

PAST 193 MASTERS

James Hilton
William Mcleod Raine
A. Hyatt Verrill
Max Afford
Miles Franklin
Sinclair Lewis
Cicely Fox Smith
Temple Bailey
Maxwell Struthers Burt

and more

PAST MASTERS 193

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

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1: One Night, Long Ago

James Hilton

1900-1954

Good Housekeeping, June 1941

ALL this happened many years ago, no matter exactly when or where; many other far more important things have happened since...

GEORGE BURNHAM would go far (somebody once said) if he lived long enough, and he probably would, since he was as careful about his health as about everything else. And his acquaintances knew also that the far distance would be achieved, not by any spectacular jumping or desperate frontal attack, but by neatly graduated steps. For George was sound, dependable, shrewd; George kept on passing examinations, saved his money, didn't drink or smoke; and his natural nervousness was counterbalanced by an immense and private conceit that remained unsuspected even by his closest friends. He had intelligent worries, too— not only about his future, but about *the* future, about the state of the country in general, and in particular about the trend of stock markets during the ensuing year— though all such worries, of course, only made him work harder at his job in a lawyer's office.

All in all, it didn't seem possible for George to fail in life, given a world in which virtue was even the least bit rewarded, and George's employers, the firm of Attenborough, Thriplow, Thriplow, and Turnberry, held as high an opinion of him as did Mary Attenborough, whose beauty was (one would have thought) reward enough for more virtues than most men have.

Mary and George were just "friends;" but it was part of George's plan to marry her someday, if only he could summon enough courage to propose. He was terribly scared of being turned down; yet his secret pride assured him that she doubtless inherited her father's smartness in knowing something good when he saw it. And George really was good— physically, mentally, and morally. The thing to do, of course, was to go on being just friends and concealing his real intentions until the Exactly Right Moment for disclosing them.

Of course, George's real intentions were not concealed from Mary at all. She knew he would someday propose to her, and she guessed she would probably accept.

There came a certain evening in June of a certain year when George felt the Right Moment might well be at hand, because on that particular evening Mary had been the witness of one of those small, almost imperceptible triumphs in which George's career abounded.

It had happened at a meeting of a local literary society to which George belonged. Literature was not really a source of much enjoyment to George, but for that very reason he felt it must be good for him; so it was one of the many things he cultivated in his spare time. And when Mr. Harvey Hedsall, famous not only as a corporation lawyer but as a book collector, consented to give a talk about his first editions, George not only contrived to be chairman at the meeting, but he learned by heart a speech in which he briefly mentioned Shakespeare, Plato, the disquieting state of the country, and the eminence of Mr. Hedsall.

I should add that George was only twenty-two and that his natural nervousness had made it very hard for him to become a public speaker. He had, however, set his mind to it, and finally he could occupy five minutes at any time in saying exactly the Right Thing. For George had a feeling for the Right Thing equal, if not superior, to his feeling for the Right Moment.

HE made his speech, and it was excellently received. He had wanted Mary to sit on the platform with him; but she had declined. Among the audience, though, she could perhaps better realize the success he had been. And as he kept glancing at her in the third row, he hoped she would be thrilling with as much pride in him as he was in himself. When he met her later, his mood was almost ebullient.

"But, Mary, you shouldn't have slipped away afterward. Why didn't you let me introduce you to Mr. Hedsall? Plenty of people stayed and introduced themselves."

"Oh, it doesn't matter, George," Mary answered cheerfully. "There's really not much point in meeting people you don't particularly feel you have things in common with. Life's too short."

George flashed her a look of puzzlement, in which there possibly lurked the faintest shadow of reproof. A side of her existed, he had to admit, that he didn't properly understand.

"Well, anyhow," he continued, "Mr. Hedsall couldn't have been nicer to me afterward. We talked for quite a time in the little room behind the platform, though there was a stream of other people wanting to talk to him, and when I saw him out to his car, he shook hands and said he hoped we should meet again."

"Well, I hope so, too," Mary said, "if you liked him."

"I think he might be a very useful man to know," replied George thoughtfully.

And then it was, as he took Mary's arm, that it suddenly occurred to him to top his triumph by making a definite proposal of marriage that very evening. Of

course, he would be careful to add that he wasn't suggesting any immediate step— he was quite willing, indeed it would be only prudent, to wait till his salary had reached a certain figure, and what this figure would be, of course, they could settle by amicable discussion.

Just as for the Right Moment and the Right Thing, George had a feeling for the Right Place. Now it happened that Mary lived with her parents in a smart suburb across the river, while George had a couple of rented rooms in the city itself; so that often, when they had been out for the evening, he took Mary home by the midnight ferryboat. This means of transportation offered rows of deck seats, which could be quite suitably romantic on a June night, and the trip took twenty or twenty-five minutes, according to the tide— time enough for a fellow to propose to a girl who, he hoped but wasn't quite certain, could weigh future prospects as well as present actualities.

It must be admitted that the deck seats were much sought after, and George, knowing this, led Mary down to the pier by half-past eleven, at which time passengers were allowed on board. He was thus able to commandeer one of the more secluded seats, and wise he was to think of it, for the boat soon began to fill up, and within a few minutes all the other seats were taken.

GEORGE was perhaps as confident that night as he could be. Taking his hat off, he let the salty zephyrs riffle pleasantly through his neatly parted hair, breathing meanwhile deep gusts into his lungs— inhalations that he hoped would somehow quiet his nervousness and give him power to say the Right Things when the Right Moment came. It was certainly a well-chosen scene. The blue-black sky was overhead, and dark water lapped peacefully below; ropes twisted and strained as the tide pulled hard against the hull. A hurricane lamp on the captain's bridge sent down a cone of pallor that rather accentuated than dispelled the mystery of the night. Soon the gangways would be drawn up and the paddle wheels begin to revolve, churning a corridor of foam in a wide curve under the moon. Then, he felt, would come the Finally Perfect Moment. He was envisaging it with gathering hopefulness when suddenly, as his fingers idly roamed along the brim of his hat, a jarring awareness intruded.

Simply an awareness that *this* was not his hat.

To be sure, it looked like it, and it had fitted him normally during the short walk from the meeting to the pier; but he knew, from the sensation in his fingertips, that it wasn't his.

Now George (give him his due) was an honest fellow, and the first thing he did was to hold the hat in the cone of light from the hurricane lamp. An examination of the lining revealed something that caused him to exclaim, with a note of startled dismay, "My goodness, Mary, I've got Mr. Hedsall's hat!"

"Have you, George?"

"I must have taken it by mistake. Yes, I remember now— mine wasn't on the hook where I left it before the meeting, and there was such a crowd afterward in that room behind the platform our things must have got mixed up."

"Well, it's all right. You can send it back to him tomorrow."

"But he's leaving tonight— by the midnight train, he told me— and besides, he's probably got *my* hat. So he'll guess who took *his*."

"Maybe he took yours first, and it was his mistake."

"But don't you see, this is a better hat— he might think it wasn't a mistake on my part at all."

"Nonsense, George, I'm sure he won't."

"He *might*. Anyhow, he's bound to be annoyed. A pity, after the good impression I think I made on him."

"Oh, George, don't worry about it."

"I'm not exactly worrying— I'm just anxious to do the right thing."

George was silent for a time, and Mary knew so well from experience what his silence signified that she was not enormously surprised when he resumed, in a rather troubled voice: "Of course, there's only one thing to do really. I ought to catch him before his train leaves. Then at least he'll know it was a genuine mistake and that I did my best to rectify it."

"You mean go now?"

"There's time if I make a dash for it." He got up from his seat. "It's only a few minutes to the station. Yes, Mary, that's what I'd better do. Do you mind?"

"Not if you feel you must. I don't suppose I can keep your seat for you."

"Yes. I see... Well, I'll hurry, anyway." He moved off quickly and disappeared toward the gangway. As he pressed through the stream of people and explained his situation to the ticket officer on duty, he felt a twinge of disappointment about the seat he had surrendered. It was probably true— she wouldn't be able to keep it for him. And without that seat, so romantically secluded, how would he be able to achieve that supremely Right Conjunction of Time and Place so necessary for saying the Right Thing? Probably now he wouldn't risk proposing at all that evening. It was a pity having to postpone things; but it couldn't be helped.

One thing George knew for certain— he could never have got to the proposing stage with Mr. Hedsall's hat either on his head or on his mind.

MARY smiled slightly into the darkness. She was fond of George, though curiously unworried as to whether he would find Mr. Hedsall or be back in time to catch the boat. That also didn't seem to matter much.

Suddenly she realized that someone in the next seat was leaning toward her out of the shadows. A man's voice said quietly, "Your friend sounded rather upset."

She turned, startled; but before she had considered the propriety of answering, her answer came: "Oh, it's nothing. He just took someone else's hat and wants to return it, that's all. He'd better be quick, though. There really isn't too much time to spare."

The stranger looked at his watch in the cone of light. While he did so, she could half-see his face; it was an interesting face. "Nearly half an hour," he said. "More, probably. They never leave right on the dot."

She decided then against continuing a conversation with a stranger and so made no reply; but she felt him glancing at her sideways, as if waiting for one. Presently he pulled paper and pencil out of his pocket and seemed to be busy making notes about something. Well, that was all right. Evidently he had just meant to be friendly.

About ten minutes went by, during which he seemed entirely absorbed in his note taking. Then abruptly he spoke again. "I wonder if you can guess what I've just been doing?"

"Probably not," she said, without encouragement.

"I've been writing some verses."

"Oh?"

"Would you mind if I were to read them to you?"

What could one say? He still sounded friendly; he had a rather pleasant voice; too many people were near for him to be anything worse than a temporary nuisance; and George would be back soon.

"You don't really mind, do you?" he continued.

"Not particularly," she said, trying to seem more indifferent than she really felt, for she had already the beginnings of curiosity.

"Well, that's fine." And he read, very softly and in hardly more than a whisper, the following:

*"I met you on the ferryboat. You said,
'There really isn't too much time to spare;'
And something— Heaven knows what— your lovely head,
Your words, or else the moonlight on your hair,
Gave me an oddish urge, a strange desire
To know you, hold you, and suddenly
Touch your sweet lips, and cry, with heart afire,
'You, you— in all the world— are meant for me!'
And if I had, whatever else may be,
You would have remembered me for that;
But as I merely turned to where you sat,*

*And said, 'They never leave right on the dot,'
You smiled, and didn't answer, and forgot."*

As his voice faded into silence, she was again aware that he was staring at her, as if awaiting a reply. Then she realized that the silence was an illusion, a strange world into which his words had somehow beguiled her; actually the neighborhood was full of sounds— men and women talking and laughing, children scampering noisily and being scolded by their parents, the engines already throbbing.

