, that all three of them, even the battered pugilist, should have been so deeply struck by that sunrise. Wilbraham on the last day of his life, when he hovered between consciousness and unconsciousness, kept recalling it as though it had been a vision.

'The sun— and the trees suddenly green and bright like glittering swords— and the sky pale like ivory. See, now the sun is rushing up, faster than ever, to take us with him— up, up, leaving the trees like green clouds beneath us— far, far beneath us—'

The woman said it was the finest sunrise she had ever seen; and, at once, when she saw it, she began to think of a policeman. He'd be moving them on, naturally, and what would he say when he found her there with a gentleman of the highest class? Say that she had been robbing him, of course. She wanted to move away, but he insisted on going with her, and they woke up the pugilist, and the three of them moved down the park.

He talked to her all the time about his plans. He was looking dishevelled now, and unshaven and dirty. She suggested that he should go back to his flat. No, he wished to waste no time. Who knew how long he had got? It might be only a day or two. He would go to Covent Garden and talk to the men there.

SHE WAS confused as to what happened after that. When they got to the market, the carts were coming in and the men were very busy.

She saw the gentleman speak to one of them very earnestly, but he was very busy and pushed him aside. He spoke to another, who told him to clear out.

Then he jumped on to a box, and almost the last sight she had of him was his standing there in his soiled clothes, a streak of mud on his face, his arms outstretched and crying: 'It's true! It's true! Stop just a moment! You must hear me!'

Someone pushed him off the box. The pugilist rushed in then, cursing them and saying that the man was a gentleman, and had given him half-a-crown, and then some hulking great fellow fought the pugilist and there was a regular mêlée. Wilbraham was in the middle of them, was knocked down and trampled upon. No one meant to hurt him, I think. They all seemed very sorry afterwards.

He died two days after being brought into the nursing-home. He was very happy just before he died, pressed my hand, and asked me to look after the girl.

'Isn't it wonderful,' were his last words to me, 'that it should be true after all?'

AS TO TRUTH, who knows? Truth is a large order. This is true as far as Wilbraham goes, every word of it. Beyond that? Well, it must be jolly to be so happy as Wilbraham was.

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## 19: Barratry

***J. M. Walsh***

1897-1952

Sydney Mail (NSW), 6 Dec 1922

'OF COURSE,' SAID MCDONNELL, 'you understand me clearly that, if things are as we suspect, you're taking your life in your hands. Don't imagine for a moment that I'm frying to be melodramatic— I'm not. I'm talking cold, sober facts, and the sooner you realise that the better. You'll sign on as a member of the crew— in what, capacity I'll leave to you— and the rest depends on your own keenness. You may make, good, or you may not. The gentleman in question may be a little too sharp for you. In that case, as I've already hinted, your life won't be worth a moment's purchase. Now, it's for you to go on or back out, just as you please.'

'The facts, as I gather,' said Cranburn, 'are that the ship's been insured for about twice her value, and because of that and one or two other things you've noticed, you believe she isn't intended to reach port. Am I right?'

McDonnell nodded. 'You're not right about the value, though, but that's neither here nor there.'

'My job, then,' Cranburn continued, 'is to foil any attempt at barratry. Actually it depends on me whether the ship returns to port or not. If I show my suspicions I'm almost certain, according to your theory, to be quieted in the most effective way.'

'That's about the case in a nutshell,' McDonnell replied, 'with this reservation. We might, after all, be barking up the wrong tree, in which case you'll do a lot of unnecessary hard work for nothing. Have you any idea how you'll sign on?'

'I've been a member of the Black Squad in my time,' said Cranburn, 'and, if it's any news to you, I'm the holder of a second-class engineer's certificate. All things considered, I think I'll join up as an ash-cat. I'll have a freer hand there, and if anyone tries any monkey tricks with the engines I'll be able to drop on them quicker than if I were a mere member of the crew.'

'Good man!' said McDonnell. 'I hope for your sake that we're making a mistake. I've taken rather a fancy to you, and I wouldn't care to have you topped off in the midst of your usefulness. Keep your wits about; you and your eyes skinned. If the *Pelagesian* goes down and we have to foot the bill the blame'll be all yours: if she doesn't you'll probably get neither kicks nor ha'pence. That's the beauty of it all; you're only a cog in the machine, and nobody but myself knows of you or cares a tinker's curse whether you sink or swim. But I'll promise you this off my own bat— and I don't make promises I can't carry out— if you make good I'll see your name goes in for promotion.

