PAST MASTERS 192

Otis Adelbert Kline
Jack London
William Le Queux
D. H. Lawrence
Nathaniel Hawthorne
Randolph Bedford
Henry Lawson
Owen Oliver
Warwick Deeping

and more

PAST MASTERS 192

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

25 Dec 2024

Contents

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1: Ben Serraq

Edmund S. Dixon

1809-1893

Charles Dickens' *Household Words*, (uncredited) 19 Jan 1856

THE FRENCH-ALGERIAN magistrate's *chaouch* or sheriff's-officer, Djilali by name, was recovering a little from the out-of-countenance condition into which he had been thrown by his failure in giving a miraculous turn to the embezzlement of a couple of sacks of wheat from the backs of a pair of donkeys: he straightened his back, stood stiff on his legs, and abruptly entered with ineffable zeal on the discharge of his functions as chief-constable and crier-of-the-court. He felt himself in one of those happy moments when, after having well deserved a good beating, he was ready to transfer the favour to the first person he met. He was an eight-day clock wound up again, when just at the point of running down and coming to a stop. As he opened and shut the police-room doors with the loudest bangings and clappings— shouting for the plaintiffs to appear, and hustling everybody who stood in his way as he swaggered about the antechamber— the assembly present, still impressed with the sack-and-donkey scene they had witnessed, whispered from mouth to mouth and from ear to ear that, in the memory of *mekrazeni*, so accomplished a *chaouch* had never been seen.

Suddenly, a confused noise was heard out of doors. As it approached, the sounds grew louder; and at last the ear could distinguish the most energetic oaths in the Arab language, and the music which proceeds from fisticuffs and kicks when applied to divers parts of the human body. Djilali's voice rose above the tumult, and his stick accompanied the melody of his voice. Finally, the door opened, and a group of men, singularly interlaced together, rolled into, rather than entered the room. When Djilali, by a succession of the most skilful movements, had succeeded in putting a little restraint and order into this tempestuous storm of arms and legs, the eye could manage to distinguish a group of five men, four of whom had quite enough to do to enforce on the fifth a little respect. The last-named worthy was of lofty stature and vigorously limbed. His garments torn to shreds, and his sorry face, attested participation in a recent struggle; but his hands, tied behind his back and fastened by a rope to his neck, were evidence that he had not been victorious. His companions held him fast with a degree of caution which showed that even in the state to which he was reduced, they were not quite sure he would not make his escape. Four ropes'-ends, which dangled from his wrists and his neck, were tightly grasped with exaggerated uneasiness and tenacity. Scarcely had the five new comers subsided into calmness, when an unanimous exclamation arose

from the midst of the audience, " 'Tis Ben Serraq! What has he been doing now?"

M. Richard, the presiding magistrate, inquired somewhat severely:

"What has the man done, that you should bring him bound in that cruel way?"

" 'Tis Ben Serraq!" was the answer he received from the quartette of voices.

"Ah, Ben Serraq! A professional robber belonging to the Sefhha, is he not?"

"The very same!" said the Coryphæus of the associated plaintiffs.

"Yes, sure enough; 'tis I, Ben Serraq," growled the prisoner, in a voice which reminded you of a wild beast roaring at night.

"But I was informed that he had amended his mode of life, and that lately he has been living at peace with his neighbours?"

"I have always lived at peace with my neighbours. I am a good Mussulman, fearing Allah and the law. I am calumniated."

"Hold your tongue," said the court, "and do not speak till you are spoken to."

"It is true," explained plaintiff number one, "that, for some time past, he has let us be quiet, and only committed distant robberies; but a few days since, he stole one of our bullocks."

"Sidi Bou Krari!" roared the savage. "How dare they slander a poor innocent creature like me in that way?"

"But is the fact clearly proved?" the president inquired. "How did it occur?"

"It is as plain as can be," stated plaintiff number two. "There is not the least doubt about the matter."

"That's what you get by serving the French!" muttered Ben Serraq, with the air of a Cato. "What ingratitude, gracious Allah, Lord of the universe!"

At this juncture, Djilali received orders to prevent the accused, by any means whatever, from making lengthy interruptions to the recital of the plaintiffs' wrongs. As to short exclamations that will break forth, the *chaouch* might allow them to burst from their safety-valve, seeing the material impossibility of confining them within the lips of a subject like the present defendant.

"Come, then," said the court, decidedly, "one of you explain the business."

"Don't mind what they say," Ben Serraq roared out. "They are liars. Besides, they have a spite against me."

"As I said just now," the complainant stated, "the case is plain. Our herds were grazing in the neighbourhood of Ben Serraq's tent. On driving them home in the evening we discovered that a bullock was missing. My brethren and myself immediately took the field, to discover some trace of the robbery, but

we could discover nothing. At last, after several days of fruitless search, it entered into our heads to have a look at Ben Serraq's tent. We had suspected him, in consequence of what had happened some months previously."

"Barbarians!" yelled the untamed innocent; "to violate the tent of an honest Mussulman!"

"But we had no need to enter it; which, moreover, we should not have done without the *kaïd*'s authorisation."

"Quite right," said the magistrate, approvingly.

"We met his wife, as she was coming from the water."

"What an abomination!" howled the biped brute; "to stop a woman on the road!"

"And who, for the promise of a trifling reward, told us the whole affair."

"A capital witness!— a she-beggar, who betrays me!"

"She explained that it was her husband who stole our bullock, in order to provide himself with a store of salt meat."

"Sidi Bou Krari! That a woman should lie like that!"

"She then showed us several goat-skins filled with the meat."

"As if a Mussulman were not allowed to keep salted meat in his tent!"

"And, to remove all doubt as to where the meat came from, she showed us the bullock's head lying in one corner of the tent, still in a state sufficiently preserved to enable us to recognise the animal."

"What a horrible she-vagabond! But her evidence is good for nothing; I had given her a beating not two days before."

"Our only thought then was to seize the wild-boar who is now before you. There was the difficulty; for this son of Satan is as strong as no one else, and can knock down a camel with a blow of his fist."

"What a joke! I am as mild as a sheep."

"Twenty of us met in company, and at dawn of day, informed by his wife— "

"What a pity I did not strangle her, as I meant to!"

"Informed by his wife that he was still asleep, we rushed down upon him; and, after a hard struggle, contrived to bind him in the way you see, as he lay on his mat."

"Sidi Abd-Allah! What treachery! To attack a good Mussulman as he lay asleep!"

"And a good thing it was that we did attack him in that way; for, although he was hardly awake, he managed, while he was wrestling with us, to break one of Oulid Sekrad's legs, and to put out one of Ali Oud Ama's eyes. He smashed in five or six of poor Bou Senan's teeth, and bit Otsman Oud Messassit's back savagely."

"Justice of the Master of the World! is it possible to lie in this way? On the contrary, I have been half killed by you. Don't you see my face is covered with blood?"

"Son of a dog! you well know the blood is from poor Oud Messassit's body."

"Sidi Abd-Allah!" exclaimed Ben Serraq. But it was of no use invoking the saints. Djilali called for a towel and a basin of water, and with them washed Ben Serraq's face. The experiment established the fact that that interesting individual had not received the slightest scratch, and that the bite on the unfortunate Oud Messassit's back must have been the only source of the stains.

"Well, Ben Serraq," said the president; "although I cannot entertain any reasonable doubt of your guilt, you are, nevertheless, at liberty to speak— let us hear what you have to say in justification."

"Ah! I am allowed to explain! Well; you will soon see! In the first place, my wife is a she-vagabond— everybody knows it— don't they, Djilali?"

But Djilali, who was particularly anxious to conceal all cognisance of the defendant's affairs, only replied,— "May your tent catch fire! Pray, what connection have I ever had with you, that I should know how your wife employs herself?"

"Very well; 'tis of no consequence. But the fact is notorious and incontestable— the she-dog betrays my honour."

"I will take your word for it," said the court; "and then—?"

"She has taken a fancy to Oud Raï, whose people's shepherds have treated me so shamefully. I have often said to her, 'Fatma, my darling, things cannot go on in this manner; your improper conduct sets everybody talking, and a modest and virtuous man, like myself, will soon be the laughing-stock of the whole country, and that on your account. Mind what you are about, else I shall be obliged to beat you; and you are aware, my beloved, that, when I do hit, I hit rather hard.'"

"But I do not see what reference your matrimonial tribulations can have to the business now before us."

"I beg your pardon— you will see directly. I admonished her, therefore, with the utmost gentleness, in accordance with my natural disposition. But it was a waste of time and breath. She persevered in her infamous conduct till I was obliged, as a gentleman, to administer to her and to Oud Raï one day, a considerable number of kicks and thumps."

"But, again I ask, what have these details to do with the theft of which you stand accused? Explain yourself, more clearly."

"What! cannot a man of your great genius see, now, how things have been managed?"

"I have an idea I can; but probably not in the same light as you do."

"What! don't you see that Oud Raï and my wretch of a wife, to be avenged of the beating I gave them, have subtracted the bullock in question without my knowledge, and have cut it up in my tent, in order to compromise me with the authorities? Sidi Bou Krari! it is as clear as the sun, that. Don't you see that I am a virtuous husband calumniated by a criminal wife?"

A subdued murmur, mingled with stifled laughter arose in the assembly at the victim air which Ben Serraq tried hard to assume, and also at listening to the singular pleading which he had improvised.

"Ben Serraq," said the magistrate, in a sceptical tone, "your case must be a very bad one, to compel you to employ such poor arguments for its defence. How could your wife play you such a trick as you describe without your knowledge, since your accusers found your tent filled with the animal's remains, the head particularly being so conspicuous and recognisable an object?"

"What is there extraordinary in that?" asked Ben Serraq, not in the slightest degree disconcerted. "My wife is so artful, and I am so simple and innocent, that she could easily contrive to conceal the matter."

"Come; these are wretched arguments. For a man like you, who has had so many transactions with the authorities, it is not a clever way of getting out of the scrape."

"I invoke Allah and his justice!" screamed Ben Serraq with the throat of a wild boar. "I am a poor persecuted innocent; there is nothing proved against me, absolutely nothing. The case at least is doubtful,— that is incontestable,— and in cases of doubt the law requires me to take an oath. Put me on my oath; I will swear on the *Koran*, on Sidi Bou Krari, on whatever book you please, I am as innocent as a suckling."

"No doubt. You will take a hundred oaths as readily as one. But, unfortunately for you, I have not forgotten your previous character, and must consider the charge as completely established."

"Allah! Lord of the Universe! Justice is not to be had in this country."

"Honest men will say the contrary, when they hear you are caught, and especially when they see you transported to France: whither I intend requesting you to be sent."

"That's the reward people get for serving the French!" swaggered Ben Serraq, as Coriolanus might have done when banished by ungrateful Rome.

"Not bad, by my faith! You doubtless consider you are rendering people a service by easing them of their purses."

"I have been of service to you in time of warfare, by marching constantly at the head of your columns."

"True; you have sometimes marched at the head of our columns as a guide; but most assuredly you insisted upon heavy wages, as far as I can recollect. Besides, that is no reason why you should be allowed, in recompense, to plunder the whole human race. You ought to have reformed, as you promised you would, and then we should have forgotten the past."

"I am slandered! I am a victim!"

"Retain that idea for your consolation, and hold your tongue. Djilali, take some of the men on guard and lead this fellow to prison."

"Sidi, Sidi!" pleaded Ben Serraq, "can you not deliver me from these bonds, which give me horrible pain?"

"Very well; I will. Djilali, unfasten the ropes, which, in fact, are a little too tight. It is impossible for him to make his escape now; only, take some of the cavalry with you, and keep a sharp eye on him on the way to prison."

"O, Sidi! such precautions are unnecessary. I am as gentle as a lamb." And Ben Serraq made his exit escorted by a numerous suite of *mekrazenis*, at the head of whom was Djilali, and who, feeling the greatness of his responsibility, marched as if he were carrying the world. But an Arab chief in alliance with the French, named Ben Safi, whispered to the president as soon as the prisoner had disappeared,

"Perhaps you were wrong to let his arms be untied."

"That is rather too good," the magistrate replied. "How, do you suppose, can he contrive to escape from the custody of ten soldiers, and in the midst of the town?"

"I have seen him escape," Ben Safi explained, "under circumstances that would make one believe there was something diabolical in his composition. One night, when he had the impudence to come and rob in my own *smala*, we contrived to seize him by killing the horse he had stolen from us, and under which it chanced that he was caught as it fell. I had his hands tied behind his back, and I ordered one of my men to kill him like a dog, from behind, with a pistol-shot. The shot was fired; but my gentleman, instead of dropping down dead, as he ought to have done, jumped up as lively as a grasshopper, and disappeared as if a flash of lightning had carried him off. The bullet had only cut the cords which bound him, and had been flattened on the palm of his hand. We were stupefied with astonishment."

"And well you might be!" said the official head of the Arab bureau, beginning to feel a little fidgety. "I now believe I should have acted more prudently if I had forbidden his being unpinioned till he was safely lodged in prison."

"I am sure you would;" interposed Ben Tekrouide, a second friendly chief. "I have always been told that this fellow is a perfect demon, in human shape. At the market of Kremis, he once robbed a man of his ass, without his being aware of the theft, although he was sitting on its back at the time."

"Indeed!" said the magistrate, in a fidget. "I should be very glad to know that he was definitely in custody under lock and key."

"He has the strength of twenty men," observed Ben Maoudj, a third philo-Gallic chieftain. "He once stole a camel laden with wheat from a caravan proceeding to the south; and, as the animal was unable to travel over the rocky road by which he wanted to pass, he took it on his back, wheat and all, and carried it in that way for half-a-night's march."

"That must be a slight exaggeration," remarked the president, now feeling horribly uncomfortable. "Nevertheless, I should like to be quite sure that he had reached the inside of the prison walls. They are very long about it; they ought to be back by this time."

"Do you wish that I should go and see?" asked Ben Safi, pitying his friend's uneasiness.

"I shall be much obliged to you."

At the moment when Ben Safi was leaving the court, a distant clamour was heard from without, followed by several successive gunshots. A sound of many footsteps was audible, as if a crowd of men were approaching. The doors were thrown open violently, and Djilali made his appearance. His clothes were torn and soiled with dirt, and his right eye seemed to have suffered severely.

"Ouf!" he puffed out, "my back is broken! May Sidi Abd-Allah burn me, if he is a man."

"Explain yourself. Tell me!" said the court, on thorns. "Ben Serraq—?"

"Ben Serraq, indeed? If ever you contrive to get him into prison, I will consent to be roasted alive."

"He has escaped, then?"

"How should it be otherwise: he is the devil in person?"

"Have the goodness to tell me how you could have been so stupid as to let a single man break away from ten of you."

"The thing was very simple, and he was not long about it. When we got to the prison, at the instant when they opened the door, he unceremoniously seized the sentinel's gun; he twisted it round like the sails of a windmill, and threw down three-fourths of our number flat on our backs. I immediately rushed upon him; together with the rest who were still on their legs, and you see"— here he exhibited his exterior, including his black and swollen eye— "what I got by it. After having nearly felled me by putting his doubled fist into my eye, he seized me by the skin, and threw me, like a bundle of old clothes,

on the top of my comrades. We were all left rolling pell-mell together; and, when I got up, I saw that demon already landed on the other side of the river. The guard came out and fired more than thirty musket-shots at him while he was climbing up the bank; but, bless me! they might just as well have dusted his back with pepper and salt. The bullets were flattened without hurting him."

"The thing is prodigious!"

"After he got to the other side of the river, no one knows what became of him. Some say that he burrowed into the ground, whilst others declare that he took flight with a couple of great black wings that suddenly grew out of his sides and unfolded wide. The soldiers belonging to the guard will have it that he laid hold of a horse that was grazing there, that he jumped on its back, and set off at full gallop."

2: The Vengeance That Miscarried

Edward Dyson

1865-1931

(as by Dy Edwardson)

Punch (Melbourne) 19 June 1913

WHEN SIMON LEES went to Sydney and started business as William Dickenson he was a sullen, discontented sort of man; but as Simon Lees he had been a person who habitually carried an expression suggestive of toothache and disappointed ambitions, so we may take it that more than a change of name is essential in bringing about a revolution of character and temperament.

The essential difference between William Dickenson and Simon Lees sprang from the fact that Simon's wife, an unreasonable creature, who had an unradical antipathy to soured characters, had run off with some person unknown, who might be reasonably supposed to have some trace of sweetness in his disposition. This dereliction of duty on the part of Mrs. Lees gave William Dickenson, alias Simon Lees, a substantial grievance. He was a forsaken, dishonoured man.

There was nothing but slender, circumstantial evidence to prove that Mrs. Lees had gone off with another man; but there was proof positive that she had gone off. The other man was taken for granted. Believing himself despised and scorned because of his wife's rash act, Simon Lees waited long enough to secure a divorce, then sold up his business in Battersea, London, England, and presently reappeared in Redfern, Sydney, New South Wales, at William Dickenson, in the hope of retrieving his good name and making much money.

In reality, what contempt Simon Lees had earned in Battersea was due to the inherent disqualifications of his character; but we always think much more of the trifling mischief others do us than of the big mischief we do ourselves. William Dickenson was not better liked in Redfern than Simon Lees had been in Battersea, simply because Dickenson, alias Lees, was not a likeable, genial gentleman.

Dickenson was a tallish, heavy man, big-tooted slow of gait, with a large, clean-shaven face that looked as if it had been modelled in stale dough by a caricaturist's hand. There were three distinct loose rings of flesh under his eyes, and a loose strip running from his chin to his Adam's apple. Nobody liked Dickenson, yet Dickenson's Redfern business prospered.

The devil's luck was behind him. He struck Redfern with just the shop it wanted, in the right place, at the right moment, and the first week's dealings showed a fat profit. After that progress was steady. But prosperity did not serve to cheer up William Dickenson. He had his settled sorrow. He nursed it. It was his sole consolation. His wife had dishonoured him. She was a vicious,

irreclaimable wretch. It would be a just and righteous thing to strike her down wherever he might meet her.

This grievance served as a sort of working excuse for Dickenson's native moroseness. If there were anything gloomy and evil in him now it sprang from the infidelity and despicable infamy of the recent Mrs. Lees.

When Dickenson had been about two months in business in Sydney, it became necessary for him to engage an assistant. Times were not too good in Sydney at that date, and about thirty men of all ages responded to William's advertisement.

The proprietor of the Dickenson Emporium was slow as usual and deliberate as ever in making his choice; and, strange to say, although there were several distinctly melancholy types among the applicants, Dickenson eventually selected Arthur Sherwood, a young man of thirty, brown-haired, brown-eyed, bright from top to toe, and distinctly good-looking on a strong, brown, square-headed, square-jawed "

"One thing I have to stipulate," said Dickenson to his new hand. "No women. You understand me? I detest women, and the fewer there are about this place the better. You are a married man?"

"Yes," said Sherwood, feeling that this was the finish.

"So much the better," replied Dickenson sourly. "It means you will have none tagging round the place after you. Don't mistake me, I'll have no women about, either wives or sweethearts. I must necessarily have close dealings with you; but that involves no acquaintance with your womenfolk. Keep them away."

"Oh, very well. It is not likely in any circumstances that my wife would interfere. "Then that's satisfactory. You can come in to-morrow."

DICKENSON'S choice of an assistant proved to be a wise one. Sherwood brought to the business the one thing it lacked, a pleasant personality, and again there was a jump in William Dickenson's taxable income. It was scarcely believable among Dickenson's regular customer's; but young Arthur Sherwood got along remarkably well with the gloomy proprietor. This was largely due to Sherwood's adaptability. This native cheerfulness was proof against all Dickenson's distressing humours.

"He is a man with a bug," Arthur confided to his wife. "The sort of gloomy character that retires within itself as into a 'dark cellar, simply because it dislikes sunshine. He's sullen, but let him be. That doesn't hurt. It provides a sort of foil to my own happiness."

Then Sherwood gathered his quiet little wife into his arms, and kissed her, and Sherwood's quiet little wife merely pressed her cheek to his heart and said "Arthur" in a soft voice like an infinite caress.

In six months' time Arthur Sherwood was indispensable to the business. He had taken hold of it with both hands. Two suggestions of his for developing the trade had been acted upon with splendid results, and it was already necessary to extend the premises.

"I hear the man in the fruit shop next but one on the left is dissatisfied with his business," said Sherwood. "It would be a wise move on your part to secure the place, Mr. Dickinson."

"For what?" replied Dickenson. "We can't work the business in detached shops."

"No. But it would be a good move to take that place. The business next door on the left is a good one. We couldn't get them out without paying a big price; but if we had the shop next them to offer as a further inducement a hundred or two might shift them one door higher up."

The notion was sound. Dickenson had sense enough to see a good thing when it was put to him. He acted on Sherwood's advice, and so secured the lease of the adjoining shop at a minimum price, and Dickenson's emporium began to spread itself.

When twelve months had gone, Sherwood was practically manager of Dickenson's, and had five hands under him. He was the active agent, the visible head. The gov'ner had a dismal sort of office in keeping with his dismal disposition, where he brooded all day.

One day the proprietor called Sherwood into his office. Pointing to the seat at the other side of his table, he said: "Sit down."

Sherwood sat down.

"Anything amiss?" he asked.

"There's always something amiss with me. I'm an embittered man— a man whose life has been ruined by the perfidy of another."

This was the first time Dickenson had mentioned intimate personal matters to Arthur, and the young man looked towards the door and shifted uneasily, fearing maudlin confidences.

"Perhaps if you tried to stiffen up a bit, sir, and get out into the sun," he ventured.

"There's nothing will brighten me up, Sherwood, but revenge. But that is not what I want to say to you. I have to acknowledge that you have been a good man for the business."

"I have done my best."

"I admit it. I've tried you a hundred ways, and you've proved yourself a man in whom confidence may be reposed. I am going to make you manager, Sherwood."

"Thank you, sir." "You shall have six hundred a year from the beginning of July."

Sherwood jumped to his feet, and staved at Dickenson in amazement.

"Six hundred a year?" he said. His present pay was four pounds fifteen a week.

"You are worth it, Sherwood."

Sherwood knew he was worth it. He had long recognised that he was worth a great deal more to the emporium, but realisations of one's worth and realising the cash are two distinct and widely different things.

Dickenson went on dully, "I do not stop at that, Sherwood. You are to be a partner, with a fifth interest."

Sherwood fell back into his chair. Dickenson was mad. There was no doubt on that point— he had gone stark mad. Hitherto, he had shown himself close-fisted and suspicious. This sudden burst of confidence and liberality could only be the outcome of a painful intellectual collapse.

"I— I don't know how to thank you," Arthur stammered.

"I don't want thanks. I want continued efficient service, continued faithfulness."

"You can rely upon that, sir."

"I have assured myself of it."

"HE MUST have heard that Whiting and Job were after me," Arthur explained to his wife. "Anyhow, he's done the thing handsomely, and now we're all right, dear."

When the papers were signed, and Arthur Sherwood entered into his junior partnership, there was a second intimate interview with the gov'ner.

"I've done this, Sherwood," said Dickenson "because I want to leave the business in good hands, under the best conditions. I'm taking a holiday—"

"And you couldn't do better," Arthur responded. "Get out into the sunshine. Seek cheerful surroundings."

Dickenson stood up. "I am not seeking cheerfulness," he said. "I am going to seek my wife."

"But you told me she was infamous. I understood you detested her."

"That's true. That's why. Somewhere that woman is living in ease, perhaps in happiness. That consideration blackens my life. When I think what she did to me; when I realise that she made me a mock and a byword, the thought of her living happily in her iniquity almost chokes me. I am going to seek her, to find

her out, and tear her down. At least I can expose her to her world, whatever it is, as a black adultress."

Dickinson's pale, dough-like face had become almost purple with passion, his bloodshot eyes gleamed in his head. There was a strong suggestion of mania in this weird mission.

Arthur stammered a few words of dissuasion, but Dickenson waved them aside.

"I will confide in you fully," said the boss. "My wife ran away from me. She was young and beautiful. I thought her good. She went off with some other man of whom I know nothing. My belief is that they fled to Australia. I have never forgotten or forgiven. My hope has always been to track them down. I am always seeking. Sydney has disclosed nothing, but I shall search more thoroughly. Then I shall go to Melbourne, and seek there. Then on to Adelaide. Then to the West. Meanwhile, I want your help. Keep your eyes open for this woman. Never forget what you owe me. Hunt for her— hunt— hunt!"

The two men were on their feet, Dickenson almost bloated with passion, Sherwood filled with amazement.

"I seek her," he said—I? But I do not know her."

"You will Here is her photograph. That is the vile creature."

He thrust the portrait into Sherwood's hands, and for a minute the young man stood transfixed, staring at the fair face of the picture.

"Was this your wife?" Sherwood's voice was only a thin whisper.

"Yes. My true name is Simon Lees. She was my wife. You will seek her. Never forget her."

Sherwood went from that interview, trembling in every limb. In his own office he mechanically doffed his working jacket, and putting on his coat and hat turned to the door. There he lingered in thought for five minutes, and then, returning, hung up his hat, and sitting at the table went quietly on with his work.

William Dickenson went out on his strange pilgrimage.

He spent a whole month hunting about the streets of Sydney, only looking in at the emporium now and again. Then Arthur heard from him in Melbourne. Occasionally he wrote a letter in a black spirit of disappointment at the failure of his mission. Nowhere could he find a trace of the former Mrs. Lees.

"He has gone on to Adelaide," Arthur told his wife one evening. "From there he intends to go to Perth and the big mining towns in Western Australia. After that it should not be difficult to keep him seeking. He is a handicap on the business. He, might be sent to New Zealand or even America with some imaginary clue. Anything to keep him away—"

Mrs. Sherwood seemed deeply concerned, but she offered no reply.

Dickenson spent a year seeking in Western Australia and Queensland, and after that sailed for California. His search did not prosper, and one night he was shot by a drunken criminal in a low quarter of San Francisco. The murderer claimed that Dickenson had insulted his companion, a woman of indifferent character and picturesque antecedents.

Dickenson had left a will in the hands of a firm of lawyers in Sydney. What money he had he bequeathed to charities, with the one strict condition, that no woman was to benefit by it, directly or indirectly. His share in the emporium Dickenson bequeathed to his partner, Arthur Sherwood, whose fidelity he had never doubted, and whose ability and industry had gone so far towards building up the film of Dickenson and Co.

In his own home Arthur Sherwood drew his wife to his side, and held her fast.

"Now you may know all, my darling," he said. "Dickenson's true name was Lees— Simon Lees. This is the photograph of the woman he was seeking. Now you know why I was so careful of you."

Mrs. Sherwood took the picture. The face that smiled at her from the cardboard was her own.

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3: The Radio Ghost

Otis Adelbert Kline

1891-1946

Amazing Stories Sep 1927

DR. DORP looked up in annoyance when Mrs. Bream came into the room. As was my weekly custom, I had dropped into his study for a short Saturday afternoon's visit, and the talk had turned to our mutual hobby, psychic phenomena. The learned doctor's look of vexation had followed the unobtrusive entrance of his housekeeper during a somewhat heated discussion of that physically elusive but psychologically evident substance which has come to be known as ectoplasm.

"What is it, Mrs. Bream?" he asked, petulantly.

"Sorry to interrupt you, sir, but there's a young lady to see you."

"What is she selling?"

"I believe she wants to consult you professionally, sir."

"Like the book agent who called Wednesday, I suppose. Wanted my opinion of the twelve volumes he was peddling. Well, show her in. We'll soon see."

I rose to leave the room, but the doctor raised his hand.

"Keep your seat, Evans," he said. "I don't expect this interview to be either important or protracted."

I resumed my seat, but rose again immediately as a neatly dressed girl entered the room. She was small, golden-haired, and quite pretty. For a moment she glanced at both of us, standing beside our chairs— then evidently decided in favor of the doctor's grizzled Van Dyke.

"I am Greta Van Loan, doctor," she said, addressing him as if sure she had spoken to the right man.

"You recognize me, then?" he asked, drawing a chair forward for her.

She sat down lightly, and with exquisite grace.

"To be sure. I have seen your picture in the papers ever so many times, usually in connection with your investigations of spiritistic phenomena."

The doctor did not appear to feel flattered. In fact, his look was rather one of boredom, as if he expected something unpleasant to grow out of this subtle blandishment. His voice, however, was quite pleasant as he replied.

"Indeed. Will you tell me how I may be of service to you?"

She looked at me, and I developed a most unnecessary feeling. I rose once more, this time firmly resolved to take my leave, but again the doctor detained me.

"Miss Van Loan," he said, "allow me to present Mr. Evans, my friend and colleague. Like me, he is an investigator of the supernormal in psychic phenomena."

Her acknowledgment of the introduction was accompanied by a charming smile that immediately put me at my ease.

"I have heard of your work in connection with that of Dr. Dorp," she said. "How fortunate that I find you two together— especially as my reason for coming to see the doctor has a direct bearing on the very subject that seems to be of interest to both of you. Won't you stay?"

I relapsed once more into my chair.

The doctor, I observed, had pricked up his ears like a hound on a hot trail. He leaned forward in his chair and pressed the tips of his fingers together— an attitude he always assumed when absorbed in a problem that was of intense interest to him.

"Miss Van Loan," he began, "you are not by any chance a relative of my old friend and fellow worker, Gordon Van Loan?"

"I am his niece."

"Indeed. I begin to understand your interest in spiritistic phenomena. Dense of me not to have thought of it before."

"But, doctor, I am not interested in spiritistic phenomena."

"Eh? Not interested? I'm afraid I don't—"

"I have always feared and detested the very thought of meeting or communicating with the disembodied spirits."

"Really, Miss Van Loan, you surprise me," said the doctor. "Your uncle, up to the very time of his death, was an ardent supporter of the spiritistic hypothesis. I have had many a private debate with him on the subject."

"I am aware of that. I, too, have argued the subject with him when it was forced on me. Until three days ago I was as firm an unbeliever as you. But now— I don't know what to think. It seems that my uncle, even in death, has resolved to force his belief upon me."

"You mean that he has appeared to you?"

"I'm not sure, but strange things— terrible, enervating things— have happened since I began to carry out the provisions of my uncle's will."

"He left his entire fortune to you, did he not?"

"Yes, but with a provision which I am afraid I won't be able to carry out. He stipulated that I must live in his old home in Highland Park continuously for one year, and that if I should fail to do so everything would revert to my cousin, Ernest Hegel, or in the event of his failure to carry out the provision, to the Society for Psychical Research."

"Your uncle was reputed to be quite wealthy."

"He left something over half a million, most of which was in first mortgage real estate bonds, in addition to the home and estate, which is estimated to be worth at least a hundred thousand."

"Quite a sizeable bequest, and, it seems to me, an ample recompense for the condition imposed with it."

"So I thought too, until I spent a night in that awful house. It was then that I began to realize the full import of his explanation of the reasons for his unusual provision."

"Just what was his explanation?"

"I can give you his exact words. In the last three days they have burned themselves into my very soul. He said: '—for when I return to prove the reality of life after death it is not unreasonable to ask the person who benefits so materially by this will to be on hand to greet me, and to receive and transmit my message of hope and good cheer to the misguided scoffers, who, by their very attitude, prevent their departed loved ones from communicating with them.'"

"Hem. And have you received the message, or something purporting to be the message?"

"Not exactly, but there have been indications of a strange and terrible presence in that house— an elusive, disembodied entity that, while not a creature of flesh and blood, exercises an uncanny power over material objects as well as living creatures."

"I see. And the manifestations?"

"Ghostly raps, shuffling footsteps in rooms that are untenanted, overturned furniture and broken china, strange sickening odors suggestive of the dank mustiness of the tomb, lights darkened and suddenly lighted again with no evidence of switches or of fuses having been tampered with, the touch of cold hands in the dark, doors opening and closing in the dead of night, the icy breath—"

"The icy breath? What is that?"

"It is the most convincing evidence of my uncle's presence in the house. Although the last three days and nights have been exceptionally warm, even for August, I have felt it, and the servants have felt it— a moving current of air with a dank, charnel odor, as cold as a wind from the ice-bound Arctic circle. As you are no doubt aware, my uncle was an ardent admirer of the famous Italian medium, Eusapia Palladino. One of the most baffling manifestations which she is said to have produced time and again in the presence of investigating scientists, was the icy breath— a cold breeze that appeared to come from her forehead when she was in a trance. Many scoffed, but none could explain this

remarkable phenomenon. My uncle often referred to it in his lectures. He has written several papers regarding it for spiritistic publications."

"And living creatures, you say, have been affected?"

"Yes, Sandy, my Airedale terrier, has not been himself since he entered the house. He has bristled and growled repeatedly, for no apparent reason. Although he has always been a most friendly and playful pet, he now slinks about the house like some vicious creature of the jungle, or mopes in corners, avoiding all human companionship and barely tasting food and water. This morning he snapped at my hand when I attempted to pat his head— something he has never done before. The servants, too, have seen, heard, and felt the things that have affected me, but being spiritualists, they glory in them rather than fear them. Man and wife they have worked for my uncle for the past ten years, the man acting as gardener, chauffeur and butler, the woman as cook and housekeeper."

"And your cousin, Ernest Hegel. Is he, too, stopping with you at present?"

"No. Cousin Ernest sailed for Germany last Saturday. He is American representative for a Berlin dye and chemical manufacturer, and was sent for by his concern."

"Then he is a German citizen?"

"His father was German, but he was born in America, hence he is an American citizen. His mother, like my father and Uncle Gordon, was American, of Holland Dutch descent. Part of his education was received at Heidelberg, and he took a postgraduate course in chemistry and bacteriology in Vienna. When the war broke out, his sympathy for the land of his father was what turned my uncle against him."

"And consequently made you the preferred heir?"

"I think that has something to do with it, although I disagreed as thoroughly with Uncle Gordon in his pet hobby, spiritism, as Ernest did on questions of our international relations."

"Do any of the manifestations you speak of occur in the daytime?"

"None, except the queer behavior of my dog."

"Hem. You have stated a very interesting case, Miss Van Loan. I, for one, will be very glad to investigate the phenomena which have been troubling you."

"And I will be glad to go, too, if you want me," I said.

The young lady seemed pleased.

"I hope that I may have the help of both of you— and soon," she said earnestly.

The doctor turned to me.

"How about going this evening?" he asked.

"Suits me."

"Good. We can drive out easily in an hour. You may expect us about dusk, Miss Loan."

"You know the address?"

"I have visited your uncle several times, and he has also been my guest here."

"To be sure. I have heard Uncle Gordon speak of you. Goodby, until dusk— and thank you, much..."

Our drive, that evening, through the red-gold light of the waning afternoon, was both pleasant and uneventful. After a sultry day in the loop, it was refreshing to ride through the cool, tree-shaded north shore suburbs. Dr. Dorp, as was his wont when on the trail of a new mystery, was in the best of spirits— laughing and chatting gaily.

We arrived in Highland Park just at dusk, and presently turned into a narrow driveway which circled through a heavily wooded estate. At first no house was visible, but presently, as we wound through the darkest and gloomiest copse we had yet encountered, it came unexpectedly into view— an ancient brick homestead of the Dutch Colonial type, with gables that drooped despondently, and chimneys surmounted by double tiles that stood out against the background of gray sky like headless torsos with arms upraised to heaven.

As we drew up before the entrance, the noise of the doctor's motor ceased, and from just beyond the background of trees, there came a throbbing, pulsating murmur which had not previously been audible to us, announcing the proximity of Lake Michigan.

Scarcely had we set foot on the porch, when the door opened silently and a gray haired, white jacketed man with burning gray eyes that looked out from hollow recesses in a pale, wrinkled, and cadaverous countenance, stood aside, hand on latch, for us to enter. So loathsome in appearance was this deathlike creature that I had a feeling of repugnance even at the thought of permitting him to take my hat in his bony, claw-like hands.

After disposing of our hats, he conducted us to a commodious living room, tastily furnished, where we were greeted by our charming hostess. Then he silently withdrew, closing the door after him.

Although she maintained a brave, calm demeanor, I noticed that the hand of Miss Van Loan was trembling as I took it in mine. The doctor, also, must have noticed this, for he quickly transferred his long, slim fingers to her pulse.

"Has anything happened?" he asked consulting his watch.

"Nothing yet, but I have been oppressed by a horrible feeling which I cannot explain. I have worried, too, for fear something might prevent your coming."

"You are a very brave young woman," he said, pocketing his watch and releasing her wrist, "but you have been under exceptionally severe nervous strain. Just now you are beginning to feel the reaction. Your heart, however, is good, and I believe another night of it can do you no permanent injury. Were this not the case, I should advise you to immediately leave this house, despite the tremendous financial stake involved."

"But, doctor, do you think the— the presence, can be driven out in one night?"

"That is my hope. I have a theory—"

His speech was suddenly interrupted by a noisy rattling of the doorknob—the very door which the servant had silently closed a few minutes before.

"It is coming!" said the girl breathlessly, a note of terror in her voice.

The three of us watched the door silently— intently. It opened, revealing the dimly lighted hallway, in which no living creature was visible. For a moment it remained open as if someone were standing there with a hand on the knob. Then it closed with a bang.

I felt a prickly sensation in my scalp, then started from my tracks at the sound of a throaty rumble behind me.

"That is Sandy, my Airedale," explained the girl, "hiding in the corner behind the davenport. He always growls when it comes."

"I believe he scared me worse than *it*," I said with a nervous laugh, sinking back on the davenport, relieved by the realization that the noise, at least, had been earthly.

"It is now in the room," said the girl. "Don't you feel a strange presence?"

"Not yet," said the doctor gravely.

We waited breathlessly for the next manifestation. For several minutes the only sounds I could hear were those which drifted through the two open windows, one on each side of the fireplace— the clatter of frogs, the piping of nocturnal insects, the incessant muffled roar of the surf on the beach, and the occasional call of a night bird. Then a heavy poker, which had been leaning against the fireplace, clattered to the tiles, slid across them, and progressed with a queer jerky motion across the rug to the center of the room. It remained there for a moment, then twirled around and came straight toward me, still with the same jerky motion. When it seemed about to strike my feet I drew them up, half-expecting the thing to leap at me.

Despite this singular and, to me, inexplicable phenomenon, Dr. Dorp maintained, unruffled, his look of complete absorption. The girl, however, was manifestly alarmed.

"Be careful, Mr. Evans," she said tensely. "I'm afraid it may hurt you."

Somehow I did not want to appear cowardly in the eyes of this girl. The heavy poker which had performed such amazing antics now lay quiescent, and apparently quite harmless, at my feet.

Simulating a calmness which I was far from feeling, I bent over and picked the thing up. I was examining it minutely, half-expecting to find some mechanical attachment which would prove the whole thing a hoax, when it was suddenly and forcibly jerked from my grasp. It thumped to the floor, then spun half around and traveled jerkily back to the fireplace.

"What made you drop it?" asked the doctor. "Wasn't hot, was it?"

When I told him that it had been jerked from my hands, he seemed surprised.

"Are you sure you didn't just drop it from— ah— nervousness?"

"Positive."

"Hem. Strange."

We sat for several minutes without incident. Then I noticed that the lights were growing dim. I concentrated my gaze on the filaments of the reading lamp beside me. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, they were losing their incandescence.

Presently the room was in darkness, save for the dim twilight which came through the two windows. I could barely discern the figures of my two companions, blending with the shadowy outlines of the chairs in which they sat. A strange, musty odor assailed my nostrils. I felt a cold touch on the back of my hand, and automatically jerked it away. Then a breeze, icy cold, chilled me to the marrow. The dog growled ominously.

A light thud, as if some object had fallen, attracted my attention to the center of the room. Scarcely crediting the evidence of my senses, I saw a pale, luminous figure rising from the floor. The thing was irregular in outline, and swayed this way and that as if wafted by eddying air currents. Taller and taller it grew, until, when it had reached a height of nearly six feet, it bore some resemblance to a human figure shrouded in a white, filmy material.

Although my flesh crept and chills chased each other up and down my spine, I remembered that I was here to investigate this thing, and rising, forced myself to walk stealthily toward the center of the room. As I approached the grim wraith it grew taller, towering menacingly above me, and a queer, sickening odor became momentarily stronger— an odor which might have been produced by a combination of the fumes of brimstone with the offensive effluvium of putrefying flesh.

By the time I was within two feet of the thing I was nearly strangled by its horrible stench, but I had made up my mind to test its solidity at last, and stretched out my hand to touch it. The hand encountered no resistance.

Moving it horizontally, I passed my hand clear through it from side to side. By this time my eyes were watering so badly from the effect of the acrid fumes that I was scarcely able to see. Then the lights flashed on, completely blinding me for a moment with their brilliance. A moment later I was able to see clearly.

A cry from Dr. Dorp aroused me.

"Quick, Evans," he said, "the girl has fainted. We must get her into the open air."

He was endeavoring to lift her himself, but found her weight too much for him. Being his junior by some thirty-five years and of a rather more substantial build, I found her slight form no burden whatever.

"Open the doors, doctor," I said. "I'll do the rest."

I had lifted the girl from the chair, and was turning toward the door, the doctor meanwhile advancing to open it. Before he could do so, however, the latch rattled, and the door swung open by itself. Quick as a flash, the doctor sprang out into the hall, peering this way and that.

"Nobody here," he said. "Come on."

I followed him down the hallway, this time close at his heels, with the girl still lying limply in my arms. He extended his hand, about to open the door which led to the front porch, when the knob turned, and this second door was opened as if by some invisible presence. Once more the doctor sprang forward, only to find the porch untenanted.

I laid the still unconscious girl in the porch swing, at the behest of the doctor, who informed me that she would regain consciousness more quickly in a reclining position.

"Now fan her with this magazine, Evans," he instructed, handing me a copy of "*Science and Invention*" which he had taken from the porch table. He felt her pulse for a moment. "She'll be all right in a few minutes. I'm going back to that room and have a look around. Keep fanning until she is fully revived."

Interested as I was in the phenomena which were taking place, I was glad of this brief respite and a chance to inhale some fresh air. The girl, unconscious, was free from the sway of fear for the time being, and I knew from the reassuring manner of the doctor that she was in no danger. While I continued to ply the improvised fan I could hear the doctor, or someone, moving about the house.

Presently the girl's eyelids fluttered, and she began talking— her words disconnected and broken like those of one in a dream.

"Saw it— saw— spirit— Uncle Gordon. Must be— be his— ghost. Saw— put arm— through it."

Lightly I placed my hand on the smooth, cool forehead. Then she opened her eyes and looked earnestly into mine.

"What— what was I saying?" she asked, apparently quite bewildered.

"You fainted," I replied. "Don't worry. Everything is all right."

"But where is Dr. Dorp?"

"Just went in the house to look around. He'll be out in a few minutes, no doubt."

We waited a full twenty minutes, but still the doctor did not appear. Miss Van Loan had taken one of the wicker porch chairs, assuring me that she had fully recovered. I was sitting in another. All sounds in the house had ceased, and I began to feel some apprehension for the doctor's safety.

"Do you mind staying alone for a few minutes?" I asked. "I should like to go and see if my friend is all right."

"I'll go with you," she replied, rising.

"Are you sure you are strong enough?"

"Of course. Oh, I do hope nothing happened to him. I should never forgive myself."

We met the pale houseman in the hall.

"Where is the doctor, Riggs?" she asked.

"I don't know, ma'am. I heard someone goin' up the stairs a while ago. Might have been him."

"You haven't seen him?"

"No ma'am. I come in just now to ask if you would be a-needin' of me any more this evenin'. I feel sort of tired like, after—"

"I know, Riggs. You haven't had much rest for the last three nights. You may go."

"Thank you, ma'am."

We ascended the stairs, the steps of which creaked weirdly under our weight. I could readily understand why Riggs had been able to hear them from the service quarters.

At the top was a long hallway with a door at one end, a window at the other, and two doors on either side.

Miss Van Loan opened the first door at our right, and we entered a bedroom daintily furnished in cane and ivory, with light blue hangings and spreads.

"This is my room," she informed me. "We have four bedrooms, each with a private bath and clothes closet."

I looked into the bath and clothes closet, but both were untenanted. Then we passed to the next room. This was furnished in burled walnut, with light green the prevailing color. No sign of the doctor here. The next room, which was just across the hall, was furnished in massive oak, with a taupe and maroon color scheme. Somehow it seemed thoroughly a man's room.

"This belonged to Uncle Gordon," said the girl. "It was in that bed that he died."

I looked at the bed and somehow the gray and maroon of the bolster and spread reminded me of blood trickling over a sacrificial slab of granite. With this thought came an inexplicable feeling of horror which I could not shake off.

"It is back!" said the girl, suddenly, a note of terror in her voice.

She must have had the same feeling as I, at the same time, although nothing startling had happened— at least nothing that either of us could perceive with the aid of our five senses. The bathroom was empty, and I had started for the door of the closet, when the lights suddenly went out. Once more I was conscious of the peculiar, dusty odor I had detected in the room below. The girl shrieked. Then as if in answer to her cry, I heard a hollow groan and five distinct raps, apparently coming from the direction of the bed.

The door of the closet which I had not searched was not more than a foot from the head of the bed. I could still see it, though indistinctly, by the dim, gray light which came in through the window. Although I am not superstitious, a nameless dread assailed me at the thought of approaching nearer to that bed in which the former owner of the house had breathed his last. I hesitated, berating myself for a coward and weakling— then forced myself toward the door.

As I did so, I heard more raps, not quite so pronounced as formerly, then another moan, and sounds like those of a person gasping for breath. On reaching the door, I turned the knob, but found it locked. Then my fingers touched a key just below it. I turned this with difficulty. It seemed that either the lock was stuck, or something was resisting my efforts. Releasing the key, I once more attempted to open the door. Before I could turn the knob, however, the door again locked itself. From somewhere nearby, I heard a sound which plainly resembled the death rattle!

Once more I succeeded in unlocking the door, although the key was bent in the process. Then, holding the key with my left hand, I turned the knob with my right, and applied my shoulder to the door. Someone, or some thing, was pushing against it on the other side. At first I only succeeded in moving it a fraction of an inch. Gathering my strength for a supreme effort, I forced it wide open. As I did so, a rush of icy cold air enveloped me from head to foot. Hot and perspiring from my exertions as I was, it chilled me to the marrow. My teeth chattered, and I shivered as if I had suddenly been immersed in ice-water.

Within the closet, all was black, as no light reached it from the window. Holding one foot against the door, which was still resisting my efforts, I lighted a match. It went out almost as soon as I struck it, but I had seen enough.

Beneath a mound of clothing, evidently snatched from the hooks on the wall, lay a human figure.

Stooping, I succeeded in grasping a foot and ankle. Then I dragged the body with its accompanying mound of clothing, from the closet. By this time my fingers were so numbed with cold that I could scarcely use them. I took my foot from the door, and it closed with a vicious bang.

Miss Van Loan had apparently recovered, in some measure, from her fit of terror, for she came up beside me.

"What is it? What did you find in the closet?" she whispered, peering at the shapeless thing which lay there in the dim, gray light.

Without taking time to reply, I hastily removed the pile of miscellaneous clothing from the body. Then my hand touched a cold forehead— a hairy face.

"Open the door, quickly!" I ordered. "My God, I'm afraid we have come too late."

She promptly did as she was bidden, while I gathered the cold, still form of Dr. Dorp in my arms. Then I staggered out of the room, across the hall, down the creaking stairway, and out upon the porch, the girl following. As I laid the doctor in the swing where I had deposited the mistress of the house less than an hour before, the lights flashed on once more.

"Rouse the servants," I said. "Telephone for a doctor. Then bring hot water, towels, blankets, hot-water bottles— and some brandy."

While she was gone, I alternately slapped, kneaded and rubbed the cold flesh of my friend. She returned in a few minutes that seemed like hours, with two hot water bottles and an armful of towels. Behind her toddled a stout, round-faced woman in a red kimono, with a steaming kettle of water in one hand and a bottle and glass in the other.

We applied the various articles with better will than skill, and a moment later Riggs appeared in bathrobe and slippers carrying four thick woolen blankets. Another ten minutes elapsed before we succeeded in even warming the flesh of our patient.

"We haven't any brandy, so I brought a bottle of Uncle Gordon's whiskey," said the girl. "Do you think we had better give him some?"

"Not yet," I replied. "It might strangle him if he has enough life left in him to strangle."

The rumble of a motor sounded in the driveway, and two bright headlights flashed on the porch. A coupe pulled up with shrieking brakes and a young man, carrying a small satchel, got out and dashed up the steps.

"This way, Dr. Graves," called the girl, beckoning him to the swing where my friend lay.

"Why, it's Dr. Dorp!" said the young physician, taking the pulse of my friend. "What happened to him?"

"Asphyxiation," I replied, "and exposure to extreme cold."

Dr. Graves took a stethoscope from his case and used it for a few moments.

"The doctor has sustained quite a severe shock," he said, "but he is doing nicely now. There is nothing I can give him or do for him at this stage which will help matters. Fresh air and warmth are our best allies now."

My friend regained consciousness five minutes later. He immediately recognized Dr. Graves, who had attended a number of his lectures before members of the medical fraternity, and had entered into discussions with him.

While the two were talking, the housekeeper went in for some hot water, lemon and sugar for a toddy. She had only been absent for a few minutes when we were all alarmed by the sound of barking and snarling within the house, punctuated by piercing screams.

Dr. Graves was the first to reach the door, where he paused. I attempted to force my way past him, but he stayed me with his arm.

"Get back, woman!" he shouted to someone within. "Get back and close the door. The creature is mad."

At the far end of the hall, I saw the stout wife of the house man apparently rooted to the floor by horror. Just in front of her, the Airedale, growling and snarling savagely, was rapidly demolishing the upholstering of a beautiful antique settee. The hairy jaws of the creature were flecked with white foam, and the eyes were bloodshot and unnaturally luminescent from extreme dilation of the pupils.

Seeing the peril in which the poor woman was placed, I caught up one of the porch chairs and rushed past the doctor. The dog took no notice of me until I swung at it with the chair. Then it dodged with surprising dexterity and leaped for my throat, just as two of the chair legs were shattered against the floor. I managed to elude it by quickly crouching behind the chair back, so that it passed clear over my head.

It was up again in an instant, however, and I had all I could do to protect myself from its leaps by fencing with the remains of the chair. Almost before I was aware of it, the beast had backed me into the living room. Then, to my horror, the door closed, and the lights winked out.

I shall never forget the battle I fought in that dark room. That which had been a shaggy creature of flesh and bone in the light, had become a pair of burning orbs, set in a shadowy form, that leaped, snapped, and snarled in a manner which was twice as terrifying as its former attacks had been when each move was completely visible. Now I was guided only by the movements

of the luminous eyes, whereas I had previously been able to forecast each hostile move or leap by the crouch or muscular tension which preceded it.

Using the chair as a shield, I eventually managed to circle back to the door. With one hand I attempted to turn the knob, while I manipulated the chair with the other. The door was locked. I immediately felt below for the key, recalling that it had been there earlier in the evening. It was gone!

My canine adversary made a determined leap that forced me to one side. Then some one pounded on the door, and I heard the voice of Dr. Graves.

"Unlock the door, Mr. Evans. I have a gun and electric torch."

"There is no key on this side," I replied. Then I caught a glimpse of a light flashing through the keyhole and wondered what had become of the key.

"It must have fallen to the floor on that side," said the young doctor. "I cannot find it in the hall."

I again succeeded in maneuvering to a position in front of the door. Then I tramped about in front of it until my shoe struck a hard object. Stooping, I picked it up, and rejoiced to find that the doctor had been right. Again using one hand to manipulate the chair, I inserted the key in the lock and managed to turn it, though with considerable difficulty.

"Turn the knob," I shouted, "and push."

The knob turned, and the door opened behind me. A beam of light shot past me, for a moment illuminating the hairy face and dripping fangs of the brute. Then a shot rang out, the light faded from the luminous eyes, and the beast sank slowly to the floor, blood gushing from its mouth and nostrils.

"Good shot, doctor," I said, turning and releasing my hold on the battered chair. To my surprise I saw Miss Van Loan holding the flashlight in one hand and a smoking pistol in the other, while great tears trickled down her cheeks.

"You!" I cried.

"I was holding these while the doctor went for a ladder," she said. "He was going to try to help you by climbing up to the window. Then I heard you call. Poor Sandy."

"Too bad you had to kill your pet," I replied, closing the door and relieving her of gun and torch.

"W— wasn't it horrible?" she sobbed. "B-but I had to do it. He might have k-killed you."

I was about to thank her for having saved my life when the young doctor suddenly came up from the basement, dragging a stepladder. Seeing us standing there in the hall, he laid it down and joined us.

"You have been rescued, I see," he said.

"Most bravely," I replied.

"Did the beast bite or scratch you?"

"No."

"Are you sure? Sometimes a wound goes unnoticed in the heat of combat. Perhaps I had better look you over. I am reasonably sure the dog had hydrophobia."

He forthwith examined me with the aid of the flashlight. I had not known it before, but my left coat sleeve was torn, and my arm was bleeding where the sharp fangs had raked it.

"Infected," he said, "and of course I have no serum with me. Come out on the porch."

On the porch, he made a ligature with a towel and a pair of long scissors. Then he took a bottle and some cotton from his case and drenched the wounds with silver nitrate.

"Better come to the hospital with me at once for a serum treatment," he advised. "It may save your life."

"But I can't leave my friends—" I began.

"Nonsense," interrupted Dr. Dorp, who was sitting up, although still muffled in a blanket. "Miss Van Loan and I will be all right here on the porch until you get back."

"Of course," said the girl. "You have put your life in sufficient jeopardy as it is, Mr. Evans."

Thus admonished, I got into the coupe with the young doctor, and we set out for the hospital.

"Queer thing the way that door shut and locked itself," he said, when we emerged on the smooth paving of Sheridan Road. "The key must have been half turned in the lock when the wind blew it shut. The jar locked it and shook out the key."

Although I did not feel that his explanation of the phenomenon was a true one, I decided not to debate the matter with him, as it was evident that Miss Van Loan did not want it known among her acquaintances that there were strange goings-on in her home.

"It was odd," I agreed.

"Too bad that the lights had to go out just when they did, too," he went on. "A most unfortunate coincidence."

"It was," I said, with mental reservations.

An hour later at the hospital, my wound was dressed and a considerable quantity of serum injected into my bloodstream. Then I called a cab which got me back to my friends shortly after midnight.

I found Dr. Dorp dozing in one of the porch chairs with a blanket around him, and Miss Van Loan, completely exhausted, asleep in the swing.

"Better try to get some rest in one of these chairs," said the doctor. "There is nothing further we can do until morning."

I was not loath to follow his suggestion, and soon drifted into a fitful, dream-haunted slumber from which I did not thoroughly awaken until the slanting rays of the morning sun struck me full in the face.

For a moment I sat there, blinking in the bright light, trying to remember where I was. Then the sound of a low cough from the doorway caused me to turn. I beheld the cadaverous face and angular form of Riggs.

"Good morning, sir," he said.

"Good morning, Riggs."

"Will you have your bath hot or cold, sir?"

"The colder the better."

"Thank you, sir."

A few moments later I was shaving with a razor which Riggs informed me had belonged to his late master, while a sizable column of cold water roared into the tub. While I bathed and dressed, the houseman repaired the rent in my sleeve. A half-hour afterward, feeling greatly rested and refreshed, I went down to breakfast. Miss Van Loan met me in the dining room where places had been laid for two.

"Dr. Dorp left early this morning for the city," she informed me. "He asked me to have you wait here until his return this afternoon."

"He could not have set me a more pleasant task," I replied, receiving my cup of coffee from the hand of my charming hostess. "Did he mention what urgent business took him to the city?"

"Something about some investigations he wished to make, and some paraphernalia he would need for tonight," she said. "He was in a great hurry. Wouldn't even stop for a bite of breakfast."

"That is his way," I replied, "when engrossed in a particularly interesting investigation. He will probably neither eat nor drink until the mystery has been solved."

"And will that be soon?"

"I believe it will."

"Just what is your opinion, Mr. Evans, of the things you saw last night?"

"I'm afraid," I replied, "that my opinion at this time is not of much value. Frankly, I have been mystified. I have theories, of course, but they are, after all, only theories."

"Do you believe it was the ghost of Uncle Gordon that we saw in the living room last night?"