"Well?" he said after a pause.

"Well?" she answered.

He laughed pleasantly. "Is that all you can say?"

"What do you want me to say? I'm not competent to give you any expert criticism."

"Oh, you aren't? Well, as it happens, that isn't exactly what I was after."

"Of course, if you want an outsider's opinion, it's quite clever— for something done on the spur of the moment. I once heard the same sort of thing done as a stage trick by somebody— I forget who."

"A stage trick! I'm a writer!"

"My goodness, how very, very interesting."

"You make me wonder if you really took in what I read. You're treating it so— so casually."

"Well," she asked, "how else should I treat it? Not seriously, I should hope?"

"So you do realize what it meant?"

"I heard what you read."

He laughed again. "But you're extraordinary! You might have been offended and walked off, or you might have been so embarrassed you wouldn't have been able to say a word, or you might have been— forgive me— so flattered you'd have gone all coy and confidential. But just to take it in your stride, like this, almost as if you're used to having confessions of love made to you in rhymed verse— "

"Evidently you're used to making them, or else why did you expect me to behave so differently?"

"Look here, let's be quite certain we know what we're talking about. It's true I have a knack for making my thoughts rhyme and scan; but that poem wasn't merely a literary exercise, and I've never written or read anything like it before. It's a new experience for me, whether it is for you or not. Do you believe me? I mean, do you believe that I'm telling the truth?"

"Well, if you are, it's just absurd and, really, rather unthinkable."

"You mean you reject entirely the possibility of anyone's falling in love at first sight? You know, of course, that it's been exploited in countless novels and plays— in fact, it's almost a stock-in-trade of writers, good and bad."

"Oh, yes, I know that."

"And you think they're all wrong? That they've just been writing about something that doesn't exist?"

"I didn't say that. It may exist, for all I know; but whether it does or not, you don't have to cross-examine me as if I were on trial for my life."

"THAT'S just what you are— and so am I. But let that pass. If you admit that falling in love at first sight can happen, that's enough; because all I claim is that it has happened— to me five minutes ago. The only difference between me and others is that I'm confessing it to the person concerned rather sooner than usual."

"Exactly. That's why it's so absurd."

"But wouldn't it be more absurd to say nothing about it and let the chance pass by? Listen— I saw you when you came on this boat with your friend. Something happened to me then. You and I were strangers. I had no means of forcing myself on you— your friend would naturally have objected if I had. By the way, who is your friend? Are you engaged to him?"

"Suppose I said he was my husband?"

"I shouldn't believe you. Let's go on calling him your friend. Chance took him away, giving me twenty or thirty precious moments to convey as much as most men spread over weeks or months. Just think— thirty minutes to arrange the affairs of a lifetime! Suppose I hadn't used those minutes, or had wasted them in idle chatter? Then I'd certainly never have seen you again as long as our two lives last. Don't you see that I had to violate the conventions— had to break down the barriers? Just think of it— thirty minutes."

"Ten of which you devoted to composing a poem."

"Yes, and do you know why? Because I'm a gambler. I took a chance within a chance. I guessed that if I told you the truth in prose, you'd have called the captain and told him there was a maniac on board or something. You might have."

"Yes, I might have."

"But you listened to the poem because you didn't quite know at first what it was all about, and by the time you did know, it was too late to object."

"Too foolish, also, after I'd been foolish enough to listen." She gave a little sigh. "Well, we'll admit we've both been foolish, and now your time's half gone, so let's talk about something else."

"Ourselves."

"Yourself if you like. But stick to facts."

"My name's Michael Croft. I've got a job of sorts on a paper; but I don't suppose I'll keep it long. I don't usually keep jobs. I sell a few stories now and again. I'm not very successful; but I'm pretty happy, one way and another. You'd like my friends. They're not quite so crazy as I am, and of course I'm not really so crazy myself as I must have seemed to you up to now."

"I should hope not."

"I'm good fun, though. You wouldn't be bored."

"Just stick to the facts."

"THAT reminds me, I'll be under the clock in the Market Square at noon tomorrow. I'll wait for you."

"You'll wait a long time."

"I don't mind. Any time you can manage."

"I thought we were going to drop the nonsense."

"Nonsense?"

"Well, fun, if you like. It is a bit funny, once one sees it from the right angle."

"But I'm perfectly serious. Tomorrow at noon."

"Look here, will you please realize that, though I don't feel offended or tongue-tied or flattered, I can't go on being amused at the same joke, and I haven't the slightest intention of meeting you tomorrow?"

"So you don't want to see me again— ever?"

"Why should I?"

"There's only one sensible reason— you dislike me. All right, I accept that. Instinctive dislike is like sudden infatuation— it can't be argued about. Some people loathe tomatoes. They can't tell you why, and it's silly to ask them. Believe me, I understand."

"Oh, do stop putting words into my mouth! I never said I disliked you."

"No? Then you mean you do like me?"

"It's not a matter of liking or disliking. I don't know you, so how— "

"How much do you have to know somebody before you agree to meet him again? Suppose you're at a dinner party and your host puts you next to an old bore, who asks you next week to one of *her* dinner parties, what do you say— yes or no?"

"No, if I can think of an excuse. Life's too short to do that sort of thing, and that's the second time this evening I've said it."

"Oh? What was the other?"

"It doesn't matter, and if you don't mind, Mr. Cross, we'll change the subject."

"Croft's the name, not Cross. And you didn't tell me yours."

"I'm not going to— and please stop asking me questions. Why not make ordinary conversation for a few minutes, just to show that you can?"

"I can't if I think I'm never to see you again. But once I know I shall, then I'll make ordinary conversation about anything you like— yes, anything in the world. The world itself, if you want. It's a pretty exciting world, don't you find? When you think how big and terrible and lonely the universe is, and how long eternity is, isn't the mere fact of being alive at any given moment the most amazing piece of luck? So whatever you do, don't waste it. Don't throw away chances. Have friends. Have fun. Marry the man you love and have a dozen children."

"And you call this ordinary conversation?"

"Yes— between you and me. We've got to exchange ideas. Isn't that what you were complaining about just now— that you didn't know me? You will soon, because I've got no secrets. Ask me anything you like— cross-examine me. I don't mind."

In the midst of her laughter the boat siren suddenly sounded.

"Come on, now— hurry," he shouted above the din. "You've got two more minutes. Fire away some questions."

She was still laughing. "All right, then. Do you smoke?"

"Yes, far too much."

"Drink?"

"I don't ever get drunk, if that's what you mean."

"Gamble?"

"I said I was a gambler. But not for money."

"Belong to any literary societies?"

"Good Lord, no. And look here, I'm not that sort of fellow at all. I don't like meetings and societies and social stuff. Life's too short, as you yourself said. Give me my own friends, give me good food and a good argument like the one we're having now, give me good books to read and now and then a good book to write— at least I hope there'll be one someday."

"So that's your ambition?"

"One of them. You know the other. My dear— whoever you are, I mean it, and it's the truth, and it's also the truth that I'll be waiting tomorrow at noon under the clock, whether you turn up or not, and that's all I can say, because your friend's just coming back."

That was true, too. George was just coming back.

ALL this happened years ago, no matter exactly when and where; many other far more important things have happened since.

MICHAEL CROFT'S real name is one you may possibly have come across. He has written a few books that have attracted some attention. On the whole, his life has been one of striving, full of ups and downs, but with a good deal of happiness interspersed, always plenty of friends, never much money, and a large and uproarious family to spend it on. Naturally, he looks back on that midnight ferryboat trip as a turning point in his life, since it was then that he met Mrs. Croft.

But the odd thing is that George Burnham also looks back on that same evening as a turning point. George has gone far, as people said he would. He is rich and socially prominent. He belongs to all the right societies and also to the right society. You would certainly know *his* real name if I mentioned it. He married rather late in life— a Miss Shovelton. He has an only son at a university— rather a scapegrace, from all accounts, and that worries him a bit. In fact, it's just another of the numerous worries he has nowadays— income tax, the state of the country, his future, *the* future, and the possibility that the stock market hasn't any.

Sometimes he bores his son by reminiscing. "Let this be a lesson to you, my boy— always do the Right Thing at the Right Moment, however small or trivial it may seem to be. If I hadn't returned the hat to Mr. Hadsell promptly that night, the good impression I'd already made on him would have been destroyed, and I'm sure I should never have become a partner in the firm of Hedsall, Burnham, Ledgwood, and Shovelton. Think of *that!*"

2: The Voice from the Inner World

A. Hyatt Verrill

1871-1954

Amazing Stories July 1927

ON THE EIGHTEENTH of October, the New York papers reported the appearance of a remarkable meteor which had been seen in mid-Pacific, and the far more startling announcement that it was feared that the amazing celestial visitor had struck and destroyed a steamship.

"At eleven-fifteen last evening," read the account in the *Herald*, "the Panama-Hawaiian Line steamship *Chiriqui* reported by radio the appearance of an immense meteor which suddenly appeared above the horizon to the southeast, and which increased rapidly in size and brilliance. Within ten minutes from the time the phenomenon was first sighted, it appeared as a huge greenish sphere of dazzling brilliance high in the sky, and heading, apparently, directly for the *Chiriqui*. Almost at the same time as reported by the *Chiriqui*, several other ships, among them the Miners and Merchants Line *Vulcan*, and the Japanese liner *Fujiama Maru* also reported the meteorite, although they were more than one thousand miles apart and equidistant from the position of the *Chiriqui*.

"In the midst of a sentence describing the appearance of the rapidly approaching meteor, the *Chiriqui's* wireless message came to an abrupt end, and all attempts to get into further communication with her operator failed. The other vessels reported that a scintillating flash, like an explosion, was followed by the meteor's disappearance, and it is feared that the immense aerolite may have struck the *Chiriqui*, and utterly destroyed her with all on board. As no S O S has been received, and as the ship's radio broke off with the words: 'It is very close and the sea is as bright as day. Below the immense mass of green fire are two smaller spheres of intense red. It is so near we can hear it roaring like a terrific wind. It is headed—' It is probable that the vessel, if struck, was instantly destroyed. It has been suggested, however, that it is possible that the meteor or meteors were accompanied by electrical phenomena which may have put the *Chiriqui's* wireless apparatus out of commission and that the ship may be safe."