That, now, is about all. Sure you don't want to back out while you have a chance?'

'Not I,' said Cranburn cheerily. 'There's just that spice of danger in it that appeals to me.'

McDonnell's stern face relaxed into smiles.

'I was like that once,' he remarked with a trace of wistfulness in his voice. 'I didn't care a hang as long as there was danger in my work. But, when a man marries and the kiddies begin to come along he grows more careful of himself. For that I'm pleased you're a single man.'

He held out his hand to the young man.

'Good luck,' he said, 'and my own best wishes. And remember what I said.'

'Trust me to take care of myself,' said Cranburn, with the confidence of youth as he returned his chief's handshake.

'THERE'S a lad we have down in my watch,' said the second engineer, 'that I don't like the looks of. He's a trifle too intelligent for me, and he has a knowledge of the machinery that isn't decent in a man of his standing. Where'd you pick' him up?'

'Me?' said the chief. 'Why, on the wharf, of course. He was broke to the wide, and you could tell from the look of him that he'd seen better days. I kind of took pity on him seeing we were a man short.'

The second filled his pipe, lit and puffed at it contemplatively before he spoke again.

'Maybe you noticed,' he said at length, 'that when he came aboard his knuckles were all barked and one eye was a gorgeous purple?'

'I did. I thought to myself that he was just the very kind of laddie we wanted. A man that comes on board with torn hands and a plum-coloured eye usually has good reasons for making a pier-head jump, and as a consequence will work like the very devil if only for the sake of getting out of the country.'

'Maybe,' said the second. Then, 'I wouldn't be at all surprised if that eye and those knuckles were sort of connected with our being a man short.'

'Meaning?'

'That you'll probably find the chap that didn't turn up is in the hospital.'

'Ah, yes, I see. The new man created the vacancy you mean?'

The second engineer, well versed in the ways of iniquity, nodded over his pipe.

'I don't like the cut of him,' he went on. 'I know you'll find all kinds in the stokehold gang, gentleman rankers and the rest, and usually I don't trouble about them. But this chap makes me nervy; I've a feeling that he's always watching me.'

'That's your own guilty conscience,' said the chief. 'What are you up to now?'

'Nothing that's got anything to do with you,' the other retorted. 'And now, as it happens to be my watch below, I'm off to flirt with the stewardess.'

'And you a married man? Well, they say they're always the worst. But between you and me this stewardess business is all bunkum.'

'Can't I see that with half an eye? The old man wants to take his daughter with him for the voyage, and as we don't carry passengers she has to sign articles the same as you or me. Rating of stewardess and pay of a bob a month gets over that.'

'If I'm not mistaken,' said the chief with a wicked gleam in his eye, 'I've seen that prodigal of yours hanging round the lassie when he should be asleep below. But perhaps that explains your dislike of him.'

'It does,' said the second candidly. 'Confound his impudence.'

'All's fair in love, me boy. And as you're a married man you can't growl if he cuts you out.'

'I'll warm his hide for him if I catch him at it,' said the other. 'Married man or not, there's such a thing as caste, and it won't do to let a flaming ash cat make up to the old man's daughter. For two pins I'd smash his face in.'

'Don't be blood-thirsty. The fellow looks as if he could put up a comfortable scrap, and, anyway, I don't want my second messed up in a fight with one of the stokehold gang. It's bad for discipline for one thing, and for another I can do all the beating up that's necessary. So put that in your pipe and smoke it, my amorous friend.'

'Thank you— for nothing,' said the second provocatively.

He had taken care, however, before he spoke to place the length of the cabin between him and his chief, and as it was he reached the alleyway just the two jumps ahead that spelt safety.

MEANWHILE Cranburn— he still stuck to his name, seeing no reason for travelling under an alias— was finding his task not so easy as he had supposed. He had ample opportunity of observing anything in the nature of foul play with the engines, but he had an uneasy feeling that there was nothing doing in that direction. As lime went on and nothing occurred to arouse his suspicions, he began to think that McDonnell had been wrong in his conclusions; the fact that the skipper had taken his daughter to bear him company rather accentuated that belief. In the last analysis the people under suspicion narrowed down to four— the skipper, the mate, the chief engineer, and his second. The two engineers, he decided, were average hardworking, hard-fisted, acid-tongued

men incapable of tampering with their beloved machinery; the skipper he eliminated on account of the girl, which left only the mate.