"I don't believe in ghosts."

"Then what was it? What could have caused it? What could have caused doors to lock and unlock, to open and close without the touch of human hands? What could have caused the intense cold— the poker to creep across the floor as if it were alive? What drove my dog mad with fear?"

"The dog," I replied, "showed symptoms of hydrophobia."

"That is what Dr. Dorp thought, although he was not sure. He took the carcass with him, wrapped in a sheet for examination."

"Then his opinion confirms that of Dr. Graves."

"I don't see how poor Sandy could have gotten it," she said. "He hasn't been near any other animal, and I understand he would have to be scratched or bitten by one to become infected."

"The examination will show whether or not he had hydrophobia, and I hope he hadn't," I replied, "for a very personal reason. Just how he contracted it, of course, may never be known."

"For your sake, I too hope that he didn't have it. You are in grave danger, are you not, from that bite?"

"Not so bad as all that. A comparatively short time ago it was the equivalent of a death warrant to be bitten by a rabid animal. Modern science, however, has made death from hydrophobia a rarity when treatment is administered in time."

The remainder of the day was spent quite pleasantly, strolling about the grounds and on the white, foam-edged beach, or lolling on the large, conformable porch.

We had dinner at six, and I was enjoying a cigar in the swing shortly thereafter, when I heard the throb of a motor in the driveway and the big car of Dr. Dorp came into view.

He drove up to the curb, and I saw that he had four men with him. Each was carrying a large package covered with khaki. The packages were placed on the porch, and the doctor presented his four companions, as Mr. Easton, civil engineer, Mr. Brandon, electrical engineer, and Messrs. Hogan and Rafferty, detectives. At a sign from the doctor, the two detectives immediately strolled out into the shrubbery.

"We're going to make a few preparations for the show this evening," he said, addressing me. "Want to come along?"

"Of course."

"All right. Each man grab a bundle. We haven't much time before dark."

I took up one of the khaki-wrapped packages, which was far from light, and each other man did likewise. The doctor led the way around the house, and down to the beach.

Directly behind the house we unwrapped two of the packages. One proved to be a set of surveyor's instruments which the civil engineer quickly assembled. The other looked very much like a radio set with its loop aerials and dials, although there was no speaker or headphone with it. The radio set was placed on a small folding table, and Mr. Easton sighted from that point, while I acted as roadman and Mr. Brandon as chainman. We measured off a distance of two thousand feet in a straight line along the beach, the doctor following with the other package. At that point, the other radio-like machine was assembled and placed on a folding table. We left Mr. Brandon with this machine, and went back to the first one.

"Now, Evans," said my friend. "You and Mr. Easton go back to the house and keep Miss Van Loan company. As soon as it begins to get dark go into the living room and occupy the same positions as last night. Mr. Easton has a false beard with him, and will be disguised to look like me. Caution Miss Van Loan, when she is inside the house, to address Mr. Easton by my name. Do not, under any circumstances, tell her this while you are in the house. When you hear my motor racing outside, come out. Mr. Easton will remain. Rafferty will then go in to take your place. Is everything clear?"

"Perfectly."

We found Miss Van Loan on the porch, and I whispered our plans to her while Easton adjusted his whiskers. He was about the same build and height as the doctor, and thus disguised, bore considerable resemblance to him.

We chatted on the porch until dusk, then went into the living room and took our seats. Presently the door opened and closed as on the night before. Then the lights went out. Hearing a rustling sound near the door, I looked, and saw the gleaming print of a human foot forming on the carpet. In a moment another had formed in front of it while the rustling sound continued. The first footprint disappeared and a third formed in front of the second. It was as if some invisible entity were walking toward the center of the room, leaving luminous tracks which disappeared each time a foot was lifted.

The footprints stopped, and drew together, side by side, in the center of the room. Then there was a slight thump, and a wispy form, similar to the one we had seen the night before, began to materialize while the two footprints slowly faded. The thing reached a height of more than six feet, wabbling this way and that as if scarcely able to support its own weight, while the horrible odor we had noticed the night before permeated the room.

Suddenly the lights flashed on, and the apparition disappeared. Noticing that there was something glistening on the floor where the thing had stood, I went over to investigate. There was a small pool of clear, foul-smelling liquid rapidly soaking into the rug. As I bent over to examine it I heard a cry of

warning from the girl and a quick movement behind me. I turned, but could not move in time to avoid the heavy chair which was rushing toward me. It knocked me flat, fell over me, righted itself, and came back, apparently bent on my destruction. I managed to roll out of its way and get to my feet, but it promptly chased me to the davenport, behind which I took shelter.

"Holy mackerel!" exclaimed the pseudo Dr. Dorp.

The chair, apparently realizing that it was baffled, swung about and quickly returned to its place in the corner.

The phenomena, thus far, including the materialization of the spectre, had taken a little more than half an hour. I heard the sound for which I had been listening— the roar of the doctor's motor.

"A remarkable chair, doctor," I said. "The thing rather fagged me. I think I'll step out on the porch for a breath of cool air."

The door obligingly opened for me when I left the room. The front door, however, was already open. Rafferty was standing on the porch.

"Go on down to the car," he whispered. "The doctor's waitin' for you."

I went, and climbed into the front seat beside the doctor. Detective Hogan was in the back seat. We whirled away with moaning gears.

The doctor handed me a folded map.

"Open this, will you, Evans?" he requested. "Hold it beneath the dash light. I don't want to miss the road."

I opened it, and found it was a detailed map of Lake County. A large triangle had been traced on the paper, its smallest angle resting on a spot marked with an X, apparently some eight miles due west of our present location.

"Does X mark the spot where the body was found?" I asked, as we spun around onto Sheridan Road on two wheels.

"It marks the spot where I expect to find the source of Miss Van Loan's troubles," replied the doctor. "It isn't far, as the crow flies, but there is no through road to it. We have a roundabout trip of about sixteen miles ahead of us."

We continued north on Sheridan Road for nearly four miles. Then we swung west at Highwood, continuing in this direction for about eight miles. Turning south on the Milwaukee road at Halfday, we covered another three miles of road before the doctor slowed his terrific pace.

"Take the wheel now, will you?" he requested, "and drive slowly."

We changed places, and I started off at a speed of about ten miles an hour. The doctor lifted a small portable radio set from behind the back seat, adjusted the tuning dials, and slowly moved the loop aerial back and forth until there was an angry buzz from inside the machine. He then continued to slowly turn

the loop aerial as we moved along, apparently with the purpose of keeping it in a position where the machine would buzz the loudest.

I noticed that, at first, the direction of the loop only made a very slight deviation from the direction in which we were going. Gradually, however, the deviation grew greater until the loop stood at right angles to our course. We were, at the moment, passing the entrance to a lane, which led to a farmhouse set back about half a mile from the road. As we continued past the lane the aerial gradually straightened out toward our course.

About a thousand feet beyond the entrance to the lane was a brightly-lighted filling station. We stopped there, left the car in charge of the service man, and started across the fields. When we had gone a short distance, the doctor handed me an automatic pistol.

"I hope we won't have to do any shooting," he said, "but it's safer to be prepared."

It took us all of ten minutes to reach the farmhouse. It was in darkness, except for one of the rear rooms, which was dimly lighted. Admonishing us to tread carefully, the doctor led the way around the house. As we rounded the rear porch, I saw that a four-wire aerial had been stretched between the gable of the house and the barn. A wire connected to the aerial led down into the dimly lighted rear room.

Instructing us to stay where we were, the doctor crept stealthily up on the porch and peered through the window. For five minutes at least he stood there, looking into that room while we waited below. Then he turned and beckoned to us. Neither Hogan nor I lost any time in getting up to the window. I'm sure he was as curious as I to learn what was going on in that room.

Seated on a long bench before an instrument board which contained a bewildering array of dials, buttons and levers, was a short, bull-necked man. He wore a close-cropped, bristling pompadour, a thin, fiercely upturned moustache, and an immense pair of thick-lensed, horn-rimmed spectacles. A set of headphones covered his ears, and his pudgy hands worked incessantly with the levers, dials and buttons on the board before him. The only light in the room came from a panel of frosted glass which was just above the instrument board. On the panel, which the operator constantly watched, was a very clear shadow picture of the living room I had quitted only a short time before, in the home of Miss Van Loan.

From where I stood I could see Miss Van Loan and the pseudo Dr. Dorp seated just as I had left them, while Rafferty, who was impersonating me, was staging a quite lively wrestling match in the center of the room with the chair which had proven so hostile toward me earlier in the evening.

At a sign from Dr. Dorp, we drew our weapons and tiptoed to the door. It was locked, and the key was in place, but Hogan opened it quickly and silently with a small tool which he carried for the purpose. Before he was aware of our presence we had the operator surrounded and covered. The doctor jerked the phones from his head, and said:

"Hands up, Mr. Hegel. You are under arrest." His look of surprise and alarm was quickly followed by a sullen frown as he thrust his pudgy hands aloft.

"Arrest? For what?" he demanded belligerently.

"Nivver mind for what, my old buckaroo," said Hogan, snapping the handcuffs on his wrists. "I've a warrant in me pocket that covers ivverything from interferin' wid the radio reception on the north shore down to attempted murder. Come away wid yez now, and don't try no shenanigans, or be the lord Harry, I'll quiet yez wid this gun butt..."

SOME two hours later, having left Hegel in the care of the proper authorities, we were gathered in the living room of the Van Loan home— the girl, the two engineers, the two detectives, Dr. Dorp, and I. All were seated but the doctor, who stood before the fireplace. He cleared his throat and looked around with his well-known lecture-room air.

"Now that the author of the strange phenomena which have confronted us in this house has been apprehended," he said, "explanations, and such further investigations as are needed to completely clear up the mystery, are in order.

"You are all aware that the manifestations we have witnessed were under the control of an operator established in an old farmhouse eight miles west of here, and that the mechanism he used was a powerful and complicated radio set. In order that you may thoroughly understand how Ernest Hegel was able to make inanimate objects react to our movements as if they were endowed with minds, let me explain that he could both see and hear what was going on in this house as well as if he had been here in person. Planted in this very room in such a clever manner as to escape notice except by the most careful scrutiny, are powerful lenses which acted as his eyes, and microphones which served as his distance ears. If Miss Van Loan does not mind a slight mutilation of her walls in the interests of our investigation, I will disclose one of each."

"I should like to see them, doctor," said Miss Van Loan.

The doctor took out his pocket knife and opened it. Then he walked to the wall opposite us and scrutinized it very carefully. Presently he held the point of the knife to a small spot which resembled thousands of other spots on the mottled pattern of the wallpaper, and said:

"Can you see this opening?"

We all replied that we could not, and crowded around him. As we drew close to it a small hole about the diameter of a lead pencil became visible by concentration on the spot touched by the knife. Unless we had been deliberately searching for it, it is probable that it would have gone entirely unnoticed, due to its location on one of the dark spots in the pattern of the paper itself.

"This," said the doctor, "is one of Hegel's eyes." He lightly tapped inside the hole with the point of his knife and we heard it click against some hard substance. Then he cut a square of paper and plastering from around it, disclosing a black box which bore a close resemblance to a small camera with a tiny lens in front. Taking a small screwdriver from his pocket, he removed the front of the box, the back of which was covered with row on row of small, circular affairs which he described as photoelectric cells.

"Each cell," he said, "responds, according to the strength of light or shade which strikes it through the lens, with a different wave length. These various wave lengths are combined and transmitted from a common antenna. At the receiving station, the process is reversed, and this image is built up on ground glass by various vibrating light beams. For a thorough description of this process, which I will not go into here, I refer you to the book, 'Radio for All.' There are four 'eyes' like this one in this room alone. Every other room in this house is as thoroughly equipped.

"And now for the ears."

He examined the wall until he found another hole, into which he thrust the knife blade. Then he removed another square of wall paper and plaster, revealing one of those instruments with which we were all familiar— the microphone.

"As this instrument needs no explanation," he said, "I will now show you how our friend Hegel managed to lock, unlock, open and close doors from a distance of eight miles."

He walked to the door and opened it.

"This door," he said, "shows no signs of having been tampered with in any way, yet I am convinced that there are at least two electric wires connecting it with the current which Hegel tapped somewhere in front of the meter— I have not yet discovered where."

With his screwdriver, he removed the bottom hinge, while we crowded around him. Then he started to remove the top hinge, but found that the first screw he tried would not turn. Abandoning it, he removed all the other screws, then inserted the screwdriver beneath the hinge, and pried. The hinge came loose, but revealed the fact that the screw had been soldered to the metal back, and to a heavy wire which now protruded from the wall. The whole thing

had been insulated with electricians' tape, and the block of wood in which it was fastened had been cut out, surrounded with sealing wax, and replaced. He next removed the other side of the hinge from the door, and found it similarly connected and insulated, the wire leading to the interior of the door.

Having cut the wire with a pair of pliers, the doctor laid the door on its side and removed the lock and latch. Both were controlled by an ingenious arrangement of electromagnets. The return current, he found, was through round-headed, insulated contact screws, one on the door, and one on the door jamb against which it fitted.

He next turned his attention to the bottom of the door. It was evident at a glance, that a long strip of wood had been removed, replaced with glue, sanded and varnished. Using his screwdriver as a chisel, he pried up the strip of wood, and removed from the cavity behind it a heavy bar of iron.

"Now," he said, "if you will follow me to the basement I will show you the mechanism which acted on this bar of iron, causing the door to open or close."

We filed down into the basement behind him, and he led the way to a point directly beneath the living room door. The ceiling was covered with plasterboard, a block of which he removed. Fastened to the floor in a semicircle was a string of large electro-magnets.

"All of these magnets," he said, "were caused to act in their turns by impulses of varying wave lengths which closed and opened their circuits. Naturally they pulled the bar of iron although separated by two heavy layers of wood, as there is no insulation which will stop magnetic waves, thus closing or opening the door at the will of the operator. The poker and the heavy overstuffed chair were caused to travel about the room in the same manner, the latter probably having iron bars inserted in the legs, by utilizing other electro-magnets fastened beneath the floor and concealed by this plasterboard.

"While we are here we may as well clear up the mystery of the luminous footprints, for I see the removal of this square of ceiling has already disclosed a part of the mechanism. You will observe here, a glass tube, above which there are two lead plates. The top plate is movable, and is connected with an electro-magnetic device for moving it. In the bottom plate is cut in miniature, the shape of a human footprint. The glass tube is what is known as a Crookes Tube, and the rays which emanate from it when an electric connection is established are known as X-rays. Although these rays are, in themselves, invisible, some of them have the property of making certain substances phosphorescent. The rays which have this property can be cut off by a lead screen of the correct thickness. One of the substances which can be rendered luminous is sulfid of zinc, and is probably the one used, although I have not yet

had an opportunity to verify this. The substance, whatever it may be, has probably been ground into exceedingly minute particles and rubbed into the rug above our heads. A luminous footprint can thus be made to appear on the rug by the simple expedient of turning on the current in the Crookes Tube and sliding back the upper plate in such a manner that the toe prints will first be visible, then the ball of the foot, and finally the heel. I'm sure that if we remove more squares of plasterboard we will find a row of these contrivances about two feet apart, leading to a point beneath the center of the room, where two of them will be found side by side. For the present, however, we will go upstairs to continue our investigation in other directions."

When we were once more in the living room, the doctor asked for a stepladder, and Riggs was sent to bring one. When he brought it, the doctor placed it in the center of the room and climbed up to where the central lighting fixture projected from the wall.

"In this fixture," he said, "are concealed one of the sources of the icy breath, and also the source of the ghastly and foul-smelling spectre which rose from the center of the floor on two succeeding evenings. You will observe that the entire fixture, central hemisphere and surrounding collar, appears to be made from frosted glass. The central hemisphere from which the light emanates is glass, but the surrounding collar is of metal covered with a white substance. That white substance is common frost."

So saying, he scraped off a quantity of the frost and handed it down to us for our inspection.

"Please take special notice of the designs on this collar," he said, "for they are particularly well suited for the purposes for which our friend Hegel intended them— a series of circles, each about an inch from the other, reaching entirely around the collar. I will now do by force what the builder of this device previously did by mechanical means, controlled by radio."

He took the screwdriver and, reaching up, inserted the end and pried at one of the circles. It came open, revealing the fact that it was a small hinged trap door. What surprised us the most, however, was the fact that a small white globe fell out of it and broke on the rug.

"Switch off the lights for a moment," he said.

Someone pressed the light switch, and all of us saw the now familiar vision of a spectre materializing from the floor.

"Turn them on," he ordered.

They were turned on once more.

"The ghost," he said, "is nothing more than a mixture of foul-smelling gases, one of which is slightly phosphorescent. This mixture, as you will observe, is visible in the dark but invisible in the light. The gas is imprisoned in

small, thin globes of ice which shatter when they strike the rug, and melt in a few seconds, leaving no trace other than a few drops of water which quickly evaporate or are absorbed by the rug fibres. These globes are kept in a small refrigeration plant which is just above my head, and which is probably quite thoroughly insulated against heat. The intense cold in this plant is produced by a substance which is not new to science, but the use of which for this particular purpose is quite new. The substance is frozen CO_2 or carbon dioxide, and when expanded into a gas it is identical with the substance that gives zest to soda water and bottled beverages. It has a temperature of 114° below zero, Fahrenheit, and evaporates to a dry gas without going through the intermediate liquid state with which we are familiar in most substances.

"The cold air and gas from this refrigerating chamber, when propelled into the room by small, noiseless fans through others of these hinged openings which do not contain the gas balls, creates the phenomenon of the icy breath. It can also create the illusion of a light touch from a cold hand, as I have proved experimentally. The slight breeze moving the small hairs on one's hand or arm gives the sensation of one having been lightly touched while the coldness of the breeze makes it appear that one has been touched by something cold. The closet, in which I came so near being asphyxiated and frozen to death, is equipped with a similar refrigeration plant, and it is probable that we shall find more of them which have not been used, in other rooms.

"The matter of the lights going out and again being turned on will be settled as soon as we can find the radio-controlled rheostat and switch which operates them. Is everything clear?"

"You have not explained what it was which drove my dog mad," Miss Van Loan reminded him.

"Your dog," he said, "had hydrophobia. As I found a bottle of the virus which produces this disease in the house occupied by Mr. Hegel, I don't think it at all remarkable that the dog was infected. No doubt it was acquainted with and friendly toward your cousin, who found an opportunity to inoculate it when it was ranging on your estate. The queer behavior of the dog, thereafter, is common to all animals that contract the disease. In my opinion the dog was inoculated three or four days ago. It would certainly have died within a few hours, had you not shot it when you did."

"What I cannot understand," said Mr. Brandon, the electrical engineer, "is how Mr. Hegel found the time or opportunity to install this complicated array of electrical equipment. Mr. Van Loan, I understand, had only been dead a little more than a month."

"I made a few investigations today which cleared up that point," replied the doctor. "It is a matter of common knowledge that Gordon Van Loan died

from cancer of the stomach. Mr. Van Loan was not aware that he had this disease, although both his niece and nephew had been apprised of the fact nearly a year before his death by the family physician. They had also been informed that an operation would be fruitless and fatal, and were told almost to the day just how long their uncle would live.

"Last winter, in the vain hope that he might better his condition, Gordon Van Loan went to Florida for a three months' stay, taking his two servants with him. Some time before, the nephew had left in a huff after Mr. Van Loan, in a fit of anger, had disclosed to him the contents of the will he had made. Being in possession both of the knowledge of the will and the probable length of time his uncle would live, Hegel laid his plans for winning the estate. Just before Mr. Van Loan left for Florida, he visited him, saying that he was out of a job and penniless, and asking that he might be given something to do in order that he might earn some money. The house was badly in need of cleaning and decorating, and, as he had good taste in this line, he was permitted to oversee the work of papering, painting, and varnishing while his uncle was away, asking in return only a very small salary and the privilege of rooming in the house. His uncle turned over the keys of the house to him, paid him his salary in advance, and established credit with a firm of decorators.

"Hegel's supposed trip to Europe was, of course, only a blind to hide his recent operations here. Are there any more questions?"

"Yes," said Mr. Easton. "Now that Hegel has been apprehended, what can the law do with him? What charges can be placed against him?"

"He will be charged with robbery, resisting an officer, and attempted murder. You see he robbed a radio and camera shop after stealing a small truck, in order to get equipment for this elaborate installation, which his slender means would not permit him to buy. A police officer on night duty saw him just as he was leaving the shop, but Hegel wounded him with a revolver shot, and escaped. As he left fingerprints, and the stolen articles will be easy to identify, there is no possible way for him to escape final and certain conviction."

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4: Lady Mason's Rubies

Anonymous

Manilla Express (NSW) 6 and 13 Aug 1910

Syndicated across several rural Australian newspapers

THE MAYOR had been knighted, and it was the proudest moment of his life when he heard himself addressed as 'Sir John.' In the exuberance of his joy he did, what in calmer moments, he would, have considered well— he wrote to a friend in the 'Burmese trade' giving him *carte blanche* as to a set of rubies he was desirous of purchasing for the bedecking of 'My Lady'— his wife.

'My lady' was simple, homely, and tame; perfectly free from ambition, and uncomfortable in public. Herein she was a contrast to her big, blustering, and assertive spouse. Indeed, on one occasion when she entertained Royalty in the person of a young prince, she could not help confiding to him, as he took her in to dinner, that she was 'Mortally afraid of company, and far preferred to live private'; whereupon the kind young prince with a smile assured her that he felt just the same, thus restoring her to courage and confidence once more.

Alas! this kindly personage, with his pleasant manner and sympathetic smile, has faded from earthly courts, and we shall see his like no more. No one mourns him so truly, amongst his subjects, as Lady Mason.

But to return; Sir John, elevated in his own eyes, and in those of his townsfolk, blossomed out into quite a personage on his own account. He gave splendid receptions, vying indeed with the lord lieutenant of the county, who was an earl with two or three centuries of ancestors behind him. Sir John kept quite as fine an establishment, drove finer horses, and did the grand man to greater perfection— which is saying a good deal.

His wife's rubies were the admiration of the country, and made every alderman's lady green with sheer envy. In short, there were greedy minds at Medowsley that envied everything Lady Mason possessed, including her handsome son, who stood six feet three in his stockings, and was, really, as fine a specimen of manhood as could be seen anywhere.

One spring morning, when the larches were budding in the baronet's beautiful gardens, 'my lady' gave a little shriek which roused Sir John from his papers.

'There's smoke coming out of the chimneys over the way,' she announced from her post at the window.

Sir John rose hastily, and went to look out too. 'Aye, so there is!' he said. 'Who's taken the place, I wonder? It's been empty a goodish bit. Simons'— he turned to the butler who had entered the room— 'who has come to The Grove?'

'Some people named Montgomery, Sir John,' replied the man. 'They are from the West Indies, I believe, and have made a fortune in sugar—at least, so I am told.'

'Montgomery!' mused Sir John, 'Never heard of them before. What is he like— this Mr. M.— if there is one?'

'There is not, Sir John. The whole family consists of three ladies, mother, and two daughters, and very fine young ladies they are— if one may so in your presence, Miladi.'

'H'm!' Sir John was not much pleased With the incursion, of women-folk. They had enough, and to spare, of the kind at Medowsley. After a few moments he grew more gracious.

'You can hear what the parson says, Betty,' he said, pompously, 'and if he reports favourably you had better call. Perhaps we may go the length of a dinner, or— so. It will be a chance to wear the rubies.'

'I've never had them on since we went up to the Lord Mayor's ball. They are too grand, John. When can I wear them down here?'

'We'll give a dinner, I tell you. It will be ostensibly for these Montgomerys; in reality it; will be for the sake of the rubies.'

He ended in a burst of laughter, but Lady Mason was rather dismayed at the prospect before her. Yet the vicarage report was so satisfactory that she took heart again.

When one of the two young ladies had promised to take a class in the Sunday school there could not be anything very much amiss with the family— so argued the Rev. James Rowe, and Lady Mason supported him. She called at The Grove and was quite pleased with the house and its appearance,

The old lady was rather formidable, perhaps, but she was quite a stylish person, and anyone of that description would dismay Lady Mason. The two girls were charming, although, for her own part, she liked the fair-haired Anita better than the heavier-featured Cordelia, her sister.

Cordelia overpowered Lady Mason. Her airs and graces were particularly severe in the presence of the homely little woman who came to call. That the Montgomerys were well-off was abundantly evident. They kept no 'man', it is true, but their maids seemed sedate ones, who looked as if they had been a long time in the family; and so, on the whole, Lady Mason was pleased. She sent an invitation for the following Thursday, and then sat down to ask a few others to meet the newcomers— and admire the rubies.

Lawrence was not at home— which was a pity.

'It cuts two ways, however,' said she told herself. 'There's these two girls, and the Miss Bakers — and little Susie Gledhill. Live girls! Enough to turn any man's head. I'm glad Lawrence is out of the way, anyhow; and, in his place, I

think I'll invite the Doctor. His head is strong enough to stand any number of attractions.'

When she came to count things over there were exactly twelve invited guests, and Lady Mason fell relieved.

'I was afraid I'd gone and asked thirteen,' she told Sir John. ' That would have been horrible.'

'Don't you believe such nonsense,' he replied. 'There's luck in odd numbers, I'd I like you to remember.'

But it seemed as if Lady Mason were destined to have thirteen, after all; for when Thursday came it brought with it— all un-foreseen— a letter from Lawrence, announcing his return.

'It does me good to see you,' said his mother, greeting him delightedly. 'You'll have to take in the elder Miss Baker, but I'll put Miss Anita Montgomery on the other side, and she can talk— if Molly Baker cannot.'

She had forgotten all about the thirteen by now, and, warming to her subject, told him how she had been impressed by the inmates of The Grove.

'I hope he will not get too friendly with them,' she said— later— to Sir John. 'They are a bit taking in their ways, Miss Anita especially.'

'He's bound to get friendly with somebody one of these days, said Sir. John, in anything but consolatory fashion. 'I'll bet he's got his eye on someone.'

But he only covered her with dismay. It did not seem as if Lawrence Mason had his 'eye', on anybody, for when Thursday came he was observed to be most attentive to Anita Montgomery, to whom he talked steadily, whenever be dared to desert Miss Baker.

Anita was fresh and attractive. She had used her brains to some purpose, and could talk agreeably on many subjects; she was a lovely girl, and, withal, of a graceful and gracious manner. She showed up in contrast to Medowsley's young maidenhood, and Lawrence was delighted with this specimen of his mother s new friends.

After dinner she sang, and her well-trained voice sounded to great advantage in the large drawing-room at the Hall. Lawrence, who loved music, could not tear himself away from the piano, and the Doctor, who had cultivated a little voice, felt distinctly aggrieved. He had not at all enjoyed his seat between Susie Gledhill and the elder Miss Montgomery, who, he decided, was a prig.

The evening passed successfully, and was but the forerunner of many such entertainments in which The Hall and The Grove took part. Indeed, The Grove came to be recognised as quite a feature of the neighbourhood.

Then came an event that shocked the district and appalled the stoutest heart, for The Hall was broken into one dark night, and, in spite of Sir John, the

butler, the two footmen, and an 'understrapper,' who helped in both gardens and stables indiscriminately, Lady Mason's rubies were stolen.

She had worn them that evening at the Mayor's ball, and had put them into their case, leaving that upon her dressing-table for the few remaining hours; and, alas, they were gone!

The loss was great, and Sir John fumed, and Lady Mason sat, white and worn-looking, in bewildered surprise, while Lawrence confessed himself puzzled and baffled.

Detectives were summoned to their aid, but found no clue. Cleverer rogues had never been seen than those who managed this little profitable affair.

'The rubies will not be negotiable in this country,' said Sir John, but Lady Mason dashed his hopes to the ground by murmuring softly, 'Amsterdam.'

'Ah, true; I had forgotten that,' he replied, and then relapsed into thoughtfulness. He found it hard to submit to such wholesale robbery, and have no redress and no suggestion as to the robber.

Nor were the Masons alone in their sufferings. The ice having been broken in this summary fashion, other events followed in quick succession. The vicarage lost its small store of highly prized relics— more quaint than valuable, and only of esteem to the original owners. The banker's mansion afforded a plenteous haul. The lawyer's villa furnished a clear prize. The whole place sat in tears, everyone having some loss to declare, one bond of sympathy making them kin indeed.

The local police were at their wits' end: the higher officials called in had nothing to go upon. The thief or thieves managed the business in a manner not often seen, and while Medowsley stood aghast the district groaned aloud. Sir John brought the whole force of his Mayoral weight to hear upon the constables.

'Who ever heard of such a thing!' he cried. 'Are we to be baffled in this fashion and made into fools, for the derision of knaves? Why, the country will point the finger of scorn at us soon!'

But his eloquence was wasted. Words could not help him— or anyone else. He fell back disconsolate.

Then another affair stirred the Hall to its centre, but this time, though it took Sir John by surprise again, there was quite a different, complexion to the matter; and strange to say, it seemed to occasion Lady Mason no small disquietude.

She had taken the loss of her rubies, after the first half-hour, with singular fortitude. She took this later affair much more hardly. It even cost her some tears. And what had happened had been simply this: Lawrence, who had been

drawn irresistibly to Anita Montgomery from the very first, had yielded to the fascination, and fallen in love with her— irretrievably.

He, who had withstood Susie Gledhill, Flossy Baker, and all the others, had gone down ignominiously before Anita. He loved her— and she— she loved him.

The confession had been mutual, and while Lawrence triumphed Lady Mason felt chagrined. She took an odd prejudice against the Montgomerys, and wondered what she had ever seen in them.

Sir John, who had chafed and grumbled— after his fashion— ended by admitting that, after all, the girl is not so bad; the lad might have done worse, no doubt.

The lad, himself, thought he could not have done better: he loved his Anita very dearly; she was the one being on earth for him, and he esteemed himself the most fortunate of men.

At The Grove complications had arisen, however, which demanded serious consideration. As Cordelia put it roughly, 'The Mason episode has upset our apple cart, mother, and what we are going to do now I cannot imagine.'

There is no doubt that the occasion was perplexing.

'IT WAS your fault that Anita came home,' said Cordelia, still grumbling. 'If you had kept her at school there would have been none of this. I knew the very first time we dined there, what was sure to happen.'

Mrs. Montgomery sighed profoundly. 'It's a break-up,' she admitted slowly, 'but I could not go on keeping a big girl like Anita at school. She had to leave at some time or another.'

'Oh! of course.'

'And, remember, when we accepted that first civility, the son was not supposed to be at home.'

'I was not to blame for his sudden appearance.'

'No, I know that.'

'Very well. We were obliged to go— in order—'

'I know why we went, thank you.'

'What are we to do, Cordelia?'

The elder sister folded her hands and thought deeply. At length she lifted her head, and Mrs. Montgomery looked up expectantly. Cordelia was always the one who was said to have a 'head upon her shoulders.'

'We must marry her off to this man. He wants her, and for goodness sake let her go to him. When that is done, you and I will disappear.'

She lowered her voice. 'We can try the Nice and Cannes districts, and a change of air will suit us both. Do you agree?'

'I must have time to think it over,' replied her mother. 'You are so quick that it takes me a while to keep pace, even in thought.'

'You must agree,' Cordelia said coldly. 'Anita will always to a drag upon us. She possesses a conscience, and that is an awkward encumbrance, besides being an unnecessary one.'

'I know she is not heroic,' said Anita's mother.

'She is far from heroic. Let her marry Lawrence Mason, and play the Lady Bountiful here. The role will suit her to perfection, and she will hamper us no more.'

'Don't yon think, Cordelia,' said the mother, 'that we have done enough? We are rich; let that suffice. We can afford to rest on our oars.'

'Not yet,' replied Cordelia, stubbornly. 'We will have a try at Nice first, for I do not intend to retire to this country.'

'Anita may be Lady Mason some day,' whispered the mother.

'Let her be what sue chooses; you and I will be far richer.'

'Riches are not everything; and I am growing old— Cordelia.'

'Oh, no, you are not. You have any amount of vigour in you still. You must not grow old just now.'

Mrs Montgomery smiled sadly. 'Ah, Cordelia, I think this life is telling on me—'

'Nonsense! Anita has weighed too much on your mind. Pray don't let her find out anything.'

'Pray keep your own counsel.'

'Heaven forbid that she should find out— anything! I would not cloud her career for the world.'

Cordelia rose hastily. In her heart she had the greatest contempt for her younger sister, although she lived in constant dread lest Anita should find out what sort of a life she was leading. The girl who was a housebreaker by profession and an undaunted robber— who had despoiled her neighbour of their most treasured possessions— had yet a perfect terror of being found out by her younger sister. So far conscience, in spite of her sneers, was not quite dead within her own heart, though she would have been the very last to acknowledge this fact.

She spent some time arguing the matter with her mother, who was the only being for whom she cared, and finally managed to bring Mrs. Montgomery round to her way of thinking; so that by the time Lawrence came to ask her consent she was quite able to see the whole affair from Cordelia's standpoint, and to promise Anita to the man who so truly loved her.

This done, Mrs. Montgomery acknowledged that she felt relieved. Anita's future was secure, come what might. And Anita was happy. It was bliss to feel

herself so loved, so considered; to know that she was of consequence in the eyes of one man; to look forward contentedly to years of happiness and quiet comfort. She planned all sorts of delightful things. She dreamed such blissful dreams. In her eyes her hero was perfect.

And Lady Mason became kinder, too. Imbued, as she was, with thorough belief in her son, she could scarcely hold out against the girl he had chosen in the face of the whole world. And so the day came when the two were made one in the little church at Medowsley, with all their friends around them to wish them luck, and any amount of gifts showered upon them from those who liked them and wished them well.

TWO MONTHS afterwards Mrs. Montgomery and Cordelia went south, and Lady Mason's rubies, with other valuable commodities, went with them— to be no more seen in Medowsley. Strange to say, the various agitations that had kept Medowsley from stagnating ceased also about this time ; and from then the village sank into its ancient state of insignificance and quietude.

No one connected the departure of the Montgomerys with the cessation of anxieties; for the kith and kin of Lawrence's wife were, surely, above suspicion. But Lady Mason persisted in remembering that she never liked Cordelia; and the worthy old Sir John— who was a shrewd man of the world in spite of his clumsiness— had his opinions, which he kept to himself; having only once permitted his wife to hear him say that he doubted 'Miss Cordelia was no belter than she should be.' He was always good to Anita— perhaps better than ever, when her people went away; but he never allowed himself to feel really interested in his son's wife until he heard how very little she know of the movements of her sister and mother.

When these ceased to trouble Lawrence's wife with letters the old man became quite affectionate.

'No doubt they tricked her as they did the rest of us,' said he in his heart. 'I'd let them keep— yes, even the rubies— if I could have one or two peeps behind the scenes in their house.'

But since that could not be, and since the offenders had gone off scot free, and the rubies were beyond recovery— why, Sir John's plaintive wail reached Lady Mason now and then, especially after a pretty long spell of thinking. And at these times he summed up his sense of Cordelia's defects by declaring his assurance that she was 'really no better than she should be'.

He rather chuckled at the knowledge that the rubies would prove a cumbersome 'white elephant,' and, in fact, would not readily be negotiable in the face of Scotland yard. But he is loyal enough to keep these suspicions to himself, and, above all, to refrain from darkening Anita's life by them.

The Montgomerys have passed out of range, and Anita makes the best of wives, and the kindest of daughters; and so 'All's well that end's well,' says he.

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5: The Queen's Hand

William Le Queux

1864-1927

The Queen, 29 Oct 1898

Kalgoorlie Western Argus, 4 May 1899

I ENTERED THE SILENT KINGDOM six years ago. Praise be to Allah, whom the weight of a peace upon the earth does not escape. May prayer and salvation be with the master of the first and last, our Lord Mahommed.

Of a verity have I been blessed with blessings abundant, and enveloped by the cloak of his protection. The adventures which have befallen me through forty years of Bedouin life are many and diverse, but none so astounding as those I encountered when in search of that mysterious phantom of the Soudan, the Fatassi.

We, the desert pirates of the tribe Ennitra, dreaded from the Tinghert even to the white city of the Sultan of Sokoto, had left the marshes behind Lake Chad, after pillaging a great caravan from the north, and were moving eastward across the stern sterile desert in the direction of Gao, or Kou-Kou, as it is popularly known among us, where we could dispose of our stolen merchandise.

For months we had travelled across that immensity of red-brown sands, where the very birds lose themselves, our camels often stumbling upon some skull, tibia, or even an entire skeleton, the remains of bygone generations of travellers who had perished on those lonely wastes.

The sun blazed fiercely in the flaming sky, the lips were parched and cracked, and the mouth filled by the ever-whirling sand. All the water we had was warm, and having been in the skins for many days was full of worms. A scaly viper occasionally crossed our route, and at long intervals the swift flight of an antelope was seen.

For days, months, nothing had rejoiced our eyes save the deceitful vision of the mirage, until one evening we decided upon a three days' halt for rest. On the previous day our vision had been gladdened by sight of a small well, where we had re-filled our water-skins; therefore we were enabled to take our ease, although, being in an entirely unfamiliar country, the watchfulness of our sentries was never for a single instant relinquished.

We were travelling with the sun only as our guide, therefore knew not into what territory we had entered, save that it was as barren and inhospitable a region as it had ever been our lot to encounter— a shadowless land of solitude, abandonment and misery.

In our raid upon the caravan near Lake Chad a bundle of papers had come into our possession, and these had been handed to me as being a scholar and

able to speak the tongue of the Franks, but travelling constantly I had not had either time or inclination to examine them.

That night, however, alone in my tent, I untied and spread them out. Most of them, including a kind of diary, were written in the language of the Roumis, and some lore the image of the Liberty of the Franks, I concluded that they must have belonged to some Zouave officer in the northern region of the desert, who had probably perished in an attempt to penetrate south.

One paper, however, the last I took up, was written in my own tongue, and I read it eagerly. It was an official letter dated from the Ministry of War in Paris, urging its recipient to secure, if possible, during his explorations the far-famed *Fatassi* of Koti, as the French Government were extremely anxious to obtain possession of it, and by that letter offered to pay any sheikh or tribesman a large sum of money in exchange for it.

I put the letter down, smiled, and resumed my pipe.

The Franks are, indeed, a strange people. Having conquered us in Algeria, they believe themselves masters of the world. The hapless explorer, whoever he may have been, had probably died, and certainly his hopes would never be realised, for the *Fatassi* of the learned *marabout* Koti was the phantom book of the Soudan. There was not a clansman in the whole of the Great Desert who did not know all about that priceless volume, yet no one had ever seen it. It had been lost to the world for ages.

Mohaman Koti, the learned Arab scholar, who lived at Jenne, near Timibuktu, in the year 850 of the *hejira*, was the most esteemed and even tyrannical councillor of our ancestor, its powerful Sultan. According to the story, common among us, his authority is said to have originated thus:

The king one day distributed some dried dates to his court, and Koti, who had recently arrived, was overlooked. Shortly afterward the learned councillor assembled a number of people and to them distributed fresh dates. This miracle for we have no fresh dates in this region of the far south— having reached the Sultan's ears, he discerned that upon Koti was set the Divine seal, and frim that moment gave him all his confidence.

A few years later the *marabout* edited a history of the great kingdoms of Ganata, Songhoi, and Timbuktu, the only history of those once all-powerful centres of a civilisation now decayed and forgotten. Families since grown rich and powerful, and the chiefs of various countries, were shown to be of very humble origin, oft-times being the offsprings of slaves.

But while the book was being written news was conveyed to the Sultan of Jenne that the Songhois had revolted and had combined with the great nation of Mossi to attack and capture its capital. Therefore, in order to save his great

store of treasure he at once had it made up into single camel loads, taken out of the city, and secreted in various distant spots on the confines of his empire.

In these circumstances it became necessary, of course, to keep a strict and minute indication of each spot where the wealth of the capital was concealed, in order that it might be recovered after the war, therefore Koti was ordered to inscribe in his book directions how to unearth the great store of gold and gems, the spoils of wars of four centuries.

This, according to our book, the "*Tarik e Soudan*" he did, and the precious manuscript was given into the Sultan's own keeping. Ere one moon had waned, however, the learned historian died suddenly at Tindirma, where a little white mosque-like house marks his grave to this day. It is supposed that he was poisoned by the Sultan so that he should not divulge the whereabouts of the secreted treasure.

The war was afterwards fought, proving disastrous to the Sultan, who was compelled to fly and, it is believed, was afterwards treacherously murdered, as rulers were apt to be in those turbulent days. But the priceless volume and the guide to the enormous treasure of ancient Jenne and Timbuktu became lost to all.

For nearly five centuries the recovery of the *Fatassi* has been the dream of rich and poor alike throughout the Soudan. The scholar coveted it because it would shed so much light upon the obscure past of these vast regions; the camel-driver, the merchant, and the prince alike desired to possess it for the information it was known to contain regarding the long-lost wealth. It was because of the latter that our conquerors, the French, desired to obtain it.

But theirs, like my own, was a vain desire. A whole moon passed, and still we pressed forward towards Gao, ever in the crimson track of the dying day.

One night, however, when the camp was asleep the guards raised the alarm, but so sudden were we attacked that we scarce had time to defend ourselves against the desperate onslaught of a column of French Spahis who had swept down upon us. It was a mad, terrible rush. Although our tribesmen fought valiantly and well, it was impossible to withstand the frightful hail of bullets poured upon us by a mechanical gun which spat forth lead in deadly showers.

Our men, seeing the havoc wrought by this devilish weapon, turned and fled. Fortunately the poison-wind had sprung up, and its clouds of sand cannot be faced by the men of the North; therefore we were enabled to escape, although unfortunately compelled to leave the greater part of the stolen camels and merchandise in their possession.

As in the confusion I caught a horse, sprang upon it and rode into the blinding sandstorm for my life, I heard the dull thud of the horses' hoofs of my

pursuers. From the noise there must have been a score or so of them, anxious no doubt to secure a marauder feared by all the caravans.

But swift as the wind I galloped on alone the greater part of the hot, stifling night, until pulling up, dismouning, and placing my ear to the ground, I could detect no sound of pursuit. At last I had by the narrowest escape evaded the red burnoused men of the North, whose chief delight is to shoot us down like dogs.

In the glimmering twilight, as night gave place to dawn, I saw before me a huge dark rock rising from the ocean of sand shaped like a camel's hump, and riding onward, I tethered my horse beneath it and flung myself down to snatch an hour's sleep ere the sun rose, intending to go forth again and rejoin my scattered tribesmen.

How long mine eyes were closed Allah alone knoweth, but when I opened them I found myself lying upon a panther's skin in a darkened chamber, my ears filled with the noise of running water. The place was cooled by the stream, and in the dim recess of the room. could distinguish rich divans. Suspended from the roof was a fine Moorish lamp of chased brass which shed a soft yellow light, while from the perfuming pan was diffused the intoxicating odor of attar of rose. The light was soft and restful after the accustomed desert glare, and in wonder I rubbed my eyes and gazed about me.

"Allah give thee peace, O stranger!" a thin voice croaked, and glancing quickly behind me, I beheld, a wizened-faced man, small of stature, dressed in a robe of bright blue silk, and so befit by age that his white beard almost swept the ground. Notwithstanding the venerable appearance, however, his face was dark and forbidding, and his small black, piercing eyes that time had not dimmed had a glint in them. Instinctively, ere we had exchanged a dozen words, I distrusted him.

"To whose hospitality do I owe the rest and repose I have enjoyed?" I inquired slowly rising to my feet and stretching my cramped limbs.

"My name," the old men answered, "is Batouba. I discovered thee sleeping in the sun outside this my dwelling place, and brought thee in, for the rays had smitten thee with a grievous sickness, and thou wert on the point of death. Thou hast remained my guest these twelve days."

"Twelve days," I cried with incredulity, at the same moment feeling my head reeling as though I had drunk the palm wine of the pagans. "Then to thee I owe my life?"

The hideous old man in blue grinned with satisfaction, regarding me with a strange covert glance. By this time my eyes had grown accustomed to the semi-darkness, and I saw that the chamber was a natural one— a kind of

arched cavern, the floor of which had been levelled and a channel formed for the cool spring that bubbled forth and rippled away into gloomy depths.

"This thy dwelling is beneath the surface of the earth," I observed, glancing around me in curiosity. "Why dwellest thou here in secret?"

"The true Arab answereth not the questions of a robber of the *Ennitra*," he replied, with a sneering accentuation on the final word. "Allah has sent thee as my guest; partake of all that I have, but seek no explanation of who or of what I am."

He evidently recognised that I was a freebooter of the dreaded *Ennitra*, but his strange words puzzled me.

First, I had no idea that such a luxurious abode could exist in the centre of that wild, inhospitable region to which I had penetrated; secondly, the very fact pointed to the conclusion that in my flight I had approached near a town; but, thirdly, I had already proof positive that my ugly host, the man who declared he had saved my life, lied to me. At the well where we had filled our water-skins on the day before the fight, I had plucked a sprig of jasmine and placed a tiny piece behind my ear beneath the white *haick* wound about my head.

This I recollected, and taking it in my hand, found it still limp and undried. By that alone I knew I had not been there many hours, and that his story was false. I suggested that I should soon be reluctantly compelled to leave, but at once he became more profuse in his hospitality.

"No, not yet," he protested. "I am alone, save for my slaves, and thy companionship is pleasant. Remain and. I will show the over this my hidden dwelling-place. It may interest thee."

And taking down a torch he lit it and led the way across a tiny bridge that spanned the running water, then opening a low door in the rock, conducted me through several intricate passages, narrow and dark until we came to a series of caverns of various sizes, the roofs of hanging stalactites, the walls hung with rich silken hangings and the floors covered by beautiful carpets from the East. Over each the great lamp of filigree shed a soft light, showing how rich and costly were the antique tables of inlaid pearl and silver, and how wide and soft were the divans. In each the thin blue smoke curling upwards from the golden perfuming pan gave forth a delicious odor, and in one I noticed, lying discarded, a pair of tiny green slippers, embroidered with seed-pearls, a *jinkra*, one of those little two-stringed guitars, fashioned from a tortoise-shell, both of which objects betrayed the presence of a woman.

When we had passed through half-a-dozen similar chambers in solid rock, the old man, croaking as we went, stopped suddenly at the further end of the

last and most gorgeous of all his subterranean domain, and with a grim expression on his evil face said:

"And this is the dreaded gate of the Kingdom of Darkness, whence none return."

I started, and drew back; throughout the desert there has been for all time a legend that, somewhere there exists the entrance to the dreaded kingdom of Hawiyat, where Eblis reigneth.

He opened wide the small door, but there was only a darkness impenetrable, and an odor of damp earth. Holding his torch aloft he crossed the threshold and bade me peer in. Then I distinguished a few spans from where he stood, a yawning noisome chasm, opening to the very bowels of the earth.

"Harken!" he cried, in his squeaking, uncanny voice, at the same time returning into the room, and snatching up from one of the coffee stools a large metal dish, which an instant later he hurled into the dark abyss. I listened to ascertain its depth, but no sound came back. I shuddered, for I knew it was unfathomable.

As he faced me in closing the door, I detected in his keen eyes a strange exultant look, and was seized by a sudden desire to ascend once again to the light of the day. True, I could have crushed the life out of him as easily as I could crush a viper beneath my heel, while in my sash was still my keen *jambiyah*, that curved knife, which a score of times had tasted the life-blood of mine enemies, Yet, he had not harmed me, and to kill one's host is forbidden by our *Koran*. Therefore I stayed my hand.

As we retraced our steps, he poured upon me nauseating adulation, declaring me to be the most valiant freebooter in the Great Desert, and using the most extravagant simile of which the Arab tongue is capable, a fact which, in itself, filled me with increased suspicion.

Suddenly, as we reached the chamber where flowed the cooling spring, the truth became instantly plain. As he opened the door two officers of the French in linen garments and white helmets, who had been apparently lying in wait, pounced upon me, uttering loud cries of triumph.

The old, white-bearded recluse— may Allah burn his vitals with the fire unquenchable— had betrayed me. He had held me and sent word to the Infidels to come and capture their prize. But in an instant I, upon whose head a price was set, drew my blade, and defended myself, slashing vigorously right and left, succeeding at last in escaping down the dark winding passage we had just traversed.

Forward I dashed through room after room, upsetting some of the tables in my mad rush, for behind me were the white-faced officers with drawn swords,

determined to take me alive or dead. Well, I knew how desperate they were, and in an instant believed myself lost. Yet, determined to sell my life dearly, it flashed across my mind that rather than suffer the ignominy of being taken in chains to Algiers, the Infidel city, and there tried by tribunal, as others had been, I would cast myself into the fathomless pit.

I sprang towards the small door, but at first could not open it. Then, just as they put out their hands to seize me, I swung aside, lifted my knife, and struck my evil-faced betrayer full to the heart. With a piercing shriek he fall forward over the threshold, and his lifeless body rolled down into the awful chasm, while at the same instant I gave a bound, and with a cry of defiance, leaped headlong down into the darkness after him.

I felt myself rushing through air, the wind whistling in my ears, as deep down I went like a stone into the impenetrable gloom. Each second seemed an hour, until of a sudden a blow on my back knocked me insensible, and I found myself an instant later wallowing in a bed of thick, soft dust.

At that moment it occurred to me that because this carpet of the dust of ages deadened the sound of all things pitched into the chasm, the belief had naturally arisen that it was unfathomable.

I rose, but sank again to the knees in the dry soft dust, which, stirred by my fall, now half choked me. Far above, looking distant like a star, I saw the light of a torch. My infidel pursuers were peering into the fearsome place in chagrin that I had evaded them. The air however, was hot and foul, and I knew that to save my life I must be moving. Therefore, with both hands outstretched, I groped about, amaze to discover the great extent of this natural cleft in the earth formed undoubtedly by some earthquake in a remote age.

Once I stumbled, and bending, felt at my feet the still warm body of my betrayer may Eblis rend him. I drew my *jambiyah* from his breast and replaced it in its sheath. Then tearing from his body the silken gauze which formed his girdle, I fashioned from it a torch, igniting it after some difficulty with my steel.

Around me was only an appalling darkness, and I feared to test the extent of the place by shouting lest my pursuers above should hear. So forward I toiled in a straight line, floundering about in the dust, until the cleft narrowed and became tunnel-like, with a hard floor.

I stooped to feel, and was astounded to discover that the rock had apparently been worn smooth and hollow either by a watercourse, now dry, or by the tramp of many feet. Besides the air had become distinctly fresher, and this fact renewed courage within me. At first I felt myself doomed to die like a fox in a trap, but hope was reawakened in me, and there might, after all, I thought, be some outlet.

Of a sudden, however, my eyes were startled at beholding a colossal female figure seated on a kind of stool, with features so hideous and repulsive. that I drew back with an involuntary cry. It was a score times as high as myself, and as I held my torch above my head to examine it, I saw it was of some white, semi-transparent stone, the like of which I had never before witnessed. The robes were colored scarlet and bright blue, and the face and hands were crudely tinted to resemble life. One hand was outstretched. On the brow was a chaplet of wonderful magnificent pearls, and on the colossal fingers, each as thick as my own wrist, were massive golden rings which sparkled with emeralds and diamonds.

But the sinister grinning countenance was indeed that of a high priestess of Eblis. I had entered the Silent Kingdom!

Amazed I held my breath and gazed about me. Around the sides of the cavern were ranged many other smaller female figures, seated, like the central one, the face of each bearing a hideous repulsive grin, as if in mockery of my misfortunes. Before the great central colossus was a small triangular stone altar, upon which was some object.

I crossed, and glancing at it, found to my dismay that it was a beautiful and very ancient illuminated manuscript of our holy *Koran*. But through it had been thrust a poignard, now red with rust, and it had been torn, slashed and otherwise defiled. Then it dawned upon me. This noisome place into which I had plunged was the temple of that ancient accursed sect, who worshipped Eblis as their god.

As I gazed wonderingly about me, I saw everywhere evidences that for ages no foot of man had entered that silent chamber. The dust of centuries lay smooth and untrodden. Again I passed beneath the ponderous feet of the gigantic statute, when suddenly my eyes were attracted by an inscription in Kufi, the ancient writings of the *marabouts*, traced in geometrical design upon the hem of the idol's garments.

My torch had burned dim, so I lit another, and by its flickering rays succeeded in deciphering the following words

Lo! I am Azour, wife of Eblis, and the Queen of All Things Beneath the Earth. To me all bow, for I hold its riches in the hollow of my hand.

I glanced up quickly, and there far above I distinguished that in the idol's open palm there lay some object which the fickle flame of my torch could not reveal. But consumed by curiosity, I at once resolved to clamber up and ascertain what riches lay there. With extreme difficulty and holding my flambeau in my left hand, I managed to reach the platform formed by the

knees of the figure, and then scrambled up the breast and along the outstretched arm.

On mounting the latter I was dismayed to discover that the object for which I had toiled was neither gold, silver nor gems, but merely a brown and mouldy parchment scroll. Standing at last upon the open hand, I bent and picked it up, but next instant I recognised that my find was of priceless value. Ere I had read three lines of the beautifully formed but sadly-faded Arabic characters, I knew that this scroll was none other than the long sought manuscript of the *Fatassi*, the mysterious phantom book.

Ages ago it had evidently fallen into the hands of the accursed worshippers of Eblis, and they had placed it there because it was a key to the enormous wealth of buried treasure. With my find beneath my burnouse I at once descended, eager to discover some means of escape from that weird and gloomy cavern peopled by its hideous ghosts of a pagan past.

In frantic haste I sought means of exit from that temple where so many rites, hideous and horrible, had been practised, but not until many hours had elapsed, did I succeed in finding a narrow burrow, which, leading as it did out into a barren ravine in the desert, has once been used as entrance to the secret place of worship of that now forgotten sect who believed not in the One Merciful but in Eblis and Azour, his queen.

After wandering many days I succeeded in joining my people at a spot four marches from Gao, bearing hidden beneath my robe the priceless history of my ancestors, with its minute instructions for the recovery of their hidden treasure.

At this moment the *Fatassi*, traced by the bands of Koti, the marabout, and so long coveted by the French, is in my possession, though only to two of my tribesmen have I imparted the secret that I have recovered it.

At one spot indicated I have already sought secretly, and not in vain. To seek, however, to unearth the treasure of our ancestors at present would be worse than useless, for our conquerors would at once despoil us. But when the holy war has been fought against the infidels, and mere peaceful days dawn in the Soudan, then will the secret treasure-house be opened, and the now-despised *Ennitra* become a power in the land, because of their inexhaustible riches left to them by their valiant ancestors for the re-establishment of their long lost kingdom.

Until then they possess themselves in patience and trust in the One.

To thee, O reader of this, my *Tarik* of toil and tumult, peace.

———————

6: Santa Claus' Nephew

Owen Oliver

1863-1933

Australian Town and Country Journal (Sydney) 3 Dec 1913

SANTA CLAUS had retired from business this year, father said. He always said that, if Limb and Lamb had remembered; but little people do not remember what they never understood, and Limb was quite young the year before, and. did not know what father meant. Now he was seven, so he realised the awful consequences of Santa Claus' retirement; and Lamb realised them, because Limb explained to her.

They discussed the matter in whispers beside the nursery fire on Christmas Eve. "Nanna" was busy helping cook with Christmas preparations, and father and mother had gone cut. So they were minding themselves.

"What's retired?" Lamb wanted to know.

"Like grandfather," Limb explained. "He's too old to go out much but he always has lots of things for you if you go to his house. I expect Santa Claus has."

"Let's go there," Lamb proposed.

Limb considered with his chin on his hand, staring at the fire through the fireguard.

"I don't know where he lives," he admitted; "but we could ask people, If Nanna would let us go out."

"She wouldn't," Lamb stated. "She's silly!"

"Awful!" Limb agreed. He sighed. Nanna's lack of comprehension was a great trouble to him. She was always saying that she couldn't understand how he came to do things!

"I can dress myself," Lamb remarked presently; and Limb whistled. Whistling was a recent accomplishment, and he was proud of it.

"The snow's ripping!" he observed. "Even if we didn't find him it would be fun."

"And they wouldn't make much fuss on Christmas Eve," his sister pointed out. She was the more audacious, in spite of an angelic appearance.

"Come on, Maggot!" he commanded. (Lamb's real name was Maggie, but he called her that).