Later editions of the press announced that no word had been received from the *Chiriqui*, that other ships had reported the meteor, and that two of these had radioed that the aerolite, instead of exploding, had been seen to continue on its way and gradually disappear beyond the horizon. These reports somewhat allayed the fears that the *Chiriqui* had been struck by the meteor, and prominent scientists expressed the opinion that the supposed explosion

had been merely an optical illusion caused by its passage through some dense or cloudy layer of air. They also quoted numerous cases of immense meteors having been seen by observers over immense distances, and declared their belief that the aerolite had not reached the earth, but had merely passed through the outer atmosphere. When asked regarding the possibility of the meteor having affected the ship's wireless apparatus, experts stated that such might have been the case, although, hitherto, severe electrical disturbances had never been associated with the passage of meteors. Moreover, they declared that even if the wireless had been injured, it could have been repaired in a few hours, and that they could not explain the continued silence of the *Chiriqui*. Word also came from Panama that the naval commandant at Balboa had despatched a destroyer to search for the *Chiriqui*, or any survivors of the catastrophe if the ship had been destroyed.

A few hours later, despatches were received from various points in Central and South America, reporting the meteor of the previous night. All of these agreed that the fiery mass had swept across the heavens in a wide arc and had vanished in the east beyond the summits of the Andes.

It was, therefore, fairly certain that the *Chiriqui* had not been struck by the meteor, and in a few days the incident was completely forgotten by the public at large.

But when, ten days later, the warship reported that no sign of the missing ship could be found, and the officials of the Panama-Hawaiian Line admitted that the *Chiriqui* was four days overdue, interest was again aroused. Then came the startling news, featured in screaming headlines, that the meteor or its twin had been again reported by various ships in the Pacific, and that the U. S. S. *McCracken*, which had been scouring the seas for traces of the missing *Chiriqui*, had sent in a detailed report of the meteor's appearance, and that her wireless had gone "dead," exactly as had that of the *Chiriqui*.

And when, after every effort, no communication could be established with the war vessel, and when two weeks had elapsed without word from her, it was generally conceded that both ships had been destroyed by the amazing celestial visitor. For a time the double catastrophe filled the papers to the exclusion of nearly everything else, and such everyday features as scandals and murder trials were crowded to the back pages of the dailies to make room for long articles on meteors and missing ships and interviews with scientists. But as no more meteors appeared, and as no more ships vanished, the subject gradually lost interest and was no longer news.

About three months after the first report of the green meteor appeared (on January fifteenth, to be exact) I was in Peru, visiting my daughter, when I received a communication of such an utterly amazing character that it

appeared incredible, and yet was so borne out by facts and details that it had all the earmarks of truth. So astounding was this communication that, despite the fact that it will unquestionably be scoffed at by the public, I feel that it should be given to the world. As soon as I had received the story I hurried with it to the American Minister in Lima, and related all that I had heard. He agreed with me that the authorities at Washington should be acquainted with the matter at once, and together we devoted many hours to coding the story which was cabled in the secret cipher of the State Department. The officials, however, were inclined to regard the matter as a hoax, and, as far as I am aware, no steps have yet been taken to follow out the suggestions contained in the communication which I received, and thus save humanity from a terrible fate. Personally, I am convinced that the amazing tale which came to me in such an astounding and unexpected manner is absolutely true, incredible as it may seem, but whether fact or fiction, my readers may decide for themselves.

My son-in-law was intensely interested in radio, and devoted all of his spare time to devising and constructing receiving sets, and in his home in the delightful residential suburb of Miraflores, were a number of receiving sets of both conventional and original design. Having been closely in touch with the subject for several years, I was deeply interested in Frank's experiments, and especially in a new type of hook-up which had given most remarkable results in selectivity and distance. Practically every broadcasting station in America, and many in Europe, had been logged by the little set, and on several occasions faint signals had been heard which, although recognizable as English, evidently emanated from a most remote station. These, oddly enough, had come in at the same hour each night, and each time had continued for exactly the same length of time.

We were discussing this, and trying to again pick up the unintelligible and unidentified signals on that memorable January evening, when, without warning, and as clearly as though sent from the station at Buenos Ayres, came the most astounding communication which ever greeted human ears, and which, almost verbatim, was as follows*:

** The message as it came in, was halting, and interrupted, with many unintelligible words and repetitions, as if the sender were laboring under an intense strain or was an amateur. For the sake of clarity and continuity, the communication has been edited and filled in, but not altered in any detail.*

"LISTEN! For God's sake, I implore all who may hear my words to listen! And believe what I say no matter how unbelievable it may seem, for the fate of thousands of human beings, the fate of the human race may depend upon you

who by chance may hear this message from another world. My name is James Berry, my home is Butte, Montana, my profession a mining engineer, and I am speaking through the short wave transmitter of the steamship *Chiriqui* on which I was a passenger when the terrible, the incredible events occurred which I am about to relate. On the evening of October sixteenth * the *Chiriqui* was steaming across the Pacific in calm weather when our attention was attracted by what appeared to be an unusually brilliant meteor of a peculiar greenish color.

* The metropolitan papers reported the meteor on the eighteenth and stated it was observed by those on the *Chiriqui* on the evening of the seventeenth, but it must be remembered that the *Chiriqui* was in the western Pacific and hence had gained a day in time.

It first appeared above the horizon to the southeast, and very rapidly increased in size and brilliancy. At the time I was particularly struck by the fact that it left no trail of light or fire behind it, as is usual with large meteorites, but so rapidly did it approach that I had little time to wonder at this. Within a few moments from the time that it was first seen, the immense sphere of green incandescence had grown to the size of the moon, and the entire sea for miles about our ship was illuminated by a sickly green light. It appeared to be headed directly towards our ship, and, standing as I was on the bridge-deck near the wheel-house, I heard the chief officer cry out: 'My God, it will strike us!' By now the mass of fire had altered in appearance, and a short distance below the central green mass could be seen two smaller spheres of blinding red, like huge globes of molten metal. By now, too, the noise made by the meteor was plainly audible, sounding like the roar of surf or the sound of a tornado.

"Everyone aboard the ship was panic-stricken; women screamed, men cursed and shouted, and the crew rushed to man the boats, as everyone felt that the *Chiriqui* was doomed. What happened next I can scarcely describe, so rapidly did the events occur. As the meteor seemed about to hurl itself upon the ship, there was a blinding flash of light, a terrific detonation, and I saw men and women falling to the decks as if struck down by shell fire. The next instant the meteor vanished completely, and intense blackness followed the blinding glare. At the same moment, I was aware of a peculiar pungent, suffocating odor which, perhaps owing to my long experience with deadly gases in mining work, I at once recognized as some noxious gas. Almost involuntarily, and dully realizing that by some miracle the ship had escaped destruction, I dashed below and reached my cabin almost overcome by the fumes which now penetrated every portion of the ship. Among my possessions was a new type of gas-mask which had been especially designed for mine work, and my idea

was to do this, for I felt sure that the meteor had exploded close to the ship and had released vast quantities of poisonous gases which might hang about for a long time.

"Although almost overcome by the choking fumes, I managed to find and put on the apparatus, for one of its greatest advantages was the rapidity and ease with which it could be adjusted, it having been designed for emergency use. But before it was fairly in place over my face, the electric light in my room went out and I was in complete darkness. Also, the ship seemed strangely still, and as I groped my way to the stateroom door it suddenly dawned upon me that the engines had stopped, that there was no longer the whirr of dynamos from the depths of the hull. Not a light glimmered in the passageway, and twice, as I felt my way towards the social hall, I stumbled over the sprawled bodies of men, while in the saloon itself I several times stepped upon the soft and yielding flesh of passengers who lay where they had been struck down by the poisonous gas. In all probability, I thought, I was the sole survivor aboard the ship, unless some of the firemen and engineers survived, and I wondered how I would manage to escape, if the vessel should be sighted by some other ship, or if it should be my gruesome task to search the *Chiriqui* from stem to stern, drag the bodies of the dead to the deck and cast them into the sea, and remain—perhaps for weeks—alone upon the ship until rescued by some passing vessel. But as I reached the door and stepped upon the deck all such thoughts were driven from my brain as I blinked my eyes and stared about in dumfounded amazement. I had stepped from Stygian darkness into dazzling light. Blinded for the moment, I closed my eyes, and when I again opened them I reeled to the rail with a cry of terror. Poised above the ship's masts, and so enormous that it appeared to shut out half the sky, was the stupendous meteor like a gigantic globe of green fire, and seemingly less than one hundred feet above me. Still nearer, and hanging but a few yards above the bow and stern of the ship, were the two smaller spheres of glowing red. Cowering against the rail, expecting to be shrivelled into a charred cinder at any instant, I gazed transfixed and paralyzed at the titanic masses of flaming light above the ship.

"Then reason came back to me. My only chance to escape was to leap into the sea, and I half clambered upon the rail prepared to take the plunge. A scream, like that of a madman, came from my lips. Below me was no sign of the waves, but a limitless void, while, immeasurably distant beneath the ship, I could dimly see the crinkled surface of the sea. The *Chiriqui* was floating in space!

"It was impossible, absolutely preposterous, and I felt convinced that I had gone mad, or that the small quantity of gas I had breathed had affected my

brain and had induced the nightmarish vision. Perhaps, I thought, the meteors above the ship were also visionary, and I again stared upward. Then, I knew that I was insane. The spheres of green and red light were rushing upward as I could see by the brilliant stars studding the sky, and the ship upon which I stood was following in their wake! Weak, limp as a rag, I slumped to the deck and lay staring at the great globes above me. But the insanely impossible events which had crowded upon my overwrought senses were as nothing to the amazing discovery I now made.

"As my eyes became accustomed to the glare of the immense green sphere, I saw that instead of being merely a ball of fire it had definite form. About its middle extended a broad band from which slender rods of light extended. Round or ovoid spots seemed placed in definite order about it, and from the extremities of its axes lines or cables, clearly outlined by the glare, extended downward to the red spheres above the ship. By now, I was so firmly convinced that I was irrational, that these new and absolutely stunning discoveries did not excite or surprise me in the least, and as if in a particularly vivid dream, I lay there gazing upward, and dully, half consciously speculating on what it all meant. Gradually, too, it dawned upon me that the huge sphere with its encircling band of duller light was rotating. The circular markings, which I thought were marvelously like the ports of a ship, were certainly moving from top to bottom of the sphere, and I could distinctly hear a low, vibrant humming.