All things considered, the mate was the most likely of the four. It was common talk on board that he spent rather more than a man in his position could afford— these items travel mysteriously, originating no one knows where— and speculation was rife as to the source of his income. Cranburn had an idea he knew; a man who is capable of committing the serious sea crime of barratry doesn't do it for nothing, and a '*douceur*' at the beginning is just as necessary to set the wheels in motion as is the final reward for work performed.

Clay, the mate, was a surly, black-haired, black-eyed man, who invited no confidences, and certainly gave none. Furtiveness was in his glance, and the sheer brutality of his treatment of the crew earned him unlovely regard. Even the Black Squad, who were by force of occupation removed from the range of his petty tyranny, occasionally fell foul of him.

Here, then, was the one man of the whole ship's company, above and below decks, who was capable of sending the dear insured to a watery grave.

The mate became an obsession with Cranburn, and he bitterly regretted that technical knowledge which had prompted him to enlist in the stokehold. Had he been able, he would willingly have exchanged places with the veriest deck hand; but his bed was made, and lie on it he must.

As it was, that flirtation with Marion Spencer, nominally stewardess and actually skipper's daughter, which had so annoyed the amorous second engineer, was fifty per cent of it an excuse for remaining on deck at odd times. The other fifty per cent, it may be noted, was no excuse at all. Marion Spencer was that sort of woman who carries an irresistible appeal to a man's man. Small and dainty— the irreverent second engineer, described her in his more . confidential moments as an armful of cuddle'— with blue eyes and golden hair, she was of the type that attracts men as a candle flame attracts moths. There was this difference, however— the men-moths who were drawn by the light in her eyes found themselves snubbed, not singed.

Yet somehow she never snubbed Cranburn; flirtatious and all as he was, or pretended to be, he knew his place and kept it. His attitude towards her contained just that amount of deference which made snubbing a matter of impossibility.

Now, a ship, be she tramp or liner, is a little world in herself, and the lines of caste are more strongly marked than in the greater world beyond. Between the captain's daughter and the ash-cat there yawned a social gulf; the gulf between the nominal ash-cat and the nominal stewardess, though great, was yet not so wide.

Marion Spencer, the stewardess, could dream dreams that Miss Spencer, the skipper's daughter, dare not vision. Cranburn intrigued her in the former capacity, repelled her in the latter. The passing of a casual word, contrary to discipline though it was, showed her that he was something more than a mere member of the Black Squad. There was about him that breeding that envelops even the gentleman-ranker like an aura: when he spoke his tone was cultured, his sentences smooth, and his words well chosen. He came of a different world from the one he lived and worked in. Once she asked him some question about the engines; and his answer, simple and shorn of technicalities, showed her that he had a greater grasp of machinery than is common among the stokehold crowd. Her first conclusion was that he was a gentleman who had come down in the world, her second that he had taken his present position for a wager. He had none of the marks of the down-and-out.

Her interest in him, heightened, no doubt, by the air of mystery about him, steadily increased; she began to note casual inflexions in his voice; began to think about him at odd times. His picture came very clearly to her mind. Thus subtly does love creep into one's heart.

Cranburn, more used to facing starkly the stern facts of life, was quick in realising that he was falling in love with the girl, and he set himself grimly to repress for the present, at least his dawning affection. He had work to perform, work that required all his attention and might yet require all his energies, and he dare not allow himself to be swayed by side-issues, Somewhere on board, if McDonnell's theory were sound, was a man intent on seeing that the *Pelagesian* did not reach port. It was Cranburn's task to discover and unmask that man, and, though he rather fancied the finger of suspicion pointed directly in the mate, he could not say with any degree of certainty that he was right in that. So he resolutely shut Marion Spencer out of his mind for the present, and though he sought her company again and again he did not allow himself to think of her as he would have liked.

From the first he had decided that any attempt to sink or disable the. steamer must originate in or near the engine-room, and he kept a careful watch on all who were not actual members of the stokehold crew. Once or twice he saw the mate descend to the depths, but silent shadowing, while confirming his suspicions of the man, yielded no tangible result. Strictly speaking, the after-guard, oilier than the engineers, have no right to be roaming about in the engine room; but in the majority of cargo steamers the rule is honoured in the breach rather than the observance. Nobody minded very much the mate, the skipper, or even the stewardess— as happened once or twice— prying round the vital parts of the ship's inside.

So the days passed on, and hazy suspicions showed no signs of crystallising into accomplished fact. More and more were the girl and the man drawn towards each other, and when their eyes met, as they did on odd occasions, they each saw there something that made the girl drop her eyes and blush prettily, that set the young man's heart beating in a way that wasn't normal. Love that was denied speech found other ways of breaking the self-imposed restraint.