They ran to the cupboard, and put on hats and coats. Then they crept downstairs whispering "Ssh!" to each other, and went out of the front door very quietly, leaving it ajar for their return.

"We'll find a policeman and ask him," decided. "Policemen know everything!"

They ran round corners looking for police men, but did not find one— or anybody else— till they had turned so many corners that they had no idea where they had come to. Then in a dark square they saw a tall white figure approaching. It was the snow which made it white too, but they did not think of that.

"I believe it is Santa Claus!" Limb cried; and. they stopped in front of it, holding out their arms.

"Hulloa, kiddies!" it said pleasantly. "What do you take me for?"

"Father Christmas!" Limb answered.

"Santa Claus!" Lamb declared.

"We're looking for him," Ted explained.

"So am I," the figure said. "So am I! He seems to have got out of my way this year."

"Father says he's retired," Limb explained. "It's a nuisance, 'cause we wanted a lot of things."

"Did you?" the figure said. He had a voice like a young man. "I only wanted one— a little company! And you've come out to look for him, eh?"

"Yes!" they both exclaimed.

"And how are you going to get back home? their friend asked.

"Teddie knows," Lamb said; but Limb shook his head.

"It's somewhere," he said vaguely.

"What is the address?"

"What is it, Teddie?" the girl demanded; but the boy shook his head again.

"It's gone out of my think," he owned.

"Well," their friend inquired, "what is your name?"

"Ted," the boy said. "Hers is Maggie."

"I mean your other name."

"Well," Limb said, "father calls me Limb and her Lamb; but mother says they're not proper names, and I'm a very good boy— sometimes."

Their friend laughed. "I daresay!" he agreed. "Well, it seems to me that I shall have to see if I can't take Limb and Lamb home."

"Take us to Santa Claus first!" they entreated in one voice.

He looked down at them for a few moments. Then he laughed. "I think I will!" he decided. "I've no one else to play Santa Claus to. Come along!"

He took one by each hand, and they trotted beside him, chattering a deal.

"How many little boys and girls have you?" Limb wanted to know.

"None, he said. "I'm not married."

"Very likely I'll marry you when I grow up," Lamb volunteered.

"Don't you let her," Limb advised. "I shan't let anybody marry me; not if they try ever so hard."

"They don't try very hard to marry me," the Stranger asserted. "I don't know a girl in the town. I've only been here two months." He sighed.

"Won't you have any Christmas, parties?" Lamb asked compassionately.

"Not one!" he said. "No dancing, no games, no mistletoe!"

"Mistletoe's a nuisance!" Limb asserted. "Kissing girls! Ugh! I hate it!"

"He's a story-teller!' Lamb stated positively. "He kissed Marjorie under it. d'rectly it was up, on purpose!"

"Marjorie who?" the stranger inquired.

"Bessie's sister," Lamb answered promptly.

"Umph!" he said, "That isn't much clue."

"No," Lamb agreed. "Her name isn't Clue, but it's rather like it... I know! It's Marjorie Clara!"

"Umph!" the stranger said again.

Then they came out into a thoroughfare blazing with electric light and festooned with evergreens.

"Santa Claus lives in a shop over there," their friend told them.

"Why!" Lamb cried. "I thinked you was him."

He laughed again, and shook himself till he had sent all the snow flying; and then they saw that he was not Santa Claus, but a young gentleman who looked something like Cousin Tom. He made them shake themselves, and brushed them with his hands and handkerchief.

"No," he said. "I'm not Santa Claus; but I know where he lives. It's in the bazaar. Let's go and see if he has anything for us."

They entered the gorgeous glass doors. A tall man in a uniform held them back while they passed, and another tall gentleman dressed very beautifully came and bowed and asked their friend what he could do for him. Their friend said that he wanted to see his Uncle Santa Claus, and winked at the gentleman; and the gentleman said. "I see, sir; I see!" He explained something about "tickets," and "settlement at the cash desk," and their friend said "all right;" and then they, went into a lift with red velvet, cushions

"You's Santy Claus' niece!" Lamb accused their friend.

"Nefew, silly!" Limb corrected.

"That's it," their friend agreed cheerfully. He was a very jolly gentleman they saw, now they were in the light.

"You'll see that the old chap will know me!" He winked at the lift attendant, and the attendant winked at him.

"I know your secret password!" Limb stated. "It's this!" He winked solemnly.

"I can too!" Lamb claimed. She held one eye shut, and made a funny little wink with the other; and Santa Claus' Nephew said "Nice little Lamb!" and gave her a hug.

They were shown into a beautiful room with a lovely carpet. Santa Claus himself stood at the end between two great counters full of toys. He had long white hair with a holly wreath on top, and a tremendous white beard, and he was very fat, and he had a red face and his voice was hoarse. There were beautiful young ladies behind the counters to help him. Their friend called him uncle, and said, "Of course you remember your nephew, uncle;" and Santa Claus said, "Yes, sir! of course, sir; certainly, sir! And haven't I seen these little dears before?"

Limb explained he must have seen them asleep when he brought their toys down the chimney, before he retired; and Santa Claus said that was what he meant.

"I found I'd got a bit too stout for chimneys!" he explained. "And they wasn't swept clean enough for my liking!" He winked at his "nephew," and the "nephew" winked at him; and Limb winked at both to know that he knew the secret sign. Lamb tried to wink, but her arms were full of dolls, so she couldn't.

"You hold my eye!" she suggested to Santa Claus' nephew; and he picked her up and held one eye while she winked with the other; and there was a mistletoe spray dangling from the beautiful canopy over Santa Claus. So he kissed her.

"That's my Christmas box!" he told her. "Now you must choose yours."

They did a deal of choosing. Finally Limb had a concertina, and a lovely . set of reins, and a box of jointed acrobats who could be made to stand in all sorts of positions. Lamb had a doll in long clothes, and a dust-pan and brush and a box of dolls' furniture. They were very grateful.

Limb insisted on buying a Christmas card for "Santa Claus' Nephew" with two coppers which he had. Lamb hadn't any money, but she stroked his hand and offered to wink again.

"Up there!" she explained, pointing to the mistletoe; and he picked her up and took two more Christmas boxes.

"You kids are dears!" he asserted. "I wish I could keep you for Christmas, but I must try to take you home. If I could find anybody who knew you— who is that old lady staring at us so?"

Limb came up close to him to whisper.

"We think she is an old witch!" he whispered. "When she came to tea we put a broom stick in the passage to see if she'd ride on it; but she didn't. I 'speck it was 'cause we were looking."

"Oh!" Santa Claus' Nephew said, "she comes to your house to tea, does she? You listen to that gramophone for a minute, while I see if I can find out whether she is a real witch."

He left them, and went across to the old lady and talked to her. The children watched them to make sure that no harm came to their friend. The old lady or, witch— whichever she was— did not do anything dreadful; but she looked at him first through her spectacles, and then over them, and she frowned a great deal. He stood with his hat in his hand, and his head on one side, and smiled down at the old lady.

She was very short and he was very tall. They could not hear all the conversation, because the gramophone was making such a noise, but they caught little pieces, especially pieces of what he said; something like this: "Lost themselves.... Pretty dull all alone in town.... Thought It would be fun... Santa Claus' Nephew.... Yes. I'm the young man at twenty-seven. Here's my card.... It's all right, I assure you. I'll see them in their door.... '3 Raynor Terrace?'. Yes, I know it. Name of Smithson... Thank you... You won't give me away will you? Real good sport. Thanks!'

He bowed to the witch— if she was one— and returned to Limb and Lamb.

"I've found out the address," he announced. "3 Raynor Terrace, eh?"

"Yes!" Limb cried. "I knew it all the time, if I'd recollected! That isn't all the address. It's Edward Maybury Smithson, 3 Raynor Terrace, Graham Square; and she's Margaret Beatrice. Smithson. That's her address!"

"The house with lions at the bottom of the steps," Lamb volunteered. "Mummy said I could say that, if I got losted, and didn't remember the 'dress!"

"We'll go in a taxi," Santa Claus' Nephew proposed. "Perhaps your mother and father won't be back yet, and you'll get in quietly. They'll wonder where the toys have come from. Will they be angry?"

Limb considered, pursing his lips.

"Of course," he observed, "I'll say it's my fault, 'cause Maggot doesn't know any better; She's only six. I expect father will only be going to be very cross next time! Mother's sure to hug me and say 'You meant well, old man!' That's what she always says!"

"I see!"

Their friend laughed.

"I don't fancy you're in much danger. I think I should run out alone, if I were you. Suppose the witch has found you, instead of me, eh?"

"They don't witch you at Christmas," Lamb asserted. "It's in a book mummy reads to us, the pink one!"

"I believe you're a bit of a witch yourself, Lamb!" their friend said. "I wish— Hulloa! Here's the house; lions and all. Got all your parcels? That's right. Shake

hands. Teddie! A merry Christmas, old man!— Got a kiss for me, Lamb? Bless you, girlie.— A merry Christmas kids!"

He watched them clamber up the snowy steps, struggling with their parcels. The front door was ajar as they had left it. Apparently their absence had not been discovered. They stumbled inside; turned and nodded to him; called in a whisper "Merry Christmas!"

Then the door closed.

He told the cabman to drive on. "It will be the first Christmas dinner I've fever eaten alone!" he muttered. "If Santa Claus were a sport he'd send his poor nephew an invitation from someone. I'd like to steal those kids to play with to-morrow!"

He groaned several times over his lonely Christmas breakfast, and looked very unlike his usual cheerful self.

Then Santa Claus arrived in the shape of the postman. He brought his note.

Dear Nephew of Santa Claus,

Since you are very lonely, perhaps you would like to come and have your Christmas dinner with a crotchety old woman? If you think I should bore you more than you bore yourself, you can easily say that you have arranged to go and play bridge at your club!

I live at No. 35, as I daresay you know. Dinner at 1.30.

Wishing you the compliments of the season,

Yours sincerely,

Mary Reeve.

Santa Claus' Nephew leaned back in his chair and laughed aloud.

"Good old sport! " he cried. "I daresay she's lonely too. Of course I'll go! She might have a party with some nice, fellows and girls! That would be luck!"

He arrived at No. 35 a little before half past one; a very smiling, smartly dressed young man. The old witch — but he thought she was more of the fairy godmother— received him, very graciously; but, there was no other company. However the dinner was excellent, and the old lady had a sharp, amusing tongue, and cheered him up wonderfully.

"I am a woman of moods," she told him, after dinner; "and, I had a fancy to be alone to-day; but I know plenty of people, and you shall know some of them."

"You are good to take me on trust," he said.

"Oh!" she laughed. "You are so well-connected! Your Uncle Santa Claus is a very old friend. I think"— she paused to listen to a knock and ring— "I suspect that is one of his young relatives!"

The visitor did not give the name of Santa Claus, however, but Boyce. Miss Frances Boyce. The old lady called her "Frankie."

"You wouldn't come to us," she cried, holding the old lady's hands. "So I thought I'd come round and chatter for half an hour. The kids don't give me a chance at Lou's. They are so excited about the toys, and— Oh! I didn't know you had company."

The old lady introduced them.

"Mr. Lee and I made acquaintance quite romantically," she remarked. "His action in a certain matter gained my confidence and approval."

"Oh, Mr. Lee!" she cried merrily. "You must be a wonderful man! Auntie Reeve— she isn't really my auntie, you know, it's a pet name— so rarely, approves of anybody; not even me! I'm full of news this afternoon. My little nephew and niece have had a wonderful adventure. They are seven and six, and their father calls them Limb, and Lamb. I think Lamb is worse than Limb really. Shall I tell you about it? Well, their mother and father went out buying things last night, and I went to see a friend. Nurse was helping cook downstairs; and it seems that her young man was home for the holidays, and called to see her. So she was 'rather a long time,' that's how she puts it— before she went up to see what the mischiefs were doing in the nursery. In fact, she didn't go till we all came back! She found them playing with a quantity of new toys! It appears that their father's teasing had frightened them that Santa Claus wasn't, coming, and the little imps had dressed and gone out to; look for him! It seems that they met 'Santa Claus' nephew; and he took them to see his uncle; and his uncle knew him; and remembered seeing them when he brought toys down the chimney, but now he's too fat to get down! We think he must he the Santa Claus at the bazaar in the Universal! Emporium! The nephew seems to have been some lonely fellow who thought he'd like to have a bit of fun with two pretty children. They really are dear little things, Mr. Lee! Lamb says he was 'a lovely man,' and he kissed her 'cause I winked, and he shutted my other eye.' She can't close one by itself, you see. They want to ask him to their party, because he isn't going to any, and the ladies don't try to make him marry them."

"Well," the old lady said, "suppose I come round this afternoon, and you can act as Niece Santa Claus, and ask me to bring Mr Lee for an hour. He is all alone in town; as lonely as Nephew Santa Claus seems to have been."

The girl nodded smilingly.

"My sister and her husband will be pleased. I'm sure, Mr. Lee," she said.

"I'm just delighted," he declared; and they all went together. The children were busy with their toys in the drawing-room, and did not look up till the introductions had been made. Then Lamb gave a wild scream.

"Santy Claus' Nefew!" she cried, and rushed at him. Limb jumped up and seized the visitor at the same time.

"Now we can ask you to our party!" he stated.

"The mistletoe's over the door!" Lamb mentioned.

"Kissing girls is silly!" Limb protested.

"Not if they fall in love with you!" said Santa Claus' Nephew. He kissed Lamb; but he looked at the auntie.

He had a presentiment he told her, a week later, that he would kiss her under the mistletoe before it was down.

"Santa Claus has brought the best thing he'll ever give me, dear," said Santa Claus' Nephew.

7: The Secret of Ledger D.

Randolph Bedford

1868-1941

Eastern Recorder (Kellerberrin, WA), 4 July 1924

DAVID PLOWMAN, importer and exporter, director of several industrial concerns, chairman of the Metropolitan Gas Company, and president of the Bank of Hobson's Bay, was in a bad temper. The immediate cause of his ill-humour was that he had just been told by the manager of the bank that £810 was missing from the note reserve, and while he valued money as all traders value it, Plowman's loss lay not in the sum, but in his hatred of all irregularity.

He was a bald, slight, hard-eyed man with preciseness in every wrinkle of him. More than middle-aged, he had neglected all the joys of youth in favour of making money while he was young, believing that when his fortune was made he might purchase all the pleasure of living. He had awakened, however, to the fact that age brings no dividends of happiness unless youth has made investments of service. Even at middle age he might have found happiness, for happiness is largely physical, but moneymaking not only demands the sacrifice of youth, but health also, and overwork had leeched the sweetness of his blood. On his bad days even the girl typists in his office fled at the sound of his step.

And now to his physically bad day was added the trouble of the missing notes. On his way to the manager's office, Mr. Plowman's glance fell on a bank messenger, and seemed to shrivel him, leaving the lad trembling.

John Giles, the keeper of ledger "D to H," glanced furtively and afraid at Plowman as he disappeared into the manager's office. Giles had been twelve years in the service of the bank, and he was still a ledger keeper. The marks of his experience of long hours, small pay and deferred hopes of promotion were visible in his eyes. He was a man of thirty-five, and looked fifty.

As Plowman returned from the manager's room, accompanied by the manager, his roving, irritable eye caught the half-questioning, half furtive glance of Giles. Giles shifted his glance as soon as he saw that he had been observed; and to Plowman the diffidence translated itself into a sense of guilt.

"What's the name of that ledger keeper?'' "Giles, John Giles."

"How long in the bank?"

"Twelve years."

Plowman suddenly felt intuitively that Giles' half frightened, furtive glance was so absolutely guilty that the move he thought of it the move he decided that Giles was in some wav connected with the missing notes. He stated his opinion to the manager and, although that officer smiled incredulously, Plowman remained firm.

"I know that there's something sly about that man, and if it isn't that he's taken the notes, what is it?'

The manager urged Giles' twelve years of attention to duty.

"What are his weaknesses?" Plowman demanded.

"He hasn't any that I know of."

"Ah! 'That you know of.' Does he gamble?"

"No, I would swear to that."

"Well, I think the gentleman needs an investigation. Where does he live?"

"At South Yarra, in a high-class boarding house."

"H'm, that must cost him thirty shillings a week. What's his salary?"

"A hundred and sixty-five pounds year."

"H'm— and he probably spends ei.ultv for board and laundry. How does he travel?"

"By rail to South Yarra."

"That's another eight pounds a year for travelling. Clothes, say thirteen pounds a year. He still has over fifty pounds a year to speculate with."

"Would you like to have him watched?"

"No. Leave this to me. I'm going to make a few inquiries."

And David Plowman walked back to his office with a pleasurable consciousness of a new interest in life. For he was a lonely man.

And that night he began his pursuit of Giles.

For the first week of his detective work. Plowman was content to follow the ledger keeper from the bank to the railway station, realising that Giles' irregularities, if there were any, belonged to the suburbs. Then, one evening, he boarded the ledger keeper's train, taking the next coach behind the one Giles had entered, thinking to watch his employee's movements at South Yarra.

But at South Yarra a surprise awaited him, for when Plowman looked along the platform he found that Giles had not left the train! Plowman thought deeply for several minutes, and then, as he had Giles' address, he decided to walk there and make inquiries. He set off almost youthfully, and after ten minutes he reached No. 7 Wistaria Terrace.

"Mr. Giles is not in," the woman who answered the door told him. "He never has lived here, you know. He only pays a little to have an address for his letters."

Mystery! Plowman turned awav, and his suspicions gave him a sleepless night. The next morning he detailed his experience to the bank manager.

"Shall I call him and demand an explanation?" the manager asked.

"No, I'll prove something against him before long, and I'm pretty sure of tracing the missing notes to him."

"You won't do that, Mr. Plowman, because they were found last night. They were in the strong-room all the time; it was a case of nine hundred pound notes getting in with the tens and being counted as tens."

Plowman shook his head. He was more and more puzzled. Also, he was determined to solve what he called the mystery of ledger D.

That night he followed Giles again, getting into the coach behind him, but keeping a sharp look-out so that Giles should not escape him again. At the second station, Windsor, he saw Giles leave the train, and he followed. For several blocks Giles led the way until he reached a quiet little street where gardens bloomed before the houses. Before one of these houses Giles stopped, opened the gate, and then let himself into the front door with a latchkey.

Plowman stopped short. So this was where Giles lived.

But had he in any way solved the mystery? Plowman had just decided not, when there came to him children's and a woman's voices, and then the voice of Giles with a new note in it— the voice of the master who is beloved. Suddenly the rays of a lamp broke the dusk, and two children ran onto the small verandah; then came a sweet-faced woman with a large tray, and then Giles, holding the lamp high with one hand, the other steadying a golden-headed boy who rode on his shoulder. The woman placed the tray on a table, and Giles put the lamp beside it. Plowman, hidden away in the dusk, saw that Giles and his family were going to have a picnic supper on the verandah.

For many minutes David Plowman stood there in contemplation of this picture of family life, his thoughts wandering. He had never known poverty, even the respectable poverty such as Giles knew. No, he had made a good start, and earned much money, and for it he had thrown away his chance of love in youth, of children in his middle age, of contentment in his last days.

He turned to go. His work was done. His suspicions of Giles were at an end. Giles had covered up virtue as if it were a crime; had trembled with fear of discovery as if he were a felon. Plowman knew it all now. The false address at South Yarra. the posing as a single man, were merely Giles' cloaks to his infraction of the rule of the bank— "No employee of this bank shall marry until his salary has reached two hundred pounds a year."

The absolute alternative was dismissal. Plowman recognised its unalterableness, while for the first time questioning its justice. That night David Plowman lay awake, while all his little sins and greeds came to him in the darkness and danced insultingly on the foot-rail of his bed.

"Look at this man Giles," they seemed to say. "He gets a little more than three pounds a week, but he keeps his family. He's worried about little things, and behind it all is the fear of discovery and discharge— and that he keeps to

himself, and smiles all through. His wife doesn't know he married her against the rules of the bank; she wouldn't or, be happy if she did. He's happy; happy, all through, and once he opens his gate at night he's loved. He's happy and loved, David Plowman, and you're not."

The red and black devils gibbered at him through the darkness.

"And now that you've found out that he's married you must report it, and Giles will be discharged," the imps went on. "He's broken a rule and you will have to discharge him."

With the morning, though a certain strange kindliness filled him, David Plowman was swayed by his respect for system, and his hatred of irregularity.

He was at the bank early, and asked that Giles be sent to him at once.

"Giles," he commenced, "you have broken the rule against marrying while under the minimum salary, and you must go. Have you anything to say?"

"No, sir, nothing." Giles paled, and his eyes burned with misery. "The rule is unjust, but I accepted it at the beginning." Plowman nodded his approval.

"That's the spirit, the spirit I expected in you. I agree with you that the rule is unjust. Are you sorry you broke it?"

The ledger keeper looked down and replied slowly:

"No, if I had to be alone again I'd die."

"Well, Giles, I'm sorry for you. The bank's rule is what it is. I wouldn't break it if I could. It's the system."

He spoke as reverently of the system as if its origin had been divine.

"Yes, sir, I don't blame anybody."

"Not even yourself?"

"No, sir, I've been happy for ten years."

"Well, you've got to leave the bank. You must resign to save yourself dismissal."

"Very well, sir."

He turned to go but Plowman stopped him. "Would you like to know how we found out?"

"No, sir, it wouldn't interest me." He spoke bitterly, and Plowman decided that the play had gone far enough.

"Well, I found it out. I've followed you for days and had fine tramps after you— more exercise than I've had for years. It has really done me good. Don't you think I am looking better?"

At this intimate inquiry Giles plucked up enough courage to be interested.

"Yes, sir, you're not so badly marked under the eyes as you were."

"That's right, that's right," said Plowman with a sudden pleasant ring in his voice. "It's the exercise; we'll go for walks together."

"Together, sir?"

"Why not? It's just this, Giles, you're a good man, a straight man."

"Oh—"

"Listen a minute. I found your South Yarra address was bogus. I followed you to your home in Windsor, saw you at supper, saw the children."

The ledger keeper smiled.

"And I've been thinking a great deal," Plowman went on. "You must, leave the bank, but I want a confidential man. You can have two hundred and fifty pounds a year for a start. Will you take it?"

"Take it? Why— why, I'll serve you as if you were my father. You don't, know what it, means, Mr. Plowman. ''

"Oh yes, I do. That's settled. So put in your resignation and take a week off, on full pay from me, of course. And don't thank me. Taking an interest in you has given me the habit of exercise. I'll live ten years longer for it. Good-bye. I'll see you in a week."

Giles backed out, incoherently murmuring gratitude, and thinking what his news would mean to the cottage at Windsor.

Plowman also thought of that cottage in Windsor, and there was a lonely ache in his heart. But, presently the thought of the happiness he had brought to the ledger keeper came to comfort him, and the virtuous glow of the benefactor spread through his veins like wine. He was happy, because he had made others happy. He smiled as he turned to his work.

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8: Extra Turn

Herbert Allingham

1867-1936

Yes or No, 7 March 1908

West Coast Sentinel (Streaky Bay, SA), 7 April 1917

Herbert Allingham was the father of Margery Allingham, the golden age detective writer and creator of Albert Campion

THE TENTH-RATE music-hall in South London was providing the usual dreary entertainment to a scanty and depressed audience.

Less than a dozen people yawned and dozed in the shilling stalls. Among a young man about thirty was conspicuous both by his attire and by his grave, handsome face. He wore evening clothes, and the accessories of his toilet were faultless almost to the point of dandyism.

His face, however, was keen, strong and intellectual, denoting a man of both character and attainments.

He watched with amused curiosity a very fat lady on the stage, dressed as a Hussar, singing an incredibly stupid song, in an incredibly bad voice, and then, as she disappeared amidst the rapturous applause of the faithful gallery, he consulted his programme.

"No. 7," he read. "The Brothers Pinko, in their screamingly funny knockabout sketch."

He looked up with a shade of weariness on his face, and then noted that instead of the figure 7, the card on the other side of the stage bore the words "Extra Turn."

Frank Wilmot, a rising young barrister, with political ambitions, found himself in this dingy South London music-hall, owing to the receipt of an anonymous letter.

"If you go and sit out the performance on Friday night you will learn something that it may be worth your while to know."

So the mysterious message had concluded.

Wilmot never neglected an anonymous letter. He found that such communications often led to business. Nevertheless, as the evening wore on, he began to think that he had come, on a fool's errand.

Then came the extra turn.

A beautiful girl simply but stylishly dressed, walked quietly on to the staged

She came forward to the footlights, bowed gravely to the audience and began to sing. The audience suddenly grew silent. The buzz of talk, the clink of glasses the striking of matches suddenly ceased.

It was strange to hear such singing in such a place.

The voice was one of great power, and marvellous sweetness, and had been well trained. People leaned forward entranced, their eyes all directed to the slim, girlish figure and to the pale and pathetically beautiful face.

When the simple ballad was finished the house broke into a storm of applause. Many of the people leaped upon their seats, waved their handkerchiefs, and shouted words of admiration.

But Frank Wilmot did not move.

His eyes were fixed upon the singer, his mouth, was set and hard, and Ms face had assumed an ashen pallor.

He had reason to be affected, for the girl whose refined presence and God-given power of song had brought a cloud of glory into that common South London music-hall was Frank Wilmot's wife.

SHE SANG AGAIN, and yet again, although it could be seen that she found the heated and smoke-laden atmosphere more than a little distressing.

When at last she made her final exit, bowing gravely as before to the noisy plaudits of the excited house, Wilmot woke as from a dream. For a moment . he felt inclined to rush upon the stage, and pursue the singer by way of the wings. Restraining himself he called an attendant and slipped a half-crown and a visiting-card into the man's hand.

"Take this card to the singer who has Just gone off," he said, " and ask her if she will be good enough to see me in five minutes."

In three minutes the reply came.

"Madame Paoli is at present engaged with the manager, but she will meet Mr. Wilmot in twenty minutes, outside the theatre."

Wilmot at once left the building, and took up his stand in the sordid thoroughfare outside.

He now had himself well under control. His face wore an impassive expression already well known in the Law Courts, but behind those steady grey eyes, the brain was working.

At length the dainty little figure of the singer, soberly attired, emerged from the building.

Wilmot approached and raised his hat. She held out her hand and Wilmot's keen eyes noted that it trembled.

"What does this mean?" he asked

She looked up into his face, and in her eyes he saw surprise and perhaps a shade of reproach.

"We cannot talk here," she said "If you care to take to supper, you may."

Her voice was curiously even and self-possessed, it seemed to the man. How different she was! He looked at her again to be sure she was the same girl he had wooed and won in Devonshire seven years ago.

"Thanks," he said awkwardly, "Let us take a cab and get across the water."

They said little or nothing until they were seated at a table in a private, room in a select West End restaurant.

She looked so beautiful as she leaned back in her chair, her face flushed with excitement, her glorious eyes aglow, that Wilmot remained for a while looking at her in silence.

Do I look much older, Frank?" she asked with a smile.

"Yes," he murmured, "you are a greatly changed and yet you are the same. Lucy, I have been an awful blackguard."

She raised her hand in protestation.

"Don't. Not yet. Let me speak. When you married me I was sixteen, an awkward, silly country girl. But I loved you, Frank, and you seemed to care for me. We were very happy until your holiday came to an end, and you had to go back to London. Do you remember our tears and— and your promises?"

"Yes," replied the man hoarsely,

"You promised to make a little money and then send for me. You wrote me several letters— I have them all— the first four were very kind. Then they grew short end abrupt, and after a year they stopped. But you sent me money from time to time."

"Why did you not write again to me? Why did you not complain?"

"Complain? Complain because you had ceased to love me? I could not do that. But I followed you to London. For the last five years I have watched you and rejoiced in your success Many times I have seen you in the streets and hear you in the Courts."

"Heavens, child, why did you not come to me?"

"Because, Frank, I had the truth."

"What do you mean?"

"That you were ashamed of me. That you had regretted having tied yourself to an ignorant country girl." He tried to deny her words, but her grave, truthful eyes were upon him and he was silent.

"So I went my way," she continued. "I managed to get into the Guildhall School of Music. Your money has helped me, Frank."

He bit his moustache savagely but said nothing.

"They think a lot of me at the Guildhall. They talk of opera and that sort of thing, but I have come to an end of my money. To-night I got a show at the place where you saw me. I seemed to have pleased them, and the manager has offered me an engagement to sing at his three halls for £15 a week."

"Of course you refused ?"

"Oh, no; I signed an agreement to-night while you were waiting for me."

"But, Lucy, my wife must not be a music-hall singer."

"Don't you think it's rather late to begin to exert your authority? You see," she went on remorselessly, "one of the halls is the Pantheon. I think I will make a hit there and better engagements will result."

Wilmot pulled himself, together.

"Lucy," he said, leaning across the table, and speaking in low, earnest tones, "you have a right to torment me. I have no claim upon you. My cowardly neglect has done away with, all that, I know— I know but,— my darling, I love you. I heard you sing tonight, and I know you can win fame if you like. I know all that but, my darling, I love you. I have no arguments to put before you, no commands to make; but the Lucy I married in Devonshire would have given up all the world for me and for my love. I will not believe you are changed."

"It is seven years," replied the girl, gravely.

"Oh, Lucy," he cried, "do not play with me! Believe me, darling, I alone can make you happy. I must have been mad all these years. I have worked so hard— it is such a fight in my profession! and I— oh, child I cannot explain, I cannot defend myself! I only, know that I love you now, and shall love you always, and that I ask you to take pity on me and forgive me."

The girl looked at his tense, eager face and smiled half pityingly, half contemptuously.

"You men are queer creatures," she said, as she leaned back in her chair and surveyed him critically, "so cruel, so selfish, and yet so babyish. All these years you have been cursing your folly for having tied yourself to me, for having sacrificed yourself, and now because I look fairly presentable, because I can do without you, you are the adoring over once more. Don't you see how silly it all is?"

"Lucy, it is you who are cruel," said the man in a low voice.

"Not really," she replied, quite calmly. "I should be cruel if I pretended that I cared for you any more. In the old days I thought you the most wonderful man in the world, but I was very simple and ignorant then. Much has happened since. The plain truth, Frank, is that I have outgrown you. By the way, do you know why I sent you that letter ?"

"You sent it then?" he cried, an eager hopeful light leaping into his eyes.

"Yes; I wanted to see you on a matter of business. I have a friend."

"Yes?"

"She is unhappily married. How can she get a divorce without engaging in any vulgar intrigue?"

"Lucy," cried the man, fiercely, springing to his feet, "what, do you mean?"

"Please don't be stagey. You see you are the only lawyer I know; and I thought perhaps you would advise me."

"You are speaking for yourself. You mean to get rid of me," cried Wilmot hoarsely.

The woman rose and began adjusting her furs.

"Frank," she said, with a smile, "I am sure you will succeed, you are quite clever. What fun it will be when we are both famous. I wonder if we shall meet in those days. There, you silly boy, don't look so ferocious. Promise to be sensible, and you shall see me to the door of my flat."

The man seized her arm almost roughly.

"Lucy," he said, in a voice almost vibrant with emotion, "are you playing with me, or are you in earnest? For God's sake, answer me."

She looked at him gravely, and a friendly, almost tender light came into her eyes, as though she were looking at a child passionately pleading for the stars.

"Frank," she said holding other hand, "let us be friends. Beyond that, believe me, nothing is possible."

"But, child, I love you," urged the passionately. "Is my love nothing?"

The woman smiled a little bitterly. "Love may much or little, Frank," she said. "All the world, or a moment's idle fancy, but, believe me, the most worthless love of all is the love that comes too late."

She passed out of the room, and left him standing there alone, dazed and stupid.

TO-DAY Madame Paoli is a famous singer, and Frank Wilmot an eminent K.C., who might any day be a judge if he chose to relinquish the great income he makes at the Bar.

It is popularly said that neither of them has ever had a love affair, and the success of both is attributed to the fact that they have never allowed love to stand in the way of ambition.

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9: Grandfather's Courtship

Henry Lawson

1867-1922

The Lone Hand, Aug 1913

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IT WAS Christmas time, and a younger brother, a younger uncle and I had come with a couple of doubtful shotguns and the fisherman's faith to spend the holidays with Grandfather at Mount Victoria. He was a caretaker in an old mountain residence at the head of a ragged gully, and we had spent the day before Christmas in helping him to bring the timber he had split up from the head of the gully. In the evening he and I decided to rest and smoke while the other two went into the township.

Grandfather sat against the wall smoking his pipe, which he had cleared and filled with the deliberate care of an old bushman. I was trying to smoke too, being over twenty-one, and allowed that privilege by Grandfather. We were both gazing into the broad moonlight across the old orchard to the cliffs on the other side of the gully and the blue peaks beyond. After a spell of silence I had asked Grandfather to sing, and he had sung "The Golden Glove" and "The Mistletoe Bough". Then we were quiet again for a while, and the silence was broken by Grandfather.

"Henery, did I ever tell you how I courted your Grandmother?"

I had heard the story, but I kept that dark, and then Grandfather told me all about it.

"I was a young man then, Henery," said Grandfather, "about your age— but they did say I was something to look at." Grandfather paused, with his quizzical side-long glance at me; but I didn't take the matter up, so Grandfather went on, evidently disappointed: "An' I didn't wear la-di-dah clothes, an' write poetry for the papers, an' talk like a 'en (hen) to make meself look like what I wasn't."

I let that pass, too, considering it weak and unworthy of Grandfather.

"Howsomenever, we was all livin' at a place between Windsor and Penrith on the upper Hawkesbury— on the Nepean— nearabouts where we were all born and brought up, at a place called Never Mind— at least, that's what we called it. It would be called Kick-up-a-Fuss in these here la-di-dah days. We had a saw-pit and timber-trucks— they're all gone now, tyres and all, and the saw-pit's gone too, an' so's the timber. They're making new forests, I've heered, but they won't be like the old 'uns. The last time I took a holiday trip down there to see the place there was nothing but a heap of stones with tangle growin' over 'em, an' a frill lizard thinkin' in the sun; he must have been a old 'un, fer he seemed to remember me and didn't make to go away. But there was a dint in

the ground yit where the saw-pit was; an' dirty water; an' some tadpoles an' maybe a crawfish or two— the water was too muddy for me to see; an' some ducks holdin' a mothers' meetin', about me comin', I s'pose!"

"Go on, Grandfather."

"Howsomenever. It was Saturday and we knocked off at one o'clock and I went home dog-tired. I had a slush and went in and sat down to dinner. Mother was away, monthly nursin', at the minister's house— the parsonage near Penrith; an' my sister Margaret was keeping house. You never saw your great-aunt Margaret, Henery?"

(I saw the old lady since and she recognised me and said she'd know one of our tribe if she saw the skin spread out on a gooseberry bush. Then I recognised her.)

"Howsomenever, Father— that's your great-grandfather— was at home, growlin' round, which was about all he did, nowadays. You see, he had crotchety old country ideas. Howsomenever, we wanted a growler in the family to make the home complete. It was a big family, but poor old Father filled the job right down to the ground and up to the roof.

"After dinner I stretched out on the broad of me back on the big home-made sofa and smoked 'n' rested. It was good. Arter a while, Margaret (yer great-aunt) said:

" 'I want you to take the clean clothes to Mother at the minister's place this afternoon, Harry, if you will.' You see, she was washing for the parsonage.

" 'Oh, confound it!' I said, 'You're allers a worrit-worrit-worriting the life out of a man; ain't a man to get no rest at all? Let some of the others do it!' Margaret didn't say anything, but went on folding and ironing an' fillin' the basket. *She* always knew what *she* was about. Bineby I felt rested and got restless and oneasy, and sat up.

" 'You wimmin is always worrit-worrit-worritin' a man,' I said, 'he don't git no peace at all.'

" 'What's the matter with you now, Harry?' she says. 'Who's a-worritin' you?'

" 'Have you got those clothes ready?' I shouted.

" 'Presently,' she said, 'you needn't howl about it.'

"I went and tidied up a bit and put on my boots. We didn't wear our boots every day in the week then. And then I hoisted the basket onto my shoulder an' started up the river to the minister's place.

"When I got there I went round to the back and knocked at the kitchen door; it was shut, being a windy day. It was opened, and I seen the prettiest girl east of the mountains. She was short and slight and had blue eyes and hair like new straw— (but all you rascals are dark, like me). I was taken aback, not

expectin' her, though *I had* heern that there was a young English servient girl at the parsonage, but I took no notice of it; so I was flustered and took up the baskit agen, like a big fool, to have somethin' to 'old onto; and was offerin' it to her as if it had been a bokay. But she wasn't no more flustered at seein' me there than if I'd been the cat come home— or she'd been one. Wimmin *are* like cats in some ways. I recollicted myself presently and put the basket down an' scraped off me hat. 'If *you please,* Miss,' I said, 'I'd like to hassertain if Mother is in. Missis Albury, Miss,' I says.

" 'Oh! you're Harry,' she said. 'I beg your pardon— Mr Albury. Come in and sit down. Put the basket down anywheres, and I'll go and tell your mother you're here.'

"I went in and put down the basket in the middle of the big brick floor where it 'ud be in everyone's road. It was one of them old style kitchens, with everything big and scrubbed, and white and bright and yellow, and red. She started to drag a big old-fashioned cane chair out, with legs spread out like a kangaroo dog runnin', an' a dished back, all string-bound. I put me hat down very carefully in a corner on the brick floor, where it wouldn't fall off.

"Then I went to help her with the chair, an' accidentally touched her hand, and it took all the presence of mind out of me that was left in me, it was so small and cool and soft. I said, 'Beg yer pardon, Miss,' for nothing, and set down suddenly, an' the chair set down too— the legs went all ways for Sunday; and that didn't improve matters."

"What did you do then, Grandfather?"

"Got up, o' course, you ass. Do you think I was going to sit there *all* day?"

"She'd have thought it rather strange, Grandfather, if you had. But what did she say? Did she laugh?"

"No! She didn't; she wasn't a lot of thund'rin' jumpt-up laughing Jack-hasses, like my grandchildren. She looked— she looked— well— "

"Demure, Grandfather?"

"Now, I don't want none of your la-di-dah words! She looked well— "

"Concerned?" I ventured.

"Consarn you. She looked— hanxious. She wanted to hassertain if I was hurt."

"To what!"

"Well, to know, if you must know. I said I wasn't. I was concerned, as you call it, about the chair. I wanted to take it out an' mend it right away, but she wouldn't hear of it. She said it was all her fault; the cook ought to have had it put in the lumber room long ago; the minister, Mr Kinghorn, had told them to; but how it could be all her fault and the cook's too, I didn't think at the time. 'An' would you carry it into the shed for me, please, Mr er-r-Harry?' And Mr-

Herr-Harry pleased. When I came back she was dragging out a big old grandfather chair from a nook— the cook's special, I s'pose— and I reckoned she must be a big woman. I took the chair from her and put it near the door and sat down, it seemed safer there, and she started for the foot of the stairs; but Mother called over the rail:

" 'What's that noise, Harriet? Who's there?' I s'pose she knowed all the time.

" 'It's Mr— Mr Harry, ma'am,' said Harriet, 'the chair broke!'

" 'The what?' says Mother.

" 'The chair, ma'am,' says Harriet, 'it broke.'

" 'Well, you ain't been losin' much time,' says Mother, 'I must say— well, keep him there till I come down, an' don't let him fall inter the fire.'

"I wanted to go up and smother Mother— about the chair, I mean. But I don't think Harriet guessed what Mother was drivin' at. Anyways, Harriet said so afterwards, that she didn't.

"Well I set still, and Harriet said nothing. She was the quietest little housemaid I ever see. Mousemaid, rather. It was the cook's arternoon out, I s'pose. Harriet moved round like a mouse, polishin' and brightenin' up already, an' we went on sayin' nothing to each other just as fast as ever we could.

"Arter about two years hard, I think, I heern Mother coimin' downstairs, pat, pat, pat, pat, with a basket of dirty clothes— at least I wouldn't a' called 'em dirty— "

"Soiled linen, Grandfather?"

"Right! Some of yer lah-di-dandy. Howsomenever, when Mother got to the foot of the stairs, and turns round like a stopper in a bottle (she was short and stout like a Yorkshire dumpling, like yer Granny was when you knew her— a bundle as long as she was broad. Strange how all our mothers and wives are so short and dumpy, an' we so long, an' sometimes lanky, like you). Howsomenever, Mother squinted at me an' then at Harriet.

" 'Weil. You are makin' a lot o' noise between you, you two,' says she, 'for sich new acquaintances. Leastways, when I was a gal we waited till we was introduced at least. Well, how are they all at home, Harry?'

"That's the first time that I ever see Harriet— that's your Grandmother— redden up. She flushed to the roots of her hair, as the sayin' is (an' half way down her back perhaps, though I didn't see it). She went crimson, the more so that she was fair, and it become her wonderfully. I wanted to smother Mother agen, but had to kiss her instead.

"Harriet went inside, arter some business of her own, while Mother heard the news an' give me some messages for Margaret. Mother wanted me to stay an' have a cup o'tea; but I wouldn't. I'd had enough, an' besides, I didn't know

how I'd manage a cup an' sarser; especially if Harriet was in the kitchen— though the parson's kitchen crockery was big an' homely enough, it skeered me to think o' tryin'. You see, we used mugs or pannikins at home. So I said I was going somewheres that arternoon, and wanted to get home.

" 'Very well, then,' says Mother, tyin' a cloth over the basket; 'but ain't you goin' to wait an' say good-bye to Harriet. Where's yer manners?'

" 'Is her name Harriet, Mother?' I says.

" 'Yes. Of course it is,' says Mother; 'Henrietta— Harriet. Didn't yer hear me call her so, half-a-dozen times?'

" 'Well, that's funny,' I says, scratchin' my head.

" 'What's funny? You great galoot!' says Mother.

" 'Why, my name's Henery— an' Harry, too,' I said.

" 'But it ain't Henrietta, nor yet Harrieta,' says Mother; 'though you've been lookin' an' actin' more like it than she has, all the arternoon. Or like a Mary Ann rather. Why can't you hold yer own an' be a man when yer meet a good-lookin' gal? Your father could, worse luck, an' so can your brothers.'

"Jist then Harriet came back an' see me standing by the baskit, ready.

" 'Why! Isn't Mr Albury going to stay an' have some tea, Mrs Albury?' she said. 'I'll get it ready in a minute.'

" 'No, thank you, Miss,' I said, 'I've got to go somewheres; an' besides, I'm as full as a new straw bed tick.'

"I could 'a' bitten me tongue out for makin' such a hole in me manners; but it was too late now, an' I dived for the basket.

" 'Well! Say good-bye to Harriet,' says Mother.

"So I blundered up to Harriet, an' nearly over her; an' she held out her little hand a little way. Gosh, it gave me a skeer. It was soft an' cool and small— I never thought a girl could have such a small hand. It seemed alive an knowin', too, like a tame white rat in your hand. It startled me, an' I must have gripped it in my nervousness; for she gave a little sound, like a small 'Oh!' an' put both her hands behind her. Then she recollected herself, an' put em' in front, under her apron, where she was rubbing the numbness off the one she geve me with the other, I s'pose. It was all just like as if she'd given me a tame frog, unexpected, to take home and take keer of for her— that little hand was. I seen I'd hurt her, so I dived for the basket, hoisted it on me shoulder, and kissed Mother on the nose— or on the chin— I didn't know which; they both stuck out like yours will when you lose a few more teeth; and then I collared the parson's garden hat, that was hangin' on a peg on the wall, and bolted."

I waited, expectant, while Grandfather saw to his pipe and then studied the moonlight reflectively.

"Talkin' o' teeth," said Grandfather, "I wonder how you young ones all seem to lose your teeth so early. I s'pose it's the la-di-dah tucker an' soft slush you get in Sydney. It wasn't so in my time when we had to gnaw raw pumpkin an' cob corn when the floods cut the teams off."

"Confound it, Grandfather, why don't you go on with the story?"

"How kin I, when yer always keep int'ruptin' me?" said Grandfather. *"Will* you hold your tongue?" (Pause for reply, but I didn't fall in.) "Howsomenever, I'd gone about a mile along the road before I recollected that I hadn't said good-bye to Harriet arter all. That will show you how a— "

"Grandfather," I said, severely, "what did you take the minister's hat for?"

"How was I to know?" said Grandfather, in a suspiciously mild and injured tone, "an' how in thunder am I to know now, five an' forty years afterwards?"

"I beg your pardon, Grandfather."

"Well, don't do it agen. You're allers breakin' a thread in me dish-cloth, as old Betty Campney uster say.— Howsomenever, I *didn't* know I *had* the parson's hat on till I got home. I thought it strange, arterwards, in a funny sort o' way, that a parson should have the same size head as I had. But then agen, come to think of it, why shouldn't he?— Howsomenever, some of 'em I passed, agoin' into Penrith in carts an' on horseback, did look unusual hard at me, I noticed, an' I wondered what devilment I'd been up to in town last Saturday. One or two on horseback called out to ask if Harry Albury was ordained yet; if I'd taken 'oly Horders; and I couldn't make out what they were drivin' at, unless they guessed I'd come from the minister's place. They'd soon 'a' found out what they was drivin' at if I hadn't 'a' bin afoot; for we wasn't scoffers, whatever else we might 'a' been. An' don't you go in for none of that (he referred to scoffing), Henery, because, if you ain't sorry arterwards, you'll be ashamed. Ver Grandmother was struck in those matters, you remember; bein' a poor minister's darter afore she immigrated. She might have been more comfortable for all on us," Grandfather went on reflectively, "if she hadn't had such strick convictions about shirt sleeves on Sundays, and little things like that. But I forgit. You see the hat was, well, a parson's 'at; it was of a— a— "

"A clerical cut, Grandfather?"

"A whatter?"

"Clerical cut."

"Clerical," said Grandfather, trying it on himself, "sounds like the name of a bantam rooster, it seems to me— well, alright, it will do for the present, you can tell me the meaning of it arterwards."

So I had at last, got at least one la-di-dah word accepted conditionally.

"What's dimure?" said Grandfather suddenly, and somewhat aggressively, it seemed to me. I could see that he had been turning it over, all unsuspected,

in his second mind, part of the time. Like many keenly intelligent but totally uneducated men, he would be attracted by the sound of a word— the shorter the better. I explained that "demure" as well as I could and handed it over to Grandfather. So I saw that I had a second la-di-dah word accepted, unconditionally, this time; and was sure of meeting it again, later on, in Grandfather's possession.

"Howsomenever. When I got home I went into the kitchen an' put the basket down. 'There yer are,' I says to Margaret, 'now it's to be hoped you'll stop worritin' an' let a man have a little rest.'

"Margaret looked at the basket, an' then at me; an' then she looked at my head— and then she looked harder at it. It was brushed back on the back of me head by the arm I used steadyind the basket, over-arm; I must have wore it home most of the way that way, an' no wonder Margaret looked, to see me with a gamecock clarrickle hat on the back of me head.

" 'Well, you'll know me presently,' I said; 'better look at me feet to make sure.' " 'Why, Harry,' she said, 'whatever have you got on?'

" 'Me clothes,' I said, thinkin' she was referring to me coimin' so early, and wonderin' what devilment I was up to, fer we never hung about the saw-pits on Saturday afternoon. They was monotonous enough all the week. I took off me hat to throw it on the kitchen sofa, and when I felt it and caught sight of it, I stared at it harder than Margaret did. I thought at first, someone must have played a trick on me. It couldn't have bin the parson, for I didn't see him.

" 'Well, I'm bewitched!' I said.

"Margaret thought a second— she was the quickest thinkin' woman I ever saw, was your great-aunt Margaret, Henery. Then she said, 'I think you are, Harry.'

" 'It must be the parson's hat,' I said.

" 'It must be,' says Margaret.

" 'I muster wore it home by mistake,' I says.

" 'You must have,' says Margaret.

"I hung the hat up an' took out me pipe, and set down on the kitchen sofa to bluff Margaret. You see, I was suspicious of her. I knew her. I think it's a cowardly thing to take your hat an' walk away from a woman's tongue, no matter how soft it is, an' she thinks so too. You see, it jinerally hurts her— her pride or something; an', if she happens to be a wife naggin', it's worse, an' sometimes more dangerous, than sittin' silent, or whistlin' 'The Last Rose o' Summer'. She might go, too— home to her mother.

"Margaret was ironin' out our Sunday things. She was ironin' one o' Father's big white shirts, with frills like a jew-lizard all down the front of it, like they wore in them days, for Father to go to Chapel in on Sunday. She ironed a

couple of frills down very carefully (I supposed Grandfather meant 'tucks' or 'pleats') and then she says:

" 'Did yer bring anything else home from the minister's, Harry?'

"I brought the dirty clothes. There's the baskit under yer nose. Can't yer see it? What in thunder else would I bring?'

"Then I thought. I brought a message from Mother,' I said; 'but your jackhassin' put it clean out o' me head.' An' I give the message, to head her off from whatever she had comin'.

"She ironed down another frill.

" 'Did you leave anything at the minister's except your hat, Harry?' she asked.

"I left the clean clothes,' I said. 'What in thunder are yer drivin' at at all?'

"That was a slip; it's allers a mistake to swear— it spoils the rest of what you say. An' it's a bigger mistake to ask a woman what she means.

"Margaret ironed down another frill, very carefully; lookin' what you'd call 'demure', only not just that way. Presently she says:

" 'See anyone at the minister's, Harry?'

"I seen Mother,' I said; 'who else did yer think I'd see? The parson was out. Did yer expect me to go up to Mrs Parson's bedroom and ask her how many teeth the baby had? It was only born last week.'

"She ironed down another frill, a middle one, very carefully, from top to bottom, looking more demurer in another sort of a way— a *sisterly* sort of a way— than ever. She said nothin' when she'd finished it, but started on another frill, one of the shorter ones; an' I got uneasy. She was like the cattle stringin' off in the dark. At last I thought I'd ride ahead of where I thought their lead was, and have done with it, one way or the other.

"I seen the job-man there,' I said, 'an' he wasn't much to look at; an' a gal— a nursemaid or something they call Mary-Ann or some such name; an' I seen some fowls an' the pig. *Now* are yer satisfied!'

" 'Oh! That was Harriet Wynn,' says Margaret.

" 'Harriet *what?*'

" 'Wynn,' says Margaret, 'that's her name, Harriet Wynn. Didn't Mother tell you?'

" 'Oh! the gal!' I said. 'I thought you meant the pig. I didn't know the parson had taken to christening pigs, as well as kids. Well, I've had enough o' naggin' fer one day,' I said. I'm goin' out to have some peace and quietness.' And I got me old workin' hat and went out."

Short pause, and then Grandfather gave me one of his quizzical glances to see what I thought of his address and strategy in the matter. And I nodded my

head emphatically at the still moonlight path with all the worldly wisdom of twenty-one.

"But I kept the girl's name in me mind for 'future reference', as you'd call it.

"I went an' lay down on a bank on the grass, with my hands under me head. The sun was low down over the poplars, and the willows, and the mountains. They was purple, mostly, o' mornin's, but was dark green, an' deep blue, an' light blue, now, and lighter the further away you got till they went into the sky; an' I got thinkin'— which reminds me," said Grandfather, "that I want to think a bit now, while I fill me pipe."

I WAS THINKING, too. Thinking of Great-aunt Margaret, on Berry's Estate, North Sydney, old and withered, but wiry and bright-eyed; dressed in a quaint, prim, old-fashioned Early Victorian style that was the fashion when she was a girl, and considered neither gaunt nor prim then. There was Granny as I last saw her, taking off the old black bonnet and putting on the little old lace cap; chin and nose coming closer together, crotchety, rather, and too unpleasantly truthful (or "tactless") for these "la-di-dah" days; and with a growing tendency to get hold of the wrong end of little things with those little old hands, and hold on tight. (What work those hands had done in her time!) With stronger views than ever on the subject of shirt sleeves on Sundays; and with a most uncomfortable and unconquerable distrust of clocks and watches on those days when she donned her black silk— or lustre, or cashmere, or whatever it was— and black Sunday bonnet and gloves that all looked as good as if they were bought last week. Thinking of her I could see the black bonnet go bobbing up past the railings to church. Brave old eyes that had seen more of the wildest of the early days— more of drought, flood, wilderness, hardship, and danger, by track and tent and hut, than would fill volumes. Brave old eyes that had looked at the downcast ones of Syd Lardner, Frank Wall, and "Bunny" Hughson, whilst she lectured those foolish, hunted men on the evil of their ways, and gave them honest advice; what time the bushrangers fumbled with their cabbage-tree hats; or sat in a row on a bench like scolded schoolboys; what time the brave old hands, not withered then, set forth damper and "junk" on the rough slab table, and made hot coffee. Their bowed heads were grace enough. Granny *could* make coffee.

And here was Grandfather, unbent with age— he kept himself straight carrying timber— but with hair and frill beard getting dusty very fast. Square and strong of face, with chin, mouth, and cheeks clean shaven to the world. (His razor had wakened me that morning, like an early-style stripping machine going through a heavy crop of wheat at a little distance.)

And, *hey presto!* The river above Windsor; a hint of willows down in the bend, and the long unconquerable mountains above; back to the left, up-river, a row of poplars against the skyline in a mile-distant by-lane. Homes in English style and dress, with old red brick, gable-ends, ivy; and one with the great long motherly roof coming close down to the ground on each side, like the wings of a good old hen with a big clutch of chickens. Margaret, a handsome, buxom young woman, elder sister— sister mother, in charge; wise and witty, with an instinctive knowledge of the world and its ways. Away behind the poplars the minister's place, with the nursemaid, young Harriet Wynn, a minister's daughter herself "at home"— pretty, winsome, and "demure". And Grandfather, tall, straight, strong, with thick, wavy, black hair. He might have said, in all seriousness, that he was something to look at then. Aunt Bess used to tell me, as a boy, that he "looked like a Greek god" in his young days; and I wondered where she had seen a Greek god, for Uncle-by-marriage-Mack wasn't one (going by what I'd seen in some old book decorations)— unless Greek gods were short and sandy, and bow-legged from much riding, and walked like a hen, and had the "drought peer", and had their hair blown off in many nor'-wester dust storms on the overland route. No, Uncle Mack was a grand chap and a king of drovers, but I'd seen him in swimming, and Uncle Mack wasn't any Greek god.

"Howsomenever," said Grandfather, "wheer was I? You're always int'ruptin'."

I hadn't interrupted, unless it was by the thinking, but I said nothing, fearing a trap.

"Howsomenever. Next Saturday I come home from the saw-pit as tired an' happy, an' proud as *two* dogs that had followed their master ridin' home all day, and chased every kangaroo rat a mile off the track, and caught a native cat in a holler log at last an' spoiled the skin by pulling the cat in halves. We'd put in a good week's work. Abel was out with the timber-trucks, and I'd been in the pit all the morning with a bag over me head to keep the sawdust off, fer Bill was top-sawyer and he had a touch of sandy blight an' couldn't take his shift below.

"I went home an' got towel an' soap and some clean things, an' had a dip in the swimmin' hole, way down amongst the willers. All the young fellers round used to swim an' scrub themselves an' dress there on Sunday mornin's for chapel— or some other devilment amongst the girls. When I went in to dinner, Margaret says:

" 'Someone's cleanin' up early this week, I notice, Harry.'

" 'You mind yer own P's and Q's, Margaret,' I said. (She was shelling peas for Sunday.) I'm goin' into Penrith this arternoon to see what's on. There's a

kick-up of some sort there. D'yer expect a young feller to be allers slave-slavin' an' worritin', an' list'nin' to wimmin's clack an' Father's growlin'? Ain't a man to have any pleasure at all?'

"Margaret said nothing, but got me my dinner an' went on shellin' peas. After dinner I took a turn out of the sofa, and had a grand rest an' smoke, expectin' Margaret to say something about them clothes— but she didn't. She could take her time, could your Great-aunt Margaret, when she wanted to get at something, or do something.

"Presently I got up an' went to finish tidying meself. 'Margaret!' I shouted, from the skillion.

" 'Yes, Harry,' she said, as meek as mild.

"If you've got anything to take to Mother you'd better get it ready quick. I don't want to waste the whole arternoon. (I'd twigged the basket of clothes ready on the big kitchen dresser.)

" 'O-o-h! Will *you* take them, Harry?' she said. 'I didn't like to ask you after doin' it last Saturday.'