"The next second I jerked upright with a start and my scalp tingled. Reason had suddenly returned to me. The thing was no meteor, no celestial body, but some marvelous machine, some devilish invention of man, some gigantic form of airship which—God only knew why—had by some incredible means captured the *Chiriqui*, had lifted the twenty thousand ton ship into the air and was bearing her off with myself, the only survivor of all the ship's company, witnessing the miraculous happening! It was the most insane thought that had yet entered my brain, but I knew now for a certainty that I was perfectly sane, and, oddly enough, now that I was convinced that the catastrophe which had overtaken the *Chiriqui* was the devilish work of human beings, I was no longer frightened and my former nightmarish terror of things unknown, gave place to the most intense anger and an inexpressible hatred of the fiends who, without warning or reason, had annihilated hundreds of men and women by means of this new and irresistible engine of destruction. But I was helpless. Alone upon the stolen and stricken ship I could do nothing. By what tremendous force the spherical airship was moving through space, by what unknown power it was lifting the ship and carrying it,—slung like the gondola of a Zeppelin beneath the sphere,—were matters beyond my comprehension. Calmly, now that I felt

assured that I was rational and was the victim of my fellow men—fiendish as they might be,—I walked aft to where one red sphere hung a few yards above the ship's deck.

"There seemed no visible connection between it and the vessel, but I noticed that everything movable upon the deck, the iron cable, the wire ropes, the coiled steel lines of the after derrick, all extended upward from the deck, as rigid as bars of metal, while crackling blue sparks like electrical discharges scintillated from the ship's metal work below the red sphere. Evidently, I decided, the red mass was actuated by some form of electrical energy or magnetism, and I gave the area beneath it a wide berth. Retracing my way to the bow of the ship, I found similar conditions there. As I walked towards the waist of the ship again I mounted the steps to the bridge, hoping from that height to get a better view of the monstrous machine holding the *Chiriqui* captive. I knew that in the chart-house I would find powerful glasses with which to study the machine. Upon the bridge the bodies of the quartermaster, the first officer and an apprentice lay sprawled grotesquely, and across the chart-house door lay the captain. Reaching down I lifted him by the shoulders to move him to one side, and to my amazement I discovered that he was not dead. His heart beat, his pulse, though slow and faint, was plain, he was breathing and his face, still ruddy, was that of a sleeping man rather than of a corpse.

"A wild thought rushed through my brain, and hastily I rushed to the other bodies. There was no doubt of it. All were alive and merely unconscious. The gas had struck them down, but had not killed them, and it came to me as a surprise, though I should long before have realized it, that the fumes had been purposely discharged by the beings who had captured the vessel. Possibly, I mentally decided, they had made a mistake and had failed in their intention to destroy the persons upon the ship, or again, was it not possible that they had intentionally rendered the ship's company unconscious, and had not intended to destroy their lives? Forgetting my original purpose in visiting the bridge, I worked feverishly to resuscitate the captain, but all to no purpose. Many gases, I knew, would render a man unconscious without actually injuring him, and I was also aware, that when under the influence of some of these, the victims could not be revived until the definite period of the gases' effect had passed. So, feeling certain that in due time the captain and the others would come to of their own accord, I entered the chartroom and, securing the skipper's binoculars, I again stepped upon the bridge. As I could not conveniently use the glasses with my gas-mask in place, and as I felt sure there was no longer any danger from the fumes, I started to remove the apparatus. But no sooner did a breath of the air enter my mouth than I hastily readjusted

the contrivance, for the gas which had struck down everyone but myself was as strong as ever. Indeed, the mere whiff of the fumes made my head reel and swim, and I was forced to steady myself by grasping the bridge-rail until the dizzy spell passed.

"Once more myself, I focussed the glasses as best I could upon the whirling sphere above the ship. But I could make out little more than by my naked eyes. The band about the center or equator of the globular thing was, I could now see, divided into segments, each of which bore a round, slightly convex, eye-like object from the centers of which extended slender rods which vibrated with incalculable speed. Indeed, the whole affair reminded me of the glass models of protozoans which I had seen in the American Museum of Natural History. These minute marine organisms I knew, moved with great rapidity by means of vibrating, hair-like appendages or cilia, and I wondered if the enormous spherical machine at which I was gazing, might not move through space in a similar manner by means of vibrating rods moving with such incredible speed that, slender as they were, they produced enormous propulsive power. Also, I could now see that the two extremities of the sphere, or as I may better express it, the axes, were equipped with projecting bosses or shafts to which the cables supporting the red spheres were attached. And as I peered through the glasses at the thing, the huge green sphere, which had been hitherto traveling on an even keel, or, in other words, with the central band vertical, now shifted its position and one end swung sharply upward, throwing the band about the centre at an acute angle. Involuntarily I grasped the rail of the bridge expecting to be thrown from my feet by the abrupt uptilting of the ship. But to my utter amazement the *Chiriqui* remained on an even plane and I then saw that as the sphere tilted, the cable at the uppermost axis ran rapidly out so that the two red spheres, which evidently supported the captive ship, remained, in their original relative horizontal position. No sign of life was visible upon the machine above me, and I surmised that whoever might be handling the thing was within the sphere.

"Wondering how high we had risen above the sea, I stepped to the starboard end of the bridge and glanced down, and an involuntary exclamation escaped my lips. Far beneath the ship and clearly visible through the captain's glasses was land! I could distinguish the white line marking surf breaking on a rocky shore, and ahead I could make out the cloud-topped, serried summits of a mighty range of mountains. Not until then did I realize the terrific speed at which the machine and captive vessel were traveling. I had been subconsciously aware that a gale had been blowing, but I had not stopped to realize that this was no ordinary wind, but was the rush of air caused by the rapidity of motion. But as I peered at the mountains through the binoculars,

and saw the distant surface of the earth whizzing backward far beneath the *Chiriqui's* keel, I knew that we were hurtling onward with the speed of the fastest scout airplane.

"Even as I gazed, the mountains seemed to rush towards me until, in a few minutes after I had first seen them, they appeared almost directly under the ship. Then the gigantic machine above me suddenly altered its course, it veered sharply to one side and swept along the range of summits far beneath. For some reason, just why I cannot explain, I dashed to the binnacle and saw that we were traveling to the south, and it flashed across my mind, that I had a dim recollection of noticing, when I first realized the nature of the machine which had been mistaken for a meteor, that by the stars, we were moving eastward. In that case, my suddenly alert mind told me, the land below must be some portion of America, and if so, judging by the altitude of the mountains, that they must be the Andes. All of this rushed through my brain instantly, and in the brief lapse of time in which I sprang to the binnacle and back to my observation point at the bridge-rail.

"Now, I saw, we were rapidly descending, and focussing my glasses upon the mountains, I made out an immense conical peak in the top of which was a gigantic black opening. Without doubt it was the crater of some stupendous extinct volcano, and, with a shock, I realized that the machine and the ship were headed directly for the yawning opening in the crater. The next instant we were dropping with lightning speed towards it, and so terrified and dumfounded had I become that I could not move from where I stood. Even before I could grasp the fact, the *Chiriqui* was enclosed by towering, rocky walls, inky blackness surrounded me, there was an upward breath-taking rush of air, a roar as of a thousand hurricanes. The *Chiriqui* rocked and pitched beneath my feet, as if in a heavy sea; I clung desperately to the bridge-rail for support and I felt sure that the ship had been dropped into the abysmal crater, that the next instant the vessel would crash into fragments as it struck bottom, or worse, that it would sink into the molten incandescent lava which might fill the depths of the volcano. For what seemed hours, the awful fall continued, though like as not the terrible suspense lasted for only a few minutes, and then, without warning, so abruptly that I lost my balance and was flung to the bridge, the ship ceased falling, an indescribable blue light succeeded the blackness, and unable to believe my senses I found the ship floating motionless, still suspended from the giant mechanism overhead, above a marvelous landscape.

"On every hand, as far as I could see, stretched jagged rocks, immense cliffs, stupendous crags and rugged knife-ridged hills of the most dazzling reds, yellows and purples. Mile-deep canons cut the forbidding plains, which here

and there showed patches of dull green, and in one spot I saw a stream of emerald-hued water pouring in a foaming cataract into a fathomless rift in the rock. But I gave little attention to these sights at the time. My gaze was riveted upon a strange, weird city which capped the cliffs close to the waterfall, and almost directly beneath the *Chiriqui*. Slowly we were dropping towards it, and I could see that the buildings which at first sight had appeared of immense height and tower-like form, were in reality gigantic basaltic columns capped with superimposed edifices of gleaming yellow.

"The next second the glasses dropped from my shaking, nerveless hands. Gathered on an open space of greenish plain were hundreds of human beings! But were they human? In form and features, as nearly as I could judge at that distance, they were human, but in color they were scarlet, and surmounting the head and extending along the arms to the elbows on every individual was a whitish, membranous frill, which at first sight, reminded me of an Indian's war bonnet. The beings appeared to be of average height, but as the *Chiriqui's* keel touched solid ground and, keeling to one side, she rested upon one of her bilges, I saw with a shock, that the scarlet creatures were of gigantic size, fully thirty feet in height, and that, without exception, all were females! All were stark naked; but despite the frills upon their heads and shoulders, despite their bizarre scarlet skins, despite their gigantic proportions, they were unquestionably human beings, women without doubt, and of the most perfect proportions, the most graceful forms and the most regular and even handsome features. Beside the stranded ship, they loomed as giants; but against the stupendous proportions of their land and city, they appeared no larger than ordinary mortals. By now they were streaming from their houses and even in the surprise and excitement of that moment I noticed that the giant rocky columns were perforated by windows and doors, and had obviously been hollowed out to form dwellings. Meantime, too, the huge machine which had captured the *Chiriqui* had descended and was lying at rest, and no longer emitting its green light, upon a cradle erected near the waterfall, and from openings in its central band several of the scarlet, giant Amazons were emerging. How long, I wondered, would I remain undiscovered? How long would it be before one of the female giants spied me? And then, what would be my fate? Why had they captured the ship? Where was I? What was this strange land reached through a crater?