THE climax came abruptly and startlingly. Cranburn should have been asleep in his bunk, but an uneasy premonition if impending evil had kept him watchful in the shadow of the stairway by the iron grille the men mounted to oil the plungers. The place was deserted and silent save for the clank and purr of machinery. Even that had become so much a matter of routine that one scarce heard it. though one was quick to notice any cessation or alteration in its timbre.

Cranburn crouched in the shadow beyond the radius of the oil-flares and watched first of all the lift of two feet that came down the ladder, then craned his neck to catch a glimpse of the overall-clad figure to whom the feet belonged. In the semi-darkness he could not put a name to the shape: a cap well pulled down over the eyes frustrated any attempt at identification. Yet, for all that, there was something familiar about the figure, a vague familiarity that made the man crouch closer in the shadow.

The visitor passed him, turned off from the engine-room, and seemed to be making towards the black depths of the ship's interior. He followed on tiptoe down spidery iron stairways that led to the steamer's inner skin. The unknown moved silently, and only, the steady vibration of the frail ladders told of the traffic ahead. The vibration ceased abruptly, as if the stranger had hailed for a moment. Then came the clink of steel on steel, a sound that rose even above the rumble of the engines.

Cranburn made a quick step forward, but the click of a heavy boot on the metal underfoot sent him scurrying back the way he had come. He had little or no idea of what had happened in the dark beneath him; nothing of any moment, he concluded.

He slunk back into his original position, intending to explore further after the stranger had passed him on the return. But the stranger evidently had business among the engines, for, instead of mounting the ladder to the upper air, he turned and passed out into the light of the oil flare along the grille. The huge piston-rods rose and fell in their iron jackets: the flickering light fell on and was reflected from the polished surfaces of bright steelwork. The unknown

halted opposite the first of the columns, and Cranburn caught a glimpse of greasy, flaky metal in an open palm.

He crossed the intervening space in three quick strides. The stranger's mission was plain at last. One of those thin flakes of metal dropped— or forced— between the piston-rod and its casing; would bring the engines to with a jar that might well shake them through the ship's bottom.

He seized the stranger round the neck in that stranglehold from which there is no breaking away, smote the down turned palm with the edge of his hand, and the flakes of metal dropping ringingly on the iron of the grille, slid noisily into the depths below. Yet even as he caught the stranger recognition came, and when he swung his captive round to the light and pushed back the cap it was only to find his own worst fears confirmed.

'You!' he gasped. 'You, Marion!'

In the excitement of the moment the name slipped out, unnoticed and unrebuked.

'Please let me go.' Anger and disappointment were in the girl's voice.

'Hush!' he said. 'Someone will hear you.'

'What do I care?' she said petulantly, her voice now trembling perilously near to tears

'But I do,' said Cranburn levelly. 'Come away from here, somewhere where we can talk.'

'I don't want to talk with you. Let me go— please.' There was a biting insult in the last word.

'I can't help that, Miss Spencer; I want an explanation.'

'Who are you that I should explain anything to you?'

'That,' he said quietly, 'is something that you will learn in good time.'

'I'm not going with you.'

'Yes, you are,' he asserted. Beneath them the ladder shook and rumbled, under the impact, of heavy boots. 'There's someone coming now,' said Cranburn quickly. 'For your own sake, please come.'

'I won't,' said the girl defiantly, and she planted her feel firmly on the latticework of the grille.

'I'm sorry, Miss Spencer,' Cranburn murmured, 'but you force me to it.'

There was nothing either heroic or chivalrous in what followed. The man wrenched her away from the grille, hoisted her into his arms, and clapped one hand across her mouth. He trod easily and swiftly up the further lengths of ladder despite her struggles, and did not pause in his stride until he reached the level of the deck. Then at length he removed his hand and stood her on her feel.

'What have you to say for yourself now?' he demanded.

She turned on him furiously, rendered inarticulate by the very force of her emotion. She glanced about for some way of escape: there was none. He had her hemmed in. Behind her lay the funnel: in front he barred the way with his arms. The cap she had worn pulled down over her eyes had been twisted to one side from beneath it; her hair escaped in unruly billows. Her face was in the shadow, but his was clear and visible, every line of it plainly marked. It struck as something far away and entirely unconnected with the present that he was a handsome man: even in her anger she saw, as if for the first time, the open honesty of his countenance. His eyes bored into her.