" 'Oh come, I'll take 'em!' I said. 'Haven't I told you so half-a-dozen times? How many more times do you want me to tell yer?'

" 'But, you know, Harry,' she says (see how a woman hangs on to a thing), 'but, yer know, Harry,' she said, 'you spoilt your last Saturday half holiday.'

" 'Hang last Saturday!' I shouted, It hain't this Saturday, is it? Haven't I yelled at yer a hundred times that I'm goin' to Penrith, an' it's only a step up a lane outer me way?'

" 'But Abel's goin' to ride in on his mare just as soon as he comes down from the mountain— an' Bill's goin' in, too, later on, on the colt,' said Margaret, still hangin' on, woman-like, 'an' either of 'em could take the basket in easy on the horse in front of 'em, and save you the trouble.'

" 'Hang Abel!!' I shouted. 'He'll be tireder than me, an' the mare too. Haven't I told you a dozen times I gotter get me 'at an' take back the parson's?'

" 'Bill or Abel could do that,' said Margaret, quiet like.

" 'An' me go in in me old 'un!' I yelled. 'An' them at the parson's thinkin' I was too shamefaced to face 'em. Get them clothes ready quick or I won't take 'em at all.'

" 'They're all ready, Harry,' says Margaret, soft and meek-like, 'an' the minister's hat too.'

"Then I squinted through a crack and seen me sister Margaret laughin' on the quiet to herself over the peas. Yes, she was awfully tickled about somethin'; and I knowed I was bein' had all the time.

"No: I wasn't jealous of me own brothers already," says Grandfather, looking at me narrowly out of the corners of his eyes, "as you're thinkin', Henery," (I didn't protest) "only I knowed Bill and Abel.

"Besides, they'd been pokin' it at me all the week about the parson's hat; and I hearn 'em talkin' about the pretty girl at the minister's, and Harry, in their skillion one night; so they wanted a lesson. I didn't want 'em hangin' round the parson's place when I wasn't there to take keer on 'em— or any other time jist now, for that matter, interruptin' me. At first I thought of lettin' Bill's colt out of the yard by accident— it was hard to ketch— an' so save him the trouble of goin' to Penrith at all. He wanted rest, anyways, an' besides, the night air was bad for his eyes. But we three brothers didn't play no tricks like that on each other; so I went into their skillion and borrowed Abel's best hat because it suited me better'n Bill's. Bill's was a bit tight. I seen Abel comin' down the mount'in with the bullocks, an' expected Bill at any minute; so I histed the baskit an' started to start. The parson's hat was on top, well brushed an' done up in brown paper— an' brown paper was skeerce round our place in them days.

"Jist as I was goin', Margaret says: 'Harry!' says she, 'if you happen to see Harriet, remind her of her promise to come over. Tell her I've been expectin' her ever since I was there last.'

" 'There yer go agen!' I says, 'expectin' me to go carryin' messages and clack-clackin' round amongst a parsil o' girls! Alright! Now are yer satisfied?' an' off I goes.

"I seemed to get to the parson's long before I was ready," said Grandfather. "But I wasn't the first," he reflected, looking at the fire, "an' I mightn't be the last," he continued, with a side squint at me. "I seemed to get there before I started— in a dream like. (Some goes in a nightmare.) Howsomenever, I put the baskit down, very quietly, inside the gate, an' looked round for somethin' to mend, an' presently I seen a back gate wanted attendin' to; and then I was satisfied. So I took up the baskit an' went to the kitchen door, an' there was Harriet. She seemed half expectin' to see me— p'r'aps she saw me comin' along the road through the side window; it was open, now I come to think of it. They was hinged windows they had in them days, that opened sideways and outwards, with vines and roses round 'em," reflected Grandfather; "Not the la-di-dah, barefaced go-up-an'-down windows they have nowadays. Howsomenever— She seemed to have her best bib-an'-tucker on, now I come to look at her; an' she was lookin' as pretty as she was an' that's sayin' a lot. Fresh as the flowers o' May, as Mother used to say. She seemed a bit flushed and flustered, too, an' that gave me more strength, so to speak. I was all on a sudden a lot more stiddy on me pins than I was the last time.

" 'Oh! Mr Albury!' says Harriet, I'm glad you come— Mother was expectin' you.' (She didn't say *she* was.) 'Come in an' put the basket down, anywheres. An' sit down. You must be tired after your day's work and walk.'

" 'Thank you, Miss,' I said, 'but I ain't a bit tired. I bin on'y loafin' round all the mornin'.' An' I put the baskit down in one corner, steady, an' took off me hat. I took the parson's hat off the top of the clothes an' handed it to her without droppin' it or makin' a bungle between the two. It was quite a bit of sleight o' hand.

" 'I had to call an' bring Mr Kinghorn's hat,' I said, 'seein' that none of the others had the sense to send it, or bring it. An' apologise,' I said, 'an' hassertain if Mr Kinghorn was anyways annoyed or inconvenienced.' Kinghorn was the parson's name— an' he was a Man, by the way.

" 'No; not at all,' she said. 'Mr Kinghorn only laughed when your mother told him. But I'm sorry you forgot your hat, Mr Albury. But sit down, Mr Albury. Then she looks at my hat— or rather Abel's, and then she goes on, rather quick and glad like: 'But I'm so glad you've got another good hat. It might have been inconvenient.'

"So she bustled round, very busy doin' nothin' as a woman can be.

"Presently I gets up again.

" 'Yes, Miss,' I said. It would of. But I generally have two or three handy, in case of the wind and floods. I lost a good one in the river last flood time.' So I had; but I didn't tell her that the other two I had handy belonged to Abel and Bill.

" 'Oh! I'm so sorry you lost that hat,' she said; 'but I'm glad you've got more, Mr Albury.'

"I looked at her but couldn't see anything. But I didn't know how much Mother'd been tellin' her about me, an' I wanted to have done with the hat subject. She looked too demure, as you'd put it.

" 'But sit down, Mr Albury,' she says; 'your Mother's busy just now, but she'll be down in few minutes.'

"Presently I gets up agen.

" 'Oh! you're not goin', Mr Albury,' she says, all in a flutter. 'Mother'd be down in a minit.'

" 'O' *course* I'm not goin', Miss,' I said. 'What made you think that? But I seen a back gate that wants lookin' to and I might as well do it while I'm waitin', if *so be* you'll be kind enough to show me where the tool box is kept. I ain't in no particular hurry this afternoon.

" 'Oh! I'm *so* glad,' she began, an' then she caught herself an' gasped an' blushed, an' showed me where the tools was.

"While I was mendin' that gate she took courage to come out, an' said it would be just lovely; an' it was allers a nuisance, an' Mr Kinghorn tried to mend it himself, an' I must be very clever. An' while I was talkin' to her about gates and things, and showin' her how they ought to be made an' fitted, I seen Abel ridin' past at the foot of the lane. He had on what looked like Bill's hat, in the distance; so I s'pos'd he'd borrered Bill's an' Bill got a rest for his eyes. Then we both saw Mr Kinghorn comin' up the lane in his gig, and Harriet run inside.

"But Mr Kinghorn had a new kind of duck that interested me vastly. They was called Muscovies; and they hadn't been long imported, I think— leastways, I hadn't seen any before anywheers. They was about twice as big as an ordinary Quack, ony they didn't quack; ony just gibber and whisper. I christened 'em the Gibberers. No, they couldn't talk, not even old Mrs Muscovy; they was the only females I'd seen as couldn't speak.

"I said I'd like to come and potter round a bit next Saturday and fix up things for him, and maybe run up a new fowl-shed; and he said, 'Well, Harry, it will keep you out of mischief anyhow, an' I'll be very thankful.' (You see he knew me.) He said he'd give me a pair of young Gibberers to breed from as soon as they was ready, an' that suited me down to a T.

" 'An', now, Harry,' says Mr Kinghorn, 'run in an' see if Harriet can't knock you up a snack. You must be hungry; young fellows mostly are. I think I see your mother wavin' from the back door.'

"Mother showed me where to sit down. I never seen a table set so well as that before, an' I was a bit shy of it. There was some white stuff rolled up in two rings on the table, and I asked Mother what them things was.

" 'They're napkins,' she says.

"Presently Harriet comes down, an' I noticed she seemed to have titivated her hair up a different way, but it ony made her prettier. She redded a bit when Mother looked at her— I saw that. I watched Mother drinkin' her tea, an' managin' her bread and butter, an' did accordin', an' finished my cup at the same time. Then Harriet put her left hand on Mother's shoulder an' says, 'Will you have another cup o' tea, Mrs Albury?' An' Mother says, 'Thank you, Harriet,' an' handed up her cup. *Then* Harriet put her right hand on *my* shoulder an' she says:

" 'Will *you* have another cup, Mr Harry?'

"By gosh! it rattled me," said Grandfather. "It rattled the crockery too, for I upset the cup in the sarser handin' it up to her an' spilt the tea that was left. But she caught 'em from me all right an' quick, or I'd have dropped both over my shoulder. You see she had— she had— "

"Tact, Grandfather?" I ventured.

"No! Nor tacks neither!" said Grandfather. "She had— the way about her. Mother said: 'Why! Wheers your manners, Harry?' And that's what I wanted to know. They'd bolted like a flock of kangaroos at the sight of a kangaroo dog. You see, Henery, that was the first time your Grandmother ever touched me with her hand and voice.

"She touched me more than once with both— arterwards," Grandfather mused presently; "but ony when I deserved it— I wish she could do it now. But— never-mind. Wheers was I?

"If you *please,* Miss,' I said, over me shoulder, as soon as I got me wits together a bit; 'but ony half a cup.' So she pours out about three-quarters of a cup an' puts it down keerfully alongside me plate. I couldn't see *her* face; an' Mother was very intent on her tea. She seemed to be enjoying it.

"Presently I got up an' said, 'Ah well! Mother, I must be goin';' and when she'd finished givin' me a message to Margaret I turned round an' Harriet was standin' there waitin' with her hands behind her back. She looked very— demure," said Grandfather, with a quick glance at me. "I thought at first she was frightened I'd hurt her agen; but she brings one hand round an' there was my own hat in it— brushed, an' the veil fixed up, as I seen arterwards. (We wore sort o' puggeree veils in those days.)

" 'Thank you very much, *Miss,*' I said, takin' it from her. An' then I gave *her* Margaret's message, in a hurry, without bunglin' much; whilst holdin' me hat very tight in both hands and lookin' round for it everywheers.

"Then I heern Mother gulpin' over her third cup o' tea, an' looked an' seen what I was a-doin' of. Then she laughed out an' said, 'What are yer lookin' for, Harry?' An' then Harriet laughed a little an' pointed to the hat in me hand, an' then I laughs an' we was all comfortable again. And I shook hands with her without hurtin' her this time; and said good-bye to Mother; an' got out 'n' started for home.

"Down near the foot of the lane I seen Abel's mare, 'Gipsy', comin' home alone along the road from Penrith with the bridle hangin' loose. She'd lost Abel somewheers, or got disgusted with the way he started carrying on. She wasn't goin' to stay with him on the spree all night, so she come home, as she'd done once or twice before. She stopped at the bottom of the lane, when she seen me, and waited for me to get on; but I didn't feel like ridin'; I wanted a walk, an' a long 'un to think happy; so I fixed up her bridle fer her an' went on ahead.

"So I walks on an' on an' on an' on, thinkin' and thinkin' as happy as Larry— *You'll* know what I was thinkin' about some day— I suppose it was the touch of that there gal's hand on me shoulder an' the sound of her voice half-callin' me by my Christian name. I didn't feel the ground beneath me feet I was— I was— "

"Elated, Grandfather?" I suggested.

"Alright!" said Grandfather. "*E-lated*.(I didn't pay fer yer edgication.) I was *B-lated*, too, by the way, for it was broad moonlight an' I didn't know what time it was. I didn't feel the ground, as I said— it was like a light tread-mill— but I was goin' up all the time. I walks right past the house in a dream, and about half a mile beyond when I thought I heers something behind me an' pulls up sudden.

"It was just about where Fisher's Ghost was seen last; and I thought all on a sudden of other ghosts that harnted round there. There was the ghost of a man leanin' against the fence in the moonlight with his back tords yer; and the ghost of the lamed Horse with the Trailin' Bridle whose master was murdered with a fence rail. I peered back, but couldn't see anythin' in the black moonlight shadders o' the big gum trees by the roadside; but presently I heers a haltin' step right enough, an' my own legs took me into the next stretch of moonlight in double-quick time— with no haltin' steps, I can tell you, Henery. An' sure enough a limpin' horse did come out of the shadders! But afore I threw up me heart quite, or me stummick quite froze, I seen it was 'Gipsy'.

"She'd followed me all the way at leisure and watched my carryin's on— I might 'a' been wavin' me arms an' singin' or recitin' a bit, part o' the way— or maybe practisin' a step dance; howsomenever, she'd seen me go past home, an' got anxious, an' hurried on, jerked her bridle loose in her hurry, an' that was what was trippin' her. So I waited till the old gal come up, took her nose under me arm, an' told her I was alright. An' then I got on an' she swung round contented and took me home.

"When I got home, Margaret was still up, finishin' up ready to begin agen on Sunday. She ain't done yet, your Great-aunt Margaret. She said nothin', but I was ready for her an' sed nothin' too, but stood by the fire.

"Presently she said:

" 'Well Harry?'

"And I said, 'Well Margaret?' an' went to bed.

"An' it was not till then that it struck me, somehow, that I'd forgotten Abel's hat. It was wonderful how much mischief an innercent lookin' parson's hat could do. It nearly bust up a lifelong friendship between three livin' brothers in the mornin'. Bill had growled round a bit about his hat and then gone fishin' in the cool."

"NEXT Saturday I had no bother at home. Abel got home first an' went to Windsor in my hat, an' Bill got home next an' went somewheers else in his; but that didn't matter— I was workin' at the parson's now an' ony wanted clean an' decent workin' clothes. So I borrered a clean pair o' cords that Abel had

ready to take timber down to Sydney on Monday in, an' Bill's goin'-to-work coat, that was better'n mine— it was summer weather, so that was all right. An' I borrered Father's workday waistcoat that he never went to work in at all, so it was pretty clean, an' nearly as good as new. But I didn't ask him, for he was asleep— restin' arter a hard week's growlin'. Besides Father was allers very touchy an' particular about his workin' clothes, an' always wanted them clean an' ready to go to work in on Monday.

"On the way to the parson's I felt like I was bein' roped in, like a two-year-old, for brandin' and breakin'; but I was very happy an' contented about it an' I didn't let the rope slacken all the way to the parson's this time."

"I was branded alright by-an'-by too," Grandfather mused, looking at the fire. He might have said that the letters were on his heart still.

"Howsomenever. We all had a comfortable afternoon. I got up the frame of the fowlhouse agenst the fence in a couple of hours, and put the roof on an' roosts in, for I was a good bush carpenter in them days. But I left the rest till next Saturday, in case things didn't hurry up, for I had some sense— even in them days.

"I didn't see Harriet about when I came in for some tea, an' I got awfully disappointed and anxious. I thought perhaps it was her comin' out an' she'd gone somewheers; but I wouldn't risk askin' Mother for the world.

"Well, jist as I was givin' it up an' feelin' sinkin', Mother said, as if she'd just remembered it: 'Oh! by-the-way, Harry; it's Harriet's day out tomorrow, an' she was thinkin' o' spendin' the day with Margaret; so I told her she must be a bit tired o' the house— she ain't had a Sunday out since the baby came— so if she liked, you'd take her along tonight, an' she'd have a chance of a longer chat with Margaret, an' Margaret 'ud fix her up in the spare room for the night.

" 'Weil, Mother,' I said, arter a while, 'what did she say to that?'

" 'She didn't say much,' said Mother. 'She's upstairs gettin' ready now. So you'll have to bring her back in good time tomorrow evenin', mind— that's if you've got nothin' else on. Anyways, in that case,' says Mother, I dare say one of the others would do it; so that'll be all right.'

" 'Alright, Mother,' I says.

"Presently Harriet comes down all flustered up and dressed, I don't know how, in some dark stuff an' a bonnet like you see in old portraits, an' the big crinoline they wore to keep off intruders. Young fellers couldn't get so close to their girls in them days, an' it was quite right. So I took the dirty clothes— they wasn't much— an' Harriet came along with me with Mother's messages to Margaret, and Abel's hat in brown paper. I wished she hadn't taken that trouble— it would have done in the basket.

"An' so we went along down the lane an' into the road, an' it was moonlight agen." Grandfather sat silent for awhile— I knew he was looking back along those roads and lanes.

"An' what did you talk about, Grandfather?" I asked, after a decent pause.

"Hens," said Grandfather, reflectively, without changing his attitude.

" 'I see, Miss Wynn,' I said, 'that hen they call yours has got all her chickens out alright,' an' that started us.

"You see, Henery," said Grandfather, "no two hens ever acts or lays or sits, or brings up their chickens exactly alike. It's the same with the animals an' things, I think; an' maybe with fishes and snakes. Male, female, or neuter (it's the same with trees and plants) *no* two things o' the same kind an' gender ever acts prezactly alike. There's as much— as much— "

"Individuality, Grandfather."

"Difference!" said Grandfather decidedly; and I saw that another la-di-dah word had missed fire. "There's as much difference between 'em as there is between human bein's. Miss Harriet had noticed it with hens; but the parson hadn't. He seemed more interested in me noticin' it when I spoke to him about it."

"And what did Harriet have to say to all this?"

"She wasn't Harriet yet," said Grandfather reprovingly. "She might 'a' been, though, in these— howsomenever, she said, 'Yes, Mr Albury' an' 'No, Mr Albury', an' she'd noticed that herself, and she seemed to listen very respectfully to all I said. She was about the first that did.

"Then we got talkin' of the timber birds, and things round there, just like a new brother an' sister talkin' contented an' interested of the things that was round us. I hurried her on, for the wrong clouds were comin' up, an' I knowed Hawkesbury weather. The first drops fell afore we got home; an' Margaret took charge of Harriet an' her bonnet just as if she was a big child— an' so she was; come to think of it.

"We all got cosy and comfortable round the fire, the more so because it rained heavens hard and it was a cold rain. Even Father lost his growl an' told some yarns, as he could tell 'em; and when I went to bed I felt more happy and contented an' satisfied than I'd ever been in my life afore. An', bein' abed," reflected Grandfather, after a think, "did you ever hear how I come to swear at your Grandmother for the first time? I s'pose you have— I never heered the last on it.

"Howsomenever, next mornin' it fined up, an' Margaret packed us off to chapel in Windsor (and Father found his growl— about his workin' weskit— an' went in the gig somewheers); but Harriet would stay an' help Margaret with

the dinner. She seemed happy there, an' freer, an' seemed to like some of our happy-go-lucky ways.

"At dinner time I noticed one or two more young fellers than usual hangin' round our place. They stayed to dinner, of course— there was allers plenty for everybody. Arter dinner I kept 'em away from about the kitchen with my yarns.

" 'I see ye're doin' some work for the parson, Harry,' one on 'em remarks to the Blue Mountains, scratching behind his ear like a cross between a donkey an' a cockatoo. The Blue Mountains said nothin' an neither did I.

" 'Is that so?' said another. 'How much are yer gettin' the ararternoon— Harry— five bob?'

" 'Mor'n that,' I said.

" 'Ten?'

" 'Mor'n *that!*' I said. He shied then. Thought I was leadin' him on to a slippery bridge.

"An' that was all. Abel *had* said, to Nobody At All at breakfast that morning, that he'd heerd that the parson's housemaid was a judge o' gates, and that it was unusual in a new chum. But the girl was in the house now; an' there was no jokin' about her. That's the sort of young fellers there was in them days.

"Arter dinner we had a row on the river in the two boats; but Harriet kept clcloseo Margaret while Abel and Bill and the others did the pulling and I fished an' saw to things generally; an', arter tea, Margaret said, 'You'd better take Harriet away along home now, or Mother'll be gettin' anxious.' While Harriet was gettin' ready, Joe Buckman— Margaret's boy— came ridin' past from Penrith, an' stopped to say something to Margaret, an' I heerd Margaret say that she was glad Father had took the gig, and that the big galoot would have to help her over the crick now; but I didn't know what she meant till Harriet 'an me got to a little cross crick about half way to the parson's. Last night's rain had swelled it, and the steppin' stones was awash even now. I don't know how it happened, but we got no time to argy. I just ketched her up round the waist, and splashed right through with her, in spite o' the crinoline— it went all to the other side, anyhow. By gum, but my knees nearly give at the feel of her, and my heart was thumpin' by the time I got acrost as if I'd carried a bullock over; an' she was light as a feather to me. An' she was pantin' too, when I set her down, as if she'd carried *me* over. There was a big dry white log on the bank in the moonlight.

" 'Oh! Mr Albury,' she said. I do feel so giddy. Do let us sit down on that log for a minute; I feel quite faint!'

"I'm afraid you muster been frightened, Miss Wynn,' I said, sitting down an' puttin' my arm round her shoulders to steady her in case she fainted off the log. I'm afraid I was too sudden.

" 'Oh, no! not at all,' she said, though she didn't mean it that way. I'll be all right directly, Mr Albury— I don't know what came over me.'

"I kept stiddyin' her.

"Arter a while she gave a sort o' sigh, an' she said, I'm all right now, Mr Albury, thank you. I don't know what *could* have come over me. I think we'd best go on now. Your mother'll be waitin' up.'

"So I helped her up and took her along the road."

"Still steadying her, Grandfather?" I said.

"Never you mind," said Grandfather. "I had to keep her out of the puddles in the shadders. Presently, when we got in sight of the house, I said:

" 'Ah well! It's a lonely world, Miss Wynn.'

" 'It is, Mr Albury,' she said.

"I waited, and presently she asked,

" 'Do you feel lonely, Mr Albury?'

"I do, Miss Wynn,' I said, an' presently I said, 'Do you ever feel lonely, Miss Wynn?' " 'Yes,' she says, I do, very much, sometimes.'

"Then I said, 'Well! Are yer satisfied then?' And she said, *'Perfectly,* Mr Albury.' An' that settled it.

"An' now, Henery," said Grandfather, sittin' up an' stretching himself, "it's about time those young shavers turned up; an' besides, we've been maggin' enough, Lord knows, for one night. Jist put the billies on the coals, will you?"

"Grandfather," I said, sternly, "d'ye mean to say the story's finished?"

"Yes. What else?"

"Do you mean to tell me that's how you proposed?"

"Proposed what?"

"Marriage, of course— to Harriet!"

"Marriage yer Grandmother!" said Grandfather. "We didn't go a-courtin' in that way in my time. Courtin' came a-courtin' us. I tell you I only proposed keepin' company with Harriet an' I hassertained if she was willin'."

"But didn't you kiss her, Grandfather?"

"No, I did not! We didn't go huggin' an muggin' on sight in them days."

"And you had your arm round her waist all the time, 'steadying her', as you call it."

"You thund'rin' jumpt-up fool, how could I? You saw your Grandmother an' she hadn't grow'd since. I tell yer I had me arm round her shoulders! Put the billy on the coals." But presently Grandfather relented.

"Listen here, Henery— is it your courtship or mine?"

"Yours of course, Grandfather."

"Did you ever court your Granny except for lolly money, or to be let stay at her place?"

"Well, maybe. I beg pardon, Grandfather."

"Then don't interrupt agen, an' don't hurry me. I'm gettin' old— tho' I'll see close on the hundred, and that's more'n some of you will.

"Howsomenever. We went on to the parson's gate; but I wouldn't go in. I seen a light in the kitchen winder an' knowed Mother was up and about, but I said goodbye an' Harriet run inside quick and I started back home. But I hadn't gone a dozen yards down the lane when I heers Mother callin':

" 'Harry! You! Harry!'

"So I goes back.

" 'What are yer rennin' off like that for?' said Mother. 'Been misbehavin' yerself?'

"I thought you was in bed, Mother,' I said.

" 'Then thought's your master agen,' says she. 'Come in an' dry yer feet.'

"So I slips off my boots on the verandah and went in. There was a good fire. Harriet had gone up to take off some of her armour.

"Presently Mr Kinghorn comes into the passage. He must have overheerd something. " 'Better give Harry a dry pair o' socks er mine, Mrs Albury,' he says, 'and a spare pair o' dry boots of any o' mine that'll fit him. They might, since me hat does.'

"Next minute Harriet comes down, all practical, with socks, an' went to hunt up a pair of boots while I changed 'em. It's allers that way. When a girl gets a man's heart she starts to look arter the rest o' him straight away. I noticed her clingin' an' hoverin' round Mother a good deal more than usual. Now I wonder," reflected Grandfather, "if them two was in collision all the time?"

"I think they all were, Grandfather," I said (he meant collusion), "I could have betted on Great-aunt Margaret, anyhow."

"Anyways," concluded Grandfather, "when I was goin' Mother said: 'You'd best see that big galoot safe out the gate, Harriet, or he'll forget to shut it; and Harriet did as she was told."

"And then it happened, Grandfather?"

"Well, I s'pose it did. *You* ought to know," in a loud voice: "I know all about you and the baker's daughter down by the Gatehouse night afore last."

I was dumb with surprise. It was such a very close guess.

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10: The Silent Woman

Leopold Kompert

1822-1886

Transl. Charles Flint McClumpha, 1863-1933

("Die Schweigerin", *Neue Geschichten aus dem Ghetto*, 1860

THE UPROARIOUS merriment of a wedding-feast burst forth into the night from a brilliantly lighted house in the "*gasse*" (narrow street). It was one of those nights touched with the warmth of spring, but dark and full of soft mist. Most fitting it was for a celebration of the union of two yearning hearts to share the same lot, a lot that may possibly dawn in sunny brightness, but also become clouded and sullen— for a long, long time! But how merry and joyous they were over there, those people of the happy olden times! They, like us, had their troubles and trials, and when misfortune visited them it came not to them with soft cushions and tender pressures of the hand. Rough and hard, with clinched fist, it laid hold upon them. But when they gave vent to their happy feelings and sought to enjoy themselves, they were like swimmers in cooling waters. They struck out into the stream with freshness and courage, suffered themselves to be borne along by the current whithersoever it took its course. This was the cause of such a jubilee, such a thoughtlessly noisy outburst of all kinds of soul-possessing gayety from this house of nuptials.

"And if I had known," the bride's father, the rich Ruben Klattaner, had just said, "that it would take the last gulden in my pocket, then out it would have come."

In fact, it did appear as if the last groschen had really taken flight, and was fluttering about in the form of platters heaped up with geese and pastry-tarts. Since two o'clock— that is, since the marriage ceremony had been performed out in the open street— until nearly midnight, the wedding-feast had been progressing, and even yet thesarvers, or waiters, were hurrying from room to room. It was as if a twofold blessing had descended upon all this abundance of food and drink, for, in the first place, they did not seem to diminish; secondly, they ever found a new place for disposal. To be sure, this appetite was sharpened by the presence of a little dwarf-like, unimportant-looking man. He was esteemed, however, none the less highly by every one. They had specially written to engage the celebrated "Leb Narr," of Prague. And when was ever a mood so out of sorts, a heart so imbittered as not to thaw out and laugh if Leb Narr played one of his pranks. Ah, thou art now dead, good fool! Thy lips, once always ready with a witty reply, are closed. Thy mouth, then never still, now speaks no more! But when the hearty peals of laughter once rang forth at thy command, intercessors, as it were, in thy behalf before the very throne of God,

thou hadst nothing to fear. And the joy of that "other" world was thine, that joy that has ever belonged to the most pious of country rabbis!

In the mean time the young people had assembled in one of the rooms to dance. It was strange how the sound of violins and trumpets accorded with the drolleries of the wit from Prague. In one part the outbursts of merriment were so boisterous that the very candles on the little table seemed to flicker with terror; in another an ordinary conversation was in progress, which now and then only ran over into a loud tittering, when some old lady slipped into the circle and tried her skill at a redowa, then altogether unknown to the young people. In the very midst of the tangle of dancers was to be seen the bride in a heavy silk wedding-gown. The point of her golden hood hung far down over her face. She danced continuously. She danced with every one that asked her. Had one, however, observed the actions of the young woman, they would certainly have seemed to him hurried, agitated, almost wild. She looked no one in the eye, not even her own bridegroom. He stood for the most part in the door-way, and evidently took more pleasure in the witticisms of the fool than in the dance or the lady dancers. But who ever thought for a moment why the young woman's hand burned, why her breath was so hot when one came near to her lips? Who should have noticed so strange a thing? A low whispering already passed through the company, a stealthy smile stole across many a lip. A bevy of ladies was seen to enter the room suddenly. The music dashed off into one of its loudest pieces, and, as if by enchantment, the newly made bride disappeared behind the ladies. The bridegroom, with his stupid, smiling mien, was still left standing on the threshold. But it was not long before he too vanished. One could hardly say how it happened. But people understand such skillful movements by experience, and will continue to understand them as long as there are brides and grooms in the world.

This disappearance of the chief personages, little as it seemed to be noticed, gave, however, the signal for general leave-taking. The dancing became drowsy; it stopped all at once, as if by appointment. That noisy confusion now began which always attends so merry a wedding-party. Half-drunken voices could be heard still intermingled with a last, hearty laugh over a joke of the fool from Prague echoing across the table. Here and there some one, not quite sure of his balance, was fumbling for the arm of his chair or the edge of the table. This resulted in his overturning a dish that had been forgotten, or in spilling a beer-glass. While this, in turn, set up a new hubbub, some one else, in his eagerness to betake himself from the scene, fell flat into the very débris. But all this tumult was really hushed the moment they all pressed to the door, for at that very instant shrieks, cries of pain, were heard issuing from the entrance below. In an instant the entire outpouring crowd

with all possible force pushed back into the room, but it was a long time before the stream was pressed back again. Meanwhile, painful cries were again heard from below, so painful, indeed, that they restored even the most drunken to a state of consciousness.

"By the living God!" they cried to each other, "what is the matter down there? Is the house on fire?"

"She is gone! she is gone!" shrieked a woman's voice from the entry below.

"Who? who?" groaned the wedding-guests, seized, as it were, with an icy horror.

"Gone! gone!" cried the woman from the entry, and hurrying up the stairs came Selde Klattaner, the mother of the bride, pale as death, her eyes dilated with most awful fright, convulsively grasping a candle in her hand. "For God's sake, what has happened?" was heard on every side of her.

The sight of so many people about her, and the confusion of voices, seemed to release the poor woman from a kind of stupor. She glanced shyly about her then, as if overcome with a sense of shame stronger than her terror, and said, in a suppressed tone:

"Nothing, nothing, good people. In God's name, I ask, what was there to happen?"

Dissimulation, however, was too evident to suffice to deceive them.

"Why, then, did you shriek so, Selde," called out one of the guests to her, "if nothing happened?"

"Yes, she has gone," Selde now moaned in heart-rending tones, "and she has certainly done herself some harm!"

The cause of this strange scene was now first discovered. The bride has disappeared from the wedding-feast. Soon after that she had vanished in such a mysterious way, the bridegroom went below to the dimly-lighted room to find her, but in vain. At first thought this seemed to him to be a sort of bashful jest; but not finding her here, a mysterious foreboding seized him. He called to the mother of the bride:

"Woe to me! This woman has gone!"

Presently this party, that had so admirably controlled itself, was again thrown into commotion. "There was nothing to do," was said on all sides, "but to ransack every nook and corner. Remarkable instances of such disappearances of brides had been known. Evil spirits were wont to lurk about such nights and to inflict mankind with all sorts of sorceries." Strange as this explanation may seem, there were many who believed it at this very moment, and, most of all, Selde Klattaner herself. But it was only for a moment, for she at once exclaimed:

"No, no, my good people, she is gone; I know she is gone!"

Now for the first time many of them, especially the mothers, felt particularly uneasy, and anxiously called their daughters to them. Only a few showed courage, and urged that they must search and search, even if they had to turn aside the river Iser a hundred times. They urgently pressed on, called for torches and lanterns, and started forth. The cowardly ran after them up and down the stairs. Before any one perceived it the room was entirely forsaken.

Ruben Klattaner stood in the hall entry below, and let the people hurry past him without exchanging a word with any. Bitter disappointment and fear had almost crazed him. One of the last to stay in the room above with Selde was, strange to say, Leb Narr, of Prague. After all had departed, he approached the miserable mother, and, in a tone least becoming his general manner, inquired:

"Tell me, now, Mrs. Selde, did she not wish to have 'him'?"

"Whom? whom?" cried Selde, with renewed alarm, when she found herself alone with the fool.

"I mean," said Leb, in a most sympathetic manner, approaching still nearer to Selde, "that maybe you had to make your daughter marry him."

"Make? And have we, then, made her?" moaned Selde, staring at the fool with a look of uncertainty.

"Then nobody needs to search for her," replied the fool, with a sympathetic laugh, at the same time retreating. "It's better to leave her where she is."

Without saying thanks or good-night, he was gone.

Meanwhile the cause of all this disturbance had arrived at the end of her flight.

Close by the synagogue was situated the house of the rabbi. It was built in an angle of a very narrow street, set in a framework of tall shade-trees. Even by daylight it was dismal enough. At night it was almost impossible for a timid person to approach it, for people declared that the low supplications of the dead could be heard in the dingy house of God when at night they took the rolls of the law from the ark to summon their members by name.

Through this retired street passed, or rather ran, at this hour a shy form. Arriving at the dwelling of the rabbi, she glanced backward to see whether any one was following her. But all was silent and gloomy enough about her. A pale light issued from one of the windows of the synagogue; it came from the "eternal lamp" hanging in front of the ark of the covenant. But at this moment it seemed to her as if a supernatural eye was gazing upon her. Thoroughly affrighted, she seized the little iron knocker of the door and struck it gently.

But the throb of her beating heart was even louder, more violent, than this blow. After a pause, footsteps were heard passing slowly along the hallway.

The rabbi had not occupied this lonely house a long time. His predecessor, almost a centenarian in years, had been laid to rest a few months before. The new rabbi had been called, from a distant part of the country. He was unmarried, and in the prime of life. No one had known him before his coming. But his personal nobility and the profundity of his scholarship made up for his deficiency in years. An aged mother had accompanied him from their distant home, and she took the place of wife and child.

"Who is there?" asked the rabbi, who had been busy at his desk even at this late hour and thus had not missed hearing the knocker.

"It is I," the figure without responded, almost inaudibly.

"Speak louder, if you wish me to hear you," replied the rabbi.

"It is I, Ruben Klattaner's daughter," she repeated.

The name seemed to sound strange to the rabbi. He as yet knew too few of his congregation to understand that this very day he performed the marriage ceremony of the person who had just repeated her name. Therefore he called out, after a moment's pause, "What do you wish so late at night?"

"Open the door, rabbi," she answered, pleadingly, "or I shall die at once!"

The bolt was pushed back. Something gleaming, rustling, glided past the rabbi into the dusky hall. The light of the candle in his hand was not sufficient to allow him to descry it. Before he had time to address her, she had vanished past him and had disappeared through the open door into the room. Shaking his head, the rabbi again bolted the door.

On reëntering the room he saw a woman's form sitting in the chair which he usually occupied. She had her back turned to him. Her head was bent low over her breast. Her golden wedding-hood, with its shading lace, was pulled down over her forehead. Courageous and pious as the rabbi was, he could not rid himself of a feeling of terror.

"Who are you?" he demanded, in a loud tone, as if its sound alone would banish the presence of this being that seemed to him at this moment to be the production of all the enchantments of evil spirits.

She raised herself, and cried in a voice that seemed to come from the agony of a human being:

"Do you not know me— me, whom you married a few hours since under the *chuppe* (marriage-canopy) to a husband?"

On hearing this familiar voice the rabbi stood speechless. He gazed at the young woman. Now, indeed, he must regard her as one bereft of reason, rather than as a specter.

"Well, if you are she," he stammered out, after a pause, for it was with difficulty that he found words to answer, "why are you here and not in the place where you belong?"

"I know no other place to which I belong more than here where I now am!" she answered, severely.

These words puzzled the rabbi still more. Is it really an insane woman before him? He must have thought so, for he now addressed her in a gentle tone of voice, as we do those suffering from this kind of sickness, in order not to excite her, and said:

"The place where you belong, my daughter, is in the house of your parents, and, since you have to-day been made a wife, your place is in your husband's house."

The young woman muttered something which failed to reach the rabbi's ear. Yet he only continued to think that he saw before him some poor unfortunate whose mind was deranged. After a pause, he added, in a still gentler tone: "What is your name, then, my child?"

"God, god," she moaned, in the greatest anguish, "he does not even yet know my name!"

"How should I know you," he continued, apologetically, "for I am a stranger in this place?"

This tender remark seemed to have produced the desired effect upon her excited mind.

"My name is Veile," she said, quietly, after a pause.

The rabbi quickly perceived that he had adopted the right tone towards his mysterious guest.

"Veile," he said, approaching nearer her, "what do you wish of me?"

"Rabbi, I have a great sin resting heavily upon my heart," she replied despondently. "I do not know what to do."

"What can you have done," inquired the rabbi, with a tender look, "that cannot be discussed at any other time than just now? Will you let me advise you, Veile?"

"No, no," she cried again, violently, "I will not be advised. I see, I know what oppresses me. Yes, I can grasp it by the hand, it lies so near before me. Is that what you call to be advised?"

"Very well," returned the rabbi, seeing that this was the very way to get the young woman to talk— "very well, I say, you are not imagining anything. I believe that you have greatly sinned. Have you come here then to confess this sin? Do your parents or your husband know anything about it?"

"Who is my husband?" she interrupted him, impetuously.

Thoughts welled up in the rabbi's heart like a tumultuous sea in which opposing conjectures cross and recross each other's course. Should he speak with her as with an ordinary sinner?

"Were you, perhaps, forced to be married?" he inquired, as quietly as possible, after a pause.

A suppressed sob, a strong inward struggle, manifesting itself in the whole trembling body, was the only answer to this question.

"Tell me, my child," said the rabbi, encouragingly.

In such tones as the rabbi had never before heard, so strange, so surpassing any human sounds, the young woman began:

"Yes, rabbi, I will speak, even though I know that I shall never go from this place alive, which would be the very best thing for me! No, rabbi, I was not forced to be married. My parents have never once said to me 'you must,' but my own will, my own desire, rather, has always been supreme. My husband is the son of a rich man in the community. To enter his family was to be made the first lady in the gasse, to sit buried in gold and silver. And that very thing, nothing else, was what infatuated me with him. It was for that that I forced myself, my heart and will, to be married to him, hard as it was for me. But in my innermost heart I detested him. The more he loved me, the more I hated him. But the gold and silver had an influence over me. More and more they cried to me, 'You will be the first lady in the gasse!'"

"Continue," said the rabbi, when she ceased, almost exhausted by these words.

"What more shall I tell you, rabbi?" she began again. "I was never a liar, when a child, or older, and yet during my whole engagement it has seemed to me as if a big, gigantic lie had followed me step by step. I have seen it on every side of me. But to-day, when I stood under the *chuppe*, rabbi, and he took the ring from his finger and put it on mine, and when I had to dance at my own wedding with him, whom I now recognized, now for the first time, as the lie, and— when they led me away—"

This sincere confession escaping from the lips of the young woman, she sobbed aloud and bowed her head still deeper over her breast. The rabbi gazed upon her in silence. No insane woman ever spoke like that! Only a soul conscious of its own sin, but captivated by a mysterious power, could suffer like this!

It was not sympathy which he felt with her; it was much more a living over the sufferings of the woman. In spite of the confused story, it was all clear to the rabbi. The cause of the flight from the father's house at this hour also required no explanation. "I know what you mean," he longed to say, but he could only find words to say: "Speak further, Veile!"

The young woman turned towards him. He had not yet seen her face. The golden hood with the shading lace hung deeply over it.

"Have I not told you everything?" she said, with a flush of scorn.

"Everything?" repeated the rabbi, inquiringly. He only said this, moreover, through embarrassment.

"Do you tell me now," she cried, at once passionately and mildly, "what am I to do?"

"Veile!" exclaimed the rabbi, entertaining now, for the first time, a feeling of repugnance for this confidential interview.

"Tell me now!" she pleaded; and before the rabbi could prevent it the young woman threw herself down at his feet and clasped his knees in her arms. This hasty act had loosened the golden wedding-hood from her head, and thus exposed her face to view, a face of remarkable beauty.

So overcome was the young rabbi by the sight of it that he had to shade his eyes with his hands, as if before a sudden flash of lightning.

"Tell me now, what shall I do?" she cried again. "Do you think that I have come from my parents' home merely to return again without help? You alone in the world must tell me. Look at me! I have kept all my hair just as God gave it me. It has never been touched by the shears. Should I, then, do anything to please my husband? I am no wife. I will not be a wife! Tell me, tell me, what am I to do?"

"Arise, arise," bade the rabbi; but his voice quivered, sounded almost painful.

"Tell me first," she gasped; "I will not rise till then!"

"How can I tell you?" he moaned, almost inaudibly.

"Naphtali!" shrieked the kneeling woman.

But the rabbi staggered backward. The room seemed ablaze before him, like a bright fire. A sharp cry rang from his breast, as if one suffering from some painful wound had been seized by a rough hand. In his hurried attempt to free himself from the embrace of the youngwoman, who still clung to his knees, it chanced that her head struck heavily against the floor.

"Naphtali!" she cried once again.

"Silence, silence," groaned the rabbi, pressing both hands against his head.

And still again she called out this name, but not with that agonizing cry. It sounded rather like a commingling of exultation and lamentation.

And again he demanded, "Silence! silence!" but this time so imperiously, so forcibly, that the young woman lay on the floor as if conjured, not daring to utter a single word.

The rabbi paced almost wildly up and down the room. There must have been a hard, terrible struggle in his breast. It seemed to the one lying on the

floor that she heard him sigh from the depths of his soul. Then his pacing became calmer; but it did not last long. The fierce conflict again assailed him. His step grew hurried; it echoed loudly through the awful stillness of the room. Suddenly he neared the young woman, who seemed to lie there scarcely breathing. He stopped in front of her. Had any one seen the face of the rabbi at this moment the expression on it would have filled him with terror. There was a marvelous tranquillity overlying it, the tranquillity of a struggle for life or death.

"Listen to me now, Veile," he began, slowly. "I will talk with you."

"I listen, rabbi," she whispered.

"But do you hear me well?"

"Only speak," she returned.

"But will you do what I advise you? Will you not oppose it? For I am going to say something that will terrify you."

"I will do anything that you say. Only tell me," she moaned.

"Will you swear?"

"I will," she groaned.

"No, do not swear yet, until you have heard me," he cried. "I will not force you."

This time came no answer.

"Hear me, then, daughter of Ruben Klattaner," he began, after a pause. "You have a twofold sin upon your soul, and each is so great, so criminal, that it can only be forgiven by severe punishment. First you permitted yourself to be infatuated by the gold and silver, and then you forced your heart to lie. With the lie you sought to deceive the man, even though he had intrusted you with his all when he made you his wife. A lie is truly a great sin! Streams of water cannot drown them. They make men false and hateful to themselves. The worst that has been committed in the world was led in by a lie. That is the one sin."

"I know, I know," sobbed the young woman.

"Now hear me further," began the rabbi again, with a wavering voice, after a short pause. "You have committed a still greater sin than the first. You have not only deceived your husband, but you have also destroyed the happiness of another person. You could have spoken, and you did not. For life you have robbed him of his happiness, his light, his joy, but you did not speak. What can he now do, when he knows what has been lost to him?"

"Naphtali!" cried the young woman.

"Silence! silence! do not let that name pass your lips again," he demanded, violently. "The more you repeat it the greater becomes your sin. Why did you not speak when you could have spoken? God can never easily forgive you that.

To be silent, to keep secret in one's breast what would have made another man happier than the mightiest monarch! Thereby you have made him more than unhappy. He will nevermore have the desire to be happy. Veile, God in heaven cannot forgive you for that."

"Silence! silence!" groaned the wretched woman.

"No, Veile," he continued, with a stronger voice, "let me talk now. You are certainly willing to hear me speak? Listen to me. You must do severe penance for this sin, the twofold sin which rests upon your head. God is long-suffering and merciful. He will perhaps look down upon your misery, and will blot out your guilt from the great book of transgressions. But you must become penitent. Hear, now, what it shall be."

The rabbi paused. He was on the point of saying the severest thing that had ever passed his lips.

"You were silent, Veile," then he cried, "when you should have spoken. Be silent now forever to all men and to yourself. From the moment you leave this house, until I grant it, you must be dumb; you dare not let a loud word pass from your mouth. Will you undergo this penance?"

"I will do all you say," moaned the young woman.

"Will you have strength to do it?" he asked, gently.

"I shall be as silent as death," she replied.

"And one thing more I have to say to you," he continued. "You are the wife of your husband. Return home and be a Jewish wife."

"I understand you," she sobbed in reply.

"Go to your home now, and bring peace to your parents and husband. The time will come when you may speak, when your sin will be forgiven you. Till then bear what has been laid upon you."

"May I say one thing more?" she cried, lifting up her head.

"Speak," he said.

"Naphtali!"

The rabbi covered his eyes with one hand, with the other motioned her to be silent. But she grasped his hand, drew it to her lips. Hot tears fell upon it.

"Go now," he sobbed, completely broken down.

She let go the hand. The rabbi had seized the candle, but she had already passed him, and glided through the dark hall. The door was left open. The rabbi locked it again.

Veile returned to her home, as she had escaped, unnoticed. The narrow street was deserted, as desolate as death. The searchers were to be found everywhere except there where they ought first to have sought for the missing one. Her mother, Selde, still sat on the same chair on which she had sunk down an hour ago. The fright had left her like one paralyzed, and she was unable to

rise. What a wonderful contrast this wedding-room, with the mother sitting alone in it, presented to the hilarity reigning here shortly before! On Veile's entrance her mother did not cry out. She had no strength to do so. She merely said: "So you have come at last, my daughter?" as if Veile had only returned from a walk somewhat too long. But the young woman did not answer to this and similar questions. Finally she signified by gesticulations that she could not speak. Fright seized the wretched mother a second time, and the entire house was filled with her lamentations.

Ruben Klattaner and Veile's husband having now returned from their fruitless search, were horrified on perceiving the change which Veile had undergone. Being men, they did not weep. With staring eyes they gazed upon the silent young woman, and beheld in her an apparition which had been dealt with by God's visitation in a mysterious manner.

From this hour began the terrible penance of the young woman.

The impression which Veile's woeful condition made upon the people of the gasse was wonderful. Those who had danced with her that evening on the wedding now first recalled her excited state. Her wild actions were now first remembered by many. It must have been an "evil eye," they concluded—a jealous, evil eye, to which her beauty was hateful. This alone could have possessed her with a demon of unrest. She was driven by this evil power into the dark night, a sport of these malicious potencies which pursue men step by step, especially on such occasions. The living God alone knows what she must have seen that night. Nothing good, else one would not become dumb. Old legends and tales were revived, each more horrible than the other. Hundreds of instances were given to prove that this was nothing new in the gasse. Despite this explanation, it is remarkable that the people did not believe that the young woman was dumb. The most thought that her power of speech had been paralyzed by some awful fright, but that with time it would be restored. Under this supposition they called her "Veile the Silent."

There is a kind of human eloquence more telling, more forcible than the loudest words, than the choicest diction— the silence of woman! Ofttimes they cannot endure the slightest vexation, but some great, heart-breaking sorrow, some pain from constant renunciation, self-sacrifice, they suffer with sealed lips—as if, in very truth, they were bound with bars of iron.

It would be difficult to fully describe that long "silent" life of the young woman. It is almost impossible to cite more than one incident. Veile accompanied her husband to his home, that house resplendent with that gold and silver which had infatuated her. She was, to be sure, the "first" woman in the gasse; she had everything in abundance. Indeed, the world supposed that she had but little cause for complaint. "Must one have everything?" was

sometimes queried in the gasse. "One has one thing; another, another." And, according to all appearances, the people were right. Veile continued to be the beautiful, blooming woman. Her penance of silence did not deprive her of a single charm. She was so very happy, indeed, that she did not seem to feel even the pain of her punishment. Veile could laugh and rejoice, but never did she forget to be silent. The seemingly happy days, however, were only qualified to bring about the proper time of trials and temptations. The beginning was easy enough for her, the middle and end were times of real pain. The first years of their wedded life were childless. "It is well," the people in the gasse said, "that she has no children, and God has rightly ordained it to be so. A mother who cannot talk to her child, that would be something awful!" Unexpectedly to all, she rejoiced one day in the birth of a daughter. And when that affectionate young creature, her own offspring, was laid upon her breast, and the first sounds were uttered by its lips— that nameless, eloquent utterance of an infant—she forgot herself not; she was silent!

She was silent also when from day to day that child blossomed before her eyes into fuller beauty. Nor had she any words for it when, in effusions of tenderness, it stretched forth its tiny arms, when in burning fever it sought for the mother's hand. For days— yes, weeks— together she watched at its bedside. Sleep never visited her eyes. But she ever remembered her penance.

Years fled by. In her arms she carried another child. It was a boy. The father's joy was great. The child inherited its mother's beauty. Like its sister, it grew in health and strength. The noblest, richest mother, they said, might be proud of such children! And Veile was proud, no doubt, but this never passed her lips. She remained silent about things which mothers in their joy often cannot find words enough to express. And although her face many times lighted up with beaming smiles, yet she never renounced the habitual silence imposed upon her.

The idea that the slightest dereliction of her penance would be accompanied with a curse upon her children may have impressed itself upon her mind. Mothers will understand better than other persons what this mother suffered from her penalty of silence.

Thus a part of those years sped away which we are wont to call the best. She still flourished in her wonderful beauty. Her maiden daughter was beside her, like the bud beside the full-blown rose. Suitors were already present from far and near, who passed in review before the beautiful girl. The most of them were excellent young men, and any mother might have been proud in having her own daughter sought by such. Even then Veile did not undo her penance. Those busy times of intercourse which keep mothers engaged in presenting the superiorities of their daughters in the best light were not allowed her. The

choice of one of the most favored suitors was made. Never before did any couple in the gasse equal this in beauty and grace. A few weeks before the appointed time for the wedding a malignant disease stole on, spreading sorrow and anxiety over the greater part of the land. Young girls were principally its victims. It seemed to pass scornfully over the aged and infirm. Veile's daughter was also laid hold upon by it. Before three days had passed there was a corpse in the house— the bride!

Even then Veile did not forget her penance. When they bore away the corpse to the "good place," she did utter a cry of anguish which long after echoed in the ears of the people; she did wring her hands in despair, but no one heard a word of complaint. Her lips seemed dumb forever. It was then, when she was seated on the low stool in the seven days of mourning, that the rabbi came to her, to bring to her the usual consolation for the dead. But he did not speak with her. He addressed words only to her husband. She herself dared not look up. Only when he turned to go did she lift her eyes. They, in turn, met the eyes of the rabbi, but he departed without a farewell.

After her daughter's death Veile was completely broken down. Even that which at her time of life is still called beauty had faded away within a few days. Her cheeks had become hollow, her hair gray. Visitors wondered how she could endure such a shock, how body and spirit could hold together. They did not know that that silence was an iron fetter firmly imprisoning the slumbering spirits. She had a son, moreover, to whom, as to something last and dearest, her whole being still clung.

The boy was thirteen years old. His learning in the Holy Scriptures was already celebrated for miles around. He was the pupil of the rabbi, who had treated him with a love and tenderness becoming his own father. He said that he was a remarkable child, endowed with rare talents. The boy was to be sent to Hungary, to one of the most celebrated teachers of the times, in order to lay the foundation for his sacred studies under this instructor's guidance and wisdom. Years might perhaps pass before she would see him again. But Veile let her boy go from her embrace. She did not say a blessing over him when he went; only her lips twitched with the pain of silence.

Long years expired before the boy returned from the strange land, a full-grown, noble youth. When Veile had her son with her again a smile played about her mouth, and for a moment it seemed as if her former beauty had enjoyed a second spring. The extraordinary ability of her son already made him famous. Wheresoever he went people were delighted with his beauty, and admired the modesty of his manner, despite such great scholarship.

The next Sabbath the young disciple of the Talmud, scarcely twenty years of age, was to demonstrate the first marks of this great learning.

The people crowded shoulder to shoulder in this great synagogue. Curious glances were cast through the lattice-work of the women's gallery above upon the dense throng. Veile occupied one of the foremost seats. She could see everything that took place below. Her face was extremely pale. All eyes were turned towards her— the mother, who was permitted to see such a day for her son! But Veile did not appear to notice what was happening before her. A weariness, such as she had never felt before, even in her greatest suffering, crept over her limbs. It was as if she must sleep during her son's address. He had hardly mounted the stairs before the ark of the laws— hardly uttered his first words— when a remarkable change crossed her face. Her cheeks burned. She arose. All her vital energy seemed aroused. Her son meanwhile was speaking down below. She could not have told what he was saying. She did not hear him— she only heard the murmur of approbation, sometimes low, sometimes loud, which came to her ears from the quarters of the men. The people were astonished at the noble bearing of the speaker, his melodious speech, and his powerful energy. When he stopped at certain times to rest it seemed as if one were in a wood swept by a storm. She could now and then hear a few voices declaring that such a one had never before been listened to. The women at her side wept; she alone could not. A choking pain pressed from her breast to her lips. Forces were astir in her heart which struggled for expression. The whole synagogue echoed with buzzing voices, but to her it seemed as if she must speak louder than these. At the very moment her son had ended she cried out unconsciously, violently throwing herself against the lattice-work:

"God! living God! shall I not now speak?" A dead silence followed this outcry. Nearly all had recognized this voice as that of the "silent woman." A miracle had taken place!

"Speak! speak!" resounded the answer of the rabbi from the men's seats below. "You may now speak!"

But no reply came. Veile had fallen back into her seat, pressing both hands against her breast. When the women sitting beside her looked at her they were terrified to find that the "silent woman" had fainted. She was dead! The unsealing of her lips was her last moment.

Long years afterwards the rabbi died. On his death-bed he told those standing about him this wonderful penance of Veile.

Every girl in the *gasse* knew the story of the "silent woman."

11: Planchette

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

The Bulletin, 15 July 1936

PLANCHETTE had always appeared something of a joke to Tom Peters. And it was only as a joke he attended a seance at which the queer little contraption, the pencil at one end resting upon a pad of paper, wrote the answers to the questions of those who placed their hands upon it.

Merely for a joke Peters, in his turn, put his hand on the little frame. It fidgeted under his touch.

"You must ask Planchette a question," someone prompted.

"How am I going to die?" asked Peters.

Even some of the laughers checked their merriment. This was throwing a challenge into the face of Providence! Peters knew his question would create a sensation, and enjoyed making it.

Planchette jerked about spasmodically. Distinctly on the paper, when it finished with a flourish, was the one word "Violence!"

The group whose faces were bent over the table around him gave a gasp. Peters felt the necessity of maintaining the jest as a jest.

"When?" he asked, with assumed bravado. Planchette moved again.

"That's plain enough!" someone cried with a finger on what had been written. "It says June 24, 1936. And what's this other word? It looks like 'Midnight!' "

Peters would not have admitted to anybody the profound sense of relief he felt. The whole affair was a joke to him; certainly a prophecy of death to occur in twenty-six years could be quite an easy joke.

The war came. Peters enlisted.

"The war will have to last until 1936 before it finishes me," he used to say laughingly. He had been in the habit of jesting like that about the prophecy even before the war; his survival through all

its dangers may have helped to fasten an unacknowledged real belief upon him. To feel that one had a certain tenure of life for twenty, fifteen, ten or even five years was, in a way, comfortable.

But when 1936 came it was different. Peters might tell himself that the Planchette writing was all a foolish joke it could not dispel the gathering terror in his heart as he found January changed into February, and February, March and April flying.

THE lighted face of a clock stared mockingly at Peters as he looked out of a window. There seemed derision in the hands as they pointed to the time— 11.30. And 12 was the death hour.

That morning Dr. Burton had put him through a medical examination and had told him that organically he was good for another twenty or twenty-five years.

"Something's upset you, man!" he had exclaimed on his arrival. "You're ghastly, and shaking, too. What's wrong?"