"All these thoughts rushed through my brain as I peered cautiously down at the giant women who swarmed about the ship. But I had not long to wait for an answer to my first mental question. With a sudden spring, one of the women leaped to the *Chiriqui's* anchor, with a second bound she was on the fore deck, and close at her heels came a score of others. Standing upon the

deck with her head fringed by its erect vibrating membrane level with the boat-deck, she gazed about for an instant. Then, catching sight of the form of a sailor sprawled upon the deck, she uttered a shrill, piercing cry, leaped forward, and, before my unbelieving, horror-stricken eyes, tore the still living, palpitating body to pieces and ravenously devoured it.

"Unable to stir through the very repulsiveness of the scene, realizing that my turn might be next, I gazed fascinated. But the giant cannibal female was not to feast in peace. As her companions reached the deck, they rushed upon her and fought viciously for a portion of the reeking flesh. The struggle of these awful giants, as smeared with human blood, scratching and clawing, uttering shrill cries of rage, they rolled and fought on the deck, was indescribably terrible and disgusting. But it came to an abrupt end. With a bound, a giantess of giantesses, a powerfully-muscled female, appeared, and like cowed beasts, the others drew aside, licking their chops, the membranes on their heads rising and falling in excitement, like the frills on an iguana lizard, and watching the newly-arrived giantess with furtive eyes. Evidently she was the leader or chieftainess, and in curt but strangely shrill and, of course, to me, utterly unintelligible words, she gave orders to the others. Instantly, the horde of women began swarming over the ship, searching every nook and corner, and, wherever they discovered the inert bodies of the ship's company, dragged them on deck and piled them in heaps. Shaking with abject terror, I crouched back of the bridge, and racked my brains for thought of some safe spot in which to hide. But before I could make up my mind, one of the terrifying, monstrous females sprang upon the bridge and rushed towards me. With a maniacal scream, I turned and fled. Then, before me, blocking my way, there appeared another of the creatures. And then a most marvelous and surprising thing happened. Instead of falling upon me as I expected her to do, the giantess turned, and with a scream that equalled my own, leaped over the rail and fled to the uttermost extremity of the deck.

"I forgot my terror in my amazement. Why should this giant, cannibal woman fear me? Why should she run from me when, a few moments before, she had been fighting over a meal of an unconscious sailor? And it was evident that the others were equally afraid of me, for at her cry, and my appearance, all had rushed as far from me as possible, and stood regarding me with an odd mixture of wonder and terror on their huge faces. And then it occurred to me that their fear was, perhaps, due to my gas-mask, to the apparatus that transformed me from a human being to a weird-looking monster. At any rate, I was evidently safe from molestation for the time being, and thanking my lucky stars that I had on the mask, I descended from the bridge, the giantesses retreating as I advanced. I entered the captain's cabin and locked the door.

"Here I breathed more freely, for even if the women overcame their fear of me and attempted to capture me, the steel doors and walls of the cabin would be impregnable defenses. Moreover, upon the wall above the bunk, was a rifle, in a drawer of the dresser was a loaded revolver, and a short search revealed a plentiful supply of cartridges. Yes, if I were attacked, I could give a good account of myself, and I determined, if worst came to the worst, that I would blow out my brains rather than fall a victim to the female cannibal horde.

"Dully, through the thick walls of the cabin, I could hear the sounds of the women on the deck, but I had no desire to witness what was going on, and seated upon the captain's chair, I thought over the events which had transpired during the past few hours and tried to find a reasonable solution to the incredible happenings.

"That I was within the earth seemed certain, though utterly fantastic, but who the giant women were, why they had captured the *Chiriqui* or by what unknown, tremendous power their marvelous airship was operated, were all utterly beyond my comprehension. But I must hurry on and relate the more important matters, for my time is limited and the important thing is to let the world know how the human race may be saved from the terrible fate which has befallen me and all those upon the *Chiriqui*, and upon the destroyer *McCracken*, for that vessel, too, has fallen a victim to these horrible cannibalistic giantesses here within the centre of the earth.

"Hunger and thirst drove me at last from my refuge in the captain's cabin, and armed with the loaded rifle and revolver, I cautiously peered out and stepped upon the deck. Only one woman was in sight, and instantly, at sight of me, she fled away. Not a body of the hundreds of men and women aboard the ship was visible, and feeling relieved that I was for a time safe, I stepped to the ship's rail and peered over. Scores of the women were carrying the inert forms of the unconscious men and women towards the nearby city. Stealthily I hurried below in search of food and drink. Fears assailed me that the women had, in all probability, preceded me and carried off everything edible. But I need not have worried about food. I was yet to learn the horrible truth and the gruesome habits of these red giantesses. The saloon, the corridors, the staterooms, everything, had been searched, and every person upon the vessel removed. In the pantry I found an abundance of food, and quickly satisfied my hunger and thirst. I pondered on my next move. The skipper's cabin seemed my safest refuge. I placed a supply of provisions within it, and locked myself in the little room again. For several days nothing of great importance occurred. I say days, but there are no days in this terrible place. There is no sun, no moon, no stars and no darkness. The whole place is illuminated by a brilliant, greenish light that issues from a distant mountain range, and which seems to be of the

same character as that which emanated from the spherical air machine. Fortunately I had presence of mind enough to keep my watch going, as well as the captain's chronometer, for otherwise I would have had no knowledge of the passage of time. Once or twice the scarlet women visited the ship, but seemed nervous and wary, and made no effort to approach or molest me, merely gazed about as if searching for something—perhaps for me—and then retiring. Several times, too, I ventured on deck, and peered over the ship's side, but saw none of the giantesses, although with the glasses I could see crowds of the beings about the city in the distance.

"Also, I noticed among them, several individuals who were much smaller than the rest, and who appeared to be men, although I could not be sure. I also discovered, and almost lost my life in the discovery, that the atmosphere of this place is unfit for human beings to breathe, and is thick with sulphurous fumes. Close to the ground these fumes are so dense that a person would succumb in a few moments, but at the height of the *Chiriqui's* decks, nearly seventy feet above the rocky bed on which she rests, the air is breathable, although it causes one to choke and cough after a few minutes. And I am sure that the houses of these giant beings have been built on the summits of the basalt columns in order to avoid the suffocating fumes of the lower levels. Later, too, I learned that the membrane-like frills upon these creatures are a sort of gills, or as I might say, natural gas-masks, which by some means enable the beings to breathe the sulphur-laden air. But even with these, they avoid the lower areas where the fumes are the worst, and only visit them when necessity arises, which accounts for my being left in peace, with none of the horrible women near the ship, for days at a time. I discovered the presence of the sulphur gas on the first day when, attempting to eat, I removed my gas-mask. Suffocating as I found the fumes, I was compelled to endure them, and gradually I became slightly accustomed to them, so that now I have little trouble in breathing during the short time it takes me to eat my meals. At all other times I must wear the apparatus, and I thank God that this is so, for I know now that it is the gas-mask which so far has preserved my life.

"On the tenth day after my arrival I noticed a number of the giantesses gathering about the huge, spherical airship which still rested on its cradle near the *Chiriqui*, but which, I have forgotten to state, ceased to emit its green or red lights after it had landed. Lying there it resembled nothing so much as a gigantic can-buoy or a floating mine, if one can imagine a buoy two hundred yards in diameter.

"On the day I mentioned, all interests seemed to be centered on the thing, and cautiously peering from the shelter of the deck-house, I watched the proceedings. Presently several of the women entered the sphere through an

opening in its middle band; the aperture closed behind them, and immediately there was a low, humming sound as of machinery. As the sounds issued from the sphere, the cables to which were attached the smaller spheres (which glowed red when carrying the *Chiriqui* through the air) were drawn in until the two smaller spheres were resting in recesses at the axes of the large sphere, and where they appeared merely as hemi-spherical projections. Then, slowly at first, but with ever increasing speed, the slender rods about the large sphere began to move back and forth, or rather in an oscillating manner, until they were vibrating with such rapidity that they appeared merely rays of light. Slowly, majestically, the immense globe rose from its cradle, and gathering headway, leaped upward to an immense height. Then, tilting at an angle, it passed over the city and headed for an immense pinnacle of rock, which, fully seven miles from where I stood, reminded me of a gigantic chimney or funnel.

"Although it was barely visible to the naked eye, I could see it distinctly through the glasses, and I watched it with the most intense and concentrated interest. For a few moments it remained, poised a hundred feet or so above the pinnacle. Then, from the towering, tapering rock, a terrific jet of steam roared forth, and striking the great spherical machine above it, hurled it upward and beyond my vision. Give close heed to these words, whoever may, by God's grace, be listening to what I say, for upon them may hinge the fate of the human race. Only by this means, by being shot upward by this titanic jet of steam, can the airship leave this subterranean land and emerge through the crater by which it entered bearing the *Chiriqui*. Within this place it can sail at will; once above the crater opening it can travel anywhere, although it cannot land; but by some unknown force or magnetic attraction or freak of gravitation the machine cannot ascend through the crater, although, when over it, it will drop like a plummet through the opening. And herein—for the sake of humanity, listen to this and remember my words—lies a means of destroying the machine, for by surrounding the crater with powerful guns the sphere can be shelled as it emerges and utterly destroyed. To attempt to do so as it returns to the crater would be suicidal, for once in the outer air, it emanates vast quantities of most poisonous gas, and all living things within a radius of several miles would be struck down unconscious, as were my companions on the *Chiriqui*. Even if gas-masks were worn, it would be most difficult to destroy the machine as it descended, for it travels with incredible speed in its descent and, moreover, the terrible creatures who man the thing would see that enemies lurked near and would find some means of destroying them, or by the mysterious magnet force they control, would draw even the heaviest cannon to the machine as an ordinary magnet draws needles or iron filings. So if the thing is to be destroyed, it must be done as the machine emerges from the

crater. Would to God that I could tell where the crater is, but beyond feeling sure it is at the summit of an Andean peak, I have no means of locating it.

"But I was telling of what occurred on that tenth day when the spherical airship was projected from my sight by the blast of steam. As the machine vanished, the women who had watched its departure, returned to their city, and I swept the landscape with my glasses, wondering at the bleak, terrible scenery and bizarre colors.