'Who are you?' she gasped. That penetrating glance of the man's dark eyes had acted on her like a douche of cold water.

'Who am I? Well, my name is Cranburn, Harry Cranburn. You'll find it signed that way on the articles.'

'Is that your real name?' She had not meant to ask him that; something outside of her seemed to be shaping question and answer for her.

The man nodded. Inwardly he was debating how much he should tell her.

'What are you doing here?' She seemed to have accepted the situation by this; was evidently trying to make the best of it.

'Well, if you want to know,' he said slowly, 'I came on board to prevent the very thing I caught you attempting.'

'You!' The astonishment in her voice was dramatic without being convincing.

Again he nodded.

'Then— then you're in the employment of the underwriters?'

'You can put it that way if you please,' he said with a wry twist to his mouth.

'Oh, I hate you! I'd rather it had been anyone but you!'

It had come at last— the breakdown he had feared. She was crying now: inarticulate sobs shook her slight frame. The man took a hasty step forward, caught her in his embrace. She made no motion of resistance. Instead she collapsed in his arms, and when he raised her face to his her tear-filled eyes were shining with something that, was neither anger nor repugnance. Swiftly he bent forward and kissed her— once. The girl shivered.

'You shouldn't,' she whispered in the small voice of shame.

'We can't help it how; it's gone so far,' Cranburn said. Neither of them had spoken a word of love; yet they both knew that henceforward their lives were given into each other's keeping. Love does not need words to make it articulate.

'You know what I was doing?' the girl queried at length.

'I do, Marion.' This time he addressed her by her Christian name without either apology or trepidation. The events of the past few minutes had given him an irrevocable right to so address her.

'It was— barratry,' he added, hesitating perceptibly over the last word.

'The making away of the ship in order to collect the insurance,' the girl said. She spoke as if she wished him to realise the depths to which she purposed plunging. 'What I was doing would have stopped the engines suddenly. Then in the confusion meant to slip down and open the seacocks. That was where I went first— to I make sure everything was— ready. You understand?'

'I see,' Cranburn said gravely. 'Yes. If the engines were brought to suddenly and the water from the sea-cocks came flooding in it would look as if the ship had struck a sunken reef. Nobody on board would have a doubt for a moment as to what had happened. The sudden stoppage of the engines— and, by the way, they might easily have jarred through the ship's bottom— would make everything look very realistic.'

'You— you don't hate me for— for what I tried to do?' She asked the question with her deep blue eyes fixed intently on his face.

There was only one possible answer to that. Cranburn gave it, in the only possible way.

'But why did you do it?' he asked.

'Why did I do it?' she echoed, and her laugh held a trace of bitter hardness. 'I did it for the reason for which people always do such things— money.'

'You want money?'

'Not money exactly, but the things money will buy— ease, comfort, luxuries for my father in his old age.'

'And peace of mind for you?'

The girl shivered. 'Don't,' she said vibrantly. 'You'll make me hate you.'

'Your father, then...?' His eyes finished the uncompleted, question.

'He doesn't know, whatever he might have guessed if— if I had succeeded.'

'You were working alone, then?'

'Yes.' There was a certain amount of pride in the girl's answer.

Cranburn looked keenly at her for the space of a heart-beat.

Then, 'I think you had better tell me the whole story from beginning to end,' he said soberly.

'Oh, well,' she said, with a little gesture of helplessness....

IT was a common enough tale she told. A shipmaster trembling between the deep sea of unemployment and the devil of a dividend-hunting owner on almost his last legs: a heavy insurance on the ship and a plot laid by the owner to sink her in mid-ocean; veiled and ambiguous advances promptly rejected

made by intermediaries of the skipper; a girl who overheard what she was not meant to hear— these were the ingredients of the story.

She had approached the tempter herself in the end, and for the sake of the father she loved and the money that would tide them both over evil workless days she had agreed to see the thing through herself. Agreements were made verbally, nothing that one could swear to in a court of law with any hope of being believed, yet sufficiently binding by the power of that honour which exists among thieves.

She spoke in halting, jerky sentences: she left much to the man's imagination, and at times the recrudescence of the sobbing choked her voice. She ended lamely, with pale and trembling lips and a vague fear clutching at her heart. After all, she had bared her soul to him, and he held her own honour and her father's safely in the hollow of his hand. There was his duty to his employers to be considered. Would that triumph over his new-born, new-found love? she wondered.

Something of her thoughts must have shown in her starlit face, for the man said abruptly, 'You trust me, don't you?'

'I've been honest with you.' She answered his question by implication.