"I'd like you to give me the once-over first, doctor. We'll talk about things afterwards." Peters had stuck to that. Burton was giving him a final examination of his heart when he became startled.

"Good heavens, man, what is wrong?" he demanded.

"That blasted clock!" exclaimed Peters. The timepiece on the mantelpiece was still chiming the hour. Every time a clock struck now it was a reminder to Peters of swiftly-flying time. As he dressed he began his explanation.

"Now look here, old man," said Dr. Burton gently; "sit down quietly and look at the matter reasonably. I've heard of these planchette writings; I've also heard of table rappings— all that bunk. When people get together intent upon experiencing manifestations, they will get some, somehow. When you were working that planchette your mind, either on your own inspiration or impressed by the thoughts of others bent on a joke, guided your hand in scrawling that word 'Violence.' Then, in the same way, you put down the date— a comfortably far-distant date. And, because that date has arrived, you're letting a little trick in mental or nerve mechanics worry you so much that you send for me in case violence may mean a sudden collapse.Let me assure you, old man, you're as sound as a bell. All that's wrong with you is that you've let this idea take possession of you. Been worrying over it for weeks, perhaps?"

"Ye-es. As a fact, I have."

"Well, you'll laugh to-morrow, when the fatal day has passed."

Strangely it stuck in Peters's mind that the doctor had used the words "fatal day."

"I'll call at the chemist's and get them to send up a tonic that will brace up your nerves a bit; and, as for to-night, I'll give you a sleeping draught—"

"That's no good," said Peters with apparently restored cheerfulness. "I've invited a few friends along, and I can't very well go to sleep with friends in the house."

"So much the better. Keep your mind off this absurd business, anyhow. I bet you can't think of anyone who would want to harm you."

"No; I can't."

"Then forget it!" cried Burton briskly. "Enjoy yourself to-night, and forget a silly fear. There's nothing to worry over."

IT was easy enough for the doctor to tell him to forget the planchette; it was hard to do the forgetting. He had been for days like a condemned man counting off the days to his execution. Yet here he was, a hale man; popular, too— there was no one likely to wish him injury. Even if burglars came, he could lock himself in his room, avoiding them. Life was more valuable than any goods they might take.

Peters told himself this, time and again; yet oppression hung over him. It was futile to attempt to lose himself in a book; he had failed to rivet his attention on the paper that morning. After the doctor had gone he took it up again, determined

The chiming of the clock once more brought him to his feet with jumping heart. Another hour gone!

He strode to the clock and, with a peevish action, put the chimes out of commission. Not a single line of what he had read remained in his mind. The whole day passed like that; his thoughts overridden by that nightmare fear, in spite of every interest he sought. With painful care at each crossing, as he looked up and down for fear of cars, he had made his way to the bowling green. When he left, he could hardly remember the men with whom he had spoken. Only Danvers— it was a remark by Danvers which lashed the dull ache of his fear to a positive pain.

"One o'clock! " Danvers had said. "I'll have to get home to lunch— friends coming. By jingo, how time flies!"

Time did fly, in spite of the painfulness of moments. One o'clock— eleven hours to go!" was how Peters's heart registered an echo to the exclamation of Danvers.

Billiards in the afternoon, after a lunch that was a nightmare, was equally a failure as a distraction. Something seemed to be dragging at him, telling him he was wasting time when he ought to be setting his affairs in order. He hated to think of that. It was pandering to the panic that had taken possession of him.

HE was standing on his verandah when a clock in some house opposite began to strike the hour of five. His heart jolted afresh. Seven hours only!

And then six; and then five! It was impossible to avoid keeping the gruesome tally. He was glad when his friends arrived; but even they brought only a partial forgetfulness. To entertain them, talk to them, was an effort, with his thoughts dragging back to his fear. They noticed the worry upon him, and their looks were curious. It was one thing explaining the situation to your

doctor; another entirely to put it before these people, whose sympathy might have covered a secret derision.

Even when he flattered himself that he was free from the nag of the terror, it was suddenly restored.

"I say, Peters, that clock of yours has stopped," said Pritchard ; and he looked at the watch on his wrist. "It's gone nine o'clock!"

Only three more hours!

And then the Sampsons. "Jim and I will have to go, I'm afraid. The children have gone to a party, and we arranged to pick them up," said Mrs. Sampson. "It's ten o'clock!"

Two more hours— two only! He tried to ignore it. They were a bright crowd, used to taking possession of his house and amusing themselves. That gave him opportunity for a quiet talk with Palmer, the one man there to whom he cared to speak in confidence.

"What's the matter with you to-night, Tom?" Palmer asked. "Look how that whisky's shaking in your hand!"

"I'm under sentence of death," said Peters with a forced laugh.

"Doctor?"

"No." He hesitated, and then he plunged into the story.

"What's the use of troubling about a foolish idea like that?" demanded Palmer robustly.

"That's easy to say. I've said it myself a hundred times to-day. The fact is, the idea won't be got rid of. If I wake up to-morrow well and alive the spell will be broken; but—"

"Now, look— what's likely to harm you? Nothing! If you like— I pass the police station on the way home— I'll call in and ask them to tell a man off to watch the house. I'll say some suspicious characters have been hanging about. That'll stop the only possibility."

"I had hoped that you would hang on until after twelve." said Peters.

"Right, I will!" said Palmer heartily. "And so will some of the others. We'll make an all-night session of it."

After that it seemed ominous, the working of a malevolent fate, that the party should break up early. Peters's parties usually lasted late; to-night the guests all had some excuse for going. Perhaps the atmosphere, lacking its usual geniality, had deprived them of their desire to stay. And then a phone call came for Palmer. His wife, a chronic invalid, had taken a bad turn; she wanted him at home.

"I'll come back if I can, said Palmer awkwardly. Peters knew that the querulous invalid would see that he didn t.

"Anyway, I'll drop in at the police station, as I said. Put that idea out of your mind, old chap; you'll be all right."

The last of the others went on his heels.

ONE hour to go.

"You won't want me any longer, Mr. Peters?" queried his housekeeper.

"No— yes," said Peters, suddenly changing his mind. "I wonder if you mind, Mrs. Hansford, waiting up for a while— just in case anyone comes back. Mr. Palmer said he might. Until a little after midnight—12.15 would do. I don't like troubling you."

"Oh, it's no trouble. You're not feeling too well, sir? If I might suggest a tonic, there's nothing like"

"I've got the one Doctor Burton sent me. He sent a sleeping draught, too, didn't he? You might mix it for me."

But when she handed it to him he furtively threw it into the grate. That was because he dreaded to open a window to throw it into the garden. Of all things he did not want to sleep— until the fatal hour was past. He felt that he would be able to sleep well enough when the ordeal of the night was over. A consciousness of his cowardice was upon him as he began to ascend the stairs. He was flying from terror, leaving a frail old woman to face what he feared. He slipped a revolver from his desk drawer into his pocket before he went.

"The house is locked securely?" he asked, with a foot on the stairs.

"I always see to that," returned Mrs. Hansford.

What an insupportable terror was upon him as he entered his room! He could have shrieked out against it, like a frightened child. The blind was up, and the clock in the tower seemed to grin at him— malevolently, derisively. It was 11.30. Half an hour of torture before he could hope to put aside the horror superstition had placed upon him!

He shrank back from the window in the act of approaching to let down the blind. Here was a loophole for disaster. Some murderous maniac with a gun in his hands might seize the opportunity for a killing if his figure showed in the window. He switched off the light he had just turned on and stood in a darkness only relieved by the pale light of the moon.

His heart throbbed furiously, painfully. A new idea came to him. If it was possible that anyone should have evil designs upon him he would trick him— or them. He tossed cushions upon the bed, pulling the clothes over them to give the impression of a sleeping form. Then he stole soft-footed from the room, closing the door behind him.

He half expected some attacker to spring out from the darkness; but, swift-footed, he moved across to a seldom-used guest-room. The light gleamed as

he touched the switch, showing the room to be safely empty. He turned the light off again, locked the door and leaned against it, panting in sheer fear.

This room had the same aspect as his own. It seemed to him that the lighted clock-face was stooping to leer at him through the window. Its hands were surely derisive fingers, pointing out to him the swift passage of time to the hour that had become so dreadful. It was close upon the quarter to now. All foolishness, of course. Only another fifteen minutes and the spell of terror would be over and he could laugh at his fears.

His heart stopped suddenly; then it beat more furiously than ever. There was undoubtedly a step—a man's step— on the stair, a step stealthily made, as if by one who did not wish to be heard. So the wild improbability had happened after all! His ear against the door panel, he heard again the soft fall of a foot. He heard the handle of his door turned and the faint creak the door made as it opened.

Somebody had entered his room. But who— who? What had happened to Mrs. Hansford?

As he listened with a desperation so intense that it seemed his heart was making a drumming that might drown other sounds and betray him, he clutched his revolver tightly. Fear filled each second with dreadful agony. Again he heard a soft footfall. Peters recognised the faint creak of the loose board outside his doorway. Another door was opened as softly as the first.

Peters threw a swift glance at the clock-face. It was more jeering than ever; there was a sort of demoniacal triumph on it. Seven minutes to!

He knew now that Planchette had written truthfully. Midnight on this day was his death-time. The ruse by which he had delayed the marauder was only lengthening time to fulfil the prophecy. Everything had worked to that end. Of what use was resistance? It was only prolonging the agony of seconds that each held a year's torture.

And then the handle of the door against which he was pressed moved stealthily. There was a gentle pressure which the lock resisted.

Peters's heart froze with horror; the cold sweat covered him. A quick glance showed him that the last minute to the hour had arrived. A shot rang out just as the chime in the lighted tower began to toll the midnight hour.

"WHAT the deceased had told me in the morning," said Doctor Burton at the inquest, "worried me. Having had a late call elsewhere, I decided to look in upon him before I returned home. Mrs. Hansford, hearing my step on the verandah, opened the door for me. She seemed to be expecting me, and relieved that I had come. Hoping he had gone to sleep, and fearing to disturb

him, I went upstairs softly... I would say that he was goaded to insanity by a superstitious fear when he shot himself."

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12: The Biography of a Superman

Richard Middleton

1882-1911

In: *The Ghost Ship and other stories*, 1912

"O limèd soul that struggling to be free
Art more engaged!"

CHARLES STEPHEN DALE, the subject of my study, was a dramatist and, indeed, something of a celebrity in the early years of the twentieth century. That he should be already completely forgotten is by no means astonishing in an age that elects its great men with a charming indecision of touch. The general prejudice against the granting of freeholds has spread to the desired lands of fame; and where our profligate ancestors were willing to call a man great in perpetuity, we, with more shrewdness, prefer to name him a genius for seven years. We know that before that period may have expired fate will have granted us a sea-serpent with yet more coils, with a yet more bewildering arrangement of marine and sunset tints, and the conclusion of previous leases will enable us to grant him undisputed possession of Parnassus. If our ancestors were more generous they were certainly less discriminate; and it cannot be doubted that many of them went to their graves under the impression that it is possible for there to be more than one great man at a time! We have altered all that.

For two years Dale was a great man, or rather the great man, and it is probable that if he had not died he would have held his position for a longer period. When his death was announced, although the notices of his life and work were of a flattering length, the leaderwriters were not unnaturally aggrieved that he should have resigned his post before the popular interest in his personality was exhausted. The Censor might do his best by prohibiting the performance of all the plays that the dead man had left behind him; but, as the author neglected to express his views in their columns, and the common sense of their readers forbade the publication of interviews with him, the journals could draw but a poor satisfaction from condemning or upholding the official action. Dale's regrettable absence reduced what might have been an agreeable clash of personalities to an arid discussion on art. The consequence was obvious. The end of the week saw the elevation of James Macintosh, the great Scotch comedian, to the vacant post, and Dale was completely forgotten. That this oblivion is merited in terms of his work I am not prepared to admit; that it is merited in terms of his personality I indignantly wish to deny. Whatever Dale may have been as an artist, he was, perhaps in spite of himself, a man, and a

man, moreover, possessed of many striking and unusual traits of character. It is to the man Dale that I offer this tribute.

Sprung from an old Yorkshire family, Charles Stephen Dale was yet sufficient of a Cockney to justify both his friends and his enemies in crediting him with the Celtic temperament. Nevertheless, he was essentially a modern, insomuch that his contempt for the writings of dead men surpassed his dislike of living authors. To these two central influences we may trace most of the peculiarities that rendered him notorious and ultimately great. Thus, while his Celtic æstheticism permitted him to eat nothing but raw meat, because he mistrusted alike "the reeking products of the manure-heap and the barbaric fingers of cooks," it was surely his modernity that made him an agnostic, because bishops sat in the House of Lords. Smaller men might dislike vegetables and bishops without allowing it to affect their conduct; but Dale was careful to observe that every slightest conviction should have its place in the formation of his character. Conversely, he was nothing without a reason.

These may seem small things to which to trace the motive forces of a man's life; but if we add to them a third, found where the truth about a man not infrequently lies, in the rag-bag of his enemies, our materials will be nearly complete. "Dale hates his fellow human-beings," wrote some anonymous scribbler, and, even expressed thus baldly, the statement is not wholly false. But he hated them because of their imperfections, and it would be truer to say that his love of humanity amounted to a positive hatred of individuals, and, pace the critics, the love was no less sincere than the hatred. He had drawn from the mental confusion of the darker German philosophers an image of the perfect man— an image differing only in inessentials from the idol worshipped by the Imperialists as "efficiency." He did not find— it was hardly likely that he would find— that his contemporaries fulfilled this perfect conception, and he therefore felt it necessary to condemn them for the possession of those weaknesses, or as some would prefer to say, qualities, of which the sum is human nature.

I now approach a quality, or rather the lack of a quality, that is in itself of so debatable a character, that were it not of the utmost importance in considering the life of Charles Stephen Dale I should prefer not to mention it. I refer to his complete lack of a sense of humour, the consciousness of which deficiency went so far to detract from his importance as an artist and a man. The difficulty which I mentioned above lies in the fact that, while every one has a clear conception of what they mean by the phrase, no one has yet succeeded in defining it satisfactorily. Here I would venture to suggest that it is a kind of magnificent sense of proportion, a sense that relates the infinite greatness of the universe to the finite smallness of man, and draws the inevitable

conclusion as to the importance of our joys and sorrows and labours. I am aware that this definition errs on the side of vagueness; but possibly it may be found to include the truth. Obviously, the natures of those who possess this sense will tend to be static rather than dynamic, and it is therefore against the limits imposed by this sense that intellectual anarchists, among whom I would number Dale, and poets, primarily rebel. But— and it is this rather than his undoubted intellectual gifts or his dogmatic definitions of good and evil that definitely separated Dale from the normal men— there can be no doubt that he felt his lack of a sense of humour bitterly. In every word he ever said, in every line he ever wrote, I detect a painful striving after this mysterious sense, that enabled his neighbours, fools as he undoubtedly thought them, to laugh and weep and follow the faith of their hearts without conscious realisation of their own existence and the problems it induced. By dint of study and strenuous observation he achieved, as any man may achieve, a considerable degree of wit, though to the last his ignorance of the audience whom he served and despised, prevented him from judging the effect of his sallies without experiment. But try as he might the finer jewel lay far beyond his reach. Strong men fight themselves when they can find no fitter adversary; but in all the history of literature there is no stranger spectacle than this lifelong contest between Dale, the intellectual anarch and pioneer of supermen, and Dale, the poor lonely devil who wondered what made people happy.

I have said that the struggle was lifelong, but it must be added that it was always unequal. The knowledge that in his secret heart he desired this quality, the imperfection of imperfections, only served to make Dale's attack on the complacency of his contemporaries more bitter. He ridiculed their achievements, their ambitions, and their love with a fury that awakened in them a mild curiosity, but by no means affected their comfort. Moreover, the very vehemence with which he demanded their contempt deprived him of much of his force as a critic, for they justly wondered why a man should waste his lifetime in attacking them if they were indeed so worthless. Actually, they felt, Dale was a great deal more engaged with his audience than many of the imaginative writers whom he affected to despise for their sycophancy. And, especially towards the end of his life when his powers perhaps were weakening, the devices which he used to arouse the irritation of his contemporaries became more and more childishly artificial, less and less effective. He was like one of those actors who feel that they cannot hold the attention of their audience unless they are always doing something, though nothing is more monotonous than mannered vivacity.

Dale, then, was a man who was very anxious to be modern, but at the same time had not wholly succeeded in conquering his æesthetic sense. He

had constituted himself high priest of the most puritanical and remote of all creeds, yet there was that in his blood that rebelled ceaselessly against the intellectual limits he had voluntarily accepted. The result in terms of art was chaos. Possessed of an intellect of great analytic and destructive force, he was almost entirely lacking in imagination, and he was therefore unable to raise his work to a plane in which the mutually combative elements of his nature might have been reconciled. His light moments of envy, anger, and vanity passed into the crucible to come forth unchanged. He lacked the magic wand, and his work never took wings above his conception. It is in vain to seek in any of his plays or novels, tracts or prefaces, for the product of inspiration, the divine gift that enables one man to write with the common pen of humanity. He could only employ his curiously perfect technique in reproducing the wayward flashes of a mind incapable of consecutive thought. He never attempted— and this is a hard saying— to produce any work beautiful in itself; while the confusion of his mind, and the vanity that never allowed him to ignore the effect his work might produce on his audience, prevented him from giving clear expression to his creed. His work will appeal rather to the student of men than to the student of art, and, wantonly incoherent though it often is, must be held to constitute a remarkable human document.

It is strange to reflect that among his contemporary admirers Dale was credited with an intellect of unusual clarity, for the examination of any of his plays impresses one with the number and mutual destructiveness of his motives for artistic expression. A noted debater, he made frequent use of the device of attacking the weakness of the other man's speech, rather than the weakness of the other man's argument. His prose was good, though at its best so impersonal that it recalled the manner of an exceptionally well-written leading article. At its worst it was marred by numerous vulgarities and errors of taste, not always, it is to be feared, intentional. His attitude on this point was typical of his strange blindness to the necessity of a pure artistic ideal. He committed these extravagances, he would say, in order to irritate his audience into a condition of mental alertness. As a matter of fact, he generally made his readers more sorry than angry, and he did not realise that even if he had been successful it was but a poor reward for the wanton spoiling of much good work. He proclaimed himself to be above criticism, but he was only too often beneath it. Revolting against the dignity, not infrequently pompous, of his fellow-men of letters, he played the part of clown with more enthusiasm than skill. It is intellectual arrogance in a clever man to believe that he can play the fool with success merely because he wishes it.

There is no need for me to enter into detail with regard to Dale's personal appearance; the caricaturists did him rather more than justice, the

photographers rather less. In his younger days he suggested a gingerbread man that had been left too long in the sun; towards the end he affected a cultured and elaborate ruggedness that made him look like a duke or a market gardener. Like most clever men, he had good eyes.

Nor is it my purpose to add more than a word to the published accounts of his death. There is something strangely pitiful in that last desperate effort to achieve humour. We have all read the account of his own death that he dictated from the sick-bed— cold, epigrammatic, and, alas! characteristically lacking in taste. And once more it was his fate to make us rather sorry than angry.

In the third scene of the second act of "Henry V.," a play written by an author whom Dale pretended to despise, Dame Quickly describes the death of Falstaff in words that are too well known to need quotation. It was thus and no otherwise that Dale died. It is thus that every man dies.

13: The Christmas Banquet

Nathaniel Hawthorne

1804-1864

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"I HAVE HERE attempted," said Roderick, unfolding a few sheets of manuscript, as he sat with Rosina and the sculptor in the summerhouse— "I have attempted to seize hold of a personage who glides past me, occasionally, in my walk through life. My former sad experience, as you know, has gifted me with some degree of insight into the gloomy mysteries of the human heart, through which I have wandered like one astray in a dark cavern, with his torch fast flickering to extinction. But this man, this class of men, is a hopeless puzzle."

"Well, but propound him," said the sculptor. "Let us have an idea of hint, to begin with."

"Why, indeed," replied Roderick, "he is such a being as I could conceive you to carve out of marble, and some yet unrealized perfection of human science to endow with an exquisite mockery of intellect; but still there lacks the last inestimable touch of a divine Creator. He looks like a man; and, perchance, like a better specimen of man than you ordinarily meet. You might esteem him wise; he is capable of cultivation and refinement, and has at least an external conscience; but the demands that spirit makes upon spirit are precisely those to which he cannot respond. When at last you come close to him you find him chill and unsubstantial— a mere vapor."

"I believe," said Rosina, "I have a glimmering idea of what you mean."

"Then be thankful," answered her husband, smiling; "but do not anticipate any further illumination from what I am about to read. I have here imagined such a man to be— what, probably, he never is— conscious of the deficiency in his spiritual organization. Methinks the result would be a sense of cold unreality wherewith he would go shivering through the world, longing to exchange his load of ice for any burden of real grief that fate could fling upon a human being."

Contenting himself with this preface, Roderick began to read.

IN A CERTAIN OLD GENTLEMAN'S last will and testament there appeared a bequest, which, as his final thought and deed, was singularly in keeping with a long life of melancholy eccentricity. He devised a considerable sum for establishing a fund, the interest of which was to be expended, annually forever, in preparing a Christmas Banquet for ten of the most miserable persons that could be found. It seemed not to be the testator's purpose to make these half a score of sad hearts merry, but to provide that the stern or fierce expression of human discontent should not be drowned, even for that

one holy and joyful day, amid the acclamations of festal gratitude which all Christendom sends up. And he desired, likewise, to perpetuate his own remonstrance against the earthly course of Providence, and his sad and sour dissent from those systems of religion or philosophy which either find sunshine in the world or draw it down from heaven.

The task of inviting the guests, or of selecting among such as might advance their claims to partake of this dismal hospitality, was confided to the two trustees or stewards of the fund. These gentlemen, like their deceased friend, were sombre humorists, who made it their principal occupation to number the sable threads in the web of human life, and drop all the golden ones out of the reckoning. They performed their present office with integrity and judgment. The aspect of the assembled company, on the day of the first festival, might not, it is true, have satisfied every beholder that these were especially the individuals, chosen forth from all the world, whose griefs were worthy to stand as indicators of the mass of human suffering. Yet, after due consideration, it could not be disputed that here was a variety of hopeless discomfort, which, if it sometimes arose from causes apparently inadequate, was thereby only the shrewder imputation against the nature and mechanism of life.

The arrangements and decorations of the banquet were probably intended to signify that death in life which had been the testator's definition of existence. The hall, illuminated by torches, was hung round with curtains of deep and dusky purple, and adorned with branches of cypress and wreaths of artificial flowers, imitative of such as used to be strewn over the dead. A sprig of parsley was laid by every plate. The main reservoir of wine, was a sepulchral urn of silver, whence the liquor was distributed around the table in small vases, accurately copied from those that held the tears of ancient mourners. Neither had the stewards— if it were their taste that arranged these details— forgotten the fantasy of the old Egyptians, who seated a skeleton at every festive board, and mocked their own merriment with the imperturbable grin of a death's-head. Such a fearful guest, shrouded in a black mantle, sat now at the head of the table. It was whispered, I know not with what truth, that the testator himself had once walked the visible world with the machinery of that sane skeleton, and that it was one of the stipulations of his will, that he should thus be permitted to sit, from year to year, at the banquet which he had instituted. If so, it was perhaps covertly implied that he had cherished no hopes of bliss beyond the grave to compensate for the evils which he felt or imagined here. And if, in their bewildered conjectures as to the purpose of earthly existence, the banqueters should throw aside the veil, and cast an inquiring glance at this figure of death, as seeking thence the solution

otherwise unattainable, the only reply would be a stare of the vacant eye-caverns and a grin of the skeleton jaws. Such was the response that the dead man had fancied himself to receive when he asked of Death to solve the riddle of his life; and it was his desire to repeat it when the guests of his dismal hospitality should find themselves perplexed with the same question.

"What means that wreath?" asked several of the company, while viewing the decorations of the table.

They alluded to a wreath of cypress, which was held on high by a skeleton arm, protruding from within the black mantle.

"It is a crown," said one of the stewards, "not for the worthiest, but for the woefullest, when he shall prove his claim to it."

The guest earliest bidden to the festival was a man of soft and gentle character, who had not energy to struggle against the heavy despondency to which his temperament rendered him liable; and therefore with nothing outwardly to excuse him from happiness, he had spent a life of quiet misery that made his blood torpid, and weighed upon his breath, and sat like a ponderous night-fiend upon every throb of his unresisting heart. His wretchedness seemed as deep as his original nature, if not identical with it. It was the misfortune of a second guest to cherish within his bosom a diseased heart, which had become so wretchedly sore that the continual and unavoidable rubs of the world, the blow of an enemy, the careless jostle of a stranger, and even the faithful and loving touch of a friend, alike made ulcers in it. As is the habit of people thus afflicted, he found his chief employment in exhibiting these miserable sores to any who would give themselves the pain of viewing them. A third guest was a hypochondriac, whose imagination wrought necromancy in his outward and inward world, and caused him to see monstrous faces in the household fire, and dragons in the clouds of sunset, and fiends in the guise of beautiful women, and something ugly or wicked beneath all the pleasant surfaces of nature. His neighbor at table was one who, in his early youth, had trusted mankind too much, and hoped too highly in their behalf, and, in meeting with many disappointments, had become desperately soured. For several years back this misanthrope bad employed himself in accumulating motives for hating and despising his race— such as murder, lust, treachery, ingratitude, faithlessness of trusted friends, instinctive vices of children, impurity of women, hidden guilt in men of saint-like aspect— and, in short, all manner of black realities that sought to decorate themselves with outward grace or glory. But at every atrocious fact that was added to his catalogue, at every increase of the sad knowledge which he spent his life to collect, the native impulses of the poor man's loving and confiding heart made him groan with anguish. Next, with his heavy brow bent downward, there stole

into the hall a man naturally earnest and impassioned, who, from his immemorial infancy, had felt the consciousness of a high message to the world; but, essaying to deliver it, had found either no voice or form of speech, or else no ears to listen. Therefore his whole life was a bitter questioning of himself: "Why have not men acknowledged my mission? Am I not a self-deluding fool? What business have I on earth? Where is my grave?" Throughout the festival, he quaffed frequent draughts from the sepulchral urn of wine, hoping thus to quench the celestial fire that tortured his own breast and could not benefit his race.

Then there entered, having flung away a ticket for a ball, a gay gallant of yesterday, who had found four or five wrinkles in his brow, and more gray hairs than he could well number on his head. Endowed with sense and feeling, he had nevertheless spent his youth in folly, but had reached at last that dreary point in life where Folly quits us of her own accord, leaving us to make friends with Wisdom if we can. Thus, cold and desolate, he had come to seek Wisdom at the banquet, and wondered if the skeleton were she. To eke out the company, the stewards had invited a distressed poet from his home in the almshouse, and a melancholy idiot from the street-corner. The latter had just the glimmering of sense that was sufficient to make him conscious of a vacancy, which the poor fellow, all his life long, had mistily sought to fill up with intelligence, wandering up and down the streets, and groaning miserably because his attempts were ineffectual. The only lady in the hall was one who had fallen short of absolute and perfect beauty, merely by the trifling defect of a slight cast in her left eye. But this blemish, minute as it was, so shocked the pure ideal of her soul, rather than her vanity, that she passed her life in solitude, and veiled her countenance even from her own gaze. So the skeleton sat shrouded at one end of the table, and this poor lady at the other,

One other guest remains to be described. He was a young man of smooth brow, fair cheek, and fashionable mien. So far as his exterior developed him, he might much more suitably have found a place at some merry Christmas table, than have been numbered among the blighted, fate-stricken, fancy-tortured set of ill-starred banqueters. Murmurs arose among the guests as they noted, the glance of general scrutiny which the intruder threw over his companions. What had he to do among them? Why did not the skeleton of the dead founder of the feast unbend its rattling joints, arise, and motion the unwelcome stranger from the board?

"Shameful!" said the morbid man, while a new ulcer broke out in his heart. "He comes to mock us! we shall be the jest of his tavern friends I— he will make a farce of our miseries, and bring it out upon the stage!"

"O, never mind him!" said the hypochondriac, smiling sourly. "He shall feast from yonder tureen of viper-soup; and if there is a fricassee of scorpions on the table, pray let him have his share of it. For the dessert, he shall taste the apples of Sodom, then, if he like our Christmas fare, let him return again next year!"

"Trouble him not," murmured the melancholy man, with gentleness. "What matters it whether the consciousness of misery come a few years sooner or later? If this youth deem himself happy now, yet let him sit with us for the sake of the wretchedness to come."

The poor idiot approached the young man with that mournful aspect of vacant inquiry which his face continually wore, and which caused people to say that he was always in search of his missing wits. After no little examination he touched the stranger's hand, but immediately drew back his own, shaking his head and shivering,

"Cold, cold, cold!" muttered the idiot.

The young man shivered too, and smiled.

"Gentlemen, and you, madam," said one of the stewards of the festival, "do not conceive so ill either of our caution or judgment, as to imagine that we have admitted this young stranger— Gervayse Hastings by name— without a full investigation and thoughtful balance of his claims. Trust me, not a guest at the table is better entitled to his seat."

The steward's guaranty was perforce satisfactory. The company, therefore, took their places, and addressed themselves to the serious business of the feast, but were soon disturbed by the hypochondriac, who thrust back his chair, complaining that a dish of stewed toads and vipers was set before him, and that there was green ditchwater in his cup of wine. This mistake being amended, he quietly resumed his seat. The wine, as it flowed freely from the sepulchral urn, seemed to come imbued with all gloomy inspirations; so that its influence was not to cheer, but either to sink the revelers into a deeper melancholy, or elevate their spirits to an enthusiasm of wretchedness. The conversation was various. They told sad stories about people who might have been Worthy guests at such a festival as the present. They talked of grisly incidents in human history; of strange crimes, which, if truly considered, were but convulsions of agony; of some lives that had been altogether wretched, and of others, which, wearing a general semblance of happiness, had yet been deformed, sooner or later, by misfortune, as by the intrusion of a grim face at a banquet; of deathbed scenes, and what dark intimations might be gathered from the words of dying men; of suicide, and whether the more eligible mode were by halter, knife, poison, drowning, gradual starvation, or the fumes of charcoal. The majority of the guests, as is the custom with people thoroughly

and profoundly sick at heart, were anxious to make their own woes the theme of discussion, and prove themselves most excellent in anguish. The misanthropist went deep into the philosophy of evil, and wandered about in the darkness, with now and then a gleam of discolored light hovering on ghastly shapes and horrid scenery. Many a miserable thought, such as men have stumbled upon from age to age, did he now rake up again, and gloat over it as an inestimable gem, a diamond, a treasure far preferable to those bright, spiritual revelations of a better world, which are like precious stones from heaven's pavement. And then, amid his lore of wretchedness he hid his face and wept.

It was a festival at which the woeful man of Uz might suitably have been a guest, together with all, in each succeeding age, who have tasted deepest of the bitterness of life. And be it said, too, that every son or daughter of woman, however favored with happy fortune, might, at one sad moment or another, have claimed the privilege of a stricken heart, to sit down at this table. But, throughout the feast, it was remarked that the young stranger, Gervayse Hastings, was unsuccessful in his attempts to catch its pervading spirit. At any deep, strong thought that found utterance, and which was torn out, as it were, from the saddest recesses of human consciousness, he looked mystified and bewildered; even more than the poor idiot, who seemed to grasp at such things with his earnest heart, and thus occasionally to comprehend them. The young man's conversation was of a colder and lighter kind, often brilliant, but lacking the powerful characteristics of a nature that had been developed by suffering.

"Sir," said the misanthropist, bluntly, in reply to some observation by Gervayse Hastings, "pray do not address me again. We have no right to talk together. Our minds have nothing in common. By what claim you appear at this banquet I cannot guess; but methinks, to a man who could say what you have just now said, my companions and myself must seem no more than shadows flickering on the wall. And precisely such a shadow are you to us."

The young man smiled and bowed, but, drawing himself back in his chair, he buttoned his coat over his breast, as if the banqueting-hall were growing chill. Again the idiot fixed his melancholy stare upon the youth, and murmured, "Cold! cold! cold!"

The banquet drew to its conclusion, and the guests departed. Scarcely had they stepped across the threshold of the hall, when the scene that had there passed seemed like the vision of a sick fancy, or an exhalation from a stagnant heart. Now and then, however, during the year that ensued, these melancholy people caught glimpses of one another, transient, indeed, but enough to prove that they walked the earth with the ordinary allotment of reality. Sometimes a

pair of them came face to face, while stealing through the evening twilight, enveloped in their sable cloaks. Sometimes they casually met in churchyards. Once, also, it happened that two of the dismal banqueters mutually started at recognizing each other in the noonday sunshine of a crowded street, stalking there like ghosts astray. Doubtless they wondered why the skeleton did not come abroad at noonday too.

But whenever the necessity of their affairs compelled these Christmas guests into the bustling world, they were sure to encounter the young man who had so unaccountably been admitted to the festival. They saw him among the gay and fortunate; they caught the sunny sparkle of his eye; they heard the light and careless tones of his voice, and muttered to themselves with such indignation as only the aristocracy of wretchedness could kindle, "The traitor! The vile impostor! Providence, in its own good time, may give him a right to feast among us!" But the young man's unabashed eye dwelt upon their gloomy figures as they passed him, seeming to say, perchance with somewhat of a sneer, "First, know my secret then, measure your claims with mine!"

The step of Time stole onward, and soon brought merry Christmas round again, with glad and solemn worship in the churches, and sports, games, festivals, and everywhere the bright face of Joy beside the household fire. Again likewise the hall, with its curtains of dusky purple, was illuminated by the death-torches gleaming on the sepulchral decorations of the banquet. The veiled, skeleton sat in state, lifting the cypress-wreath above its head, as the guerdon of some guest illustrious in the qualifications which there claimed precedence. As the stewards deemed the world inexhaustible in misery, and were desirous of recognizing it in all its forms, they had not seen fit to reassemble the company of the former year. New faces now threw their gloom across the table.

There was a man of nice conscience, who bore a bloodstain in his heart— the death of a fellow-creature— which, for his more exquisite torture, had chanced with such a peculiarity of circumstances, that he could not absolutely determine whether his will had entered into the deed or not. Therefore, his whole life was spent in the agony of an inward trial for murder, with a continual sifting of the details of his terrible calamity, until his mind had no longer any thought, nor his soul any emotion, disconnected with it, There was a mother, too— a mother once, but a desolation now— who, many years before, had gone out on a pleasure-party, and, returning, found her infant smothered in its little bed. And ever since she has been tortured with the fantasy that her buried baby lay smothering in its coffin. Then there was an aged lady, who had lived from time immemorial with a constant tremor quivering through her frame. It was terrible to discern her dark shadow

tremulous upon the wall; her lips, likewise, were tremulous; and the expression of her eye seemed to indicate that her soul was trembling too. Owing to the bewilderment and confusion which made almost a chaos of her intellect, it was impossible to discover what dire misfortune had thus shaken her nature to its depths; so that the stewards had admitted her to the table, not from any acquaintance with her history, but on the safe testimony of her miserable aspect. Some surprise was expressed at the presence of a bluff, red-faced gentleman, a certain Mr. Smith, who had evidently the fat of many a rich feast within him, and the habitual twinkle of whose eye betrayed a disposition to break forth into uproarious laughter for little cause or none. It turned out, however, that, with the best possible flow of spirits, our poor friend was afflicted with a physical disease of the heart, which threatened instant death on the slightest cachinnatory indulgence, or even that titillation of the bodily frame produced by merry thoughts. In this dilemma he had sought admittance to the banquet, on the ostensible plea of his irksome and miserable state, but, in reality, with the hope of imbibing a life-preserving melancholy.

A married couple had been invited from a motive of bitter humor, it being well understood that they rendered each other unutterably miserable whenever they chanced to meet, and therefore must necessarily be fit associates at the festival. In contrast with these was another couple still unmarried, who had interchanged their hearts in early life, but had been divided by circumstances as impalpable as morning mist, and kept apart so long that their spirits now found it impossible to meet, Therefore, yearning for communion, yet shrinking from one another and choosing none beside, they felt themselves companionless in life, and looked upon eternity as a boundless desert. Next to the skeleton sat a mere son of earth— a hunter of the Exchange— a gatherer of shining dust— a man whose life's record was in his ledger, and whose soul's prison-house the vaults of the bank where he kept his deposits. This person had been greatly perplexed at his invitation, deeming himself one of the most fortunate men in the city; but the stewards persisted in demanding his presence, assuring him that he had no conception how miserable he was.

And now appeared a figure which we must acknowledge as our acquaintance of the former festival. It was Gervayse Hastings, whose presence had then caused so much question and criticism, and who now took his place with the composure of one whose claims were satisfactory to himself and must needs be allowed by others. Yet his easy and unruffled face betrayed no sorrow.

The well-skilled beholders gazed a moment into his eyes and shook their heads, to miss the unuttered sympathy— the countersign never to be

falsified— of those whose hearts are cavern-mouths through which they descend into a region of illimitable woe and recognize other wanderers there.

"Who is this youth?" asked the man with a bloodstain on his conscience. "Surely he has never gone down into the depths! I know all the aspects of those who have passed through the dark valley. By what right is he among us?"

"Ah, it is a sinful thing to come hither without a sorrow," murmured the aged lady, in accents that partook of the eternal tremor which pervaded her whole being "Depart, young man! Your soul has never been shaken, and, therefore, I tremble so much the more to look at you."

"His soul shaken! No; I'll answer for it," said bluff Mr. Smith, pressing his hand upon his heart and making himself as melancholy as he could, for fear of a fatal explosion of laughter. "I know the lad well; he has as fair prospects as any young man about town, and has no more right among us miserable creatures than the child unborn. He never was miserable and probably never will be!"

"Our honored guests," interposed the stewards, "pray have patience with us, and believe, at least, that our deep veneration for the sacredness of this solemnity would preclude any willful violation of it. Receive this young man to your table. It may not be too much to say, that no guest here would exchange his own heart for the one that beats within that youthful bosom!"

"I'd call it a bargain, and gladly, too," muttered Mr. Smith, with a perplexing mixture of sadness and mirthful conceit. "A plague upon their nonsense! My own heart is the only really miserable one in the company; it will certainly be the death of me at last!"

Nevertheless, as on the former occasion, the judgment of the stewards being without appeal, the company sat down. The obnoxious guest made no more attempt to obtrude his conversation on those about him, but appeared to listen to the table-talk with peculiar assiduity, as if some inestimable secret, otherwise beyond his reach, might be conveyed in a casual word. And in truth, to those who could understand and value it, there was rich matter in the upgushings and outpourings of these initiated souls to whom sorrow had been a talisman, admitting them into spiritual depths which no other spell can open. Sometimes out of the midst of densest gloom there flashed a momentary radiance, pure as crystal, bright as the flame of stars, and shedding such a glow upon the mysteries of life, that the guests were ready to exclaim, "Surely the riddle is on the point of being solved!" At such illuminated intervals the saddest mourners felt it to be revealed that mortal griefs are but shadowy and external; no more than the sable robes voluminously shrouding a certain divine reality, and thus indicating what might otherwise be altogether invisible to mortal eye.

"Just now," remarked the trembling old woman, "I seemed to see beyond the outside. And then my everlasting tremor passed away!"

"Would that I could dwell always in these momentary gleams of light!" said the man of stricken conscience. "Then the bloodstain in my heart would be washed clean away."

This strain of conversation appeared so unintelligibly absurd to good Mr. Smith, that he burst into precisely the fit of laughter which his physicians had warned him against, as likely to prove instantaneously fatal. In effect, he fell back in his chair a corpse, with a broad grin upon his face, while his ghost, perchance, remained beside it bewildered at its unpremeditated exit. This catastrophe of course broke up the festival.

"How is this? You do not tremble!" observed the tremulous old woman to Gervayse Hastings, who was gazing at the dead man with singular intentness. "Is it not awful to see him so suddenly vanish out of the midst of life— this man of flesh and blood, whose earthly nature was so warm and strong? There is a never-ending tremor in my soul, but it trembles afresh at, this! And you are calm!"

"Would that he could teach me somewhat!" said Gervayse Hastings, drawing a long breath. "Men pass before me like shadows on the wall; their actions, passions, feelings, are flickerings of the light, and then they vanish! Neither the corpse, nor yonder skeleton, nor this old woman's everlasting tremor, can give me what I seek."

And then the company departed.

We cannot linger to narrate, in such detail, more circumstances of these singular festivals, which, in accordance with the founder's will, continued to be kept with the regularity of an established institution. In process of time the stewards adopted the custom of inviting, from far and near, those individuals whose misfortunes were prominent above other men's, and whose mental and moral development might, therefore, be supposed to possess a corresponding interest. The exiled noble of the French Revolution, and the broken soldier of the Empire, were alike represented at the table. Fallen monarchs, wandering about the earth, have found places at that forlorn and miserable feast. The statesman, when his party flung him off, might, if he chose it, be once more a great man for the space of a single banquet. Aaron Burr's name appears on the record at a period when his ruin— the profoundest and most striking, with more of moral circumstance in it than that of almost any other man— was complete in his lonely age. Stephen Guard, when his wealth weighed upon him like a mountain, once sought admittance of his own accord. It is not probable, however, that these men had any lesson to teach in the lore of discontent and misery which might not equally well have been studied in the common walks

of life. Illustrious unfortunates attract a wider sympathy, not because their griefs are more intense, but because, being set on lofty pedestals, they the better serve mankind as instances and bywords of calamity.

It concerns our present purpose to say that, at each successive festival, Gervayse Hastings showed his face, gradually changing from the smooth beauty of his youth to the thoughtful comeliness of manhood, and thence to the bald, impressive dignity of age. He was the only individual invariably present. Yet on every occasion there were murmurs, both from those who knew his character and position, and from them whose hearts shrank back as denying his companionship in their mystic fraternity.

"Who is this impassive man?" had been asked a hundred times. "Has he suffered? Has he sinned? There are no traces of either. Then wherefore is he here?"

"You must inquire of the stewards or of himself," was the constant reply. "We seem to know him well here in our city, and know nothing of him but what is creditable and fortunate. Yet hither he comes, year after year, to this gloomy banquet, and sits among the guests like a marble statue. Ask yonder skeleton, perhaps that may solve the riddle!"

It was in truth a wonder. The life of Gervayse Hastings was not merely a prosperous, but a brilliant one. Everything had gone well with him. He was wealthy, far beyond the expenditure that was required by habits of magnificence, a taste of rare purity and cultivation, a love of travel, a scholar's instinct to collect a splendid library, and, moreover, what seemed a magnificent liberality to the distressed. He had sought happiness, and not vainly, if a lovely and tender wife, and children of fair promise, could insure it. He had, besides, ascended above the limit which separates the obscure from the distinguished, and had won a stainless reputation in affairs of the widest public importance. Not that he was a popular character, or had within him the mysterious attributes which are essential to that species of success. To the public he was a cold abstraction, wholly destitute of those rich lines of personality, that living warmth, and the peculiar faculty of stamping his own heart's impression on a multitude of hearts, by which the people recognize their favorites. And it must be owned that, after his most intimate associates had done their best to know him thoroughly, and love him warmly, they were startled to find how little hold he had upon their affections. They approved, they admired, but still in those moments when the human spirit most craves reality, they shrank back from Gervayse Hastings, as powerless to give them what they sought. It was the feeling of distrustful regret with which we should draw back the hand after extending it, in an illusive twilight, to grasp the hand of a shadow upon the wall.

As the superficial fervency of youth decayed, this peculiar effect of Gervayse Hastings's character grew more perceptible. His children, when he extended his arms, came coldly to his knees, but never climbed them of their own accord. His wife wept secretly, and almost adjudged herself a criminal because she shivered in the chill of his bosom. He, too, occasionally appeared not unconscious of the chillness of his moral atmosphere, and willing, if it might be so, to warm himself at a kindly fire. But age stole onward and benumbed him snore and more. As the hoar-frost began to gather on him his wife went to her grave, and was doubtless warmer there; his children either died or were scattered to different homes of their own; and old Gervayse Hastings, unscathed by grief— alone, but needing no companionship— continued his steady walk through life, and still one very Christmas day attended at the dismal banquet. His privilege as a guest had become prescriptive now. Had he claimed the head of the table, even the skeleton would have been ejected from its seat.

Finally, at the merry Christmastide, when he had numbered fourscore years complete, this pale, highbrowed, marble-featured old man once more entered the long-frequented hall, with the same impassive aspect that had called forth so much dissatisfied remark at his first attendance. Time, except in matters merely external, had done nothing for him, either of good or evil. As he took his place he threw a calm, inquiring glance around the table, as if to ascertain whether any guest had yet appeared, after so many unsuccessful banquets, who might impart to him the mystery— the deep, warm secret— the life within the life— which, whether manifested in joy or sorrow, is what gives substance to a world of shadows.

"My friends," said Gervayse Hastings, assuming a position which his long conversance with the festival caused to appear natural, "you are welcome! I drink to you all in this cup of sepulchral wine."

The guests replied courteously, but still in a manner that proved them unable to receive the old man as a member of their sad fraternity. It may be well to give the reader an idea of the present company at the banquet.

One was formerly a clergyman, enthusiastic in his profession, and apparently of the genuine dynasty of those old Puritan divines whose faith in their calling, and stern exercise of it, had placed them among the mighty of the earth. But yielding to the speculative tendency of the age, he had gone astray from the firm foundation of an ancient faith, and wandered into a cloud-region, where everything was misty and deceptive, ever mocking him with a semblance of reality, but still dissolving when he flung himself upon it for support and rest. His instinct and early training demanded something steadfast; but, looking forward, he beheld vapors piled on vapors, and behind

him an impassable gulf between the man of yesterday and today, on the borders of which he paced to and fro, sometimes wringing his hands in agony, and often making his own woe a theme of scornful merriment. This surely was a miserable man. Next, there was a theorist— one of a numerous tribe, although he deemed himself unique since the creation— a theorist, who had conceived a plan by which all the wretchedness of earth, moral and physical, might be done away, and the bliss of the millennium at once accomplished. But, the incredulity of mankind debarring him from action, he was smitten with as much grief as if the whole mass of woe which he was denied the opportunity to remedy were crowded into his own bosom. A plain old man in black attracted much of the company's notice, on the supposition that he was no other than Father Miller, who, it seemed, had given himself up to despair at the tedious delay of the final conflagration. Then there was a man distinguished for native pride and obstinacy, who, a little while before, had possessed immense wealth, and held the control of a vast moneyed interest which he had wielded in the same spirit as a despotic monarch would wield the power of his empire, carrying on a tremendous moral warfare, the roar and tremor of which was felt at every fireside in the land. At length came a crushing ruin— a total overthrow of fortune, power, and character— the effect of which on his imperious and, in many respects, noble and lofty nature might have entitled him to a place, not merely at our festival, but among the peers of Pandemonium.

There was a modern philanthropist, who had become so deeply sensible of the calamities of thousands and millions of his fellow-creatures, and of the impracticableness of any general measures for their relief, that he had no heart to do what little good lay immediately within his power, but contented himself with being miserable for sympathy. Near him sat a gentleman in a predicament hitherto unprecedented, but of which the present epoch probably affords numerous examples. Ever since he was of capacity to read a newspaper, this person had prided himself on his consistent adherence to one political party, but, in the confusion of these latter days, had got bewildered and knew not whereabouts his party was. This wretched condition, so morally desolate and disheartening to a man who has long accustomed himself to merge his individuality in the mass of a great body, can only be conceived by such as have experienced it. His next companion was a popular orator who had lost his voice, and— as it was pretty much all that he had to lose— had fallen into a state of hopeless melancholy. The table was likewise graced by two of the gentler sex— one, a half-starved, consumptive seamstress, the representative of thousands just as wretched; the other, a woman of unemployed energy, who found herself in the world with nothing to achieve,

nothing to enjoy, and nothing even to suffer. She had, therefore, driven herself to the verge of madness by dark breedings over the wrongs of her sex, and its exclusion from a proper field of action. The roll of guests being thus complete, a side-table had been set for three or four disappointed office-seekers, with hearts as sick as death, whom the stewards had admitted partly because their calamities really entitled them to entrance here, and partly that they were in especial need of a good dinner. There was likewise a homeless dog, with his tail between his legs, licking up the crumbs and gnawing the fragments of the feast— such a melancholy cur as one sometimes sees about the streets without a master, and willing to follow the first that will accept his service.

In their own way, these were as wretched a set of people as ever had assembled at the festival. There they sat, with the veiled skeleton of the founder holding aloft the cypress-wreath, at one end of the table, and at the other, wrapped in furs, the withered figure of Gervayse Hastings, stately, calm, and cold, impressing the company with awe, yet so little interesting their sympathy that he might have vanished into thin air without their once exclaiming, "Whither is he gone?"

"Sir," said the philanthropist, addressing the old man, "you have been so long a guest at this annual festival, and have thus been conversant with so many varieties of human affliction, that, not improbably, you have thence derived some great and important lessons. How blessed were your lot could you reveal a secret by which all this mass of woe might be removed!"

"I know of but one misfortune," answered Gervayse Hastings, quietly, "and that is my own."

"Your own!" rejoined the philanthropist. "And looking back on your serene and prosperous life, how can you claim to be the sole unfortunate of the human race?"

"You will not understand it," replied Gervayse Hastings, feebly, and with a singular inefficiency of pronunciation, and sometimes putting one word for another. "None have understood it, not even those who experience the like. It is a chillness, a want of earnestness, a feeling as if what should be my heart were a thing of vapor, a haunting perception of unreality! Thus seeming to possess all that other men have, all that men aim at, I have really possessed nothing, neither joy nor griefs. All things, all persons— as was truly said to me at this table long and long ago— have been like shadows flickering on the wall. It was so with my wife and children, with those who seemed my friends: it is so with yourselves, whom I see now before one. Neither have I myself any real existence, but am a shadow like the rest."

"And how is it with your views of a future life?" inquired the speculative clergyman.

"Worse than with you," said the old man, in a hollow and feeble tone; "for I cannot conceive it earnestly enough to feel either hope or fear. Mine— mine is the wretchedness! This cold heart— this unreal life! Ah! it grows colder still."

It so chanced that at this juncture the decayed ligaments of the skeleton gave way, and the dry hones fell together in a heap, thus causing the dusty wreath of cypress to drop upon the table. The attention of the company being thus diverted for a single instant from Gervayse Hastings, they perceived, on turning again towards him, that the old man had undergone a change. His shadow had ceased to flicker on the wall.

"WELL, ROSINA, what is your criticism?" asked Roderick, as he rolled up the manuscript.

"Frankly, your success is by no means complete," replied she. "It is true, I have an idea of the character you endeavor to describe; but it is rather by dint of my own thought than your expression."

"That is unavoidable," observed the sculptor, "because the characteristics are all negative. If Gervayse Hastings could have imbibed one human grief at the gloomy banquet, the task of describing him would have been infinitely easier. Of such persons— and we do meet with these moral monsters now and then— it is difficult to conceive how they came to exist here, or what there is in them capable of existence hereafter. They seem to be on the outside of everything; and nothing wearies the soul more than an attempt to comprehend them within its grasp."

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14: Mrs. Macgruder

Grosvenor Bunster

1838–1904

Port Adelaide News, 18 Jan 1895

Known as "Jack Bunster", Australian journalist, novelist, playwright and short story writer. Very well known in the late 19th century; like so many writers, his works vanished from the public mind after he died

THE CORPSE of the late Mr. John Macgruder was discovered floating lazily down the pellucid Yarra some four years ago. "Sat upon" by the city coroner and a jury of good men and true, a verdict of "found drowned" was recorded.

As Mr. Macgruder in life had been a man of wealth, and, therefore, of influence, the evidence of several persons ready end willing to testify that the deceased, the evening before the discovery of his remains, had been in a condition of abject intoxication, was dispensed with. It is necessary in the cause of morality to place such particulars before the public, when they relate to a common-place and uninfluential corpse, but in such a case as that of Mr. Macgruder the feelings and amiable prejudices of good society have to be regarded.

Thus, then, it is not generally known that Mr. Macgruder owed his untimely death to the circumstances that, having imbibed 14 glasses of hot whisky and water in rapid succession, his faculty of locality became rather hazy. He meant to cross the bridge at Church-street. Instead of doing so he walked over a bank and tumbled into the river. Good intentions are constantly being thwarted, as we know, and this was a graphic illustration thereof.

The late Mr. Macgruder, at the time I speak of, was about fifty years of age. He left a widow of twenty-three, whom he had married when she was eighteen, and who had presented him with two children— a boy and girl. Like most elderly spouses Mr. Macgruder was somewhat jealous of his fair young wife. Heaven knows he had no reason to be so— a purer soul never graced this earth. If she did not love her husband with that ardent and unselfish love which she might have given to a younger man, she was animated by a feeing of the warmest gratitude toward him, a feeling which was perhaps more satisfactory under the circumstance than marital affection might have proved under the test of experience.

And, indeed, Mr. Macgruder under the happiest conditions could hardly have been a loveable person, he was plain— not to say ugly— short, fat, red-faced. He drank. He was a domestic tyrant— bullied everybody attached to his household, except his wife. It is only just to say that he was tenderly considerate in his treatment of that lady. He had married her when she was a

nursery governess in a friend's family, and from that day to the last hour of their union he had behaved as a kind and indulgent husband.

Luckily, Mrs. Macgruder was not merely a sensible but a good woman. Kindness and indulgence from an elderly spouse do not always meet with honest response from the wife— the grim records of Divorce Courts show this. But with Mrs. Macgruder it was different. She was keenly alive to the many defects in her husband's character— being a woman she was no less susceptible to the circumstance that he was perhaps the most uncomely man of her acquaintance. In liquor he reminded her of Silemus— sober he presented to her nervous imagination the spectacle of a modified sort of Caliban.

But she ever kept before her the fact that this unpleasant person, however he might treat others, was most kind and generous to her, and that he had taken her from a position of miserable dependence and humiliation, and placed her in one of comfort and affluence.

If Mr. Macgruder had possessed any of the finer instincts of humanity, he would have recognised this, and would perhaps have been happy. As it was, be became morbidly sensitive to the fact that he and his wife presented contrasts, personal and moral, which rendered their union a species of outrage upon the fitness of things. He knew— how soon do they come to jealous ears— what his friends said about the matter. He had heard the jokes that had been made at his club about his marriage. Be sure the time-honored illustration of the Beauty and the Beast was one of them. And all this played havoc with his peace, until his narrow thought came to suggest to him that the cheerfulness, smiles, pleasant talk, and attention to his wishes and whims which ever marked his wife's conduct towards him, were the outcome of a sinister hypocrisy.

Miserable man— he hugged these delusions. He watched his wife; he purposely invited gay young fellows to his house; he carried her to balls, routs, and operas, though she had small taste for such vanities. And all the time he kept his green eyes fixed upon his blooming young wife, while jealousy gnawed at his vitals. Honestly, his sudden demise was at once a relief to her and to himself. Better to die, early, than live such a life as his.

He left her all his money, but with the promise that she should remain single. It is a way with these narrow, selfish men to do this. As for his widow, while she perhaps felt hurt at this bar upon her future inclinations, she did not immediately trouble herself about it. Her experience of matrimony had been such that she felt no particular anxiety about entering into the state a second time.

But then in these matters one cannot foresee what may happen, nor realise that the tighter the bonds which bind you the more eager you become to burst them.

In due time the widow cast off her mourning weeds and returned to society. In truth, her period of mourning seemed to have agreed with her. She had not wasted away with grief, but, on the contrary, had developed into a very beautiful woman. Her wealth, her personal fascinations, perhaps, also, the circumstance that she was ineligible by reason of Mr. Macgruder's conditions, contributed to make her society much sought after.

Her house became the resort of all the "best people," by whom I mean not merely the wealthiest or most pretentions, but the intellectual and well bred. It is not strange, therefore, that this lady, young, ardent, and to some extent romantic, should have begun to think that the conditions of the will under which she inherited her late husband's fortune were most cruel and harsh. By this it will be seen that love, for the first time in the little lady's life, began to blossom in her heart.

And the object? Well, he was a very nice fellow. A nicer fellow indeed than Percy Harrison it would perhaps be difficult to find during the course of the proverbial day's walk. And he owed his popularity not so much to any particular good looks, or brilliant qualities, or attractive accomplishments, as to a certain personal magnetism which is indescribable, but which is the happiest possession a man or woman can own.