"As I focussed the binoculars upon a level plateau, perhaps a mile from where the *Chiriqui* rested, I gasped in surprise. Clearly defined, lay the remnants of what had once been a steamship! Had I given the matter thought, I might have known that the *Chiriqui* was not the first vessel to have fallen a victim to these awful beings; but the sight of another ship's skeleton came to me as a terrific shock. As nearly as I could judge, the vessel had been dismantled, for only the great steel frame remained, with the mighty boilers and other portions of the ship scattered about, and gruesomely like some mammoth creature lying disemboweled upon the earth.

"I was consumed with a mad desire to visit that pathetic wreck, but I knew not to what dangers I would be exposed, once I left the security of my ship. Not a being was in sight, however, and carefully I studied the land, visually measuring the relative distances between myself and the wreck, and between the city and the route I must traverse. Having already observed that the giantesses moved slowly and cumbrously on foot, I at last decided that even if they attempted to intercept me I could regain the *Chiriqui* before I was overtaken, so I threw caution to the winds and prepared to undertake my hazardous journey. Slinging the loaded rifle on my back, with the revolver at my belt, and still further arming myself with a keen-edged fireaxe, I hunted up the pilot's ladder, lowered it over the lowest side of the ship,—which was also the side farthest from the city,—and clambering down the *Chiriqui's* lofty sides, leaped down upon the ground. To my amazement, I landed in a dense jungle of dry, tough vegetation which rose to my shoulders. From the deck, looking directly downwards, I had thought this dull-green growth a short, wiry grass, and, of course, in its relative proportion to the gigantic women, it was no higher than ordinary grass to a normal human being. It was a wonderful example of the theory of relativity, but my mind was not interested in scientific matters at the time, and I merely gave thanks that the miniature jungle,—which I saw was composed of giant lichens—would afford me cover through which I might sneak in safety, and with little chance of detection.

"Without much difficulty I made my way to the other vessel, and found her even more dissected than I had supposed. Why the denizens of the place had torn her to bits I did not then know, but certain portions of her machinery and

fittings had been left intact, and, as I examined these, I made another and most astounding discovery. Deeply engraved upon a brass plate was the ship's name '*U. S. S. Cyclops!*' For a space I stood staring, scarcely able to believe my eyes. Here then was the solution to that mystery of the sea, the disappearance of the collier, as laden with manganese, she vanished without word or trace when off the Barbados during the World War. No doubt, I thought, many a mystery of the sea had been caused by the damnable work of these beings with their infernal machine. But why, for what reason, did they capture ships? Why did they carry off the unconscious persons upon the vessels? And why did they tear the vessels apart? It was all a mystery which, in all its horrible, gruesome, ghoulis details I was soon to solve.

"There was nothing more to be learned from the remains of the *Cyclops*, and in safety I returned to the *Chiriqui* to find, to my surprise and terror, that a gang of the monstrous females had boarded the ship in my absence and were stripping her of everything. But as they caught sight of me, all threw down whatever they had and fled precipitately, leaving me once more in undisputed possession of the ship. I was relieved at this, for it was obvious that I had no need to fear the creatures. By now, too, I had formulated a theory to account for this strange dread of a being who was a puny, miserable thing compared to them. Unquestionably my gas-mask rendered me a most grotesque and unknown creature in their eyes. My remaining alive and active while all others upon the ship had succumbed to the noxious gas had probably caused them to think that I was a supernatural being. The fact that I could go about and breathe the sulphur-laden air would cause them to regard me with even greater wonder and superstition, and, as I found later, the fact that I was never seen to eat, confirmed their belief that I was some mysterious being against whom their gases and their deviltries were of no avail.

"I had not much time to devote to such matters, however. Soon after regaining the *Chiriqui* I heard excited cries from the land, and looking over the ship's rails, I found an immense crowd had gathered near the empty cradle of the airship, and that all were gazing upward. Following their example, I stared into the greenish void and instantly understood. Descending rapidly towards the plain, came the great sphere, and, suspended below it, was the hull of another captive ship. And as I focussed my glasses upon this, I rubbed my eyes and gaped. The dull gray color, the lines, the raking funnels, the barbets and gun muzzles left no room for doubt. Incredible as it seemed, the captive vessel was a warship! What hope then had my fellow men upon earth? What chance was there if these giant creatures could send forth their flaming machine, and by it, capture the fastest, most powerful war-vessels—all within the space of a few hours?

"Rapidly the machine and its burden approached, and presently descended gently dropping the war vessel close to the *Chiriqui*. My worst fears were confirmed. The vessel was an American destroyer, the *McCracken*, and I knew that scores of my countrymen must lie unconscious upon her, and in a few moments would be carried off to some unknown horrible fate. What that fate was I had already surmised. That first demonstration of the ferocious cannibalism of the giantesses upon the *Chiriqui's* deck had been enough to make my blood run cold.

"But I had not yet guessed even a fraction of the true horror of it. Scarcely had the *McCracken* been dropped upon the earth, when the women swarmed upon her, and once more I saw the creatures gathering the inert forms of men and carrying them to the city. And rapidly, too, they commenced dismantling and tearing the destroyer into bits. How they had accomplished this with the *Cyclops* had puzzled me, but now I witnessed the process close at hand. From the vicinity of the waterfall, lines or pipes were led to the vessel's side; presently there was the roaring sound of steam; dense clouds of vapor arose from the cataract; the water ceased to flow, and from the extremities of the lines or tubes twenty-foot jets of blinding flame shot out. As easily as though made of wax, the steel sides, the massive beams, the armored barbettes of the warship melted and were cut by these jets, and as the pieces fell apart, the spherical airship took a position above the vessel, and by its magnetic power, lifted tons of the fragments, then sailing off, deposited them in some spot beyond the city. It was then, as I saw the ship rapidly dissolving before my eyes, that the inspiration came to me which may make it possible for me to communicate with the outside world and may, if God wills, serve to warn my fellow men of the fate which will overtake them if these terrible creatures are allowed to follow out their plans. As the jets of flame cut through the *McCracken's* superstructure, and the radio antennae fell in a tangled mass across the deck, I forgot all else and rushed to the wireless room of the *Chiriqui*. Here was my chance. If the ship's radio transmitter was still in working order; if the auxiliary battery was still charged, I might send out messages which, small as the chances were, might reach the ears of some of the countless thousands of persons who listened each night at their receiving sets. I trembled with fear that I would find the transmitter injured or dismantled. I shook with dread that the battery might be dead. I felt faint with apprehension that the message, if sent, might never penetrate the sulphur-laden atmosphere or might never reach the outer world. And I realized, with a sickening sinking of my heart, that even if heard my communication might be regarded as a hoax, and no attention would be given it. But I would do my best. The radio set had not been molested. Everything was in working order,

and I set myself the task of transmitting my story each night at the same hour, repeating it over and over again, until the storage batteries are exhausted, for to get up steam and start the dynamos is beyond my powers. Had I knowledge of Morse I would send my story by that code, but I have not, and so—I must cease. For the love of your race and of your dear ones listen, I beseech you, until I can resume."

Here the message broke off abruptly, and Frank and I sat staring at each other, fearing to speak lest we might interrupt or miss the words which might come, and listening with straining ears at the head-sets. For an hour we sat there and then, once more the voice spoke.

"The doom that I feared is approaching. I have been here for three months and this will, I know, be my final message. Oh that I could only be sure that someone has heard my words, that my fate has not been in vain but has served to warn my fellow beings. But I must hurry on. I have learned everything of importance. I have watched, studied and have even learned to understand much of the language of these beings. I found that there were men. They are puny beings compared to the women, though ten-foot giants compared to normal men, and they are cowed, abject, mere slaves of the females. Only enough male children are permitted to survive to propagate the race. All others are killed.

"As they reach manhood only those males of super-intelligence, strength and virility are permitted to live. The others are destroyed and—yes, horrible as it sounds, their bodies, like those of the murdered infants and of the aged, sick or infirm, are devoured. And as fast as the males attain middle age their lives are forfeited. Long ago these beings subsisted upon the few wild creatures which roamed their land; but long ago all these were exhausted and human flesh became the only meat. There is no vegetable food, and for a time the sacrificed surplus males, and the aged, provided food for the race. But gradually the male births decreased, female children preponderated, and with the increased population resulting, the males were too few to nourish the others. Then, through what damnable accident or design I do not know, the creatures went forth in their airship and discovered the teeming millions of human beings on earth.

"But the bulk of humanity was and still is safe from them, at least until new means of attacking mankind are devised, for the globular airship cannot approach the land. The very power it uses to lift the greatest steamships and carry them off, draws the machine to the earth and holds it fast. But above water, which acts as an insulator apparently, the apparatus can operate at will. And they have a two-fold purpose in capturing ships. All the available metal in this land was exhausted in constructing two of the spherical machines. One of

these never returned from its first trip, and only the one remains. To construct more, these giant women plan to use the metal salvaged from captured ships, until a vast fleet of the infernal things is ready to go forth and wipe the seas clean of ships and human beings. And the bodies of the men and women, struck down by the gas, are to serve as food for these demons in human form.

"This is the most horrible, blood-curdling thing of all. Rendered unconscious by the gas, the victims remain in a state of suspended animation indefinitely, exactly as do grubs, spiders and insects when stung by certain species of wasps and placed in their nests to provide food for their young. Stacked in great storage vaults these breathing, living, but paralyzed human beings are kept, and as needed, are taken out.

"Already they have a supply on hand sufficient to last them for over a year. Some of the *Cyclops* company are still preserved; there are over three hundred from the *Chiriqui*, hundreds from other ships, and the entire crew of the *McCracken*.

"All these things I learned little by little, and mainly through a friend, for marvelous as it may seem, I have a friend—if friend he can be called, a miserable, trembling, terrified male, who, doomed to death, sought to escape his fate and sought refuge with me, dreading my presence less than his doom, and hoping that such a feared and almost revered being as myself might protect him. For two months he has been my companion, but he cannot eat anything but meat and the supply of meat upon the ship is getting low, and sooner or later he must succumb. And the women, maddened at his escape from their clutches, though not yet daring to approach too closely to me, are getting bolder. Some time, at some unguarded moment, they will find the poor fellow alone and will fall upon him. And in his terror, in an effort to buy his life, he will, I know, reveal to them that I am but an ordinary mortal, a man who eats and drinks and who survived the gas by mechanical and not supernatural means. But I will not be taken alive by these fearful female cannibals. When the time comes, as I know it will, I will blow my brains out, and though they may devour my body they will not rend me alive. No more ships have been brought in here since the *McCracken* was captured. But this I know is due to the fact that all the energies of these creatures are being devoted to building additional air machines. This work goes on in a vast cavern beyond the city where tremendous forces, furnaces with heat beyond human conception and machines of which we know nothing, are controlled by the internal steam, the radiant energy and the magnetic powers of the earth's core.