'You've trusted me with the truth,' he said softly. 'Can you trust me with your life?'

'It seems I'll have to,' she said with mock ruefulness. 'Unless, of course, you intend to hand me over to the police.'

'If you were anyone else that is just what I would do; but, you see, you being you makes it different. My instructions were to prevent any attempt at barratry— which I have— and as far as lay in my power to see that the *Pelagesian* reaches land safely— which I intend doing. Beyond that I do nothing. When I land I report all clear, and that's the end as far as I am concerned. Actually it's a compromise with my conscience: but— well, I'm not doing anyone any harm in suppressing what I know.'

'I love you for that,' the girl whispered. 'Do you know you're just as frail as I am, though your human frailly takes another form?'

'If I weren't at all in love with you,' said Cranbury, 'I don't believe I would care a hang whether you suffered or not for what you tried to do.'

'That's frank enough,' the girl smiled. Then, with a sudden accession of seriousness, 'Don't you think we'll be attracting attention if we remain here much longer?'

'I suppose we'll have to be cautious to an extent, Marion. On the whole, I fancy it'll be holier for us both if we keep this quiet until after we land.'

'Men are deceivers ever,' the girl laughed. 'But, seriously, I think you're right.'

'It's a question of caste, Marion. On board here I'm only a member of the Black Squad, while you're the skipper's daughter. On land— well, you understand. And now, as it's my watch below and not much of it left, I'd better get off. No need to ask you to promise not to sink the ship in my absence, is there?'

'I think, you're really nasty,' the girl declared. Nevertheless the kiss she gave him told him— for in such a fashion are unspoken messages conveyed from heart: to heart— that never more would there be any fear of any such thing.

'And McDonnell told me that I was taking my life in my hand,' Cranburn chuckled as he made his way below.

Deep in the iron heart of the ship the engines throbbed and pulsed, and sang their song of eternity as if there had never been any fear of the "fault that leaves six thousand ton a log upon the sea".

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## 20: The Woman of Stone

***Robert Barr***

1849-1912

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LURINE, was pretty, petite, and eighteen. She had a nice situation at the Pharmacie de Siam, in the Rue St. Honoré. She had no one dependent upon her, and all the money she earned was her own. Her dress was of cheap material perhaps, but it was cut and fitted with that daintiness of perfection which seems to be the natural gift of the Parisienne, so that one never thought of the cheapness, but admired only the effect, which was charming. She was book-keeper and general assistant at the Pharmacie, and had a little room of her own across the Seine, in the Rue de Lille. She crossed the river twice every day— once in the morning when the sun was shining, and again at night when the radiant lights along the river's bank glittered like jewels in a long necklace. She had her little walk through the Gardens of the Tuileries every morning after crossing the Pont Royal, but she did not return through the gardens in the evening, for a park in the morning is a different thing to a park at night. On her return she always walked along the Rue de Tuileries until she came to the bridge. Her morning ramble through the gardens was a daily delight to her, for the Rue de Lille is narrow, and not particularly bright, so it was pleasant to walk beneath the green trees, to feel the crisp gravel under her feet, and to see the gleaming white statues in the sunlight, with the sparkle on the round fountain pond, by the side of which she sometimes sat. Her favorite statue was one of a woman that stood on a pedestal near the Rue de Rivoli. The arm was thrown over her head, and there was a smile on the marble face which was inscrutable. It fascinated the girl as she looked up to it, and seemed to be the morning greeting to her busy day's work in the city. If no one was in sight, which was often the case at eight o'clock in the morning, the girl kissed the tips of her fingers, and tossed the salute airily up to the statue, and the woman of stone always smiled back at her the strange mystical smile which seemed to indicate that it knew much more of this world and its ways than did the little Parisienne who daily gazed up at her.

Lurine was happy, as a matter of course, for was not Paris always beautiful? Did not the sun shine brightly? And was not the air always clear? What more, then, could a young girl wish? There was one thing which was perhaps lacking, but that at last was supplied; and then there was not a happier girl in all Paris than Lurine. She almost cried it aloud to her favorite statue the next morning, for it seemed to her that the smile had broadened

since she had passed it the morning before, and she felt as if the woman of stone had guessed the secret of the woman of flesh.