And this was the man who had touched Mrs. Macgruder's heart, who, in truth, had fallen in love with her long before she realised her feelings towards him. He was not a poor man; but his little income of £500 per annum looked very small beside the lady's £12,000 a year. But in these matters money is not always considered by young lovers. It is only when, having married and settled down, it so soon takes the place of all sentiment, and looms forth as the prime necessity for happiness.

I dare say Mrs. Macgruder would not have hesitated to throw away her fortune— her children would have inherited the greater portion. But Percy was not quite so selfish as to dream of such a sacrifice. He did not want her money— his own income was sufficient for him. But he shrank from asking her to give up all her luxuries and elegancies of life she was now enabled to enjoy to share his bumble household— for humble it would be, in comparison. He was a sensible fellow, and readily conjectured the regrets which, almost insensibly, might arise to mar the happiness of such a union.

And so he never spoke. But the widow needed not speech to reveal to her that he loved her, and the reason why he did not tell her so. That very quality of personal magnetism which was Harrisons characteristic told her all. His eyes,

the touch of his hand, the tender cadence of his voice revealed the story. And the story made her very happy, and no less intensely miserable.

Or course, under these circumstances, it would have been better for Percy to cease his visits to Mrs. Macgruder. He did so for a fortnight, but yielded to a pathetic little note from her, reproaching him vaguely— and as read between the lines— for his desertion. And so the pair lived in a fool's paradise— dangerous to both.

However, the sky was about to clear. One day a number of ladies and gentlemen were present by invitations to a lawn party. In the course of the afternoon, Mrs, Macgruder showed them over the house, which was full of dainty treasures of art, bric-a-brac and such like.

Now it happened that in the room which the late Mr. Macgruder used to call his "study," there was a certain cupboard in which some curious old bronzes and hideous Indian images had been stored. These were exhibited to the guests as a collection purchased by the deceased gentleman some few months before his death. One hideous old joss was taken out, and upon setting it upon a table it was discovered that the head was moveable.

It was taken off and to Mrs. Macgruder's surprise a parchment was within the globular body of the image.

"What can this be?" she cried, as she drew it forth. She opened it out, and there read "The last will and testament of John Macgruder," by which all former wills were worked, and dated three days before the death of the testator.

Though her senses swam, and her eyesight became dazed, the widow found that by this will the arbitrary conditions of the former will had been withdrawn. The company wore too well bred to inquire into the nature of the document or the cause of the widow's agitation, and she presently recovered herself sufficiently to explain that the parchment was a document of great importance, and that it had been a very happy accident that had caused its discovery. And presently she was laughing and chattering as usual.

Mr. Percy Harrison was at breakfast, the following morning when he received a dainty little note from Mrs. Macgruder asking him to call upon her, as she wished his advice upon a matter of importance. And he was not long in obeying the summons. There was a certain light in the widow's eyes, and a significance in her smile that set his heart throbbing.

"Mr. Harrison," said she, "I made an important discovery yesterday. No less than a later will, by which Mr. Macgruder revoked all others.

"Then you have lost your money!" cried Percy, with a joyous ring in his voice. "

Read and you will see," said the lady, and as he read, and she marked his changing countenance, she smiled happily.

" Well," said he as he finished, and handed her the document, "I congratulate you. It was honest of your husband. But may I ask what advice you want from me?"

"Well," said the widow with a reproachful glance, "I have a great respect for your opinion. You see I am now free to marry again. The question is, shall I do so?"

"Assuredly, if you find a man worthy."

"I have done so!"

"Ah!"

"I think he is worthy, and— and— I fancy he loves me, as indeed I love him."

"Mrs. Macgruder," said Percy, rising, and very pale. "I cannot advise you in this matter. My own happiness is too deeply concerned, for, unfortunately, I have learned to love you."

"Well—" and she looked up with the glorious love light in her eyes.

He started. "Mrs.— Nellie!— Can it be possible?" he cried, and the very best evidence that it was very possible was given the next moment, when the widow, all blushes and happy tears, allowed him to press her to his heart and kiss her a score of times.

And so all is well that ends well, as everybody said when that day month Mrs. Macgruder changed her name for the more euphonious one of Mrs. Perry Harrison.

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15: The Man Who Loved Islands

D. H. Lawrence

1885-1930

The Dial, July 1927

First Island

THERE WAS A MAN who loved islands. He was born on one, but it didn't suit him, as there were too many other people on it, besides himself. He wanted an island all of his own: not necessarily to be alone on it, but to make it a world of his own.

An island, if it is big enough, is no better than a continent. It has to be really quite small, before it *feels like* an island; and this story will show how tiny it has to be, before you can presume to fill it with your own personality.

Now circumstances so worked out, that this lover of islands, by the time he was thirty-five, actually acquired an island of his own. He didn't own it as freehold property, but he had a ninety-nine years' lease of it, which, as far as a man and an island are concerned, is as good as everlasting. Since, if you are like Abraham, and want your offspring to be numberless as the sands of the sea-shore, you don't choose an island to start breeding on. Too soon there would be overpopulation, overcrowding, and slum conditions. Which is a horrid thought, for one who loves an island for its insulation. No, an island is a nest which holds one egg, and one only. This egg is the islander himself.

The island acquired by our potential islander was not in the remote oceans. It was quite near at home, no palm-trees nor boom of surf on the reef, nor any of that kind of thing; but a good solid dwelling-house, rather gloomy, above the landing-place, and beyond, a small farmhouse with sheds, and a few outlying fields. Down on the little landing bay were three cottages in a row, like coastguards' cottages, all neat and white-washed.

What could be more cozy and home-like? It was four miles if you walked all round your island, through the gorse and the blackthorn bushes, above the steep rocks of the sea and down in the little glades where the primroses grew. If you walked straight over the two humps of hills, the length of it, through the rocky fields where the cows lay chewing, and through the rather sparse oats, on into the gorse again, and so to the low cliffs' edge, it took you only twenty minutes. And when you came to the edge, you could see another, bigger island lying beyond. But the sea was between you and it. And as you returned over the turf where the short, downland cowslips nodded you saw to the east still another island, a tiny one this time, like the calf of the cow. This tiny island also belonged to the islander.

Thus it seems that even islands like to keep each other company.

Our islander loved his island very much. In early spring, the little ways and glades were a snow of blackthorn, a vivid white among the celtic stillness of close green and grey rock, blackbirds calling out in the whiteness their first long, triumphant calls. After the blackthorn and the nestling primroses came the blue apparition of hyacinths, like elfin lakes and slipping sheets of blue, among the bushes and under the glade of trees. And many birds with nests you could peep into, on the island all your own. Wonderful what a great world it was!

Followed summer, and the cowslips gone, the wild roses faintly fragrant through the haze. There was a field of hay, the foxgloves stood looking down. In a little cove, the sun was on the pale granite where you bathed, and the shadow was in the rocks. Before the mist came stealing, and you went home through the ripening oats, the glare of the sea fading from the high air as the foghorn started to moo on the other island. And then the sea-fog went, it was autumn, and oat-sheaves lying prone; the great moon, another island, rose golden out of the sea, and, rising higher, the world of the sea was white.

So autumn ended with rain, and winter came, dark skies and dampness and rain, but rarely frost. The island, your island, cowered dark, holding away from you. You could feel, down in the wet, sombre hollows, the resentful spirit coiled upon itself, like a wet dog coiled in gloom, or a snake that is neither asleep nor awake. Then in the night, when the wind left off blowing in great gusts and volleys, as at sea, you felt that your island was a universe, infinite and old as the darkness; not an island at all, but an infinite dark world where all the souls from all the other bygone nights lived on, and the infinite distance was near.

Strangely, from your little island in space, you were gone forth into the dark, great realms of time, where all the souls that never die veer and swoop on their vast, strange errands. The little earthly island has dwindled, like a jumping-off place, into nothingness, for you have jumped off, you know not how, into the dark wide mystery of time, where the past is vastly alive, and the future is not separated off.

This is the danger of becoming an islander. When, in the city, you wear your white spats and dodge the traffic with the fear of death down your spine, then you are quite safe from the terrors of infinite time. The moment is your little islet in time, it is the spatial universe that careers round you.

But once isolate yourself on a little island in the sea of space, and the moment begins to heave and expand in great circles, the solid earth is gone, and your slippery, naked dark soul finds herself out in the timeless world, where the chariots of the so-called dead dash down the old streets of centuries, and souls crowd on the footways that we, in the moment, call

bygone years. The souls of all the dead are alive again, and pulsating actively around you. You are out in the other infinity.

Something of this happened to our islander. Mysterious "feelings" came upon him, that he wasn't used to; strange awarenesses of old, far-gone men, and other influences; men of Gaul, with big moustaches, who had been on his island, and had vanished from the face of it, but not out of the air of night. They were there still, hurtling their big, violent, unseen bodies through the night. And there were priests, with golden knives and mistletoe; then other priests with a crucifix; then pirates with murder on the sea.

Our islander was uneasy. He didn't believe, in the daytime, in any of this nonsense. But at night it just was so. He had reduced himself to a single point in space, and, a point being that which has neither length nor breadth, he had to step off it into somewhere else. Just as you must step into the sea, if the waters wash your foothold away, so he had, at night, to step off into the otherworld of undying time.

He was uncannily aware, as he lay in the dark, that the blackthorn grove that seemed a bit uncanny even in the realm of space and day, at night was crying with old men of an invisible race, around the altar stone. What was a ruin under the hornbeam trees by day, was a moaning of bloodstained priests with crucifixes, on the ineffable night. What was a cave and hidden beach between coarse rocks, became in the invisible dark the purple-lipped imprecation of pirates.

To escape any more of this sort of awareness, our islander daily concentrated upon his material island. Why should it not be the Happy Isle at last? Why not the last small isle of the Hesperides, the perfect place, all filled with his own gracious, blossom-like spirit? A minute world of pure perfection, made by man, himself.

He began, as we begin all our attempts to regain Paradise, by spending money. The old, semi-feudal dwelling-house he restored, let in more light, put clear lovely carpets on the floor, clear, flower-petal curtains at the sullen windows, and wines in the cellars of rock. He brought over a buxom housekeeper from the world, and a soft-spoken, much-experienced butler. These too were to be islanders.

In the farm-house he put a bailiff, with two farm-hands. There were Jersey cows, tinkling a slow bell, among the gorse. There was a call to meals at midday, and the peaceful smoking of chimneys at evening, when rest descended.

A jaunty sailing-boat with a motor accessory rode in the shelter in the bay, just below the row of three white cottages. There was also a little yawl, and two row-boats drawn up on the sand. A fishing net was drying on its supports,

a boat-load of new white planks stood crisscross, a woman was going to the well with a bucket.

In the end cottage lived the skipper of the yacht, and his wife and son. He was a man from the other, large island, at home on this sea. Every fine day he went out fishing, with his son, every fine day there was fresh fish on the island.

In the middle cottage lived an old man and wife, a very faithful couple. The old man was a carpenter, and man of many jobs. He was always working, always the sound of his plane or his saw: lost in his work, he was another kind of islander.

In the third cottage was the mason, a widower with a son and two daughters. With the help of his boy, this man dug ditches and built fences, raised buttresses and erected a new outbuilding, and hewed stone from the little quarry. His daughters worked at the big house.

It was a quiet, busy little world. When the islander brought you over as his guest, you met first the dark-bearded, thin, smiling skipper, Arnold, then his boy Charles. At the house, the smooth-lipped butler who had lived all over the world valeted you, and created that curious creamy-smooth, disarming sense of luxury around you which only a perfect and rather untrustworthy servant can create. He disarmed you and had you at his mercy. The buxom housekeeper smiled and treated you with the subtly respectful familiarity, that is only dealt out to the true gentry. And the rosy maid threw a glance at you, as if you were very wonderful, coming from the great outer world. Then you met the smiling but watchful bailiff, who came from Cornwall, and the shy farm-hand from Berkshire, with his clean wife and two little children, then the rather sulky farm-hand from Suffolk. The mason, a Kent man, would talk to you by the yard, if you let him. Only the old carpenter was gruff and elsewhere absorbed.

Well then, it was a little world to itself, and everybody feeling very safe, and being very nice to you, as if you were really something special. But it was the islander's world, not yours. He was the Master. The special smile, the special attention was to the Master. They all knew how well off they were. So the islander was no longer Mr So-and-So. To everyone on the island, even to you yourself, he was "the Master".

Well, it was ideal. The Master was no tyrant. Ah no! He was a delicate, sensitive, handsome Master, who wanted everything perfect and everybody happy. Himself, of course, to be the fount of this happiness and perfection.

But in his way, he was a poet. He treated his guests royally, his servants liberally. Yet he was shrewd, and very wise. He never came the boss over his people. Yet he kept his eye on everything, like a shrewd; blue-eyed young Hermes. And it was amazing what a lot of knowledge he had at hand. Amazing what he knew about Jersey cows, and cheese-making, ditching and fencing,

flowers and gardening, ships and the sailing of ships. He was a fount of knowledge about everything, and this knowledge he imparted to his people in an odd, half-ironical, half-portentous fashion, as if he really belonged to the quaint, half-real world of the gods.

They listened to him with their hats in their hands. He loved white clothes; or creamy white; and cloaks, and broad hats. So, in fine weather, the bailiff would see the elegant tall figure in creamy-white serge coming like some bird over the fallow, to look at the weeding of the turnips. Then there would be a doffing of hats, and a few minutes of whimsical, shrewd, wise talk, to which the bailiff answered admiringly, and the farm-hands listened in silent wonder, leaning on their hoes. The bailiff was almost tender, to the Master.

Or, on a windy morning, he would stand with his cloak blowing in the sticky sea-wind, on the edge of the ditch that was being dug to drain a little swamp, talking in the teeth of the wind to the man below; who looked up at him with steady and inscrutable eyes.

Or at evening in the rain he would be seen hurrying across the yard, the broad hat turned against the rain. And the farm-wife would hurriedly exclaim: "The Master! Get up, John, and clear him a place on the sofa." And then the door opened, and it was a cry of: "Why of all things, if it isn't the Master! Why, have ye turned out then of a night like this, to come across to the like of we?" And the bailiff took his cloak, and the farm-wife his hat, the two farm-hands drew their chairs to the back, he sat on the sofa and took a child up near him. He was wonderful with children, talked to them simply wonderful, made you think of Our Saviour Himself, said the woman.

Always he was greeted with smiles, and the same peculiar deference, as if he were a higher, but also frailer being. They handled him almost tenderly, and almost with adulation. But when he left, or when they spoke of him, they had often a subtle, mocking smile on their faces. There was no need to be afraid of "the Master". Just let him have his own way. Only the old carpenter was sometimes sincerely rude to him; so he didn't care for the old man.

It is doubtful whether any of them really liked him, man to man, or even woman to man. But then it is doubtful if he really liked any of them, as man to man, or man to woman. He wanted them to be happy, and the little world to be perfect. But any one who wants the world to be perfect must be careful not to have real likes and dislikes. A general good-will is all you can afford.

The sad fact is, alas, that general good-will is always felt as something of an insult, by the mere object of it; and so it breeds a quite special brand of malice. Surely general good-will is a form of egoism, that it should have such a result!

Our islander, however, had his own resources. He spent long hours in his library, for he was compiling a book of reference to all the flowers mentioned

in the Greek and Latin authors. He was not a great classical scholar: the usual public-school equipment. But there are such excellent translations nowadays. And it was so lovely, tracing flower after flower as it blossomed in the ancient world.

So the first year on the island passed by. A great deal had been done. Now the bills flooded in, and the Master, conscientious in all things, began to study them. The study left him pale and breathless. He was not a rich man. He knew he had been making a hole in his capital, to get the island into running order. When he came to look, however, there was hardly anything left but hole. Thousands and thousands of pounds had the island swallowed into nothingness.

But surely the bulk of the spending was over! Surely the island would now begin to be self-supporting, even if it made no profit! Surely he was safe. He paid a good many of the bills, and took a little heart. But he had had a shock, and the next year, the coming year, there must be economy, frugality. He told his people so, in simple and touching language. And they said: "Why surely! Surely!"

So, while the wind blew and the rain lashed outside, he would sit in his library with the bailiff over a pipe and a pot of beer, discussing farm projects. He lifted his narrow handsome face, and his blue eye became dreamy. "*What* a wind!" It blew like cannon shots. He thought of his island, lashed with foam, and inaccessible, and he exulted . . . No, he must not lose it. He turned back to the farm projects with the zest of genius, and his hands flicked white emphasis, while the bailiff intoned: "Yes, Sir! Yes, Sir! You're right, Master!"

But the man was hardly listening. He was looking at the Master's blue lawn shirt and curious pink tie with the fiery red stone, at the enamel sleeve-links, and at the ring with the peculiar scarab. The brown searching eyes of the man of the soil glanced repeatedly over the fine, immaculate figure of the Master, with a sort of slow, calculating wonder. But if he happened to catch the Master's bright, exalted glance, his own eye lit up with a careful cordiality and deference, as he bowed his head slightly.

Thus between them they decided what crops should be sown, what fertilizers should be used in different places, which breed of pigs should be imported, and which line of turkeys. That is to say, the bailiff, by continually cautiously agreeing with the Master, kept out of it, and let the young man have his own way.

The Master knew what he was talking about. He was brilliant at grasping the gist of a book, and knowing how to apply his knowledge. On the whole, his ideas were sound. The bailiff even knew it. But in the man of the soil there was no answering enthusiasm. The brown eyes smiled their cordial deference, but

the thin lips never changed. The Master pursed his own flexible mouth in a boyish versatility, as he cleverly sketched in his ideas to the other man, and the bailiff made eyes of admiration, but in his heart he was not attending, he was only watching the Master as he would have watched a queer, alien animal, quite without sympathy, not implicated.

So, it was settled, and the Master rang for Elvery, the butler, to bring a sandwich. He, the Master, was pleased. The butler saw it, and came back with anchovy and ham sandwiches, and a newly opened bottle of vermouth. There was always a newly opened bottle of something.

It was the same with the mason. The Master and he discussed the drainage of a bit of land, and more pipes were ordered, more special bricks, more this, more that.

Fine weather came at last, there was a little lull in the hard work on the island. The Master went for a short cruise in his yacht. It was not really a yacht, just a neat little bit of a yawl. They sailed along the coast of the mainland, and put in at the ports. At every port some friend turned up, the butler made elegant little meals in the cabin. Then the Master was invited to villas and hotels, his people disembarked him as if he were a prince.

And oh, how expensive it turned out! He had to telegraph to the bank for money. And he went home again, to economize.

The marsh-marigolds were blazing in the little swamp where the ditches were being dug for drainage. He almost regretted, now, the work in hand. The yellow beauties would not blaze again.

Harvest came, and a bumper crop. There must be a harvest-home supper. The long barn was now completely restored and added to. The carpenter had made long tables. Lanterns hung from the beams of the high-pitched roof. All the people of the island were assembled. The bailiff presided. It was a gay scene.

Towards the end of the supper the Master, in a velvet jacket, appeared with his guests. Then the bailiff rose and proposed: "The Master! Long life and health to the Master!" All the people drank the health with great enthusiasm and cheering. The Master replied with a little speech: They were on an island in a little world of their own. It depended on them all to make this world a world of true happiness and content. Each must do his part. He hoped he himself did what he could, for his heart was in his island, and with the people of his island.

The butler responded: As long as the island had such a Master, it could not but be a little heaven for all the people on it.— This was seconded with virile warmth by the bailiff and the mason, the skipper was beside himself. Then there was dancing, the old carpenter was fiddler.

But under all this, things were not well. The very next morning came the farm-boy to say that a cow had fallen over the cliff. The Master went to look. He peered over the not very high declivity, and saw her lying dead, on a green ledge under a bit of late-flowering broom. A beautiful, expensive creature, already looking swollen. But what a fool, to fall so unnecessarily!

It was a question of getting several men to haul her up the bank: and then of skinning and burying her. No one would eat the meat. How repulsive it all was!

This was symbolic of the island. As sure as the spirits rose in the human breast, with a movement of joy, an invisible hand struck malevolently out of the silence. There must not be any joy, nor even any quiet peace. A man broke a leg, another was crippled with rheumatic fever. The pigs had some strange disease. A storm drove the yacht on a rock. The mason hated the butler, and refused to let his daughter serve at the house.

Out of the very air came a stony, heavy malevolence. The island itself seemed malicious. It would go on being hurtful and evil for weeks at a time. Then suddenly again one morning it would be fair, lovely as a morning in Paradise, everything beautiful and flowing. And everybody would begin to feel a great relief, and a hope for happiness.

Then as soon as the Master was opened out in spirit like an open flower, some ugly blow would fall. Somebody would send him an anonymous note, accusing some other person on the island. Somebody else would come hinting things against one of his servants.

"Some folks thinks they've got an easy job out here, with all the pickings they make!" the mason's daughter screamed at the suave butler, in the Master's hearing. He pretended not to hear.

"My man says this island is surely one of the lean kine of Egypt, it would swallow a sight of money, and you'd never get anything back out of it," confided the farm-hand's wife to one of the Master's visitors.

The people were not contented. They were not islanders. "We feel we're not doing right by the children," said those who had children. "We feel we're not doing right by ourselves," said those who had no children. And the various families fairly came to hate one another.

Yet the island was so lovely. When there was a scent of honey-suckle, and the moon brightly flickering down on the sea, then even the grumblers felt a strange nostalgia for it. It set you yearning, with a wild yearning; perhaps for the past, to be far back in the mysterious past of the island, when the blood had a different throb. Strange floods of passion came over you, strange violent lusts and imaginations of cruelty. The blood and the passion and the lust which the island had known. Uncanny dreams, half-dreams, half-evocated yearnings.

The Master himself began to be a little afraid of his island. He felt here strange violent feelings he had never felt before, and lustful desires that he had been quite free from. He knew quite well now that his people didn't love him at all. He knew that their spirits were secretly against him, malicious, jeering, envious, and lurking to down him. He became just as wary and secretive with regard to them.

But it was too much. At the end of the second year, several departures took place. The housekeeper went. The Master always blamed self-important women most. The mason said he wasn't going to be monkeyed about any more, so he took his departure, with his family. The rheumatic farm-hand left.

And then the year's bills came in, the Master made up his accounts. In spite of good crops, the assets were ridiculous, against the spending. The island had again lost, not hundreds but thousands of pounds. It was incredible. But you simply couldn't believe it! Where had it all gone?

The Master spent gloomy nights and days, going through accounts in the library. He was thorough. It became evident, now the housekeeper had gone, that she had swindled him. Probably everybody was swindling him. But he hated to think it, so he put the thought away.

He emerged, however, pale and hollow-eyed from his balancing of unbalanceable accounts, looking as if something had kicked him in the stomach. It was pitiable. But the money had gone, and there was an end of it. Another great hole in his capital. How could people be so heartless?

It couldn't go on, that was evident. He would soon be bankrupt. He had to give regretful notice to his butler. He was afraid to find out how much his butler had swindled him. Because the man was such a wonderful butler, after all. And the farm-bailiff had to go. The Master had no regrets in that quarter. The losses on the farm had almost embittered him.

The third year was spent in rigid cutting down of expenses. The island was still mysterious and fascinating. But it was also treacherous and cruel, secretly, fathomlessly malevolent. In spite of all its fair show of white blossom and bluebells, and the lovely dignity of foxgloves bending their rose-red bells, it was your implacable enemy.

With reduced staff, reduced wages, reduced splendour, the third year went by. But it was fighting against hope. The farm still lost a good deal. And once more, there was a hole in that remnant of capital. Another hole, in that which was already a mere remnant round the old holes. The island was mysterious in this also: it seemed to pick the very money out of your pocket, as if it were an octopus with invisible arms stealing from you in every direction.

Yet the Master still loved it. But with a touch of rancour now.

He spent, however, the second half of the fourth year intensely working on the mainland, to be rid of it. And it was amazing how difficult he found it to dispose of an island. He had thought that everybody was pining for such an island as his; but not at all. Nobody would pay any price for it. And he wanted now to get rid of it, as a man who wants a divorce at any cost.

It was not till the middle of the fifth year that he transferred it, at a considerable loss to himself, to an hotel company who were willing to speculate in it. They were to turn it into a handy honeymoon-and-golf island!

Then, take that island which didn't know when it was well off! Now be a honeymoon-and-golf island!

Second Island

THE ISLANDER had to move. But he was not going to the mainland. Oh, no! He moved to the smaller island, which still belonged to him. And he took with him the faithful old carpenter and wife, the couple he never really cared for; also a widow and daughter, who had kept house for him the last year; also an orphan lad, to help the old man.

The small island was very small; but, being a hump of rock in the sea, it was bigger than it looked. There was a little track among rocks and bushes, winding and scrambling up and down around the islet, so that it took you twenty minutes to do the circuit. It was more than you would have expected.

Still, it was an island. The islander moved himself, with all his books, into the commonplace six-roomed house up to which you had to scramble from the rocky landing-place. There were also two joined-together cottages. The old carpenter lived in one, with his wife and the lad, the widow and daughter lived in the other.

At last all was in order. The Master's books filled two rooms. It was already autumn, Orion lifting out of the sea. And in the dark nights, the Master could see the lights on his late island, where the hotel company were entertaining guests who would advertise the new resort for honeymoon-golfers.

On his hump of rock, however, the Master was still master. He explored the crannies, the odd handbreadths of grassy level, the steep little cliffs where the last harebells hung, and the seeds of summer were brown above the sea, lonely and untouched. He peered down the old well. He examined the stone pen where the pig had been kept. Himself, he had a goat.

Yes, it was an island. Always, always, underneath among the rocks the celtic sea sucked and washed and smote its feathery greyness. How many different noises of the sea! deep explosions, rumblings, strange long sighs and whistling noises; then voices, real voices of people clamouring as if they were

in a market, under the waters; and again, the far-off ringing of a bell, surely an actual bell! then a tremulous trilling noise, very long and alarming, and an undertone of hoarse gasping.

On this island there were no human ghosts, no ghosts of any ancient race. The sea, and the spume and the wind and the weather, had washed them all out, washed them out, so there was only the sound of the sea itself, its own ghost, myriad-voiced, communing and plotting and shouting all winter long. And only the smell of the sea, with a few bristly bushes of gorse and coarse tufts of heather, among the grey, pellucid rocks, in the grey, more pellucid air. The coldness, the greyness, even the soft, creeping fog of the sea! and the islet of rock humped up in it all, like the last point in space.

Green star Sirius stood over the sea's rim. The island was a shadow. Out at sea a ship showed small lights. Below, in the rocky cove, the row-boat and the motor-boat were safe. A light shone in the carpenter's kitchen. That was all.

Save, of course, that the lamp was lit in the house, where the widow was preparing supper, her daughter helping. The islander went in to his meal. Here he was no longer the Master, he was an islander again and he had peace. The old carpenter, the widow and daughter were all faithfulness itself. The old man worked while ever there was light to see, because he had a passion for work. The widow and her quiet, rather delicate daughter of thirty-three worked for the Master, because they loved looking after him, and they were infinitely grateful for the haven he provided them. But they didn't call him "the Master". They gave him his name: "Mr Cathcart, Sir!" softly, and reverently. And he spoke back to them also softly, gently, like people far from the world, afraid to make a noise.

The island was no longer a "world". It was a sort of refuge. The islander no longer struggled for anything. He had no need. It was as if he and his few dependents were a small flock of sea-birds alighted on this rock, as they travelled through space, and keeping together without a word. The silent mystery of travelling birds.

He spent most of his day in his study. His book was coming along. The widow's daughter could type out his manuscript for him, she was not uneducated. It was the one strange sound on the island, the typewriter. But soon even its spattering fitted in with the sea's noises, and the wind's.

The months went by. The islander worked away in his study, the people of the island went quietly about their concerns. The goat had a little black kid with yellow eyes. There were mackerel in the sea. The old man went fishing in the row-boat, with the lad. When the weather was calm enough, they went off in the motor-boat to the biggest island, for the post. And they brought

supplies, never a penny wasted. And the days went by, and the nights, without desire, without *ennui.*

The strange stillness from all desire was a kind of wonder to the islander. He didn't want anything. His soul at last was still in him, his spirit was like a dim-lit cave under water, where strange sea-foliage expands upon the watery atmosphere, and scarcely sways, and a mute fish shadowily slips in and slips away again. All still and soft and uncrying, yet alive as rooted sea-weed is alive.

The islander said to himself: "Is this happiness?" He said to himself: "I am turned into a dream. I feel nothing, or I don't know what I feel. Yet it seems to me I am happy."

Only he had to have something upon which his mental activity could work. So he spent long, silent hours in his study, working not very fast, nor very importantly, letting the writing spin softly from him as if it were drowsy gossamer. He no longer fretted whether it were good or not, what he produced. He slowly, softly spun it like gossamer, and, if it were to melt away as gossamer in autumn melts, he would not mind. It was only the soft evanescence of gossamery things which now seemed to him permanent. The very mist of eternity was in them. Whereas stone buildings, cathedrals for example, seemed to him to howl with temporary resistance, knowing they must fall at last; the tension of their long endurance seemed to howl forth from them all the time.

Sometimes he went to the mainland and to the city. Then he went elegantly, dressed in the latest style, to his club. He sat in a stall at the theatre, he shopped in Bond Street. He discussed terms for publishing his book. But over his face was that gossamery look of having dropped out of the race of progress, which made the vulgar city people feel they had won it over him, and made him glad to go back to his island.

He didn't mind if he never published his book. The years were blending into a soft mist, from which nothing obtruded. Spring came. There was never a primrose on his island, but he found a winter-aconite. There were two little sprayed bushes of blackthorn, and some wind-flowers. He began to make a list of the flowers on his islet, and that was absorbing. He noted a wild currant bush, and watched for the elder flowers on a stunted little tree, then for the first yellow rags of the broom, and wild roses. Bladder campion, orchids, stitchwort, celandine, he was prouder of them than if they had been people on his island. When he came across the golden saxifrage, so inconspicuous in a damp corner, he crouched over it in a trance, he knew not for how long, looking at it. Yet it was nothing to look at. As the widow's daughter found, when he showed it her.

He had said to her, in real triumph:

"I found the golden saxifrage this morning."

The name sounded splendid. She looked at him with fascinated brown eyes, in which was a hollow ache that frightened him a little.

"Did you, Sir? Is it a nice flower?"

He pursed his lips and tilted his brows.

"Well— not showy exactly. I'll show it you if you like."

"I should like to see it."

She was so quiet, so wistful. But he sensed in her a persistency which made him uneasy. She said she was so happy: really happy. She followed him quietly, like a shadow, on the rocky track where there was never room for two people to walk side by side. He went first, and could feel her there, immediately behind him, following so submissively, gloating on him from behind.

It was a kind of pity for her which made him become her lover: though he never realized the extent of the power she had gained over him, and how *she* willed it. But the moment he had fallen, a jangling feeling came upon him, that it was all wrong. He felt a nervous dislike of her. He had not wanted it. And it seemed to him, as far as her physical self went, she had not wanted it either. It was just her will. He went away, and climbed at the risk of his neck down to a ledge near the sea. There he sat for hours, gazing all jangled at the sea, and saying miserably to himself: "We didn't want it. We didn't really want it."

It was the automatism of sex that had caught him again. Not that he hated sex. He deemed it, as the Chinese do, one of the great life-mysteries. But it had become mechanical, automatic, and he wanted to escape that. Automatic sex shattered him, and filled him with a sort of death. He thought he had come through, to a new stillness of desirelessness. Perhaps beyond that, there was a new fresh delicacy of desire, an unentered frail communion of two people meeting on untrodden ground.

But be that as it might, this was not it. This was nothing new or fresh. It was automatic, and driven from the will. Even she, in her true self, hadn't wanted it. It was automatic in her.

When he came home, very late, and saw her face white with fear and apprehension of his feeling against her, he pitied her, and spoke to her delicately, reassuringly. But he kept himself remote from her.

She gave no sign. She served him with the same silence, the same hidden hunger to serve him, to be near where he was. He felt her love following him with strange, awful persistency. She claimed nothing. Yet now, when he met her bright, brown, curiously vacant eyes, he saw in them the mute question. The question came direct at him, with a force and a power of will he never realized.

So he succumbed, and asked her again.

"Not," she said, "if it will make you hate me."

"Why should it?" he replied, nettled. "Of course not."

"You know I would do anything on earth for you."

It was only afterwards, in his exasperation, he remembered what she had said, and was more exasperated. Why should she pretend to do this *for him* ? Why not for herself? But in his exasperation, he drove himself deeper in. In order to achieve some sort of satisfaction, which he never did achieve, he abandoned himself to her. Everybody on the island knew. But he did not care.

Then even what desire he had left him, and he felt only shattered. He felt that only with her will had she wanted him. Now he was shattered and full of self-contempt. His island was smirched and spoiled. He had lost his place in the rare, desireless levels of Time to which he had at last arrived, and he had fallen right back. If only it had been true, delicate desire between them, and a delicate meeting on the third rare place where a man might meet a woman, when they were both true to the frail, sensitive, crocus flame of desire in them. But it had been no such thing: automatic, an act of will, not of true desire, it left him feeling humiliated.

He went away from the islet, in spite of her mute reproach. And he wandered about the continent, vainly seeking a place where he could stay. He was out of key; he did not fit in the world any more.

There came a letter from Flora— her name was Flora— to say she was afraid she was going to have a child. He sat down as if he were shot, and he remained sitting. But he replied to her: "Why be afraid? If it is so, it is so, and we should rather be pleased than afraid."

At this very moment, it happened there was an auction of islands. He got the maps, and studied them. And at the auction he bought, for very little money, another island. It was just a few acres of rock away in the north, on the outer fringe of the isles. It was low, it rose out of the great ocean. There was not a building, not even a tree on it. Only northern sea-turf, a pool of rain-water, a bit of sedge, rock, and sea-birds. Nothing else. Under the weeping wet western sky.

He made a trip to visit his new possession. For several days, owing to the seas, he could not approach it. Then, in a light sea-mist, he landed, and saw it hazy, low, stretching apparently a long way. But it was illusion. He walked over the wet, springy turf, and dark-grey sheep tossed away from him, spectral, bleating hoarsely. And he came to the dark pool, with the sedge. Then on in the dampness, to the grey sea sucking angrily among the rocks.

This was indeed an island.

So he went home to Flora. She looked at him with guilty fear, but also with a triumphant brightness in her uncanny eyes. And again he was gentle, he

reassured her, even he wanted her again, with that curious desire that was almost like toothache. So he took her to the mainland, and they were married, since she was going to have his child.

They returned to the island. She still brought in his meals, her own along with them. She sat and ate with him. He would have it so. The widowed mother preferred to stay in the kitchen. And Flora slept in the guest-room of his house, mistress of his house.

His desire, whatever it was, died in him with nauseous finality. The child would still be months coming. His island was hateful to him, vulgar, a suburb. He himself had lost all his finer distinction. The weeks passed in a sort of prison, in humiliation. Yet he stuck it out, till the child was born. But he was meditating escape. Flora did not even know.

A nurse appeared, and ate at table with them. The doctor came sometimes, and, if the sea were rough, he too had to stay. He was cheery over his whisky.

They might have been a young couple in Golders Green.

The daughter was born at last. The father looked at the baby, and felt depressed, almost more than he could bear. The millstone was tied round his neck. But he tried not to show what he felt. And Flora did not know. She still smiled with a kind of half-witted triumph in her joy, as she got well again. Then she began again to look at him with those aching, suggestive, somehow impudent eyes. She adored him so.

This he could not stand. He told her that he had to go away for a time. She wept, but she thought she had got him. He told her he had settled the best part of his property on her, and wrote down for her what income it would produce. She hardly listened, only looked at him with those heavy, adoring, impudent eyes. He gave her a cheque-book, with the amount of her credit duly entered. This did arouse her interest. And he told her, if she got tired of the island, she could choose her home wherever she wished.

She followed him with those aching, persistent brown eyes, when he left, and he never even saw her weep.

He went straight north, to prepare his third island.

The Third Island

THE THIRD ISLAND was soon made habitable. With cement and the big pebbles from the shingle beach, two men built him a hut, and roofed it with corrugated iron. A boat brought over a bed and table, and three chairs, with a good cupboard, and a few books. He laid in a supply of coal and paraffin and food— he wanted so little.

The house stood near the flat shingle bay where he landed, and where he pulled up his light boat. On a sunny day in August the men sailed away and left him. The sea was still and pale blue. On the horizon he saw the small mail-steamer slowly passing northwards, as if she were walking. She served the outer isles twice a week. He could row out to her if need be, in calm weather, and he could signal her from a flagstaff behind his cottage.

Half a dozen sheep still remained on the island, as company; and he had a cat to rub against his legs. While the sweet, sunny days of the northern autumn lasted, he would walk among the rocks, and over the springy turf of his small domain, always coming to the ceaseless, restless sea. He looked at every leaf, that might be different from another, and he watched the endless expansion and contraction of the water-tossed sea-weed. He had never a tree, not even a bit of heather to guard. Only the turf, and tiny turf-plants, and the sedge by the pool, the seaweed in the ocean. He was glad. He didn't want trees or bushes. They stood up like people, too assertive. His bare, low-pitched island in the pale blue sea was all he wanted.

He no longer worked at his book. The interest had gone. He liked to sit on the low elevation of his island, and see the sea; nothing but the pale, quiet sea. And to feel his mind turn soft and hazy, like the hazy ocean. Sometimes, like a mirage, he would see the shadow of land rise hovering to northwards. It was a big island beyond. But quite without substance.

He was soon almost startled when he perceived the steamer on the near horizon, and his heart contracted with fear, lest it were going to pause and molest him. Anxiously he watched it go, and not till it was out of sight did he feel truly relieved, himself again. The tension of waiting for human approach was cruel. He did not want to be approached. He did not want to hear voices. He was shocked by the sound of his own voice, if he inadvertently spoke to his cat. He rebuked himself for having broken the great silence. And he was irritated when his cat would look up at him and mew faintly, plaintively. He frowned at her. And she knew. She was becoming wild, lurking in the rocks, perhaps fishing.

But what he disliked most was when one of the lumps of sheep opened its mouth and baa-ed its hoarse, raucous baa. He watched it, and it looked to him hideous and gross. He came to dislike the sheep very much.

He wanted only to hear the whispering sound of the sea, and the sharp cries of the gulls, cries that came out of another world to him. And best of all, the great silence.

He decided to get rid of the sheep, when the boat came. They were accustomed to him now, and stood and stared at him with yellow or colourless eyes, in an insolence that was almost cold ridicule. There was a suggestion of

cold indecency about them. He disliked them very much. And when they jumped with staccato jumps off the rocks, and their hoofs made the dry, sharp hit, and the fleece flopped on their square backs—he found them repulsive, degrading.

The fine weather passed, and it rained all day. He lay a great deal on his bed, listening to the water trickling from his roof into the zinc water-butt, looking through the open door at the rain, the dark rocks, the hidden sea. Many gulls were on the island now: many sea-birds of all sorts. It was another world of life. Many of the birds he had never seen before. His old impulse came over him, to send for a book, to know their names. In a flicker of the old passion, to know the name of everything he saw, he even decided to row out to the steamer. The names of these birds! he must know their names, otherwise he had not got them, they were not quite alive to him.

But the desire left him, and he merely watched the birds as they wheeled or walked around him, watched them vaguely, without discrimination. All interest had left him. Only there was one gull, a big handsome fellow, who would walk back and forth, back and forth in front of the open door of the cabin, as if he had some mission there. He was big, and pearl-grey, and his roundnesses were as smooth and lovely as a pearl. Only the folded wings had shut black pinions, and on the closed black feathers were three very distinct white dots, making a pattern. The islander wondered very much, why this bit of trimming on the bird out of the far, cold seas. And as the gull walked back and forth, back and forth in front of the cabin, strutting on pale-dusky gold feet, holding up his pale yellow beak, that was curved at the tip, with curious alien importance, the man wondered over him. He was portentous, he had a meaning.

Then the bird came no more. The island, which had been full of sea-birds, the flash of wings, the sound and cut of wings and sharp eerie cries in the air, began to be deserted again. No longer they sat like living eggs on the rocks and turf, moving their heads, but scarcely rising into flight round his feet. No longer they ran across the turf among the sheep, and lifted themselves upon low wings. The host had gone. But some remained, always.

The days shortened, and the world grew eerie. One day the boat came: as if suddenly, swooping down. The islander found it a violation. It was torture to talk to those two men, in their homely clumsy clothes. The air of familiarity around them was very repugnant to him. Himself, he was neatly dressed, his cabin was neat and tidy. He resented any intrusion, the clumsy homeliness, the heavy-footedness of the two fishermen was really repulsive to him.

The letters they had brought, he left lying unopened in a little box. In one of them was his money. But he could not bear to open even that one. Any kind

of contact was repulsive to him. Even to read his name on an envelope. He hid the letters away.

And the hustle and horror of getting the sheep caught and tied and put in the ship made him loathe with profound repulsion the whole of the animal creation. What repulsive god invented animals, and evil-smelling men? To his nostrils, the fishermen and the sheep alike smelled foul; an uncleanness on the fresh earth.

He was still nerve-wracked and tortured when the ship at last lifted sail and was drawing away, over the still sea. And sometimes days after, he would start with repulsion, thinking he heard the munching of sheep.

The dark days of winter drew on. Sometimes there was no real day at all. He felt ill, as if he were dissolving, as if dissolution had already set in inside him. Everything was twilight, outside, and in his mind and soul. Once, when he went to the door, he saw black heads of men swimming in his bay. For some moments he swooned unconscious. It was the shock, the horror of unexpected human approach. The horror in the twilight! And not till the shock had undermined him and left him disembodied, did he realize that the black heads were the heads of seals swimming in. A sick relief came over him. But he was barely conscious, after the shock. Later on, he sat and wept with gratitude, because they were not men. But he never realized that he wept. He was too dim. Like some strange, ethereal animal, he no longer realized what he was doing.

Only he still derived his single satisfaction from being alone, absolutely alone, with the space soaking into him. The grey sea alone, and the footing of his sea-washed island. No other contact. Nothing human to bring its horror into contact with him. Only space, damp, twilit, sea-washed space! This was the bread of his soul.

For this reason, he was most glad when there was a storm, or when the sea was high. Then nothing could get at him. Nothing could come through to him from the outer world. True, the terrific violence of the wind made him suffer badly. At the same time, it swept the world utterly out of existence for him. He always liked the sea to be heavily rolling and tearing. Then no boat could get at him. It was like eternal ramparts round his island.

He kept no track of time, and no longer thought of opening a book. The print, the printed letters, so like the depravity of speech, looked obscene. He tore the brass label from his paraffin stove. He obliterated any bit of lettering in his cabin.

His cat had disappeared. He was rather glad. He shivered at her thin, obtrusive call. She had lived in the coal shed. And each morning he had put her a dish of porridge, the same as he ate. He washed her saucer with repulsion.

He did not like her writhing about. But he fed her scrupulously. Then one day she did not come for her porridge: she always mewed for it. She did not come again.

He prowled about his island in the rain, in a big oil-skin coat, not knowing what he was looking at, nor what he went out to see. Time had ceased to pass. He stood for long spaces, gazing from a white, sharp face, with those keen, far-off blue eyes of his, gazing fiercely and almost cruelly at the dark sea under the dark sky. And if he saw the labouring sail of a fishing boat away on the cold waters, a strange malevolent anger passed over his features.

Sometimes he was ill. He knew he was ill, because he staggered as he walked, and easily fell down. Then he paused to think what it was. And he went to his stores and took out dried milk and malt, and ate that. Then he forgot again. He ceased to register his own feelings.

The days were beginning to lengthen. All winter the weather had been comparatively mild, but with much rain, much rain. He had forgotten the sun. Suddenly, however, the air was very cold, and he began to shiver. A fear came over him. The sky was level and grey, and never a star appeared at night. It was very cold. More birds began to arrive. The island was freezing. With trembling hands he made a fire in his grate. The cold frightened him.

And now it continued, day after day, a dull, deathly cold. Occasional crumblings of snow were in the air. The days were greyly longer, but no change in the cold. Frozen grey daylight. The birds passed away, flying away. Some he saw lying frozen. It was as if all life were drawing away, contracting away from the north, contracting southwards. "Soon", he said to himself, "it will all be gone, and in all these regions nothing will be alive." He felt a cruel satisfaction in the thought.

Then one night there seemed to be a relief: he slept better, did not tremble half awake, and writhe so much, half-conscious. He had become so used to the quaking and writhing of his body, he hardly noticed it. But when for once it slept deep, he noticed that.

He awoke in the morning to a curious whiteness. His window was muffled. It had snowed. He got up and opened his door, and shuddered. Ugh! how cold! All white, with a dark leaden sea, and black rocks curiously speckled with white. The foam was no longer pure. It seemed dirty. And the sea ate at the whiteness of the corpse-like land. Crumbles of snow were silting down the dead air.

On the ground the snow was a foot deep, white and smooth and soft, windless. He took a shovel to clear round his house and shed. The pallor of morning darkened. There was a strange rumbling of far-off thunder, in the

frozen air, and through the newly-falling snow, a dim flash of lightning. Snow now fell steadily down, in the motionless obscurity.

He went out for a few minutes. But it was difficult. He stumbled and fell in the snow, which burned his face. Weak, faint, he toiled home. And when he recovered, he took the trouble to make hot milk.

It snowed all the time. In the afternoon again there was a muffled rumbling of thunder, and flashes of lightning blinking reddish through the falling snow. Uneasy, he went to bed and lay staring fixedly at nothing.

Morning seemed never to come. An eternity long he lay and waited for one alleviating pallor on the night. And at last it seemed the air was paler. His house was a cell faintly illuminated with white light. He realized the snow was walled outside his window. He got up, in the dead cold. When he opened his door, the motionless snow stopped him in a wall as high as his breast. Looking over the top of it, he felt the dead wind slowly driving, saw the snow-powder lift and travel like a funeral train. The blackish sea churned and champed, seeming to bite at the snow, impotent. The sky was grey, but luminous.

He began to work in a frenzy, to get at his boat. If he was to be shut in, it must be by his own choice, not by the mechanical power of the elements. He must get to the sea. He must be able to get at his boat.

But he was weak, and at times the snow overcame him. It fell on him, and he lay buried and lifeless. Yet every time, he struggled alive before it was too late, and fell upon the snow with the energy of fever. Exhausted, he would not give in. He crept indoors and made coffee and bacon. Long since he had cooked so much. Then he went at the snow once more. He must conquer the snow, this new, white brute force which had accumulated against him.

He worked in the awful, dead wind, pushing the snow aside, pressing it with his shovel. It was cold, freezing hard in the wind, even when the sun came out for a while, and showed him his white, lifeless surroundings, the black sea rolling sullen, flecked with dull spume, away to the horizons. Yet the sun had power on his face. It was March.

He reached the boat. He pushed the snow away, then sat down under the lee of the boat, looking at the sea, which nearly swirled to his feet, in the high tide. Curiously natural the pebbles looked, in a world gone all uncanny. The sun shone no more. Snow was falling in hard crumbs, that vanished as if by miracle as they touched the hard blackness of the sea. Hoarse waves rang in the shingle, rushing up at the snow. The wet rocks were brutally black. And all the time the myriad swooping crumbs of snow, demonish, touched the dark sea and disappeared.

During the night there was a great storm. It seemed to him he could hear the vast mass of the snow striking all the world with a ceaseless thud; and over

it all, the wind roared in strange hollow volleys, in between which came a jump of blindfold lightning, then the low roll of thunder heavier than the wind. When at last the dawn faintly discoloured the dark, the storm had more or less subsided, but a steady wind drove on. The snow was up to the top of his door.

Sullenly, he worked to dig himself out. And he managed, through sheer persistency, to get out. He was in the tail of a great drift, many feet high. When he got through, the frozen snow was not more than two feet deep. But his island was gone. Its shape was all changed, great heaping white hills rose where no hills had been, inaccessible, and they fumed like volcanoes, but with snow powder. He was sickened and overcome.

His boat was in another, smaller drift. But he had not the strength to clear it. He looked at it helplessly. The shovel slipped from his hands, and he sank in the snow, to forget. In the snow itself, the sea resounded.

Something brought him to. He crept to his house. He was almost without feeling. Yet he managed to warm himself, just that part of him which leaned in snow-sleep over the coal fire. Then again, he made hot milk. After which, carefully, he built up the fire.

The wind dropped. Was it night again? In the silence, it seemed he could hear the panther-like dropping of infinite snow. Thunder rumbled nearer, crackled quick after the bleared reddened lightning. He lay in bed in a kind of stupor. The elements! The elements! His mind repeated the word dumbly. You can't win against the elements.

How long it went on, he never knew. Once, like a wraith, he got out, and climbed to the top of a white hill on his unrecognizable island. The sun was hot. "It is summer", he said to himself, "and the time of leaves." He looked stupidly over the whiteness of his foreign island, over the waste of the lifeless sea. He pretended to imagine he saw the wink of a sail. Because he knew too well there would never again be a sail on that stark sea.

As he looked, the sky mysteriously darkened and chilled. From far off came the mutter of the unsatisfied thunder, and he knew it was the signal of the snow rolling over the sea. He turned, and felt its breath on him.

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16: Planchette

Jack London

1876-1916

Cosmopolitan Magazine Jun, Jul, Aug 1906

"It is my right to know," the girl said.

Her voice was firm-fibered with determination. There was no hint of pleading in it, yet it was the determination that is reached through a long period of pleading. But in her case it had been pleading, not of speech, but of personality. Her lips had been ever mute, but her face and eyes, and the very attitude of her soul, had been for a long time eloquent with questioning. This the man had known, but he had never answered; and now she was demanding by the spoken word that he answer.

"It is my right," the girl repeated.

"I know it," he answered, desperately and helplessly.

She waited, in the silence which followed, her eyes fixed upon the light that filtered down through the lofty boughs and bathed the great redwood trunks in mellow warmth. This light, subdued and colored, seemed almost a radiation from the trunks themselves, so strongly did they saturate it with their hue. The girl saw without seeing, as she heard, without hearing, the deep gurgling of the stream far below on the canyon bottom.

She looked down at the man. "Well?" she asked, with the firmness which feigns belief that obedience will be forthcoming.

She was sitting upright, her back against a fallen tree-trunk, while he lay near to her, on his side, an elbow on the ground and the hand supporting his head.

"Dear, dear Lute," he murmured.

She shivered at the sound of his voice— not from repulsion, but from struggle against the fascination of its caressing gentleness. She had come to know well the lure of the man— the wealth of easement and rest that was promised by every caressing intonation of his voice, by the mere touch of hand on hand or the faint impact of his breath on neck or cheek. The man could not express himself by word nor look nor touch without weaving into the expression, subtly and occultly, the feeling as of a hand that passed and that in passing stroked softly and soothingly. Nor was this all-pervading caress a something that cloyed with too great sweetness; nor was it sickly sentimental; nor was it maudlin with love's madness. It was vigorous, compelling, masculine. For that matter, it was largely unconscious on the man's part. He was only dimly aware of it. It was a part of him, the breath of his soul as it were, involuntary and unpremeditated.

But now, resolved and desperate, she steeled herself against him. He tried to face her, but her gray eyes looked out to him, steadily, from under cool, level brows, and he dropped his head upon her knee. Her hand strayed into his hair softly, and her face melted into solicitude and tenderness. But when he looked up again, her gray eyes were steady, her brows cool and level.

"What more can I tell you?" the man said. He raised his head and met her gaze. "I cannot marry you. I cannot marry any woman. I love you— you know that— better than my own life. I weigh you in the scales against all the dear things of living, and you outweigh everything. I would give everything to possess you, yet I may not. I cannot marry you. I can never marry you."

Her lips were compressed with the effort of control. His head was sinking back to her knee, when she checked him.

"You are already married, Chris?"

"No! no!" he cried vehemently. "I have never been married. I want to marry only you, and I cannot!"

"Then—"

"Don't!" he interrupted. "Don't ask me!"

"It is my right to know," she repeated.

"I know it," he again interrupted. "But I cannot tell you."

"You have not considered me, Chris," she went on gently.

"I know, I know," he broke in.

"You cannot have considered me. You do not know what I have to bear from my people because of you."

"I did not think they felt so very unkindly toward me," he said bitterly.

"It is true. They can scarcely tolerate you. They do not show it to you, but they almost hate you. It is I who have had to bear all this. It was not always so, though. They liked you at first as … as I liked you. But that was four years ago. The time passed by— a year, two years; and then they began to turn against you. They are not to be blamed. You spoke no word. They felt that you were destroying my life. It is four years, now, and you have never once mentioned marriage to them. What were they to think? What they have thought, that you were destroying my life."

As she talked, she continued to pass her fingers caressingly through his hair, sorrowful for the pain that she was inflicting.

"They did like you at first. Who can help liking you? You seem to draw affection from all living things, as the trees draw the moisture from the ground. It comes to you as it were your birthright. Aunt Mildred and Uncle Robert thought there was nobody like you. The sun rose and set in you. They thought I was the luckiest girl alive to win the love of a man like you. 'For it looks very much like it,' Uncle Robert used to say, wagging his head wickedly at me. Of

course they liked you. Aunt Mildred used to sigh, and look across teasingly at Uncle, and say, 'When I think of Chris, it almost makes me wish I were younger myself.' And Uncle would answer, 'I don't blame you, my dear, not in the least.' And then the pair of them would beam upon me their congratulations that I had won the love of a man like you.

"And they knew I loved you as well. How could I hide it?— this great, wonderful thing that had entered into my life and swallowed up all my days! For four years, Chris, I have lived only for you. Every moment was yours. Waking, I loved you. Sleeping, I dreamed of you. Every act I have performed was shaped by you, by the thought of you. Even my thoughts were molded by you, by the invisible presence of you. I had no end, petty or great, that you were not there for me."

"I had no idea of imposing such slavery," he muttered.

"You imposed nothing. You always let me have my own way. It was you who were the obedient slave. You did for me without offending me. You forestalled my wishes without the semblance of forestalling them, so natural and inevitable was everything you did for me. I said, without offending me. You were no dancing puppet. You made no fuss. Don't you see? You did not seem to do things at all. Somehow they were always there, just done, as a matter of course.

"The slavery was love's slavery. It was just my love for you that made you swallow up all my days. You did not force yourself into my thoughts. You crept in, always, and you were there always— how much, you will never know.

"But as time went by, Aunt Mildred and Uncle grew to dislike you. They grew afraid. What was to become of me? You were destroying my life. My music? You know how my dream of it has dimmed away. That spring, when I first met you— I was twenty, and I was about to start for Germany. I was going to study hard. That was four years ago, and I am still here in California.

"I had other lovers. You drove them away— No! no! I don't mean that. It was I that drove them away. What did I care for lovers, for anything, when you were near? But as I said, Aunt Mildred and Uncle grew afraid. There has been talk— friends, busybodies, and all the rest. The time went by. You did not speak. I could only wonder, wonder. I knew you loved me. Much was said against you by Uncle at first, and then by Aunt Mildred. They were father and mother to me, you know. I could not defend you. Yet I was loyal to you. I refused to discuss you. I closed up. There was half-estrangement in my home— Uncle Robert with a face like an undertaker, and Aunt Mildred's heart breaking. But what could I do, Chris? What could I do?"

The man, his head resting on her knee again, groaned, but made no other reply.

"Aunt Mildred was mother to me, yet I went to her no more with my confidences. My childhood's book was closed. It was a sweet book, Chris. The tears come into my eyes sometimes when I think of it. But never mind that. Great happiness has been mine as well. I am glad I can talk frankly of my love for you. And the attaining of such frankness has been very sweet. I do love you, Chris. I love you … I cannot tell you how. You are everything to me, and more besides. You remember that Christmas tree of the children?— when we played blindman's buff? and you caught me by the arm so, with such a clutching of fingers that I cried out with the hurt? I never told you, but the arm was badly bruised. And such sweet I got of it you could never guess. There, black and blue, was the imprint of your fingers— your fingers, Chris, your fingers. It was the touch of you made visible. It was there a week, and I kissed the marks— oh, so often! I hated to see them go; I wanted to re-bruise the arm and make them linger. I was jealous of the returning white that drove the bruise away. Somehow— oh! I cannot explain, but I loved you so!"