"And now, again let me implore any and all who may hear my words to give close attention to what I say, for here again is a means by which humanity may combat and destroy these ghastly, gigantic cannibals. The spherical air-

machines are helpless from above. Their magnetic or electrical forces extend only downwards. The gasses they throw out are heavier than air and descend but cannot ascend, and by means of swift planes, huge bombs and machine guns, the things can be easily destroyed. And they cannot travel without throwing off the dazzling green light. Only when motionless are they dark. And so they will offer easy marks and can be readily detected. So, I beseech you who may hear, that the governments are notified and warned and that a fleet or many fleets of airplanes properly equipped patrol the seas, and at first sight of one of the green meteors rise above it and utterly destroy it without mercy.

"Wait! I hear a terrified scream.... I am back again at the transmitter. It was the fellow who has been with me. Poor devil! He has met his fate, but after all it was the custom of his people, and, moreover, he would have starved to death in a few days. For that matter I, too, face starvation. The ship's stock is running low; all the food upon the *McCracken* was destroyed in cutting up that vessel, and unless another ship is captured I will have no food after two weeks more. What a strange thought! How terrible an idea! That the awful fate of hundreds of my fellows would be my salvation! But I will never live to die from hunger. I can hear the terrible screams of my late companion on the deck outside. God! It is the end! The fellow must have told the enraged females. His body has been torn to shreds. With bloody hands and reeking lips they are rushing towards the upper deck where I sit. They are here! This is my last word! God grant that I have been heard! I am about to—"

Crashing in our ears came the report of a pistol.

3: Illusion***Max Afford***

1906-1954

News (Adelaide) 29 Oct 1932

"AND here, ladies and gentlemen, we have Baby Flora, the world's weightiest woman. Twenty-five years of age, and weighs 25 stone."

Over the heads of the jostling crowd thronging the narrow avenues of Bentley's Mammoth Freak Show the voice of the barker vibrated rawly on the hot, dust-laden air. The fat woman's rouged lips curved in a mechanical grin as she faced the staring crowds who craned upwards to see this grotesque joke of Nature. Above their laughter and chatter sounded the ceaseless litany of Eddie Pinkus, the freak show spruiker.

"And now see the wonder woman, Madam Mysteria She can peer into the future or probe the past."

The heavily made-up woman at the pointing end of the spruiker's stick looked down at the sea of staring faces. Her forced smile held more than a trace of contempt for this gaping mob. Pinkus noticed it, and his white teeth flashed. The woman's sneer changed to a pleased smirk, and a slow blush crept across her face. Those few in the crowd who noticed it wondered what amorous secret these two shared between them. But the unfortunate freaks knew only too well...

THE spruiker passed on, the crowd following like children at the heels of a master. The fat woman shook herself irritably, and her mountain of flesh-quivered jelly-like. The beads of perspiration gathered on her forehead. She dashed them away with an impatient hand, and turned to the living skeleton.

"Did you see that?" she asked abruptly. The living skeleton shrugged his shoulders. He used his body rather than his tongue for speech. But long association with these movements had taught the other to understand them.

"It's all very well for you to say that we can't do anything. I only wish I were a man. The way he treats that little wife of his makes my blood boil."

The tattooed woman, on the opposite side, leaned over. She was a withered, horse-faced woman, and now her high-toned voice was shriller than ever with repressed excitement.

"They 'ad a dreadful row las' night," she squeaked. "I couldn't 'elp 'earin' them. He told 'is wife that 'e wished she were dead." Her voice jumped to high notes. "'E actually said that one day 'e'd fix that guillotine so that it would actually cut off 'er 'ead. The poor creature came running into my tent almost crazy with fear."

The fat woman drew a long breath.

"I heard them," she said. "And I'll tell you something else." She lowered her voice to what she believed was a confidential whisper. "Pinkus and that woman are going away tonight— together!" She paused dramatically. "They're going to clear off and leave Norah to face the music alone."

FLORA, good-hearted soul that she was, would have lowered her voice still more if she could have seen the girl who stood listening behind the booth. Norah Pinkus had slipped away from her exhibit for a minute. Returning, she heard her name mentioned, and had paused for a second.

"Oh!" she breathed. The scarlet banners, the dirty-white canvas booths, the yellow sawdust and gaudy trappings made a drunken riot of color in her brain. She swayed and put out one hand to steady herself. Those sudden dizzy spells were becoming frequent lately. As she tightened her grip on the tent-pole her sleeve fell back to reveal four plum-colored bruises on her arm.

Norah had been the wife of Eddie Pinkus for almost a year now. She was barely out of her teens, this girl. Yet worry and some deeper emotion had carved her face in bitter lines. She stood there, pale as death, save where the twin daubs of rouge gave mockery of life to her face.

"Fool that I've been," whispered Norah. "Fool!"

Back into her mind flooded the promises this man had made to her. Eddie Pinkus gave his birthplace as California. but it was openly said that an adobe hut rather than a nursing home had been his earliest surroundings. A diversity of occupations from a gigolo in a Florida dance hall to a guitar player in a cheap vaudeville act had brought this dusky dandy to Australia, where the invasion of the talkies put an end to his livelihood.

Marriage with Norah Kelly, a stranded chorus girl, followed, and he persuaded her to join him in his illusionist act. Too late the girl learned that the "act" was nothing more than a cheap sideshow exhibit and her marriage a bitter mockery

"Now. folks, we are actually going to show you a lady beheaded on the guillotine— a page from the French Revolution."

Norah started abruptly. Her partner's raucous voice bored into her thoughts. Realising that she would be wanted any minute, she began to walk quickly in the direction of the voice.

HERE Pinkus was smacking the painted banner with his cane. The crowd, incredulous, eyed him interestedly. They edged closer.

"What you see on the outside is nothing to the actual show. Beautiful Valerie Le Fay will allow herself to be strapped to the machine of death. The knife, weighing 20 pounds, will be released on her unprotected neck."

An awed silence fell on the crowd. Somewhere a girl giggled nervously. A wavering spate of chatter broke forth. But Pinkus knew his public. He smiled engagingly.

"Of course, folks, we don't hurt the lady. It's only an illusion. Here's Miss Le Fay herself." He swept back the curtains.

Norah, just a second behind time, stepped through. Pinkus greeted her with an elaborate smile which began and ended at his lips.

Now that the free entertainment was over, some of the crowd began to move away. A small group, however, clustered about the ticket window. But Pinkus had done his part for the moment. He took the girl's hand and led her through the stained curtains. In the tiny dressing room just close he dropped her hand and turned on her. Anger flared in his eyes, mottling his dusky skin.

"Late again! D'you think you're Greta Garbo, strolling in when you please? Get into that costume."

Norah raised a hand to her face. It lay cold as marble against her burning forehead.

"I was sick, Ed," she whispered, "Honest I was sick. I was only away a few—"

Pinkus waved aside her explanations. He pushed her roughly. "Get a move on. Those people outside have paid their money. Shut your mouth and hurry up." Without a word, the girl turned and reached down the faded costume. Swiftly she donned the gown with its wide bustles and dirty lace trimmings. As she was adjusting the cotton-wool wig she caught a glimpse of her own pallid face in the glass. She wheeled suddenly on her husband.

"Eddie," she said slowly, "Is it true that you're leaving me tonight for Madam Mysteria?"

Even as she spoke she stood appalled at the expression that crossed his face. For a moment murder stared at her. Then it was gone. Pinkus showed his teeth in an open sneer.

"So— you've been spying, eh? Well, you might as well know the truth. I'm sick and tired of you and everything about you."

OUTSIDE the crowd was becoming impatient. Someone had started to clap. Fretful heels drummed on the wooden floor. But Norah heard nothing of this. - Her mind was numbed. When she spoke it was as though the words came from some distance away.

"But Eddie—you can't leave me now." Her hand flew to her throat. "Not after what I told you— last week—"

But Pinkus was grinning as though this was a huge joke.

"Oh, yeah. Well, you'll have to think of something better than that. Those sob stories don't fool me at all."

Then it seemed as though fear left her. Rage and panic fanned her courage. She faced the man squarely, head high, chin firm. But it was merely brave show, for her tones held the high note of hysteria.

"I've stood a lot from you, Eddie Pinkus. But this, is the limit— I warn you— You won't get away with this. I'll find some way to stop you." In her anger she babbled her phrases. "If you aren't man enough to face facts, I'll go to Madam Misteria and tell her the truth."

Pinkus stiffened and the smile died on his lips. The tiny room quivered with their open hostility. Outside the crowd muttered in angry monotone. The sound crept into the room and stroked them with sly, taunting fingers. For Pinkus it was too much. He took a step forward and started to say something. Then, as anger choked speech, he lifted his cane and struck the girl full across the face. Norah gave a little, cut-off gasp of pain. She stood as though turned to stone. The stinging weal across her face changed slowly from crimson to dark red to the purplish blue of a crushed plum. Then she spoke. Softly, deliberately.

"This is the end! Goodbye, Eddie Pinkus."

She turned swiftly to the mirror; daubed powder on the scar, straightened her wig, and moved out into the main tent.

RAGGED burst of clapping heralded her appearance. The crowd was grouped closely about the guillotine, which was fenced off with ropes at the far end of the tent. The machine stood in a shadowed corner, partly to cloak its tawdriness but mainly to conceal the series of mirrors which made the illusion possible. Between the uprights the triangular knife gleamed like polished silver. Two men examining the hinged platform stepped aside as Norah, followed by Pinkus, entered the square. The man picked up a length of rope and began to bind the girl. His tongue kept pace with his nimble movements.

"Watch carefully, folk. I will bind the little lady on to the platform so that there is no chance "of her moving. You may examine the knots. I will then place her head through the aperture below the knife and lock the boards about her neck."

Strained silence flung back his tones. Then a lean murmur ran through the crowd, the hungry undertone of the pack that smells blood. Eyes were wide with excitement. Breathing became audible.