Lurine had noticed him for several days hovering about the Pharmacie, and looking in at her now and then; she saw it all, but pretended not to see. He was a handsome young fellow with curly hair, and hands long, slender, and white as if he were not accustomed to doing hard, manual labor. One night he followed her as far as the bridge, but she walked rapidly on, and he did not overtake her. He never entered the Pharmacie, but lingered about as if waiting for a chance to speak with her. Lurine had no one to confide in but the woman of stone, and it seemed by her smile that she understood already, and there was no need to tell her, that the inevitable young man had come. The next night he followed her quite across the bridge, and this time Lurine did not walk so quickly. Girls in her position are not supposed to have normal introductions to their lovers, and are generally dependent upon a haphazard acquaintance, although that Lurine did not know. The young man spoke to her on the bridge, raising his hat from his black head as he did so.

"Good evening!" was all he said to her.

She glanced sideways shyly at him, but did not answer, and the young man walked on beside her.

"You come this way every night," he said. "I have been watching you. Are you offended?"

"No," she answered, almost in a whisper.

"Then may I walk with you to your home?" he asked.

"You may walk with me as far as the corner of the Rue de Lille," she replied.

"Thank you!" said the young fellow, and together they walked the short distance, and there he bade her good night, after asking permission to meet her at the corner of the Rue St. Honoré, and walk home with her, the next night.

"You must not come to the shop," she said.

"I understand," he replied, nodding his head in assent to her wishes. He told her his name was Jean Duret, and by-and-by she called him Jean, and he called her Lurine. He never haunted the Pharmacie now, but waited for her at the corner, and one Sunday he took her for a little excursion on the river, which she enjoyed exceedingly. Thus time went on, and Lurine was very happy. The statue smiled its enigmatical smile, though, when the sky was overcast, there seemed to her a subtle warning in the smile. Perhaps it was because they had quarrelled the night before. Jean had seemed to her harsh and unforgiving. He had asked her if she could not bring him some things from the

Pharmacie, and gave her a list of three chemicals, the names of which he had written on a paper.

"You can easily get them," he had said; "they are in every Pharmacie, and will never be missed."

"But," said the girl in horror, "that would be stealing."

The young man laughed.

"How much do they pay you there?" he asked. And when she told him, he laughed again and said:

"Why, bless you, if I got so little as that I would take something from the shelves every day and sell it."

The girl looked at him in amazement, and he, angry at her, turned upon his heel and left her. She leaned her arms upon the parapet of the bridge, and looked down into the dark water. The river always fascinated her at night, and she often paused to look at it when crossing the bridge, shuddering as she did so. She cried a little as she thought of his abrupt departure, and wondered if she had been too harsh with him. After all, it was not very much he had asked her to do, and they did pay her so little at the Pharmacie. And then perhaps her lover was poor, and needed the articles he had asked her to get. Perhaps he was ill, and had said nothing. There was a touch on her shoulder. She looked round. Jean was standing beside her, but the frown had not yet disappeared from his brow.

"Give me that paper," he said, abruptly.

She unclosed her hand, and he picked the paper from it, and was turning away.

"Stop!" she said, "I will get you what you want, but I will myself put the money in the till for what they cost."

He stood there, looking at her for a moment, and then said— "Lurine, I think you are a little fool. They owe you ever so much more than that. However, I must have the things," and he gave her back the paper with the caution— "Be sure you let no one see that, and be very certain that you get the right things." He walked with her as far as the corner of the Rue de Lille. "You are not angry with me?" he asked her before they parted.

"I would do anything for you," she whispered, and then he kissed her good night.

She got the chemicals when the proprietor was out, and tied them up neatly, as was her habit, afterwards concealing them in the little basket in which she carried her lunch. The proprietor was a sharp-eyed old lynx, who looked well after his shop and his pretty little assistant.

"Who has been getting so much chlorate of potash?" he asked, taking down the jar, and looking sharply at her.

The girl trembled.

"It is all right," she said. "Here is the money in the till."

"Of course," he said. "I did not expect you to give it away for nothing. Who bought it?"

"An old man," replied the girl, trembling still, but the proprietor did not notice that— he was counting the money, and found it right.

"I was wondering what he wanted with so much of it. If he comes in again look sharply at him, and be able to describe him to me. It seems suspicious." Why it seemed suspicious Lurine did not know, but she passed an anxious time until she took the basket in her hand and went to meet her lover at the corner of the Rue des Pyramides. His first question was—

"Have you brought me the things?"

"Yes," she answered. "Will you take them here, now?"

"Not here, not here," he replied hurriedly, and then asked anxiously, "Did anyone see you take them?"

"No, but the proprietor knows of the large package, for he counted the money."

"What money?" asked Jean.