In the silence that fell, she continued her caressing of his hair, while she idly watched a great gray squirrel, boisterous and hilarious, as it scampered back and forth in a distant vista of the redwoods. A crimson-crested woodpecker, energetically drilling a fallen trunk, caught and transferred her gaze. The man did not lift his head. Rather, he crushed his face closer against her knee, while his heaving shoulders marked the hardness with which he breathed.

"You must tell me, Chris," the girl said gently. "This mystery— it is killing me. I must know why we cannot be married. Are we always to be this way?— merely lovers, meeting often, it is true, and yet with the long absences between the meetings? Is it all the world holds for you and me, Chris? Are we never to be more to each other? Oh, it is good just to love, I know— you have made me madly happy; but one does get so hungry at times for something more! I want more and more of you, Chris. I want all of you. I want all our days to be together. I want all the companionship, the comradeship, which cannot be ours now, and which will be ours when we are married—" She caught her breath quickly. "But we are never to be married. I forgot. And you must tell me why."

The man raised his head and looked her in the eyes. It was a way he had with whomever he talked, of looking them in the eyes.

"I have considered you, Lute," he began doggedly. "I did consider you at the very first. I should never have gone on with it. I should have gone away. I knew it. And I considered you in the light of that knowledge, and yet … I did not go away. My God! what was I to do? I loved you. I could not go away. I could not help it. I stayed. I resolved, but I broke my resolves. I was like a

drunkard. I was drunk of you. I was weak, I know. I failed. I could not go away. I tried. I went away— you will remember, though you did not know why. You know now. I went away, but I could not remain away. Knowing that we could never marry, I came back to you. I am here, now, with you. Send me away, Lute. I have not the strength to go myself."

"But why should you go away?" she asked. "Besides, I must know why, before I can send you away."

"Don't ask me."

"Tell me," she said, her voice tenderly imperative.

"Don't, Lute; don't force me," the man pleaded, and there was appeal in his eyes and voice.

"But you must tell me," she insisted. "It is justice you owe me."

The man wavered. "If I do…" he began. Then he ended with determination, "I should never be able to forgive myself. No, I cannot tell you. Don't try to compel me, Lute. You would be as sorry as I."

"If there is anything … if there are obstacles … if this mystery does really prevent…." She was speaking slowly, with long pauses, seeking the more delicate ways of speech for the framing of her thought. "Chris, I do love you. I love you as deeply as it is possible for any woman to love, I am sure. If you were to say to me now 'Come,' I would go with you. I would follow wherever you led. I would be your page, as in the days of old when ladies went with their knights to far lands. You are my knight, Chris, and you can do no wrong. Your will is my wish. I was once afraid of the censure of the world. Now that you have come into my life I am no longer afraid. I would laugh at the world and its censure for your sake— for my sake too. I would laugh, for I should have you, and you are more to me than the good will and approval of the world. If you say 'Come,' I will—"

"Don't! Don't!" he cried. "It is impossible! Marriage or not, I cannot even say 'Come.' I dare not. I'll show you. I'll tell you."

He sat up beside her, the action stamped with resolve. He took her hand in his and held it closely. His lips moved to the verge of speech. The mystery trembled for utterance. The air was palpitant with its presence. As if it were an irrevocable decree, the girl steeled herself to hear. But the man paused, gazing straight out before him. She felt his hand relax in hers, and she pressed it sympathetically, encouragingly. But she felt the rigidity going out of his tensed body, and she knew that spirit and flesh were relaxing together. His resolution was ebbing. He would not speak— she knew it; and she knew, likewise, with the sureness of faith, that it was because he could not.

She gazed despairingly before her, a numb feeling at her heart, as though hope and happiness had died. She watched the sun flickering down through

the warm-trunked redwoods. But she watched in a mechanical, absent way. She looked at the scene as from a long way off, without interest, herself an alien, no longer an intimate part of the earth and trees and flowers she loved so well.

So far removed did she seem, that she was aware of a curiosity, strangely impersonal, in what lay around her. Through a near vista she looked at a buckeye tree in full blossom as though her eyes encountered it for the first time. Her eyes paused and dwelt upon a yellow cluster of Diogenes' lanterns that grew on the edge of an open space. It was the way of flowers always to give her quick pleasure-thrills, but no thrill was hers now. She pondered the flower slowly and thoughtfully, as a hasheesh-eater, heavy with the drug, might ponder some whim-flower that obtruded on his vision. In her ears was the voice of the stream— a hoarse-throated, sleepy old giant, muttering and mumbling his somnolent fancies. But her fancy was not in turn aroused, as was its wont; she knew the sound merely for water rushing over the rocks of the deep canyon-bottom, that and nothing more.

Her gaze wandered on beyond the Diogenes' lanterns into the open space. Knee-deep in the wild oats of the hillside grazed two horses, chestnut-sorrels the pair of them, perfectly matched, warm and golden in the sunshine, their spring-coats a sheen of high-lights shot through with color-flashes that glowed like fiery jewels. She recognized, almost with a shock, that one of them was hers, Dolly, the companion of her girlhood and womanhood, on whose neck she had sobbed her sorrows and sung her joys. A moistness welled into her eyes at the sight, and she came back from the remoteness of her mood, quick with passion and sorrow, to be part of the world again.

The man sank forward from the hips, relaxing entirely, and with a groan dropped his head on her knee. She leaned over him and pressed her lips softly and lingeringly to his hair.

"Come, let us go," she said, almost in a whisper.

She caught her breath in a half-sob, then tightened her lips as she rose. His face was white to ghastliness, so shaken was he by the struggle through which he had passed. They did not look at each other, but walked directly to the horses. She leaned against Dolly's neck while he tightened the girths. Then she gathered the reins in her hand and waited. He looked at her as he bent down, an appeal for forgiveness in his eyes; and in that moment her own eyes answered. Her foot rested in his hands, and from there she vaulted into the saddle. Without speaking, without further looking at each other, they turned the horses' heads and took the narrow trail that wound down through the sombre redwood aisles and across the open glades to the pasture-lands below. The trail became a cow-path, the cow-path became a wood-road, which later

joined with a hay-road; and they rode down through the low-rolling, tawny California hills to where a set of bars let out on the county road which ran along the bottom of the valley. The girl sat her horse while the man dismounted and began taking down the bars.

"No— wait!" she cried, before he had touched the two lower bars.

She urged the mare forward a couple of strides, and then the animal lifted over the bars in a clean little jump. The man's eyes sparkled, and he clapped his hands.

"You beauty! you beauty!" the girl cried, leaning forward impulsively in the saddle and pressing her cheek to the mare's neck where it burned flame-color in the sun.

"Let's trade horses for the ride in," she suggested, when he had led his horse through and finished putting up the bars. "You've never sufficiently appreciated Dolly."

"No, no," he protested.

"You think she is too old, too sedate," Lute insisted. "She's only sixteen, and she can outrun nine colts out of ten. Only she never cuts up. She's too steady, and you don't approve of her— no, don't deny it, sir. I know. And I know also that she can outrun your vaunted Washoe Ban. There! I challenge you! And furthermore, you may ride her yourself. You know what Ban can do; so you must ride Dolly and see for yourself what she can do."

They proceeded to exchange the saddles on the horses, glad of the diversion and making the most of it.

"I'm glad I was born in California," Lute remarked, as she swung astride of Ban. "It's an outrage both to horse and woman to ride in a sidesaddle."

"You look like a young Amazon," the man said approvingly, his eyes passing tenderly over the girl as she swung the horse around.

"Are you ready?" she asked.

"All ready!"

"To the old mill," she called, as the horses sprang forward. "That's less than a mile."

"To a finish?" he demanded.

She nodded, and the horses, feeling the urge of the reins, caught the spirit of the race. The dust rose in clouds behind as they tore along the level road. They swung around the bend, horses and riders tilted at sharp angles to the ground, and more than once the riders ducked low to escape the branches of outreaching and overhanging trees. They clattered over the small plank bridges, and thundered over the larger iron ones to an ominous clanking of loose rods.

They rode side by side, saving the animals for the rush at the finish, yet putting them at a pace that drew upon vitality and staying power. Curving around a clump of white oaks, the road straightened out before them for several hundred yards, at the end of which they could see the ruined mill.

"Now for it!" the girl cried.

She urged the horse by suddenly leaning forward with her body, at the same time, for an instant, letting the rein slack and touching the neck with her bridle hand. She began to draw away from the man.

"Touch her on the neck!" she cried to him.

With this, the mare pulled alongside and began gradually to pass the girl. Chris and Lute looked at each other for a moment, the mare still drawing ahead, so that Chris was compelled slowly to turn his head. The mill was a hundred yards away.

"Shall I give him the spurs?" Lute shouted.

The man nodded, and the girl drove the spurs in sharply and quickly, calling upon the horse for its utmost, but watched her own horse forge slowly ahead of her.

"Beaten by three lengths!" Lute beamed triumphantly, as they pulled into a walk. "Confess, sir, confess! You didn't think the old mare had it in her."

Lute leaned to the side and rested her hand for a moment on Dolly's wet neck.

"Ban's a sluggard alongside of her," Chris affirmed. "Dolly's all right, if she is in her Indian Summer."

Lute nodded approval. "That's a sweet way of putting it— Indian Summer. It just describes her. But she's not lazy. She has all the fire and none of the folly. She is very wise, what of her years."

"That accounts for it," Chris demurred. "Her folly passed with her youth. Many's the lively time she's given you."

"No," Lute answered. "I never knew her really to cut up. I think the only trouble she ever gave me was when I was training her to open gates. She was afraid when they swung back upon her— the animal's fear of the trap, perhaps. But she bravely got over it. And she never was vicious. She never bolted, nor bucked, nor cut up in all her life— never, not once."

The horses went on at a walk, still breathing heavily from their run. The road wound along the bottom of the valley, now and again crossing the stream. From either side rose the drowsy purr of mowing-machines, punctuated by occasional sharp cries of the men who were gathering the hay-crop. On the western side of the valley the hills rose green and dark, but the eastern side was already burned brown and tan by the sun.

"There is summer, here is spring," Lute said. "Oh, beautiful Sonoma Valley!"

Her eyes were glistening and her face was radiant with love of the land. Her gaze wandered on across orchard patches and sweeping vineyard stretches, seeking out the purple which seemed to hang like a dim smoke in the wrinkles of the hills and in the more distant canyon gorges. Far up, among the more rugged crests, where the steep slopes were covered with manzanita, she caught a glimpse of a clear space where the wild grass had not yet lost its green.

"Have you ever heard of the secret pasture?" she asked, her eyes still fixed on the remote green.

A snort of fear brought her eyes back to the man beside her. Dolly, upreared, with distended nostrils and wild eyes, was pawing the air madly with her fore legs. Chris threw himself forward against her neck to keep her from falling backward, and at the same time touched her with the spurs to compel her to drop her fore feet to the ground in order to obey the go-ahead impulse of the spurs.

"Why, Dolly, this is most remarkable," Lute began reprovingly.

But, to her surprise, the mare threw her head down, arched her back as she went up in the air, and, returning, struck the ground stiff-legged and bunched.

"A genuine buck!" Chris called out, and the next moment the mare was rising under him in a second buck.

Lute looked on, astounded at the unprecedented conduct of her mare, and admiring her lover's horsemanship. He was quite cool, and was himself evidently enjoying the performance. Again and again, half a dozen times, Dolly arched herself into the air and struck, stiffly bunched. Then she threw her head straight up and rose on her hind legs, pivoting about and striking with her fore feet. Lute whirled into safety the horse she was riding, and as she did so caught a glimpse of Dolly's eyes, with the look in them of blind brute madness, bulging until it seemed they must burst from her head. The faint pink in the white of the eyes was gone, replaced by a white that was like dull marble and that yet flashed as from some inner fire.

A faint cry of fear, suppressed in the instant of utterance, slipped past Lute's lips. One hind leg of the mare seemed to collapse, and for a moment the whole quivering body, upreared and perpendicular, swayed back and forth, and there was uncertainty as to whether it would fall forward or backward. The man, half-slipping sidewise from the saddle, so as to fall clear if the mare toppled backward, threw his weight to the front and alongside her neck. This

overcame the dangerous teetering balance, and the mare struck the ground on her feet again.

But there was no let-up. Dolly straightened out so that the line of the face was almost a continuation of the line of the stretched neck; this position enabled her to master the bit, which she did by bolting straight ahead down the road.

For the first time Lute became really frightened. She spurred Washoe Ban in pursuit, but he could not hold his own with the mad mare, and dropped gradually behind. Lute saw Dolly check and rear in the air again, and caught up just as the mare made a second bolt. As Dolly dashed around a bend, she stopped suddenly, stiff-legged. Lute saw her lover torn out of the saddle, his thigh-grip broken by the sudden jerk. Though he had lost his seat, he had not been thrown, and as the mare dashed on Lute saw him clinging to the side of the horse, a hand in the mane and a leg across the saddle. With a quick cavort he regained his seat and proceeded to fight with the mare for control.

But Dolly swerved from the road and dashed down a grassy slope yellowed with innumerable mariposa lilies. An ancient fence at the bottom was no obstacle. She burst through as though it were filmy spiderweb and disappeared in the underbrush. Lute followed unhesitatingly, putting Ban through the gap in the fence and plunging on into the thicket. She lay along his neck, closely, to escape the ripping and tearing of the trees and vines. She felt the horse drop down through leafy branches and into the cool gravel of a stream's bottom. From ahead came a splashing of water, and she caught a glimpse of Dolly, dashing up the small bank and into a clump of scrub-oaks, against the trunks of which she was trying to scrape off her rider.

Lute almost caught up amongst the trees, but was hopelessly outdistanced on the fallow field adjoining, across which the mare tore with a fine disregard for heavy ground and gopher-holes. When she turned at a sharp angle into the thicket-land beyond, Lute took the long diagonal, skirted the ticket, and reined in Ban at the other side. She had arrived first. From within the thicket she could hear a tremendous crashing of brush and branches. Then the mare burst through and into the open, falling to her knees, exhausted, on the soft earth. She arose and staggered forward, then came limply to a halt. She was in lather-sweat of fear, and stood trembling pitiably.

Chris was still on her back. His shirt was in ribbons. The backs of his hands were bruised and lacerated, while his face was streaming blood from a gash near the temple. Lute had controlled herself well, but now she was aware of a quick nausea and a trembling of weakness.

"Chris!" she said, so softly that it was almost a whisper. Then she sighed, "Thank God."

"Oh, I'm all right," he cried to her, putting into his voice all the heartiness he could command, which was not much, for he had himself been under no mean nervous strain.

He showed the reaction he was undergoing, when he swung down out of the saddle. He began with a brave muscular display as he lifted his leg over, but ended, on his feet, leaning against the limp Dolly for support. Lute flashed out of her saddle, and her arms were about him in an embrace of thankfulness.

"I know where there is a spring," she said, a moment later.

They left the horses standing untethered, and she led her lover into the cool recesses of the thicket to where crystal water bubbled from out the base of the mountain.

"What was that you said about Dolly's never cutting up?" he asked, when the blood had been stanched and his nerves and pulse-beats were normal again.

"I am stunned," Lute answered. "I cannot understand it. She never did anything like it in all her life. And all animals like you so— it's not because of that. Why, she is a child's horse. I was only a little girl when I first rode her, and to this day—"

"Well, this day she was everything but a child's horse," Chris broke in. "She was a devil. She tried to scrape me off against the trees, and to batter my brains out against the limbs. She tried all the lowest and narrowest places she could find. You should have seen her squeeze through. And did you see those bucks?"

Lute nodded.

"Regular bucking-bronco proposition."

"But what should she know about bucking?" Lute demanded. "She was never known to buck— never."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Some forgotten instinct, perhaps, long-lapsed and come to life again."

The girl rose to her feet determinedly. "I'm going to find out," she said.

They went back to the horses, where they subjected Dolly to a rigid examination that disclosed nothing. Hoofs, legs, bit, mouth, body— everything was as it should be. The saddle and saddle-cloth were innocent of bur or sticker; the back was smooth and unbroken. They searched for sign of snakebite and sting of fly or insect, but found nothing.

"Whatever it was, it was subjective, that much is certain," Chris said.

"Obsession," Lute suggested.

They laughed together at the idea, for both were twentieth-century products, healthy-minded and normal, with souls that delighted in the

butterfly-chase of ideals but that halted before the brink where superstition begins.

"An evil spirit," Chris laughed; "but what evil have I done that I should be so punished?"

"You think too much of yourself, sir," she rejoined. "It is more likely some evil, I don't know what, that Dolly has done. You were a mere accident. I might have been on her back at the time, or Aunt Mildred, or anybody."

As she talked, she took hold of the stirrup-strap and started to shorten it.

"What are you doing?" Chris demanded.

"I'm going to ride Dolly in."

"No, you're not," he announced. "It would be bad discipline. After what has happened I am simply compelled to ride her in myself."

But it was a very weak and very sick mare he rode, stumbling and halting, afflicted with nervous jerks and recurring muscular spasms— the aftermath of the tremendous orgasm through which she had passed.

"I feel like a book of verse and a hammock, after all that has happened," Lute said, as they rode into camp.

It was a summer camp of city-tired people, pitched in a grove of towering redwoods through whose lofty boughs the sunshine trickled down, broken and subdued to soft light and cool shadow. Apart from the main camp were the kitchen and the servants' tents; and midway between was the great dining hall, walled by the living redwood columns, where fresh whispers of air were always to be found, and where no canopy was needed to keep the sun away.

"Poor Dolly, she is really sick," Lute said that evening, when they had returned from a last look at the mare. "But you weren't hurt, Chris, and that's enough for one small woman to be thankful for. I thought I knew, but I really did not know till today, how much you meant to me. I could hear only the plunging and struggle in the thicket. I could not see you, nor know how it went with you."

"My thoughts were of you," Chris answered, and felt the responsive pressure of the hand that rested on his arm.

She turned her face up to his and met his lips.

"Good night," she said.

"Dear Lute, dear Lute," he caressed her with his voice as she moved away among the shadows.

"WHO'S GOING for the mail?" called a woman's voice through the trees.

Lute closed the book from which they had been reading, and sighed.

"We weren't going to ride today," she said.

"Let me go," Chris proposed. "You stay here. I'll be down and back in no time."

She shook her head.

"Who's going for the mail?" the voice insisted.

"Where's Martin?" Lute called, lifting her voice in answer.

"I don't know," came the voice. "I think Robert took him along somewhere— horse-buying, or fishing, or I don't know what. There's really nobody left but Chris and you. Besides, it will give you an appetite for dinner. You've been lounging in the hammock all day. And Uncle Robert must have his newspaper."

"All right, Aunty, we're starting," Lute called back, getting out of the hammock.

A few minutes later, in riding-clothes, they were saddling the horses. They rode out on to the county road, where blazed the afternoon sun, and turned toward Glen Ellen. The little town slept in the sun, and the somnolent storekeeper and postmaster scarcely kept his eyes open long enough to make up the packet of letters and newspapers.

An hour later Lute and Chris turned aside from the road and dipped along a cow-path down the high bank to water the horses, before going into camp.

"Dolly looks as though she'd forgotten all about yesterday," Chris said, as they sat their horses knee-deep in the rushing water. "Look at her."

The mare had raised her head and cocked her ears at the rustling of a quail in the thicket. Chris leaned over and rubbed around her ears. Dolly's enjoyment was evident, and she drooped her head over against the shoulder of his own horse.

"Like a kitten," was Lute's comment.

"Yet I shall never be able wholly to trust her again," Chris said. "Not after yesterday's mad freak."

"I have a feeling myself that you are safer on Ban," Lute laughed. "It is strange. My trust in Dolly is as implicit as ever. I feel confident so far as I am concerned, but I should never care to see you on her back again. Now with Ban, my faith is still unshaken. Look at that neck! Isn't he handsome! He'll be as wise as Dolly when he is as old as she."

"I feel the same way," Chris laughed back. "Ban could never possibly betray me."

They turned their horses out of the stream. Dolly stopped to brush a fly from her knee with her nose, and Ban urged past into the narrow way of the path. The space was too restricted to make him return, save with much trouble, and Chris allowed him to go on. Lute, riding behind, dwelt with her

eyes upon her lover's back, pleasuring in the lines of the bare neck and the sweep out to the muscular shoulders.

Suddenly she reined in her horse. She could do nothing but look, so brief was the duration of the happening. Beneath and above was the almost perpendicular bank. The path itself was barely wide enough for footing. Yet Washoe Ban, whirling and rearing at the same time, toppled for a moment in the air and fell backward off the path.

So unexpected and so quick was it, that the man was involved in the fall. There had been no time for him to throw himself to the path. He was falling ere he knew it, and he did the only thing possible— slipped the stirrups and threw his body into the air, to the side, and at the same time down. It was twelve feet to the rocks below. He maintained an upright position, his head up and his eyes fixed on the horse above him and falling upon him.

Chris struck like a cat, on his feet, on the instant making a leap to the side. The next instant Ban crashed down beside him. The animal struggled little, but sounded the terrible cry that horses sometimes sound when they have received mortal hurt. He had struck almost squarely on his back, and in that position he remained, his head twisted partly under, his hind legs relaxed and motionless, his fore legs futilely striking the air.

Chris looked up reassuringly.

"I am getting used to it," Lute smiled down to him. "Of course I need not ask if you are hurt. Can I do anything?"

He smiled back and went over to the fallen beast, letting go the girths of the saddle and getting the head straightened out.

"I thought so," he said, after a cursory examination. "I thought so at the time. Did you hear that sort of crunching snap?"

She shuddered.

"Well, that was the punctuation of life, the final period dropped at the end of Ban's usefulness." He started around to come up by the path. "I've been astride of Ban for the last time. Let us go home."

At the top of the bank Chris turned and looked down.

"Good-by, Washoe Ban!" he called out. "Good-by, old fellow."

The animal was struggling to lift its head. There were tears in Chris's eyes as he turned abruptly away, and tears in Lute's eyes as they met his. She was silent in her sympathy, though the pressure of her hand was firm in his as he walked beside her horse down the dusty road.

"It was done deliberately," Chris burst forth suddenly. "There was no warning. He deliberately flung himself over backward."

"There was no warning," Lute concurred. "I was looking. I saw him. He whirled and threw himself at the same time, just as if you had done it yourself, with a tremendous jerk and backward pull on the bit."

"It was not my hand, I swear it. I was not even thinking of him. He was going up with a fairly loose rein, as a matter of course."

"I should have seen it, had you done it," Lute said. "But it was all done before you had a chance to do anything. It was not your hand, not even your unconscious hand."

"Then it was some invisible hand, reaching out from I don't know where."

He looked up whimsically at the sky and smiled at the conceit.

Martin stepped forward to receive Dolly, when they came into the stable end of the grove, but his face expressed no surprise at sight of Chris coming in on foot. Chris lingered behind Lute for moment.

"Can you shoot a horse?" he asked.

The groom nodded, then added, "Yes, sir," with a second and deeper nod.

"How do you do it?"

"Draw a line from the eyes to the ears— I mean the opposite ears, sir. And where the lines cross—"

"That will do," Chris interrupted. "You know the watering place at the second bend. You'll find Ban there with a broken back."

"OH, here you are, sir. I have been looking for you everywhere since dinner. You are wanted immediately."

Chris tossed his cigar away, then went over and pressed his foot on its glowing fire.

"You haven't told anybody about it?— Ban?" he queried.

Lute shook her head. "They'll learn soon enough. Martin will mention it to Uncle Robert tomorrow."

"But don't feel too bad about it," she said, after a moment's pause, slipping her hand into his.

"He was my colt," he said. "Nobody has ridden him but you. I broke him myself. I knew him from the time he was born. I knew every bit of him, every trick, every caper, and I would have staked my life that it was impossible for him to do a thing like this. There was no warning, no fighting for the bit, no previous unruliness. I have been thinking it over. He didn't fight for the bit, for that matter. He wasn't unruly, nor disobedient. There wasn't time. It was an impulse, and he acted upon it like lightning. I am astounded now at the swiftness with which it took place. Inside the first second we were over the edge and falling.

"It was deliberate— deliberate suicide. And attempted murder. It was a trap. I was the victim. He had me, and he threw himself over with me. Yet he did not hate me. He loved me … as much as it is possible for a horse to love. I am confounded. I cannot understand it any more than you can understand Dolly's behavior yesterday."

"But horses go insane, Chris," Lute said. "You know that. It's merely coincidence that two horses in two days should have spells under you."

"That's the only explanation," he answered, starting off with her. "But why am I wanted urgently?"

"Planchette."

"Oh, I remember. It will be a new experience to me. Somehow I missed it when it was all the rage long ago."

"So did all of us," Lute replied, "except Mrs. Grantly. It is her favorite phantom, it seems."

"A weird little thing," he remarked. "Bundle of nerves and black eyes. I'll wager she doesn't weigh ninety pounds, and most of that's magnetism."

"Positively uncanny … at times." Lute shivered involuntarily. "She gives me the creeps."

"Contact of the healthy with the morbid," he explained dryly. "You will notice it is the healthy that always has the creeps. The morbid never has the creeps. It gives the creeps. That's its function. Where did you people pick her up, anyway?"

"I don't know— yes, I do, too. Aunt Mildred met her in Boston, I think— oh, I don't know. At any rate, Mrs. Grantly came to California, and of course had to visit Aunt Mildred. You know the open house we keep."

They halted where a passageway between two great redwood trunks gave entrance to the dining room. Above, through lacing boughs, could be seen the stars. Candles lighted the tree-columned space. About the table, examining the Planchette contrivance, were four persons. Chris's gaze roved over them, and he was aware of a guilty sorrow-pang as he paused for a moment on Lute's Aunt Mildred and Uncle Robert, mellow with ripe middle age and genial with the gentle buffets life had dealt them. He passed amusedly over the black-eyed, frail-bodied Mrs. Grantly, and halted on the fourth person, a portly, massive-headed man, whose gray temples belied the youthful solidity of his face.

"Who's that?" Chris whispered.

"A Mr. Barton. The train was late. That's why you didn't see him at dinner. He's only a capitalist— water-power-long-distance-electricity transmitter, or something like that."

"Doesn't look as though he could give an ox points on imagination."

"He can't. He inherited his money. But he knows enough to hold on to it and hire other men's brains. He is very conservative."

"That is to be expected," was Chris's comment. His gaze went back to the man and woman who had been father and mother to the girl beside him. "Do you know," he said, "it came to me with a shock yesterday when you told me that they had turned against me and that I was scarcely tolerated. I met them afterwards, last evening, guiltily, in fear and trembling— and today, too. And yet I could see no difference from of old."

"Dear man," Lute sighed. "Hospitality is as natural to them as the act of breathing. But it isn't that, after all. It is all genuine in their dear hearts. No matter how severe the censure they put upon you when you are absent, the moment they are with you they soften and are all kindness and warmth. As soon as their eyes rest on you, affection and love come bubbling up. You are so made. Every animal likes you. All people like you. They can't help it. You can't help it. You are universally lovable, and the best of it is that you don't know it. You don't know it now. Even as I tell it to you, you don't realize it, you won't realize it— and that very incapacity to realize it is one of the reasons why you are so loved. You are incredulous now, and you shake your head; but I know, who am your slave, as all people know, for they likewise are your slaves.

"Why, in a minute we shall go in and join them. Mark the affection, almost maternal, that will well up in Aunt Mildred's eyes. Listen to the tones of Uncle Robert's voice when he says, 'Well, Chris, my boy?' Watch Mrs. Grantly melt, literally melt, like a dewdrop in the sun.

"Take Mr. Barton, there. You have never seen him before. Why, you will invite him out to smoke a cigar with you when the rest of us have gone to bed— you, a mere nobody, and he a man of many millions, a man of power, a man obtuse and stupid like the ox; and he will follow you about, smoking; the cigar, like a little dog, your little dog, trotting at your back. He will not know he is doing it, but he will be doing it just the same. Don't I know, Chris? Oh, I have watched you, watched you, so often, and loved you for it, and loved you again for it, because you were so delightfully and blindly unaware of what you were doing."

"I'm almost bursting with vanity from listening to you," he laughed, passing his arm around her and drawing her against him.

"Yes," she whispered, "and in this very moment, when you are laughing at all that I have said, you, the feel of you, your soul— call it what you will, it is you— is calling for all the love that is in me."

She leaned more closely against him, and sighed as with fatigue. He breathed a kiss into her hair and held her with firm tenderness.

Aunt Mildred stirred briskly and looked up from the Planchette board.

"Come, let us begin," she said. "It will soon grow chilly. Robert, where are those children?"

"Here we are," Lute called out, disengaging herself.

"Now for a bundle of creeps," Chris whispered, as they started in.

Lute's prophecy of the manner in which her lover would be received was realized. Mrs. Grantly, unreal, unhealthy, scintillant with frigid magnetism, warmed and melted as though of truth she were dew and he sun. Mr. Barton beamed broadly upon him, and was colossally gracious. Aunt Mildred greeted him with a glow of fondness and motherly kindness, while Uncle Robert genially and heartily demanded, "Well, Chris, my boy, and what of the riding?"

But Aunt Mildred drew her shawl more closely around her and hastened them to the business in hand. On the table was a sheet of paper. On the paper, rifling on three supports, was a small triangular board. Two of the supports were easily moving casters. The third support, placed at the apex of the triangle, was a lead pencil.

"Who's first?" Uncle Robert demanded.

There was a moment's hesitancy, then Aunt Mildred placed her hand on the board, and said: "Someone has always to be the fool for the delectation of the rest."

"Brave woman," applauded her husband. "Now, Mrs. Grantly, do your worst."

"I?" that lady queried. "I do nothing. The power, or whatever you care to think it, is outside of me, as it is outside of all of you. As to what that power is, I will not dare to say. There is such a power. I have had evidences of it. And you will undoubtedly have evidences of it. Now please be quiet, everybody. Touch the board very lightly, but firmly, Mrs. Story; but do nothing of your own volition."

Aunt Mildred nodded, and stood with her hand on Planchette; while the rest formed about her in a silent and expectant circle. But nothing happened. The minutes ticked away, and Planchette remained motionless.

"Be patient," Mrs. Grantly counseled. "Do not struggle against any influences you may feel working on you. But do not do anything yourself. The influence will take care of that. You will feel impelled to do things, and such impulses will be practically irresistible."

"I wish the influence would hurry up," Aunt Mildred protested at the end of five motionless minutes.

"Just a little longer, Mrs. Story, just a little longer," Mrs. Grantly said soothingly.

Suddenly Aunt Mildred's hand began to twitch into movement. A mild concern showed in her face as she observed the movement of her hand and heard the scratching of the pencil-point at the apex of Planchette.

For another five minutes this continued, when Aunt Mildred withdrew her hand with an effort, and said, with a nervous laugh:

"I don't know whether I did it myself or not. I do know that I was growing nervous, standing there like a psychic fool with all your solemn faces turned upon me."

"Hen-scratches," was Uncle Robert's judgement, when he looked over the paper upon which she had scrawled.

"Quite illegible," was Mrs. Grantly's dictum. "It does not resemble writing at all. The influences have not got to working yet. Do you try it, Mr. Barton."

That gentleman stepped forward, ponderously willing to please, and placed his hand on the board. And for ten solid, stolid minutes he stood there, motionless, like a statue, the frozen personification of the commercial age. Uncle Robert's face began to work. He blinked, stiffened his mouth, uttered suppressed, throaty sounds, deep down; finally he snorted, lost his self-control, and broke out in a roar of laughter. All joined in this merriment, including Mrs. Grantly. Mr. Barton laughed with them, but he was vaguely nettled.

"You try it, Story," he said.

Uncle Robert, still laughing, and urged on by Lute and his wife, took the board. Suddenly his face sobered. His hand had begun to move, and the pencil could be heard scratching across the paper.

"By George!" he muttered. "That's curious. Look at it. I'm not doing it. I know I'm not doing it. Look at that hand go! Just look at it!"

"Now, Robert, none of your ridiculousness," his wife warned him.

"I tell you I'm not doing it," he replied indignantly. "The force has got hold of me. Ask Mrs. Grantly. Tell her to make it stop, if you want it to stop. I can't stop it. By George! look at that flourish. I didn't do that. I never wrote a flourish in my life."

"Do try to be serious," Mrs. Grantly warned them. "An atmosphere of levity does not conduce to the best operation of Planchette."

"There, that will do, I guess," Uncle Robert said as he took his hand away. "Now let's see."

He bent over and adjusted his glasses. "It's handwriting at any rate, and that's better than the rest of you did. Here, Lute, your eyes are young."

"Oh, what flourishes!" Lute exclaimed, as she looked at the paper. "And look there, there are two different handwritings."

She began to read: "This is the first lecture. Concentrate on this sentence: 'I am a positive spirit and not negative to any condition.' Then follow with concentration on positive love. After that peace and harmony will vibrate through and around your body. Your soul— The other writing breaks right in. This is the way it goes: Bullfrog 95, Dixie 16, Golden Anchor 65, Gold Mountain 13, Jim Butler 70, Jumbo 75, North Star 42, Rescue 7, Black Butte 75, Brown Hope 16, Iron Top 3."

"Iron Top's pretty low," Mr. Barton murmured.

"Robert, you've been dabbling again!" Aunt Mildred cried accusingly.

"No, I've not," he denied. "I only read the quotations. But how the devil— I beg your pardon— they got there on that piece of paper I'd like to know."

"Your subconscious mind," Chris suggested. "You read the quotations in today's paper."

"No, I didn't; but last week I glanced over the column."

"A day or a year is all the same in the subconscious mind," said Mrs. Grantly. "The subconscious mind never forgets. But I am not saying that this is due to the subconscious mind. I refuse to state to what I think it is due."

"But how about that other stuff?" Uncle Robert demanded. "Sounds like what I'd think Christian Science ought to sound like."

"Or theosophy," Aunt Mildred volunteered. "Some message to a neophyte."

"Go on, read the rest," her husband commanded.

"This puts you in touch with the mightier spirits," Lute read. "You shall become one with us, and your name shall be 'Arya,' and you shall— Conqueror 20, Empire 12, Columbia Mountain 18, Midway 140— and, and that is all. Oh, no! here's a last flourish, Arya, from Kandor— that must surely be the Mahatma."

"I'd like to have you explain that theosophy stuff on the basis of the subconscious mind, Chris," Uncle Robert challenged.

Chris shrugged his shoulders. "No explanation. You must have got a message intended for someone else."

"Lines were crossed, eh?" Uncle Robert chuckled. "Multiplex spiritual wireless telegraphy, I'd call it."

"It *is* nonsense," Mrs. Grantly said. "I never knew Planchette to behave so outrageously. There are disturbing influences at work. I felt them from the first. Perhaps it is because you are all making too much fun of it. You are too hilarious."

"A certain befitting gravity should grace the occasion," Chris agreed, placing his hand on Planchette. "Let me try. And not one of you must laugh or giggle, or even think 'laugh' or 'giggle.' And if you dare to snort, even once,

Uncle Robert, there is no telling what occult vengeance may be wreaked upon you."

"I'll be good," Uncle Robert rejoined. "But if I really must snort, may I silently slip away?"

Chris nodded. His hand had already begun to work. There had been no preliminary twitchings nor tentative essays at writing. At once his hand had started off, and Planchette was moving swiftly and smoothly across the paper.

"Look at him," Lute whispered to her aunt. "See how white he is."

Chris betrayed disturbance at the sound of her voice, and thereafter silence was maintained. Only could be heard the steady scratching of the pencil. Suddenly, as though it had been stung, he jerked his hand away. With a sigh and a yawn he stepped back from the table, then glanced with the curiosity of a newly awakened man at their faces.

"I think I wrote something," he said.

"I should say you did," Mrs. Grantly remarked with satisfaction, holding up the sheet of paper and glancing at it.

"Read it aloud," Uncle Robert said.

"Here it is, then. It begins with 'beware' written three times, and in much larger characters than the rest of the writing.

BEWARE! BEWARE! BEWARE!

Chris Dunbar, I intend to destroy you. I have already made two attempts upon your life, and failed. I shall yet succeed. So sure am I that I shall succeed that I dare to tell you. I do not need to tell you why. In your own heart you know. The wrong you are doing—

And here it abruptly ends."

Mrs. Grantly laid the paper down on the table and looked at Chris, who had already become the center of all eyes, and who was yawning as from an overpowering drowsiness.

"Quite a sanguinary turn, I should say," Uncle Robert remarked.

"I have already made two attempts upon your life," Mrs. Grantly read from the paper, which she was going over a second time.

"On my life?" Chris demanded between yawns. "Why, my life hasn't been attempted even once. My! I am sleepy!"

"Ah, my boy, you are thinking of flesh-and-blood men," Uncle Robert laughed. "But this is a spirit. Your life has been attempted by unseen things. Most likely ghostly hands have tried to throttle you in your sleep."

"Oh, Chris!" Lute cried impulsively. "This afternoon! The hand you said must have seized your rein!"

"But I was joking," he objected.

"Nevertheless…" Lute left her thought unspoken.

Mrs. Grantly had become keen on the scent. "What was that about this afternoon? Was your life in danger?"

Chris's drowsiness had disappeared. "I'm becoming interested myself," he acknowledged. "We haven't said anything about it. Ban broke his back this afternoon. He threw himself off the bank, and I ran the risk of being caught underneath."

"I wonder, I wonder," Mrs. Grantly communed aloud. "There is something in this…. It is a warning…. Ah! You were hurt yesterday riding Miss Story's horse! That makes the two attempts!"

She looked triumphantly at them. Planchette had been vindicated.

"Nonsense," laughed Uncle Robert, but with a slight hint of irritation in his manner. "Such things do not happen these days. This is the twentieth century, my dear madam. The thing, at the very latest, smacks of medievalism."

"I have had such wonderful tests with Planchette," Mrs. Grantly began, then broke off suddenly to go to the table and place her hand on the board.

"Who are you?" she asked. "What is your name?"

The board immediately began to write. By this time all heads, with the exception of Mr. Barton's, were bent over the table and following the pencil.

"It's Dick," Aunt Mildred cried, a note of the mildly hysterical in her voice.

Her husband straightened up, his face for the first time grave.

"It's Dick's signature," he said. "I'd know his fist in a thousand."

"'Dick Curtis,'" Mrs. Grantly read aloud. "Who is Dick Curtis?"

"By Jove, that's remarkable!" Mr. Barton broke in. "The handwriting in both instances is the same. Clever, I should say, really clever," he added admiringly.

"Let me see," Uncle Robert demanded, taking the paper and examining it. "Yes, it is Dick's handwriting."

"But who is Dick?" Mrs. Grantly insisted. "Who is this Dick Curtis?"

"Dick Curtis, why, he was Captain Richard Curtis," Uncle Robert answered.

"He was Lute's father," Aunt Mildred supplemented. "Lute took our name. She never saw him. He died when she was a few weeks old. He was my brother."

"Remarkable, most remarkable." Mrs. Grantly was revolving the message in her mind. "There were two attempts on Mr. Dunbar's life. The subconscious mind cannot explain that, for none of us knew of the accident today."

"I knew," Chris answered, "and it was I that operated Planchette. The explanation is simple."

"But the handwriting," interposed Mr. Barton. "What you wrote and what Mrs. Grantly wrote are identical."

Chris bent over and compared the handwriting.

"Besides," Mrs. Grantly cried, "Mr. Story recognizes the handwriting."

She looked at him for verification.

He nodded his head. "Yes, it is Dick's fist. I'll swear to that."

But to Lute had come a visioning. While the rest argued pro and con and the air was filled with phrases— "psychic phenomena," "self-hypnotism," "residuum of unexplained truth," and "spiritism,"— she was reviving mentally the girlhood pictures she had conjured of this soldier-father she had never seen. She possessed his sword, there were several old-fashioned daguerreotypes, there was much that had been said of him, stories told of him— and all this had constituted the material out of which she had builded him in her childhood fancy.

"There is the possibility of one mind unconsciously suggesting to another mind," Mrs. Grantly was saying; but through Lute's mind was trooping her father on his great roan warhorse. Now he was leading his men. She saw him on lonely scouts, or in the midst of the yelling Indians at Salt Meadows, when of his command he returned with one man in ten. And in the picture she had of him, in the physical semblance she had made of him, was reflected his spiritual nature, reflected by her worshipful artistry in form and feature and expression— his bravery, his quick temper, his impulsive championship, his madness of wrath in a righteous cause, his warm generosity and swift forgiveness, and his chivalry that epitomized codes and ideals primitive as the days of knighthood. And first, last, and always, dominating all, she saw in the face of him the hot passion and quickness of deed that had earned for him the name "Fighting Dick Curtis."

"Let me put it to the test," she heard Mrs. Grantly saying. "Let Miss Story try Planchette. There may be a further message."

"No, no, I beg of you," Aunt Mildred interposed. "It is too uncanny. It surely is wrong to tamper with the dead. Besides, I am nervous. Or, better, let me go to bed, leaving you to go on with your experiments. That will be the best way, and you can tell me in the morning." Mingled with the "Good-nights," were half-hearted protests from Mrs. Grantly, as Aunt Mildred withdrew.

"Robert can return," she called back, "as soon as he has seen me to my tent."

"It would be a shame to give it up now," Mrs. Grantly said. "There is no telling what we are on the verge of. Won't you try it, Miss Story?"

Lute obeyed, but when she placed her hand on the board she was conscious of a vague and nameless fear at this toying with the supernatural. She was twentieth-century, and the thing in essence, as her uncle had said, was medieval. Yet she could not shake off the instinctive fear that arose in her— man's inheritance from the wild and howling ages when his hairy,

apelike prototype was afraid of the dark and personified the elements into things of fear.

But as the mysterious influence seized her hand and sent it meriting across the paper, all the unusual passed out of the situation and she was unaware of more than a feeble curiosity. For she was intent on another visioning— this time of her mother, who was also unremembered in the flesh. Not sharp and vivid like that of her father, but dim and nebulous was the picture she shaped of her mother— a saint's head in an aureole of sweetness and goodness and meekness, and withal, shot through with a hint of reposeful determination, of will, stubborn and unobtrusive, that in life had expressed itself mainly in resignation.

Lute's hand had ceased moving, and Mrs. Grantly was already reading the message that had been written.

"It is a different handwriting," she said. "A woman's hand. 'Martha,' it is signed. Who is Martha?"

Lute was not surprised. "It is my mother," she said simply. "What does she say?"

She had not been made sleepy, as Chris had; but the keen edge of her vitality had been blunted, and she was experiencing a sweet and pleasing lassitude. And while the message was being read, in her eyes persisted the vision of her mother.

"Dear child," Mrs. Grantly read, "do not mind him. He was ever quick of speech and rash. Be no niggard with your love. Love cannot hurt you. To deny love is to sin. Obey your heart and you can do no wrong. Obey worldly considerations, obey pride, obey those that prompt you against your heart's prompting, and you do sin. Do not mind your father. He is angry now, as was his way in the earth-life; but he will come to see the wisdom of my counsel, for this, too, was his way in the earth-life. Love, my child, and love well.— Martha."

"Let me see it," Lute cried, seizing the paper and devouring the handwriting with her eyes. She was thrilling with unexpressed love for the mother she had never seen, and this written speech from the grave seemed to give more tangibility to her having ever existed, than did the vision of her.

"This *is* remarkable," Mrs. Grantly was reiterating. "There was never anything like it. Think of it, my dear, both your father and mother here with us tonight."

Lute shivered. The lassitude was gone, and she was her natural self again, vibrant with the instinctive fear of things unseen. And it was offensive to her mind that, real or illusion, the presence or the memorized existences of her father and mother should be touched by these two persons who were

practically strangers— Mrs. Grantly, unhealthy and morbid, and Mr. Barton, stolid and stupid with a grossness both of the flesh and the spirit. And it further seemed a trespass that these strangers should thus enter into the intimacy between her and Chris.

She could hear the steps of her uncle approaching, and the situation flashed upon her, luminous and clear. She hurriedly folded the sheet of paper and thrust it into her bosom.

"Don't say anything to him about this second message, Mrs. Grantly, please, and Mr. Barton. Nor to Aunt Mildred. It would only cause them irritation and needless anxiety."

In her mind there was also the desire to protect her lover, for she knew that the strain of his present standing with her aunt and uncle would be added to, unconsciously in their minds, by the weird message of Planchette.

"And please don't let us have any more Planchette," Lute continued hastily. "Let us forget all the nonsense that has occurred."

"'Nonsense,' my dear child?" Mrs. Grantly was indignantly protesting when Uncle Robert strode into the circle.

"Hello!" he demanded. "What's being done?"

"Too late," Lute answered lightly. "No more stock quotations for you. Planchette is adjourned, and we're just winding up the discussion of the theory of it. Do you know how late it is?"

"WELL, what did you do last night after we left?"

"Oh, took a stroll," Chris answered.

Lute's eyes were quizzical as she asked with a tentativeness that was palpably assumed, "With— a— with Mr. Barton?"

"Why, yes."

"And a smoke?"

"Yes; and now what's it all about?"

Lute broke into merry laughter. "Just as I told you that you would do. Am I not a prophet? But I knew before I saw you that my forecast had come true. I have just left Mr. Barton, and I knew he had walked with you last night, for he is vowing by all his fetishes and idols that you are a perfectly splendid young man. I could see it with my eyes shut. The Chris Dunbar glamour has fallen upon him. But I have not finished the catechism by any means. Where have you been all morning?"

"Where I am going to take you this afternoon."

"You plan well without knowing my wishes."

"I knew well what your wishes are. It is to see a horse I have found."

Her voice betrayed her delight, as she cried, "Oh, good!"

"He is a beauty," Chris said.

But her face had suddenly gone grave, and apprehension brooded in her eyes.

"He's called Comanche," Chris went on. "A beauty, a regular beauty, the perfect type of the Californian cow-pony. And his lines— why, what's the matter?"

"Don't let us ride any more," Lute said, "at least for a while. Really, I think I am a tiny bit tired of it, too."

He was looking at her in astonishment, and she was bravely meeting his eyes.

"I see hearses and flowers for you," he began, "and a funeral oration; I see the end of the world, and the stars falling out of the sky, and the heavens rolling up as a scroll; I see the living and the dead gathered together for the final judgement, the sheep and the goats, the lambs and the rams and all the rest of it, the white-robed saints, the sound of golden harps, and the lost souls howling as they fall into the Pit— all this I see on the day that you, Lute Story, no longer care to ride a horse. A horse, Lute! a horse!"

"For a while, at least," she pleaded.

"Ridiculous!" he cried. "What's the matter? Aren't you well?— you who are always so abominably and adorably well!"

"No, it's not that," she answered. "I know it is ridiculous, Chris, I know it, but the doubt will arise. I cannot help it. You always say I am so sanely rooted to the earth and reality and all that, but— perhaps it's superstition, I don't know— but the whole occurrence, the messages of Planchette, the possibility of my father's hand, I know not how, reaching, out to Ban's rein and hurling him and you to death, the correspondence between my father's statement that he has twice attempted your life and the fact that in the last two days your life has twice been endangered by horses— my father was a great horseman— all this, I say, causes the doubt to arise in my mind. What if there be something in it? I am not so sure. Science may be too dogmatic in its denial of the unseen. The forces of the unseen, of the spirit, may well be too subtle, too sublimated, for science to lay hold of, and recognize, and formulate. Don't you see, Chris, that there is rationality in the very doubt? It may be a very small doubt— oh, so small; but I love you too much to run even that slight risk. Besides, I am a woman, and that should in itself fully account for my predisposition toward superstition.

"Yes, yes, I know, call it unreality. But I've heard you paradoxing upon the reality of the unreal— the reality of delusion to the mind that is sick. And so with me, if you will; it is delusion and unreal, but to me, constituted as I am, it

is very real— is real as a nightmare is real, in the throes of it, before one awakes."

"The most logical argument for illogic I have ever heard," Chris smiled. "It is a good gaming proposition, at any rate. You manage to embrace more chances in your philosophy than do I in mine. It reminds me of Sam— the gardener you had a couple of years ago. I overheard him and Martin arguing in the stable. You know what a bigoted atheist Martin is. Well, Martin had deluged Sam with floods of logic. Sam pondered awhile, and then he said, 'Foh a fack, Mis' Martin, you jis' tawk like a house afire; but you ain't got de show I has.' 'How's that?' Martin asked. 'Well, you see, Mis' Martin, you has one chance to mah two.' 'I don't see it,' Martin said. 'Mis' Martin, it's dis way. You has jis' de chance, lak you say, to become worms foh de fruitification of de cabbage garden. But I's got de chance to lif' mah voice to de glory of de Lawd as I go paddin' dem golden streets— along 'ith de chance to be jis' worms along 'ith you, Mis' Martin.'"

"You refuse to take me seriously," Lute said, when she had laughed her appreciation.

"How can I take that Planchette rigmarole seriously?" he asked.

"You don't explain it— the handwriting of my father, which Uncle Robert recognized— oh, the whole thing, you don't explain it."

"I don't know all the mysteries of mind," Chris answered. "But I believe such phenomena will all yield to scientific explanation in the not distant future."

"Just the same, I have a sneaking desire to find out some more from Planchette," Lute confessed. "The board is still down in the dining room. We could try it now, you and I, and no one would know."

Chris caught her hand, crying: "Come on! It will be a lark."

Hand in hand they ran down the path to the tree-pillared room.

"The camp is deserted," Lute said, as she placed Planchette on the table. "Mrs. Grantly and Aunt Mildred are lying down, and Mr. Barton has gone off with Uncle Robert. There is nobody to disturb us." She placed her hand on the board. "Now begin."

For a few minutes nothing happened. Chris started to speak, but she hushed him to silence. The preliminary twitchings had appeared in her hand and arm. Then the pencil began to write. They read the message, word by word, as it was written:

There is wisdom greater than the wisdom of reason. Love proceeds not out of the dry-as-dust way of the mind. Love is of the heart, and is beyond all reason, and logic, and philosophy. Trust your own heart, my daughter. And if

your heart bids you have faith in your lover, then laugh at the mind and its cold wisdom, and obey your heart, and have faith in your lover.— Martha.

"But that whole message is the dictate of your own heart," Chris cried. "Don't you see, Lute? The thought is your very own, and your subconscious mind has expressed it there on the paper."

"But there is one thing I don't see," she objected.

"And that?"

"Is the handwriting. Look at it. It does not resemble mine at all. It is mincing, it is old-fashioned, it is the old-fashioned feminine of a generation ago."

"But you don't mean to tell me that you really believe that this is a message from the dead?" he interrupted.

"I don't know, Chris," she wavered. "I am sure I don't know."

"It is absurd!" he cried. "These are cobwebs of fancy. When one dies, he is dead. He is dust. He goes to the worms, as Martin says. The dead? I laugh at the dead. They do not exist. They are not. I defy the powers of the grave, the men dead and dust and gone!

"And what have you to say to that?" he challenged, placing his hand on Planchette.

On the instant his hand began to write. Both were startled by the suddenness of it. The message was brief:

BEWARE! BEWARE! BEWARE!

He was distinctly sobered, but he laughed. "It is like a miracle play. Death we have, speaking to us from the grave. But Good Deeds, where art thou? And Kindred? and Joy? and Household Goods? and Friendship? and all the goodly company?"

But Lute did not share his bravado. Her fright showed itself in her face. She laid her trembling hand on his arm.

"Oh, Chris, let us stop. I am sorry we began it. Let us leave the quiet dead to their rest. It is wrong. It must be wrong. I confess I am affected by it. I cannot help it. As my body is trembling, so is my soul. This speech of the grave, this dead man reaching out from the mould of a generation to protect me from you. There is reason in it. There is the living mystery that prevents you from marrying me. Were my father alive, he would protect me from you. Dead, he still strives to protect me. His hands, his ghostly hands, are against your life!"

"Do be calm," Chris said soothingly. "Listen to me. It is all a lark. We are playing with the subjective forces of our own being, with phenomena which science has not yet explained, that is all. Psychology is so young a science. The

subconscious mind has just been discovered, one might say. It is all mystery as yet; the laws of it are yet to be formulated. This is simply unexplained phenomena. But that is no reason that we should immediately account for it by labeling it spiritism. As yet we do not know, that is all. As for Planchette—"

He abruptly ceased, for at that moment, to enforce his remark, he had placed his hand on Planchette, and at that moment his hand had been seized, as by a paroxysm, and sent dashing, willy-nilly, across the paper, writing as the hand of an angry person would write.

"No, I don't care for any more of it," Lute said, when the message was completed. "It is like witnessing a fight between you and my father in the flesh. There is the savor in it of struggle and blows."

She pointed out a sentence that read: "You cannot escape me nor the just punishment that is yours!"

"Perhaps I visualize too vividly for my own comfort, for I can see his hands at your throat. I know that he is, as you say, dead and dust, but for all that, I can see him as a man that is alive and walks the earth; I see the anger in his face, the anger and the vengeance, and I see it all directed against you."

She crumpled up the scrawled sheets of paper, and put Planchette away.

"We won't bother with it any more," Chris said. "I didn't think it would affect you so strongly. But it's all subjective, I'm sure, with possibly a bit of suggestion thrown in— that and nothing more. And the whole strain of our situation has made conditions unusually favorable for striking phenomena."

"And about our situation," Lute said, as they went slowly up the path they had run down. "What we are to do, I don't know. Are we to go on, as we have gone on? What is best? Have you thought of anything?"

He debated for a few steps. "I have thought of telling your uncle and aunt."

"What you couldn't tell me?" she asked quickly.

"No," he answered slowly; "but just as much as I have told you. I have no right to tell them more than I have told you."

This time it was she that debated. "No, don't tell them," she said finally. "They wouldn't understand. I don't understand, for that matter, but I have faith in you, and in the nature of things they are not capable of this same implicit faith. You raise up before me a mystery that prevents our marriage, and I believe you; but they could not believe you without doubts arising as to the wrong and ill-nature of the mystery. Besides, it would but make their anxieties greater."

"I should go away, I know I should go away," he said, half under his breath. "And I can. I am no weakling. Because I have failed to remain away once, is no reason that I shall fail again."

She caught her breath with a quick gasp. "It is like a bereavement to hear you speak of going away and remaining away. I should never see you again. It is too terrible. And do not reproach yourself for weakness. It is I who am to blame. It is I who prevented you from remaining away before, I know. I wanted you so. I want you so.

"There is nothing to be done, Chris, nothing to be done but to go on with it and let it work itself out somehow. That is one thing we are sure of: it will work out somehow."

"But it would be easier if I went away," he suggested.

"I am happier when you are here."

"The cruelty of circumstance," he muttered savagely.

"Go or stay— that will be part of the working out. But I do not want you to go, Chris; you know that. And now no more about it. Talk cannot mend it. Let us never mention it again— unless … unless sometime, some wonderful, happy time, you can come to me and say: 'Lute, all is well with me. The mystery no longer binds me. I am free.' Until that time let us bury it, along with Planchette and all the rest, and make the most of the little that is given us.

"And now, to show you how prepared I am to make the most of that little, I am even ready to go with you this afternoon to see the horse— though I wish you wouldn't ride any more … for a few days, anyway, or for a week. What did you say was his name?"

"Comanche," he answered. "I know you will like him."

CHRIS LAY on his back, his head propped by the bare jutting wall of stone, his gaze attentively directed across the canyon to the opposing tree-covered slope. There was a sound of crashing through underbrush, the ringing of steel-shod hoofs on stone, and an occasional and mossy descent of a dislodged boulder that bounded from the hill and fetched up with a final splash in the torrent that rushed over a wild chaos of rocks beneath him. Now and again he caught glimpses, framed in green foliage, of the golden brown of Lute's corduroy riding-habit and of the bay horse that moved beneath her.

She rode out into an open space where a loose earth-slide denied lodgement to trees and grass. She halted the horse at the brink of the slide and glanced down it with a measuring eye. Forty feet beneath, the slide terminated in a small, firm-surfaced terrace, the banked accumulation of fallen earth and gravel.

"It's a good test," she called across the canyon. "I'm going to put him down it."

The animal gingerly launched himself on the treacherous footing, irregularly losing and gaining his hind feet, keeping his fore legs stiff, and

steadily and calmly, without panic or nervousness, extricating the fore feet as fast as they sank too deep into the sliding earth that surged along in a wave before him. When the firm footing at the bottom was reached, he strode out on the little terrace with a quickness and springiness of gait and with glintings of muscular fires that gave the lie to the calm deliberation of his movements on the slide.

"Bravo!" Chris shouted across the canyon, clapping his hands.

"The wisest-footed, clearest-headed horse I ever saw," Lute called back, as she turned the animal to the side and dropped down a broken slope of rubble and into the trees again.

Chris followed her by the sound of her progress, and by occasional glimpses where the foliage was more open, as she zigzagged down the steep and trailless descent. She emerged below him at the rugged rim of the torrent, dropped the horse down a three-foot wall, and halted to study the crossing.

Four feet out in the stream, a narrow ledge thrust above the surface of the water. Beyond the ledge boiled an angry pool. But to the left, from the ledge, and several feet lower, was a tiny bed of gravel. A giant boulder prevented direct access to the gravel bed. The only way to gain it was by first leaping to the ledge of rock. She studied it carefully, and the tightening of her bridle-arm advertised that she had made up her mind.

Chris, in his anxiety, had sat up to observe more closely what she meditated.

"Don't tackle it," he called.

"I have faith in Comanche," she called in return.

"He can't make that side-jump to the gravel," Chris warned. "He'll never keep his legs. He'll topple over into the pool. Not one horse in a thousand could do that stunt."

"And Comanche is that very horse," she answered. "Watch him."

She gave the animal his head, and he leaped cleanly and accurately to the ledge, striking with feet close together on the narrow space. On the instant he struck, Lute lightly touched his neck with the rein, impelling him to the left; and in that instant, tottering on the insecure footing, with front feet slipping over into the pool beyond, he lifted on his hind legs, with a half turn, sprang to the left, and dropped squarely down to the tiny gravel bed. An easy jump brought him across the stream, and Lute angled him up the bank and halted before her lover.

"Well?" she asked.

"I am all tense," Chris answered. "I was holding my breath."

"Buy him, by all means," Lute said, dismounting. "He is a bargain. I could dare anything on him. I never in my life had such confidence in a horse's feet."

"His owner says that he has never been known to lose his feet, that it is impossible to get him down."

"Buy him, buy him at once," she counseled, "before the man changes his mind. If you don't, I shall. Oh, such feet! I feel such confidence in them that when I am on him I don't consider he has feet at all. And he's quick as a cat, and instantly obedient. Bridle-wise is no name for it! You could guide him with silken threads. Oh, I know I'm enthusiastic, but if you don't buy him, Chris. I shall. Remember, I've second refusal."

Chris smiled agreement as he changed the saddles. Meanwhile she compared the two horses.

"Of course he doesn't match Dolly the way Ban did," she concluded regretfully; "but his coat is splendid just the same. And think of the horse that is under the coat!"

Chris gave her a hand into the saddle, and followed her up the slope to the county road. She reined in suddenly, saying:

"We won't go straight back to camp."

"You forget dinner," he warned.

"But I remember Comanche," she retorted. "We'll ride directly over to the ranch and buy him. Dinner will keep."

"But the cook won't," Chris laughed. "She's already threatened to leave, what of our late-comings."

"Even so," was the answer. "Aunt Mildred may have to get another cook, but at any rate we shall have got Comanche."

They turned the horses in the other direction, and took the climb of the Nun Canyon road that led over the divide and down into the Napa Valley. But the climb was hard, the going was slow. Sometimes they topped the bed of the torrent by hundreds of feet, and again they dipped down and crossed and recrossed it twenty times in twice as many rods. They rode through the deep shade of clean-bunked maples and towering redwoods, to emerge on open stretches of mountain shoulder where the earth lay dry and cracked under the sun.

On one such shoulder they emerged, where the road stretched level before them, for a quarter of a mile. On one side rose the huge bulk of the mountain. On the other side the steep wall of the canyon fell away in impossible slopes and sheer drops to the torrent at the bottom. It was an abyss of green beauty and shady depths, pierced by vagrant shafts of the sun and mottled here and there by the sun's broader blazes. The sound of rushing water ascended on the windless air, and there was a hum of mountain bees.

The horses broke into an easy lope. Chris rode on the outside, looking down into the great depths and pleasuring with his eyes in what he saw.

Dissociating itself from the murmur of the bees, a murmur arose of falling water. It grew louder with every stride of the horses.

"Look!" he cried.

Lute leaned well out from her horse to see. Beneath them the water slid foaming down a smooth-faced rock to the lip, whence it leaped clear— a pulsating ribbon of white, a-breath with movement, ever falling and ever remaining, changing its substance but never its form, an aerial waterway as immaterial as gauze and as permanent as the hills, that spanned space and the free air from the lip of the rock to the tops of the trees far below, into whose green screen it disappeared to fall into a secret pool.

They had flashed past. The descending water became a distant murmur that merged again into the murmur of the bees and ceased. Swayed by a common impulse, they looked at each other.

"Oh, Chris, it is good to be alive … and to have you here by my side!"

He answered her by the warm light in his eyes.

All things tended to key them to an exquisite pitch— the movement of their bodies, at one with the moving bodies of the animals beneath them; the gently stimulated blood caressing the flesh through and through with the soft vigors of health; the warm air fanning their faces, flowing over the skin with balmy and tonic touch, permeating them and bathing them, subtly, with faint, sensuous delight; and the beauty of the world, more subtly still, flowing upon them and bathing them in the delight that is of the spirit and is personal and holy, that is inexpressible yet communicable by the flash of an eye and the dissolving of the veils of the soul.

So looked they at each other, the horses bounding beneath them, the spring of the world and the spring of their youth astir in their blood, the secret of being trembling in their eyes to the brink of disclosure, as if about to dispel, with one magic word, all the irks and riddles of existence.

The road curved before them, so that the upper reaches of the canyon could be seen, the distant bed of it towering high above their heads. They were rounding the curve, leaning toward the inside, gazing before them at the swift-growing picture. There was no sound of warning. She heard nothing, but even before the horse went down she experienced the feeling that the unison of the two leaping animals was broken. She turned her head, and so quickly that she saw Comanche fall. It was not a stumble nor a trip. He fell as though, abruptly, in midleap, he had died or been struck a stunning blow.

And in that moment she remembered Planchette; it seared her brain as a lightning-flash of all-embracing memory. Her horse was back on its haunches, the weight of her body on the reins; but her head was turned and her eyes

were on the falling Comanche. He struck the roadbed squarely, with his legs loose and lifeless beneath him.

It all occurred in one of those age-long seconds that embrace an eternity of happening. There was a slight but perceptible rebound from the impact of Comanche's body with the earth. The violence with which he struck forced the air from his great lungs in an audible groan. His momentum swept him onward and over the edge. The weight of the rider on his neck turned him over head first as he pitched to the fall.

She was off her horse, she knew not how, and to the edge. Her lover was out of the saddle and clear of Comanche, though held to the animal by his right foot, which was caught in the stirrup. The slope was too steep for them to come to a stop. Earth and small stones, dislodged by their struggles, were rolling down with them and before them in a miniature avalanche. She stood very quietly, holding one hand against her heart and gazing down. But while she saw the real happening, in her eyes was also the vision of her father dealing the spectral blow that had smashed Comanche down in mid-leap and sent horse and rider hurtling over the edge.

Beneath horse and man the steep terminated in an up-and-down wall, from the base of which, in turn, a second slope ran down to a second wall. A third slope terminated in a final wall that based itself on the canyon-bed four hundred feet beneath the point where the girl stood and watched. She could see Chris vainly kicking his leg to free the foot from the trap of the stirrup. Comanche fetched up hard against an outputting point of rock. For a fraction of a second his fall was stopped, and in the slight interval the man managed to grip hold of a young shoot of manzanita. Lute saw him complete the grip with his other hand. Then Comanche's fall began again. She saw the stirrup-strap draw taut, then her lover's body and arms. The manzanita shoot yielded its roots, and horse and man plunged over the edge and out of sight.

They came into view on the next slope, together and rolling over and over, with sometimes the man under and sometimes the horse. Chris no longer struggled, and together they dashed over to the third slope. Near the edge of the final wall, Comanche lodged on a buttock of stone. He lay quietly, and near him, still attached to him by the stirrup, face downward, lay his rider.

"If only he will lie quietly," Lute breathed aloud, her mind at work on the means of rescue.

But she saw Comanche begin to struggle again, and clear on her vision, it seemed, was the spectral arm of her father clutching the reins and dragging the animal over. Comanche floundered across the hummock, the inert body following, and together, horse and man, they plunged from sight. They did not appear again. They had fetched bottom.

Lute looked about her. She stood alone on the world. Her lover was gone. There was naught to show of his existence, save the marks of Comanche's hoofs on the road and of his body where it had slid over the brink.

"Chris!" she called once, and twice; but she called hopelessly.

Out of the depths, on the windless air, arose only the murmur of bees and of running water.

"Chris!" she called yet a third time, and sank slowly down in the dust of the road.

She felt the touch of Dolly's muzzle on her arm, and she leaned her head against the mare's neck and waited. She knew not why she waited, nor for what, only there seemed nothing else but waiting left for her to do.

———————

17: The House of the Black Evil

Eric Purves

fl 1929

Pearson's Magazine, May 1929

The only known story by this otherwise unknown author.

THE PECULIAR behaviour of the postman, at the top of the steps, again called my attention to that dismal and forbidding house. That usually discreet official was actually kneeling on one knee and peering through the letter-slot, his letter-bag a shapeless lump on the doorstep.

I hesitated for a moment at the foot of the steps, but it was none of my business; a letter had probably stuck. Anyway, that postman was a good fellow, with whom I had had many cheerful conversations; if he chose to do unusual things why should I interfere?

I made as if to go on, though reluctantly, for that shuttered, gaunt, ill-favoured house fascinated me always, when the postman, standing up, turned and saw me. At once, in the strangest agitation, he called me by name, urgently and yet, as it were, in a distraction, and not looking at me, but stepping back and surveying the whole house hastily and anxiously.

Let me confess. I obeyed his summons indeed, but in what a confusion of dread, curiosity and amazement! Imagine then, my feelings when, on my joining him on the top step, that postman said nothing, gave no greeting, made no movement save to gaze at me with troubled eyes of fear, and to point at the letter-slot with a hand which shook.

I forced myself to kneel as he had done, to lift the flap and to peer through the slot. There was nothing there, only a black darkness.

Furious at the trick he had played upon me, I rose angrily to my feet to confront the postman. At once, however, observing my evident anger, he spoke.

"No, sir; no, sir," he said, "there is no letter-box; that's the hall you are looking into. And it's black— black dark. And the letters, sir, they disappear!"

I gazed at him. I had a moment in which I thought he was crazy, a moment in which I thought he was drunk; but no, this man was sane and sober, but terribly afraid. I did not so much as begin to understand him, however. Suddenly, without any apology, he pulled my morning paper from under my arm, thrust it, folded lengthwise, into my hand and said, with a sort of gasp:

"Shove it in, sir, shove it in and watch it!"

This was incomprehensible. Again I knelt. I put the paper to the slot, and as I did so he cried:

"Slowly!"

And I thrust it in slowly.

How shall I describe what happened? There was the door, there the letter-flap in the clear unshadowed light of bright but hazy morning. There was the wide black oblong of the letter-slot cut by the printed white of a folded Times. Now, when you thrust a paper into a hole you can see it go in. There is a part outside and a part, still visible, inside; shadowed maybe, but visible all the same. But as I pushed in that newspaper it disappeared. There was the part outside, then the line of the letter box, then— nothing, blackness!

Amazed, I hastily withdrew the paper; at once it reappeared. For a second I hesitated; then suddenly all my fear dropped from me, and with a little laugh I thrust my fingers into the slot, confident that they would encounter some strip of black cloth put there against the draught. There was nothing.

"No, sir," said the postman; "I've felt again and again; this has been like this for days; there's nothing there. Them letters simply disappears— disappears into blackness. 'Tisn't right, sir; there's something too much like magic about it. And where are the people of the house, sir? Never opened, never unshuttered; but the police men on the beat say they believe there's people in there, and certainly it's a live address, for I've brought a lot of letters here!"

While he spoke I had been thrusting my own hand into the slot. Believe me although there was nothing tangible to explain it, my hand also, like the newspaper was cut off sharply from sight across the line of the door.

The inexplicable is always fearful. All my dread returned, and was increased a hundredfold as I looked up at the postman.

My own house was on the opposite side of the square, and it happened that I had observed the arrival of the effects of the people whom I presumed to be the present occupiers. At all events I had observed this house with some curiosity for several weeks, for whereas before the furniture came it had stood confessedly empty, its unshuttered windows, void of blinds, revealing the empty, barren rooms, since that date, every window had been closely shuttered I had never seen any sign of life; no smoke from chimney, nor waiting milk bottle at any hour. Once before I had seen letters delivered; and now this extraordinary puzzle.

Upon a common impulse, and silently wondering, the postman and I went together down the steps. I was not surprised when, without a word, my companion hitched up his bag and strode rapidly away upon his round. He knew I was a man of leisure; he knew that at once I should begin to probe the matter to the bottom; he knew that, whatever I might find out, I should not leave him uninformed.

While I stood with my back to the house something of my dread left me. I could think more clearly. At once it was obvious that nothing could be cleared

up without getting into the house. Accordingly I re-mounted the steps and pulled the bell.

At once, as if I had pulled the handle of a shower bath, the full chilling flood of unreasoning terrors descended upon me. I heard the clang of the distant bell. Sheer terror held me motionless. Nothing whatever happened.

At last, after what seemed an eternity, the cheerful whistle of an errand-boy passing in the road below broke the spell. I did not ring again. Instead, with an abruptly formed resolve, I set off to seek the house agent's office.

It happened that I not only knew who the agent was, but also that he was a good friend of mine. Once more among the busy streets I laughed at my fears, and it was almost shamefacedly that I greeted my friend. He was obviously exceedingly excited and interested by my story.

He told me that he had been much concerned about this house and its occupants. It had been taken, very abruptly and with but the briefest consideration, by a "rather overwhelming lady, a foreigner," who had paid a quarter's rent in advance, arranged about water, gas, electricity and the like, moved in two days later, and (so far as my friend knew, and my own observation only confirmed the impression) had never again been seen, nor any of her household. Steevens (my friend) had been disturbed, very naturally, by this odd circumstance alone.

"Is the woman dead?" he said. "I had begun to think it possible; but even were it so I do not see that we are any nearer to an explanation of your side of the mystery."

After some talk we determined to seek legal advice and, if necessary, to make entry into the house. He promised to ring me up as soon as a decision was reached; he also promised, upon my request, that my friend the postman should, if possible, be allowed to be present were an entry to be made.

There is no need to recapitulate the steps taken by Steevens in the course of the next few hours; enough that I had just lit my pipe after lunch when he rang me up and asked me to come round to his office at once.

I arrived in company with the last few of a not unimposing assembly. In all there were, besides Steevens and myself, Holt, the postman, now in mufti and shyly standing at attention, as it were, in the corner by the door; little Meadows, the ironmonger from his shop below Steevens' office; Crosby, the lawyer who attended to most of Steevens' business; and finally, their big bodies blocking most of the light, a large policeman and an equally large detective, in mufti, whose not unintelligent face was surmounted (designedly?) by the commonest and stupidest of bowler hats.

Steevens quickly made us all acquainted, and briefly recapitulated all the points of the problem as we knew it.

The only new information he had to give me, resulting from his inquiries since our consultation in the morning, was that the lady who had taken the house in the square was a notable, or rather a notorious, occultist— "spiritualist" if you like, but the better sort of spiritualist would have nothing to do with her.

"However," said Steevens, "do not let us waste time in details which can be left till later, but let us go straight to the house." It was in the silence of men who brace themselves to meet the unknown that we tramped down the stairs.

In the street I walked with Crosby. He questioned me, as he had previously questioned Holt, about the letter-box. I had thought that perhaps to his comfortable common-sense the whole thing would appear an absurdity; that probably he was coming with us mainly in the hope of finding cause for indulgence, at our discomfited expense, in that ponderous guffawing laughter of his. Instead I found him anxious and troubled, and, as he listened to my story, I could see his face darken with the shadow of the same fear and dread which was shared by Holt and by me.

As we turned into the Square another silence fell among us. What were we approaching? Three weeks had passed since that house had been entered.

At the foot of the steps we hesitated. Then Steevens and little Meadows, the locksmith, went up first.

Steevens rang the bell with a hand which trembled. We all listened, with intent expressions as of men who strain to hear the first note of an expected passing bell. Twice and three times he rang, but none replied. Then he motioned Meadows to the door (for Steevens had no duplicate key) that he might pick the lock.

A few stragglers in the square were brusquely sent about their business by the constable; but it was a quiet place— few came that way, and we were not likely to be troubled with a crowd. For myself, I confess that had it been in a busier street I should probably have laughed at the fears which now truly held me in so firm a grip that I felt a chill cold about me and a weakness of the knees.

For several leaden-footed minutes Meadows worked at the lock. Then came the definite scrape of the turning mechanism. An instant later Meadows, twisting the handle, gave the gentlest of pushes to the heavy door. It moved sufficiently to show that the bolts had not been shot. Then he moved aside.

At once, with a rather white face and with obvious reluctance, Steevens put up his hand and thrust the door forward and open.

The result was as simple in its awfulness as it is difficult to describe. There before our amazed, uncomprehending eyes that massive door swung inwards, and as it swung was swallowed up and disappeared in an impenetrable black

darkness that filled the vacant doorway exactly as black oil would fill a tank. Where the door had been, that is to say, was now a clear-cut plane of blackness, definite as if it had been cut out of marble, so sharp that the very hinges of the in-swung door were cut in two, half visible, the inner half engulfed; and yet that black wall was simply black. No gleam, no hint of reflected light came from its dead blankness. Nothing like it has ever been seen before.

Black paper, black cloth, black paint, all these clearly define themselves by gleams and reflections. A black hole shades from light into the inner obscurity. Here one can say no more than this— outside was light; inside— the boundary clearly marked as where the door had been— was darkness, abrupt, absolute, inexplicable and terrible.

We stood amazed and awed, gazing at that strange thing.

Then suddenly Holt, the postman, did a brave thing. I do not doubt that he was prompted to it simply because, without explanation, investigation at the least, this thing was too terrible to be borne; but the action all the same was as brave as anything could be.

Stepping forward he crossed that fearsome threshold and was instantly swallowed up. It was as if he had walked right through some impalpable black door. He disappeared completely, though we could still hear him. He took a step or two, then, with a low, shuddering gasp and a scrambling shuffle, he suddenly reappeared, stepping backwards, stumbling at the lintel and collapsing among us all, wet with clammy sweat and shaking violently from head to foot, so as some mighty engine could scarce vibrate more fiercely. In a few moments, however, he was enough recovered to speak to us:

"Oh, I can't tell you! Black, black dark! At once, at once; like being smothered— the hall-mat under your feet and the sounds from outside, and nothing whatever to see but the dark the minute you pass that door."

"Was there any peculiar smell, or smoke, a gas, a feeling, anything?" I asked.

"No, sir, nothing at all. If it had been at night, a dark night, I don't think you'd have noticed anything. It's just plunging in out of the blessed day that is so horrible."

At this the detective spoke up.

"Come, sir, we shall learn nothing this way. Into that house we must go, and into that house I am going."

So saying he stepped in, and disappeared; at once, stirred by his words and determination, we crowded after him, all except Meadows and Holt, who made no move even to approach the door.

The sensation was just as Holt had described it. But already something of the first horror had worn off. As I stepped in I spoke aloud:

"Steevens, where are you?"

"Here," he replied, out of the dark, and took me by the arm.

Once we had overcome the shock of so suddenly and inexplicably leaving the light of day it was no worse than moving round in a strange house in dark of night.

We stepped cautiously forward into the hall, and, guiding each other by voice and hand-grasp, gathered in a little group at the foot of what could be felt to be the stair.

Suddenly there was a little click, and then an exclamation of irritation.

"Torch won't light," said the detective.

I heard some movements, and then the scrape of a match— no light. Another, and another. There was quite a little fusillade of the sputters of striking matches from several of the party; then a quick exclamation from Crosby.

"What is it?" said Steevens.

"Match burnt my fingers," said Crosby. "I held it to make sure it would light properly; the flame burnt me, but I never saw a spot of light."

At once (the sounds revealed) we all tried the experiment. One by one we reported matches burnt down to our fingers; there was no trace of light! Quite suddenly, with a horribleness made inconceivably more horrible in that impenetrable dark, Crosby's nerve gave way.

"Darkness!" he cried, "weeping and gnashing of teeth!" And with a horrible shuffling he took two steps and then fell headlong over something. Moving carefully towards him, feeling with hands and feet, we felt him on the floor, where he lay muttering: "A horror of great darkness! Oh, God! Let there be light!"

While we felt about there, horrorstricken and rapidly approaching poor Crosby's broken condition ourselves, we were startled by a sudden exclamation:

"Where are you, gentlemen? What's happening?"

For a moment none replied. Then Steevens cried:

"Is that you, Holt? Where are you?"

Holt and Meadows both answered:

"Here, outside!" and then there was a sound of footsteps, and (it sounded) in they both came, Holt saying: "We heard a fall. Are you all right?"

The detective's voice was heard explaining; then he said:

"Mr. Crosby, sir, pull yourself together. Will you listen to me? I have an idea of what we ought to do."

Crosby made a gasping effort.

"I'm sorry," he said; "strange affair, nerve went, better now," and he seemed to be picking himself up.

Then Grainer, the detective, said: "Gentlemen, I've been told this house was taken by a spiritualist: This must be some spooky hanky-panky. Don't let us get foolishly alarmed. Let us search the house, which we have come to do, from top to bottom; even if we can see nothing, if we make a careful plan we can search thoroughly enough by feeling. Mr. Steevens, sir, you know the house; what is there on this floor?"

Steevens hesitated an instant. One could almost hear him pulling himself together.

"Er— thank you, Grainer," he said; "that is very sensible. So far as I can remember, there is this hall, a dining-room, a drawing-room and a morning-room opening off it, and a baize door at the back of the stairs which leads to the kitchens."

"Listen, then, everybody!" we heard Grainer reply. "Fall back gradually, all of you, till you reach the walls of the hall." There ensued a minute of shuffling, and a few half-whispered exclamations, as each of us, feeling an increase of nervousness from the added sense of isolation, found his place around the walls.

"Now," said Grainer, "let us each find a door, a window, all the objects we can find in our immediate vicinity."

In this manner we made as thorough a search of the hall as was possible, announcing our discoveries, in response to Grainer's continual questioning.

The constable, who was next to me, reported a window. At the same moment I ran my head with some violence against the still wide-open door, and, explaining, I was directed to shut it, lest some passer-by should think to investigate a doorway apparently hung with a jet-black curtain, as doubtless it would appear from the pavement.

Having done so I heard Grainer cross the floor to the constable, and there came the ring of curtains along the rod, then the clatter of the shutters, and finally, the whirr of a spring blind run up. No light appeared.

"Can you find the catch of the window?" said Grainer.

"Here it is," from the constable; and then the sneck of the latch, and the rattle of the opened window. Still no light; but quite suddenly, from outside, a horrified exclamation in a young man's voice:

"Good Lord! Bob, look at that window. There's a living arm sticking out of the middle of it, cut off short!"

"What an extraordinary thing," came the reply. "But I suppose it's some trick. Hi! You in there, what d'you mean by frightening people with your silly

jugglery go away and do it somewhere else. It's enough to frighten anybody out of their wits."

To my surprise Grainer made no reply to this save to pull down the window again.

I have, often-wondered what those two young fellows— I am guessing at them by their voices— can have thought as they went on across the Square! As for us within that black and silent house, I think that nothing could have so emphasised the terrible strangeness of our situation.

Grainer, who had, with his official manner and solid common-sense, taken charge of the investigation by the tacit consent of us all, allowed us no time, however, to give way to our fears. Under his direction we made a weird, difficult, but thorough search of the whole of the ground floor. As far as was discoverable in that pitch darkness there was nothing unusual there— simply the ordinary furnishings and equipment of an average middle-class home.

We then mounted the stair and searched the upper landing. Steevens informed us that there were no attics; when we had searched this upper floor we should have searched the whole.

How strange it was, the seven of us, crawling gropingly on hands and knees, stretching out timid hands into the terrible dark, suddenly and terrifyingly encountering some all-too-much-expected body, only to discover that it was that of one of our number.

To search through a house wherein one more than half expects to come upon a corpse is a fearsome enough task at any time. To do so in absolute darkness, and with the cause of that added horror still all unexplained, was one of the most terrifying experiences that can be imagined.

Fortunately our suspense was now, by a little, curtailed, for we discovered all the doors on this upper landing locked, with the keys outside, save one— the door of the room which, said Steevens, was usually used by the mistress of the house as her boudoir, and had probably been so used by the present mistress.

Anxiously we felt our way in. What should we find? Had the lady left the house? Would she be found in this room? Had this fearsome darkness come to overwhelm her, horribly, terrifyingly, so that she had fled from it in such a fear as to have left house and town in panic, telling none of her departure?

I am not one who is sensitive to those delicate sensations and impressions which are called psychic. "Atmosphere" has but little effect upon me. Yet so exalted was my nervous condition by the strain of this evil dark that I distinctly felt an added horror, a creeping "scunner" as we entered that room; and it took all my self-restraint to refrain from a yelp of terror when, a moment later,

poor Steevens uttered a sort of shuddering groan (rather than a cry) of discovery.

I was feeling along the jamb of the door at the moment, and as Steevens uttered his exclamation my hand closed on the electric switch and pressed it down. No light resulted— by now we were used to this— but I left the switch on, and moved forward with the others towards Steevens.

"Keep back a moment!" he said. "I've found something, somebody— yes, a man— sitting in a chair— here— here." We felt towards him. My hand encountered a shoulder.

"Here?" I said, feeling it motionless and strangely cold beneath the cloth, but:

"No, here," said Steevens' voice a foot or two away, and an instant later his hand came groping towards me, found me, was identified, and guided by me towards the shoulder I had touched.

"It is another," he whispered dreadfully. I will not try to describe the stages, second by awestruck second, of our discovery. It is too tense, too horrible to attempt. Indeed, the shuddering mind halts and refuses to remember that which it first received with so deep a shock.

It is enough to say that we found there, seated in the cold silence of that dreadful dark, colder, yet more silent themselves in the darker dreadfulness of death, six human bodies— three men, three women— seated about a round table as men and women sit who try the spirits in séance.

Their outstretched hands rested on the table, little fingers linked to those of their neighbours'; while at one place we found a figure which we took to be that of the medium, seated on a chair which was deeper and more comfortable than the others, its eyes blindfolded (as if ever blindfold could be imagined darker than the blackness in which we moved), and with its head and trunk crumpled forward as if in the trance usual to the spirit-intermediary.

One by one each of us investigated every one of that dreadful circle. Suddenly Grainer, whose voice sounded from beside the medium, startled us by exclaiming:

"Which of you have felt this blindfold chap? Did he seem to you dead-cold?"

Without waiting for reply (though we waited tense as bowstrings, still as marble, horribly expectant), he was heard making rapid motions… Almost one could see him; laying back that figure from its chair on to the floor, feeling for a pulse, gently loosening clothing. There was a cork-noise and a bubble of liquid as Grainer's flask came into requisition, a rhythmic movement…

Suddenly, fearsomely, through the dark I saw, high up and across the room, two huge and horrible mis-shapen eyes, red, enormous, lurid, the eyes of a

monster. My hair crept; my skin twitched with terror, ran with a cold and clammy sweat; my throat, strangled with fear, uttered an involuntary choking cry!

"Eyes!" it said, and my hand pointed as though the rest could see.

I heard chattering teeth and my own chattered; my heart pounded and thumped so fiercely that in a moment I seemed to hear no other sound than the dreadful drums of the marching regiment of the eternal spheres.

A cry, croaking, cackling, laughing cry, and Crosby's voice:

"See, see, not eyes! It isn't eyes at all; it's the electric lights"; and even as he said it we knew it to be true, and everything was happening at once. Grainer was grunting with satisfaction, and the light was growing, blessed, blessed light, and we could see each other again, with white, drawn faces; and there is Grainer on the floor, a figure stretched beside him; he is dropping brandy into the mouth with a wonderful calm, matter-of-fact care, and look! the eyes are opening…

And all the while the light grows. The figure sighs with returning life, the eyes open wide, and at once the lights blaze out, the room is bright with light, and the constable is pulling the curtains, opening the window, letting in the day. And there are our horror-struck selves, there on the floor the emaciated figure of a pale young man, and there seated at the table five still bodies, white and cadaverous, with the indubitable stamp of death.

Late that evening we gathered at Crosby's house, the same little company, and a police-surgeon in addition. We were ushered into a large bedroom where Grey, the medium, was lying. The doctor reported him as much stronger and quite able to tell his story. In view of the inquest to be held on the morrow into the deaths of those two men and three women now lying in the grim house in the Square it was urgent that the main threads of the strange affair should be gathered at once.

I will not attempt to give at full length the question and answer, the gasping repetitions of that strange investigation. If this should do something to remove the cloud of horror wherewith, for all of us who sat there listening, it was invested, that is all to the good, for, indeed, the tale itself was weird beyond imagining. I will simply give the outlines of the tale.

It seems that Grey had been for some years a friend of Madame Seulon (the tenant of the "house of darkness"), and had frequently helped her in her psychic researches. To these her husband had given a disapproval which grew at last into an open breach, so that, leaving him, Madame travelled about into various places, making inquiries into ghost stories, haunted houses, and other mysteries in many places. Her separation from her husband had the worst

effect upon her, for now, without restraint, she gave herself up to the blackest art, the most evil mystery.

A short while previously the sudden death of one of her companions, during séance, had caused some scandal, so that in taking and in moving into the house in the Square, Madame had used some secrecy, and, indeed, had determined at first— until she had completed a certain investigation— to engage no servants, to bring in an ample supply of provisions, and to shut herself away from all the world. This done, she then communicated with some of her closest spiritualistic friends and also with Grey.

When these arrived she explained to them the theory she had formed. She had found— indeed, it is well known— that all things strange and evil fear the light. Thirsting for knowledge, longing for power, Madame had often held her séances in darkness absolute; but always as the strange border-land of the spirit world was passed some light appeared. Evilly lurid it might often be, angry red, foul purple; dread elemental things appeared, wrapped in the sulphurous flames of the pit, glaucous eyes would glare, and livid flashes glimmer in the baleful dark.

Now it occurred to Madame that manifestations of the most potent order might be brought forth if, in some whole-willed company such as that which she had gathered the Powers that rule the spirit world should be asked to make a darkness absolute, a darkness not of this world only, but of that Other also.

Grey was frightened. This was necromancy of a very dangerous sort! But he was over-persuaded, and on a certain night nearly a fortnight before this tale was told the séance began.

Now, it must be explained that mediums vary greatly. Some are almost indifferent to all that happens, even though it is through their help. Some have no memory of anything occurring from the moment that first they pass into a state of trance until they are reawakened. Some retain a sort of semi-consciousness all the while.

Grey, it seems, held an intermediate place, being subject to two states of trance, a lighter and a deeper. In the lighter trance, while he retained a memory of what was happening, yet he was quite without volition of his own, and communication with the Spirit World through his mediumship was complete and quite unhampered by his semi-consciousness. In the deeper trance he was completely "absent," as it were in a temporary death, and, on being awakened, had no memory of anything occurring during that degree of trance.

On this occasion the company being assembled as usual at a round table, Grey went almost at once into his lighter "spirit sleep." At once (he says) the"

control" with whom Madame was in the habit of holding communication, took possession of him. This was no good spirit, but some vicious and depraved monster, against whom Madame had been warned again and again, but vainly.

At once Madame put her request— that there should be a darkness complete and absolute, "both in this house," said Madame, "and in the Spirit World immediately about us."

The request was acceded to, having been received with the most horrible and gleeful laughter both by the control and by that evil company which was with him on the spirit side.

"And at once," said Grey," that strange, dim spirit-light of which I am always conscious, no matter how darkened the room may be, for, indeed, it is a light not of this world, went suddenly out, and the livid eyes of the ghostly company about me disappeared.

"And then— oh! then the most fearsome things at once began," cried Grey; "screamings and angry raging, the sounds of some most violent conflict. Voices there were, evil, fierce voices, horrid with the joy of battle; soft, kindly voices of their adversaries fighting for ourselves and our souls, grown hissing, breathless, and heavy with strife as they struggled bravely for the mastery, baffled and thwarted though they were by the cruel darkness wherein evil ever finds itself at home, while good, robbed of its natural, pure light, fights blindly and fearfully against an unfair odds.

"It seemed as if space itself rocked with the battle.

"Suddenly, trembling, terrified and small, I heard close by me five new voices, weak, strange, out-crying as it were like drowning kittens.

"I recognised them; they were the voices of my companions."

What had happened?

"Some fearful and compelling power had surely reft those shuddering souls out of their bodies and hurled them, trembling, into that Stygian battleground. Already, then, the powers beneficent were losing hold?

"And I? I was alone in all this conflict; neither in this world was I, nor in the Spirit World, but rapt away from both in my state of semi-trance. It would seem that I was safe; but what, oh! what horrible thing had happened to Madame and her companions?"

At this stage, it seems, Grey was so terrified that he did a very unusual thing. By the very potency of his terror he succeeded in overcoming, voluntarily, his trance, and in returning suddenly into his own body seated at that mystical table. Here all was silent (in this world), for he had left behind the clamour of the struggle which was going on about him in the world of spirits. Silent it was and dark.

With a terrified effort the medium spoke to his companions. There was no reply, no word, no breath, no sigh, no movement even.

Weak from the trance, poor Grey could scarcely move, and yet at length he summoned up sufficient force to sit up and to stretch forth a hand shaking with the most appalling fear into the darkness. One by one he sought and found his companions, one by one he felt under his hand the chill of five corpses already cold.

How long his trance had lasted, what had happened in that dreadful room, he knew not. And as he sat there, palsied with terror, suddenly, fierce and loud, and uttered by what agency he knew not, nor would ever know, a mighty voice rang through that room of death, speaking to him in urgent command:

"Sleep!" it cried. "Sleep deeply! These are the Dead! the Dead! Sleep on in darkness, till the Living bid thee wake!"

At this command the medium sank at once into the deepest trance— until the Living bade him wake."

What had happened, what happened then, what horrors passed about that house of dreadful dark, who shall say?

It is a terrible thing to meddle with the Powers of Darkness; it is a terrible thing to defy, with impious rashness, the laws which have been given for our quietude and peace.

The next day, in a dreary and forbidding court-house, the windows loud with the angry tumult of a gale and cold, spattering rain, the inquest was held upon those five dead bodies.

No trace of wound or poison had they, and no sign of any ill sufficient to be the cause of death.

Long and earnest was the inquiry; long and difficult the jury's consultation. Nor is it a wonder that, returning with awed and sombre faces, and having sought permission from the coroner (which, in the amazing circumstances, he gave), they declared it to be their will that the verdict in each case (and here their foreman's voice fell low and shuddering as that of one who speaks of awful doom) should be:

"Slain by the Wrath of God."

18: The Three Trees

Warwick Deeping

1877-1950

The New Magazine (UK) Dec 1924

IT WAS A stormy September with huge clouds piling themselves in an intense blue sky, and scuds of rain and floods of sunshine following fast upon each other, but to Pauline Marsac, the artist who was staying at Yew Tree Farm, this wet September was a glory and a delight.

She had come down to the Wealden country for atmosphere and an inspiration for one of her typical landscapes, England in one of its many moods, and though the weather made her expeditions somewhat patchy, never had she felt happier in her work. These stormy skies: blue, white and black; these woods and hills of green and gold and amethyst; these sudden gushes of yellow light; the grey smoke of the rain! She revelled, for in colour and the mystery of colour she saw the mystic garments of her god.

One evening she came back past Mount Hall, smokeless and tragic among its oaks and beeches, its two great cedars black against a green blue sky. The old, red, Queen Anne house surprised her. It was her first glimpse of it; and as she stood looking at it across the park she realized its emptiness. Another English home, she supposed, killed by the great war.

At the farm Mrs. Hathaway suggested a fire.

"It might be winter, Miss."

A sudden shower was beating against the windows, and the quick clouds had shut out a transiently gleaming sun.

"Yes; a fire. I'm rather wet. What a comfortable woman you are, Mrs. Hathaway."

She drew up a chair, delighting in the thought of a blaze, while Mrs. Hathaway knelt down, matchbox in hand.

"Who does the old red house belong to?"

"What, Mount Hall, Miss?"

"Is that its name? It looks empty and unhappy."

The farmer's wife was holding a match to the paper.

"Miss Orchardson lived there."

"Not Miss Eleanor Orchardson who wrote the famous book that caused all that scandal?"

"I don't know much about the book, Miss, save that after her death it was found out that she had written it; and that a man— a friend— had pretended—"

"Yes— I know. Hangard. It was one of our last year's sensations. A very dirty affair. But when did Miss Orchardson die?"

"She didn't die; she was killed."

"Oh!"

"Thrown off her horse. Yes; she was queer, a tall woman with big black eyes. Hated men— they say— and loved horses. Lived alone there— with a cousin— Miss Horn. That fellow who tried to thieve her book used to come—"

Pauline was watching the kindling fire.

"A character! Yes; I heard a good deal. We were interested. Didn't Miss Orchardson paint?"

"What, her face, Miss? No; she had one of those white faces."

"I meant pictures."

"Oh, pictures. I believe she did. And wrote poetry, and used to go riding about the country at all hours. A wild woman. She liked wild horses, and it was a wild horse that killed her."

"How old was she?"

"How old? Oh, well— what you would call thirtyish."

"That means thirty-nine. And what about the house?"

Mrs. Hathaway got up, with a lift of the shoulders.

"Ah, there you are! They say her will was the queerest thing. The house was to be left just as it was, furniture and all, though once a month two women from the village have the job of cleaning it up a bit. Empty. Yes. Uncomfortable— I call it. And that's to go on for twenty years. Leastways— that's the gossip."

Pauline Marsac spread her hands to the fire.

"This is lovely. But what a queer story. And where did her money go?"

"To a home for worn-out horses, most of it. Though I suppose Miss Horn— the cousin— had some. She's got a little house in the village."

"That's the woman who showed up Stephen Hangard when he had stolen 'Mary Wilberforce.' "

"I never heard he stole a lady, Miss."

"No; that was the name of Miss Orchardson's book. Well—I think I will have China tea to-day, Mrs. Hathaway. And I'll make myself some toast."

At ten o'clock Pauline Marsac went to bed in a room whose ceiling was a crisscross of beams and joists. The floor undulated, tilting her towards the mirror, and back again towards the mahogany bedstead, with its orange-coloured quilt. The quilt belonged to Pauline. Happy in her craft she went to bed like a child, ready for the next day's game, and as she grew drowsy she had the impression that the wind had dropped, and that stars were shining in a clear sky.

At Yew Tree Farm there was nothing to disturb you save the natural noises: chanticleer saluting the grey dawn, twittering sparrows, the wind in the trees;

but Pauline slept less well than usual. She dreamed, and yet it was not quite a dream. Something seemed to be pressing through the portals of sleep. She woke twice with the impression that a voice had been calling her, an urgent voice.

"Pauline Marsac— Pauline Marsac?"

On the second occasion she lay and stared at the blind which was neither black nor grey, but a tint between the two, and as she lay there she saw projected upon the blind a very distinct picture. Three trees on a big and swelling mound. The mound had the shape of an old round tumulus, and the trees were Scotch pines, tall of trunk, with wind-blown, spreading tops.

An hallucination!

She sat up. The thing on the blind had vanished, but it hung vividly before the eyes of her mind, so vividly that she saw the characteristic gestures of the trees.

One of them had a very long, flat branch stretching out horizontally. She got out of bed and pulled up the blind, finding the first greyness of a still, September morning, with a moon low down towards the sea, and no wind moving.

A ghost world.

She was aware of a peculiar impulse. A sketch book and pencil lay on a round table near the window, and they seemed to offer themselves.

Those three trees on the mound!

She had never seen them, and might never see them, but she felt impelled to put them on paper. She slipped on her dressing-gown, sat down, and sketched the tumulus and the Scotch pines as she had seen them on the blind.

Her comments were practical.

"Of course— it was some sort of projection. My subconsciousness. I must have seen three such trees and forgotten them. But where?"

In the morning, when Mrs. Hathaway came in with the breakfast tray, Pauline Marsac showed her the sketch.

"Have you ever seen anything like that?"

Mrs. Hathaway had an immediate answer.

"You have got it exact, Miss."

"What?"

"Why, The Mount."

She looked at Pauline as though to say:

"Why, of course you know it. You've drawn it, and you have eyes in your head."

Pauline said nothing. She picked up the teapot, and glanced for a moment at the window.

"The weather looks better."

"Sure. There's a change. And about time, I think."

It was a day of blue and gold, and Pauline went out with the deliberate purpose of discovering those three Scotch pines. She asked Mrs. Hathaway no questions beyond an enquiry as to the Mount Hall park and gardens.

"Are visitors allowed in?"

"Sure. You would be. Ask at the lodge; there's someone in charge."

Pauline's frank face and her happy smile carried her through most gateways, and the lodge-keeper proved friendly. In this wild Wealden country few people troubled to trespass over a derelict estate, and as the lodge-keeper put it and considering the state of the fences— a stranger might get in and go anywhere without a "by-your-leave." The lady from Mrs. Hathaway's could paint what she pleased. The only person likely to make trouble would be Miss Horn who lived down in the village: "An obstropolous— funny-tempered sort of woman," but she was away at the moment.

Pauline invaded the park. The beauty of it delighted her for it was a place of many vistas that ended in the blue of the hills or the blue of the sea. She wandered, glancing now and again at the white window frames and red walls of the house. Glycine and roses and a vine hung there, and the vine was turning colour. But she had come to discover those three trees; they should form an obvious and a conspicuous landmark, and yet she could not find them.

She wandered for an hour before she tried a narrow green valley running between hanging beechwoods. It took her up and up, curving westwards, to open upon rolling bluffs and great sweeps of turf and bracken, and as she climbed the slopes she saw suddenly before her on the sky line a mound and three tall trees.

"Of course I must have seen it before and not taken it in—consciously," she reflected.

But the knoll and the trees puzzled her. They formed so distinct and arrestive a feature, a landmark not likely to be missed by an artist's eyes. Their wind-blown isolation, their tinted trunks and dark outline would have made her pause, and pause with a little exultant thrill.

"Queer!" she thought.

She climbed the slope behind them. Yes; there was that flat, projecting bough spread like a big hand. The outlines seemed exact, and she was studying the towering tops of the trees when she realized the presence of the man.

He was sitting with his back to one of the trees, his face towards the great sweep of country that ended in the sea. He was quite unaware of her. He had no hat and was dressed in rough tweeds. He just sat and stared seawards with a kind of melancholy fixity as though all the life of the landscape lay in the past,

and he was nothing more than a sad spectator of the present. He was dark and clean shaven, and sombre, a man who would take sorrow hardly, who would not struggle and protest. Weak, yes, in a way, but with elements of fineness, of quixotry. She felt that she had seen him before.

Anyway, he was there, very much in possession, though judging by the look of him he would easily be dispossessed. Her intuition was to sketch these trees and to compare the sketch made from the original with the vision of them she had seen projected upon her bedroom blind.

She walked round the base of the mound, realizing that the man would be in the picture, and she hated being watched when she was at work. Some silly little human figure dotted in the foreground! She glanced up at him. He was staring at her.

She withdrew until she had the mound and the trees at the right distance, and then seated herself on the grass. She was busy with her sketch-book, and when her glance returned to the mound she found that the man had risen and was coming down the hill towards her.

He looked annoyed, but his annoyance included curiosity. And his curiosity had an element of fierceness. She wondered why he made her think of a man who was starving.

His obvious intention was to pass her, but an interchange of glances appeared to make him pause.

"I'll get out of your way," he said.

Pauline Marsac smiled at him.

"Thank you. But I have no right here."

His eyes gave her their melancholy and self-conscious stare.

"Nor have I."

It was his business to walk on, but he hesitated, and she felt that he wanted to ask her some question. The thing that surprised her was that she found herself feeling suddenly and unexplainably sorry for the man, which was absurd, so she took it upon herself to ask him a question.

"I suppose this is The Mount?"

He looked startled.

"Oh— yes—" and his glance touched her sketch-book.

"Thank you. It took me quite a long while to find it."

His eyes narrowed. He stood fidgeting one foot against a grass tussock.

"I suppose you are doing this for Miss Horn?"

Her surprise was obvious.

"I beg your pardon? I am doing it for myself."

"Oh— I thought she might have commissioned you; illustrations— you know— for a book."

Pauline had begun to be more interested in the man than in the trees.

"Is Miss Horn writing a book?"

"I have heard so."

"Let me see, she was Miss Orchardson's cousin, wasn't she?"

"That's so."

"Is it a life of the woman who wrote *Mary Wilberforce*?"

He gave her a queer, flaring look as though he were a wild creature and she had shot an arrow into him.

"She didn't write it," he said.

And then he went past her and down the hill like a man running away from something, leaving her to grope at the meaning of it all. For she felt sure now that she had seen his face somewhere, in a crowd, or in a magazine or picture paper.

She made her sketch of The Mount, and on comparing it with the rough drawing that she had made in the farmhouse bedroom she found an almost complete correspondence between them, though the finished sketch had more atmosphere.

"Well, it's a rum incident," she reflected.

That evening Pauline Marsac decided to paint The Mount, and she went to bed thinking of it, and fell asleep almost at once. Something woke her at the same hour, just between the black and the grey, and she saw The Mount projected upon the blind, but this time there was a figure in the picture, the seated figure of a man.

"Oh, hang it," she thought; "I'm not a sentimentalist. I don't want him there."

She sat up in bed, and it occurred to her with peculiar suddenness that the man had a right to be there, more right than she had.

"Well— anyway— I'll paint those trees," she decided.

When she set out next morning for The Mount Pauline Marsac wondered whether she would find him there. It seemed to her improbable yet likely— fated almost. And he was there, sitting at the foot of the big flat branch spread out like a huge hand or a sounding-board.

He got up and came down to meet her, and she thought that his eyes looked queer. He glanced at all her artist's paraphernalia that she had brought with her.

"Excuse me— are you going to paint this?"

In spite of her curiosity she was annoyed with him for being here. He distracted her.

"I am."

"But what right have you—?"

If there was going to be an argument, she thought that she would get it over straight away.

"No legal right. Do you happen to be the agent or something?"

"I'm nothing!" he said with a touch of dramatic self-pity.

She put down her belongings.

"Yet you seem to suggest—"

"I?"

"Yes— a sort of authority. You seem to come here often— but I'll bet you that the cause of my coming was much more curious. I'll tell you if you are out to question my right to come here."

"I thought that Miss Horn—"

"I know nothing about Miss Horn, save that she was Miss Orchardson's cousin, and took the principal part in proving that Hangard had purloined—"

And then she paused, for she saw on his face a kind of exasperated despair.

"I happen to be Hangard," he said, "and I wrote that book. That's the irony of it—that they should have thought me capable. You see—I loved her."

He looked over her head towards the sea, and she saw that he was smiling, a tormented smile.

"Of course— I don't expect you to believe it. No one does. I'm just a shabby and ingenious cad. The woman got back at me as she always said she would."

"What, Eleanor Orchardson?"

"Good God! no. Kate Horn. Jealousy. But I should never have dreamed—"

Pauline Marsac looked at the three trees.

"Why not tell me about it," she said. "I don't suppose it will take long."

His eyes faltered.

"You wouldn't believe. It sounds too queer."

"Queer things happen. Let's sit under the trees."

She climbed to the top of the mound and he followed her, and stood hesitating.

"Do you mind if I sit there—?"

"Where?"

"At the foot of this tree. She— used to sit here, and I used to lie at her feet. It was here that I told her the plot of 'Mary Wilberforce.' "

She let him have the sacred place, seating herself a little to one side of it.

"The trouble was the manuscript, wasn't it?"

"Yes. You see— it was my first book. In a way she had inspired it. We were rather— devoted. She said the book held the blood of both of us. Kate Horn typed it; she acted as Eleanor's secretary. My publishers never saw the manuscript, only the typescript. Eleanor wanted the original. She had queer whims; she set herself to copy the whole of my manuscript; she said that when

we died I should have her manuscript, and she mine. And then she was killed, just three months before the book was published."

He paused, pulling at the short grass.

"When the book had been out a week my publishers had a most amazing letter."

"From Miss Horn?"

"Exactly. It asserted that Eleanor had written the book— and that I was exploiting the work of a dead woman. My publishers wired to me. I went to see them. I said the whole thing was absurd. They asked for the manuscript. Well, I hadn't got it. I came down here and had a most ghastly row with Kate. She swore there was only one manuscript, Eleanor's.

"Well— what could I do? I had to go through with it. I was bewildered by the woman's vindictiveness. She wrote to the papers. Oh, well, perhaps you know what happened. She produced Eleanor's manuscript, she swore that she had seen Eleanor writing the book, and that she herself had typed it. My tale did look a little lame."

"But then— your previous work?"

"That was just part of the trouble. You see 'Mary Wilberforce,' was different from anything I had done before. It was a thing by itself, an inspiration. The literary experts who were called had to admit this. Even the style was different. So Kate Horn had me in the mud."

Pauline stroked her cheek.

"But couldn't you have written another book— a masterpiece— to prove— ?"

He shrugged.

"I did— at least, I tried to. But things wouldn't come. I was too jarred. I had lost her. And all my thoughts were of trying to find the original manuscript."

"The woman burnt it?"

"But did she? I have a feeling that Kate never had it, that it is hidden away somewhere."

He sat and gloomed. She felt that he was sorry in a way that he had told her, and that he was suffering from an exaggerated sense of humiliation. His attitude towards her became vaguely defiant. Of course she did not believe him.

"What a tragedy," she said.

He remained mute.

"To lose— two such things. And what had you done to the woman Horn that she was so much your enemy?"

"Nothing."

"That was just the reason. Well— I haven't told you how it was I happened to come here."

She could see that he was too absorbed in his own tragedy to care to listen to her gossip, but she thought that it would be good for him to be dragged for a moment out of his slough of despond, so she jumped up and went down to where her things were lying, and returned with her sketch-book.

"I am staying at Yew Tree Farm."

"Oh," he said vaguely.

"The night before last I woke about dawn and saw a picture on my window blind. I had had a feeling that someone had called me by name. 'Pauline Marsac.' The experience was so vivid that I got up and drew what I had seen on the blind, and next morning I showed the sketch to Mrs. Hathaway at the farm, and asked her if she knew any place near here that was like it."

She passed him the original sketch, and watched his face as he examined it.

"But this is The Mount."

"Yes."

"And you say you saw this on your blind, and drew it from memory, though you had never seen it before?"

"It's a fact."

"Extraordinary! So—yesterday—?"

"I was looking for the original. That's how we met. And early this morning I saw The Mount a second time on my blind."

"Just the same?"

"Not quite. There was a figure."

"Hers?"

"No; yours."

He studied the two sketches, and then, handing them back to her, sat and looked towards the sea.

"Do you believe in this sort of thing?"

"What sort of thing?"

"All the psychic stuff?"

"I'm afraid I do."

"But you must have seen these trees before."

"I hadn't; at least, not consciously."

"Ah— that's it."

"Yes; but why should I see them, as I did, projected upon my window blind? That's the point, isn't it? There must be a reason."

"Oh, I suppose so. Possibly."

He appeared sceptical, wilfully so, and she felt that his wilfulness was part of the reaction caused by his suffering. He would not let himself feel or believe that there could be any significance in the incident.

"You have never had any such experience?" she asked him.

"No; nothing definite."

"You are sceptical. But supposing someone who was dead, wanted to get a message to you, a message of vital importance?"

"Well, supposing there was such a message, why should it come through you."

"Obviously, because you are not receptive."

"That's nonsense," he said rather rudely.

And then he apologized.

"I'm sorry. But I'm all on edge. I wish to God I could get some such message."

"With regard to the manuscript of 'Mary Wilberforce'?"

"Ah— if it were possible!"

Pauline spent the day painting The Mount while Stephen Hangard lay on the grass and gloomed. She was conscious of his presence, but it did not distract her, for he kept quiet and did not talk, and about noon he got up and left her. She gathered that he was staying at a farmhouse somewhere between Mount Hill and Beechhurst village.

"That woman comes back to-morrow," he said. "I shall clear out as soon as she returns."

"Isn't that doing what she wants?"

"I can't help it. The thought of her being about here makes me ill."

That night Pauline Marsac's experience was repeated.

She saw The Mount upon her blind, but instead of there being three trees there were four.

The discrepancy astonished her, and she lay awake puzzling over it.

At breakfast she put a question to Mrs. Hathaway.

"By the way, I am painting The Mount. I suppose there were never more than three trees there?"

"There used to be four, Miss."

"Four! You are quite sure?"

"Certain. One of the four died, and was cut down. That must have been about ten years ago."

Her climb to the mound that morning was a flutter of excitement. She had left all her paraphernalia behind, for the artist had been lost in the woman, and she wanted to reach the tumulus before Hangard should arrive if he

intended paying the place a last visit. Her curiosity centred itself about that fourth tree; she wondered whether there was any vestige of it remaining.

The Mount was deserted, and she had no trouble in discovering the position of the fourth tree. A slight swelling of the turf on the very summit of the mound partly concealed the old stump, and a portion of the old butt protruded. One or two of the twisted roots were visible, and she noticed that a rabbit had been scratching in the grassy hollow between two of the roots.

"That ought to satisfy him," she thought.

Glancing seawards she discovered him far below her on the green slope toiling slowly upwards. She waved. Her excitement stood unconcealed.

"I have found something."

He heard her, and came hurrying with eager and upturned face.

"What is it?"

"Last night I saw a fourth tree. There was a fourth tree. I have found the stump of it."

He looked vastly disappointed, and he made no attempt to conceal it.

"I'm afraid the discovery leaves me cold."

"Heavens!" she said, "with your imagination, too! Lend me your stick."

She seized it from him, and running to the top of the mound she began to poke at the turf about the butt of the vanished tree, while Hangard stood and watched her with ironic gloom. What did she expect to find there, this absurd but rather charming creature with the bright eyes. And suddenly he saw the stick disappear for half its length into the green turf, like a stage dagger that slides into its hilt.

Her eyes were all lit up. He heard her cry out.

"Oh— come, feel this."

He put his hand to the crook of the stick.

"Tap— tap gently."

He obeyed her, and felt the jarring of the ferrule upon a metallic surface.

"There's a hollow there, and something in it. Don't you realize—?"

It took them less than twenty minutes— working with stick and hands— to grub the thing from the hollow under the tree stump. They knelt and stared at it in silence, a black deed-box, sealed, and with E. Orchardson painted in white upon the top. The box was locked.

"Well— your scepticism—"

"Scepticism! What's in it? If—"

She laid a hand on his shoulder.

"One moment, had it not better be opened officially— before witnesses?"

He nodded.

"There's old Carfax, her lawyer, down in the village."

"Yes; and what about Kate Horn? Wouldn't it be as well—?"

"My God," he said, "if it should prove—!"

AT SIX O'CLOCK that evening the strange affair was carried to its crisis. They had had to wait till six for Kate Horn's arrival. She came in with those cold and defiant eyes of hers set hard in her thin pale face. Old Carfax waggled his pince-nez at her.

"This box, Miss Horn, do you know anything of it?"

She stared at the thing on the table, and her face twitched slightly.

"No; nothing."

"It has been found. We thought it fair that you should be present. Smith, you can get to work."

When the local locksmith bent over the box Miss Horn gave Hangard one look of hatred and defiance. But Hangard's eyes were watching the man. It seemed to him a long while before the lid was raised, and old Carfax— bending over the box— took out a parcel and a letter.

He read the writing on the envelope and then looked over the tops of his glasses at Hangard.

"It is addressed to you in Miss Orchardson's writing. And this parcel."

Hangard, white as the paper, broke the pink tapes that bound the parcel. He turned back the wrappings.

"My manuscript! The manuscript of *Mary Wilberforce*! The letter— her letter. It explains. Eleanor had buried it— there."

End