"Why, the money for the things. You didn't think I was going to steal them, did you?"

The young man laughed, and drew her into a quiet corner of the Gardens of the Tuileries.

"I will not have time to go with you to the Rue de Lille to-night," he said.

"But you will come as usual to-morrow night?" she asked, anxiously.

"Certainly, certainly." he replied, as he rapidly concealed the packages in his pockets.

The next night the girl waited patiently for her lover at the corner where they were in the habit of meeting, but he did not come. She stood under the glaring light of a lamp-post so that he would recognize her at once. Many people accosted her as she stood there, but she answered none, looking straight before her with clear honest eyes, and they passed on after a moment's hesitation. At last she saw a man running rapidly down the street, and as he passed a brilliantly-lighted window she recognized Jean. He came quickly towards her.

"Here I am," she cried, running forward. She caught him by the arm, saying, "Oh, Jean, what is the matter?"

He shook her rudely, and shouted at her— "Let me go, you fool!" But she clung to him, until he raised his fist and struck her squarely in the face. Lurine staggered against the wall, and Jean ran on. A stalwart man who had spoken to Lurine a few moments before, and, not understanding her silence, stood in a

doorway near watching her, sprang out when he saw the assault, and thrust his stick between the feet of the flying man, flinging him face forward on the pavement. The next instant he placed his foot upon Jean's neck holding him down as if he were a snake.

"You villain!" he cried. "Strike a woman, would you?"

Jean lay there as if stunned, and two *gens d'armes* came pantingly upon the scene.

"This scoundrel," said the man, "has just assaulted a woman. I saw him."

"He has done more than that," said one of the officers, grimly, as if, after all, the striking of a woman was but a trivial affair.

They secured the young man, and dragged him with them. The girl came up to them and said, falteringly—

"It is all a mistake, it was an accident. He didn't mean to do it."

"Oh, he didn't, and pray how do you know?" asked one of the officers.

"You little devil," said Jean to the girl, through his clinched teeth, "it's all your fault."

The officers hurried him off.

"I think," said one, "that we should have arrested the girl; you heard what she said."

"Yes," said the other, "but we have enough on our hands now, if the crowd find out who he is."

Lurine thought of following them, but she was so stunned by the words that her lover had said to her, rather than by the blow he had given her that she turned her steps sadly towards the Pont Royal and went to her room.

The next morning she did not go through the gardens, as usual, to her work, and when she entered the Pharmacie de Siam, the proprietor cried out, "Here she is, the vixen! Who would have thought it of her? You wretch, you stole my drugs to give to that villain!"

"I did not," said Lurine, stoutly. "I put the money in the till for them."

"Hear her! She confesses!" said the proprietor.

The two concealed officers stepped forward and arrested her where she stood as the accomplice of Jean Duret, who, the night before, had flung a bomb in the crowded Avenue de l'Opéra.

Even the prejudiced French judges soon saw that the girl was innocent of all evil intent, and was but the victim of the scoundrel who passed by the name of Jean Duret. He was sentenced for life; she was set free. He had tried to place the blame on her, like the craven he was, to shield another woman. This was what cut Lurine to the heart. She might have tried to find an excuse for his crime, but she realized that he had never cared for her, and had but used her as his tool to get possession of the chemicals he dared not buy.

In the drizzling rain she walked away from her prison, penniless, and broken in body and in spirit. She passed the little Pharmacie de Siam, not daring to enter. She walked in the rain along the Rue des Pyramides, and across the Rue de Rivoli, and into the Tuileries Gardens. She had forgotten about her stone woman, but, unconsciously her steps were directed to her. She looked up at her statue with amazement, at first not recognizing it. It was no longer the statue of a smiling woman. The head was thrown back, the eyes closed. The last mortal agony was on the face. It was a ghastly monument to Death. The girl was so perplexed by the change in her statue that for the moment she forgot the ruin of her own life. She saw that the smiling face was but a mask, held in place by the curving of the left arm over it. Life, she realized now, was made up of tragedy and comedy, and he who sees but the smiling face, sees but the half of life. The girl hurried on to the bridge, sobbing quietly to herself, and looked down at the grey river water. The passers-by paid no attention to her. Why, she wondered, had she ever thought the river cold and cruel and merciless? It is the only home of the homeless, the only lover that does not change. She turned back to the top of the flight of steps which lead down, to the water's brink. She looked toward the Tuileries Gardens, but she could not see her statue for the trees which intervened. "I, too, will be a woman of stone," she said, as she swiftly descended the steps.

**End**