Pinkus laid Norah on the platform and pushed her head under the concealed mirror let in between the uprights. At the same moment Norah worked her arm free and thrust a dummy head through the circular aperture in

the boards. Under the pretence of testing the stability of the uprights Pinkus inserted a heavy steel pin in a socket some 6 inches from Norah's throat. It was this pin that prevented the knife from falling farther and gave the girl the opportunity to push the dummy head from its socket into the basket.

At last Pinkus straightened and turned to the crowd.

"Now, folk— when I count three I will release the knife. One..."

Lying there, gazing through the scratched mirror at the knife suspended above her head, Norah heard him vaguely. All that protected her from the death blow was that small pin placed in the upright.

Her thoughts wandered. Two, three centuries ago, people had died like this. Was it a painless death? Death? Of course. After that blow across the face it was useless to hope any longer. And Eddie and Madam Mysteria were to start life anew. Death— and a new life. It was funny. A new life as bright and attractive as— as that steel pin gleaming against the sombre woodwork.

Somehow it fascinated her, that small pin...

"Three!" Came the rattle of a drum. But even that sodden rumble could not drown out the vindictive swish of the heavy blade. And then—

THERE was a sudden brittle smashing of glass, a choked-off sound that was partly scream, partly gasping cough. Then silence. Splinters of glass shot into the air, gleamed for a second, then dropped among the horrified audience. The dummy head remained in its socket, gazing out with foolish painted eyes.

Strangely enough, there was no pandemonium. The audience were too horrified. A medical student was first to recover. He jumped forward, and with the aid of another man raised the heavy blade from the shattered fragments of the mirror. Eddie Pinkus stood as if petrified, staring down at the figure of his wife lying still as in death.

Carefully gentle hands lifted the dying woman to the ground. The student made a temporary bandage of handkerchiefs, wrapping it round the wound in her throat. A group of men rushed away to telephone the ambulance. But one look at Norah's face convinced the others that the errand was useless. Suddenly the eyelids trembled, fluttered open. A shudder ran through her body.

Falteringly, one limp hand rose ever so slightly and gestured toward the pallid husband. The word was almost a sighing breath. "Murderer..."

Then the head fell back and the word ended in a throaty rattle.

Across the silence of the crowd the fat woman's scream tore the air.

"Yes, a murderer— that's right. He threatened to do this. I heard him. Look!"

THE crowd rushed, at Eddie Pinkus, clutching at him with cruel, tearing hands. For a moment Norah was forgotten. Only the vacant, china blue eyes of the dummy head saw her fingers slowly unclasp and release a shining steel pin which rolled away beneath the guillotine.

4: Blood on his Hands

Max Afford

Smith's Weekly (Sydney) 6 Oct 1934

THE Reverend Paul Augustine Bellamy, of the Vicarage, Easterwood, gave the heavy blue curtains a final twitch into place and turned away from the window. His thin melancholy face, drained of color, looked more skull-like than ever. He stood for a moment with closed eyes as though seeking to steady himself before walking across the comfortably-furnished sitting room that looked out on to the quiet and respectable Acacia Avenue.

It was at this moment that the tall clock in the corner of the room chimed 11. Bellamy crossed to the small table near the fireplace, and took up the whisky decanter. He measured himself a stiff drink, but his trembling fingers spilt the liquid clumsily. A second attempt was more successful. He raised the glass to his lips, and was about to drink when the sound of footsteps running up the gravel path toward his door halted him.

The next moment, a sharp knocking sounded on the door. Bellamy half-turned, then drained the glass almost at a gulp. He was measuring himself a second drink when the summons was repeated, louder this time. He glanced swiftly about the room, and his narrowed eyes showed that his mind was working feverishly. Then a noise of a door opening in the rear of the house decided him. He swallowed his second drink, returned the glass to the table and walked out into the wide hall. His man-servant, Hutchins, was moving toward the door. He halted as his master approached. Bellamy nodded curtly.

"You can go. I'll answer it."

He waited until the servant had cleared the hall, then turned toward the door. Just for one instant he hesitated. Then squaring his shoulders, he threw the door wide. A figure, standing impatiently on the step, almost bounded into the hall. If his unexpected entry was surprising, the explanation that accompanied it was even more so.

"Sorry to burst in on you like, this," panted the new-comer. "But do you know there's a dead man lying across the path, outside your house?"

"A dead man?" Bellamy repeated. But there was the subtle impression that his reiteration was not so much surprise as to give him time to take stock of this sudden visitor.

He was a young man in his middle thirties— a young man rather shabbily dressed in an old overcoat, which. In spite of its shapelessness, had obviously passed through the hands of a good tailor during its manufacture. And so it was with the wearer. His unshaven face and carelessly knotted tie could not

disguise the refinement in his voice, nor did it detract from the unconscious air of gentility that was part of him.

"A dead man?" Shocked surprise raised Bellamy's tone. "Are you sure?"

"Positive," the other returned. He added grimly, "I almost fell over him as I was walking past your house. Thought the best thing to do would be to telephone the police."

Bellamy nodded, "Very sensible. There's a telephone on the small table over there. The nearest police station is Easterwood— Easterwood 3824, I think the number is." And as the young man nodded and began to walk over to the instrument, he added, "You're quite sure the man is dead?"

The newcomer spoke over his shoulder. "If not, he's pretty near it." His voice dropped a tone. "As I bent over him, I heard him whisper something— something about a girl. Then he said, 'Shot me— jealousy—' and I heard him give a hollow rattling cough I didn't wait to hear any more— just dashed into the nearest house, hoping to find a telephone handy."

He picked up the instrument and began to dial the number. Bellamy moved to the door and looked out. The night had been boisterous with wind and rain. Now the storm had spent itself and the downpour had dwindled to a thin shower that gleamed like a curtain of golden threads where the light from the open door streamed out on it.

He turned back to his visitor, who was still waiting impatiently at the telephone.

"We can hardly leave the poor fellow out there in the rain," he said mildly. "Hadn't we better bring him inside here?"

Over the mouthpiece of the telephone, the young man's eyes were curious.

"Better not" he said shortly. "The police don't like to have anything disturbed, especially in a case like this."

"But," began his host. But the other's voice cut in. "If you've got someone who could stand by the body until the police get here, it would help. Someone might stumble—" he broke off sharply to attend to the telephone.

Bellamy inclined his head. "That's the least we can do. I'll get my man to stand by. The body was just outside the gate, you said."

And because he had turned down the hall to call Hutchins, the Reverend Paul Bellamy did not see that curious expression that gleamed once again in the young man's eyes, as though something very alert and intelligent had peered out for a moment.

Five minutes later, the two men were seated in comfortable chairs set before the newly-kindled fire in the sitting-room. Bellamy had placed the table with the decanter at his elbow, and was occupied in pouring a drink. He handed the glass to his companion, who took it and looked across inquiringly.

"Thanks. But what about yourself?"

Bellamy shook his head. "Not at the moment. But drink that down— you've had a nasty shock."

And as the other began to taste his drink, he added. "The police can't get here for another ten minutes?"

"No, They're coming over on push bicycles. How about that doctor?"

Bellamy did not answer at once. The shadow across his face was reflected in his voice when he said, "There won't be any immediate hurry for a doctor. That man outside is dead. He'd been shot through the heart— from behind."

The young man stared into the fire.

"I'm not surprised. I saw he was pretty far gone when I bent over him."

He shook his head slowly. "That's rather terrible."

"Might almost be the work of a woman," mused Bellamy. "Didn't you say something about the dying man mentioning a woman just before he died?"

"That's right." The visitor sat up and placed his glass on the table. "He said a girl's name— peculiar name it was— and then muttered 'shot me— jealousy'."

"You're perfectly sure of those words?"

The young man gave a tight smile that began and ended with his lips.

"Perfectly! I've written too many stories in which the murderer's identity hangs on the dying man's words not to give them my closest attention."

His host gave a sudden ejaculation. "Of course! I knew your face was familiar, and I've been trying to place you ever since you stepped in here. You're Clive Hamilton, the playwright, aren't you? I've seen your picture in the illustrated papers." He sat back and surveyed his companion. "One of your mystery plays is opening in the city shortly."

Hamilton nodded.

"That's right. It's rather strange that you should mention the play, since it's partly responsible for my being mixed up in this business."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. The play is in the last stages of rehearsal, you see. But the producer wasn't satisfied with the last act— wanted more suspense, he said. So last week, he shot it back to me for revision. As the play is opening within the next fortnight, I had to have the corrections made within three days at the latest."

Bellamy pursed his lips.

"No light task, I should say."

"It did rather worry me," the playwright admitted. "It wasn't until late last night that I hit upon the right idea. All to-day I worked on it like a slave, stopping only to eat my meals. About an hour ago. I finished the act to my satisfaction. Then reaction set in— I felt excited, and nervous. Although it was

after 10 o'clock, I knew that It would be useless to try and sleep, so I decided to take a walk. Nowhere in particular. Just anywhere for the exercise.

"I didn't wait to shave or dress, since I meant to choose the loneliest and most deserted roads for my walk. But it was raining, so I slipped on an old overcoat and started out. I had never been down this way before, but it looked suitably dark and lonely. I strode along, deep in thought. Outside this house, I stumbled over something In the darkness. At first I thought it was a drunken man sleeping off a celebration— then I realised that even a drunken man would hardly sleep through a downpour such as we had just experienced. So I bent over the man. Then it was that I heard him mutter this queer name— wish I could remember it— and then those other words about being shot because of jealousy. It gave me a nasty shock, especially when he gave that hollow cough. I didn't wait to hear any more— just ran into the first house I came to, which happened to be this one."

His host was busy with the decanter.

"Then have another drink. You must have something to keep the cold out."

Without waiting for an acceptance, he passed over a liberal glass. Hamilton hesitated for a moment, then smiled as he took it.

"You're really very kind, showing this hospitality to a perfect stranger."

Bellamy, seated in his chair, laughed with him. Another silence fell upon the room, but this time there was a faint suggestion of awkwardness in the pause— that awkwardness which follows when a forced conversation between two strangers has covered all points of contact Bellamy had an uneasy sensation that the eyes of his visitor were covertly examining him, yet when he looked up the young man was puffing contentedly at his smoke.

He was looking toward an engraved silver cup that stood at one end of the mantelpiece.

Bellamy found himself suddenly wishing that the police would arrive, and it was almost with relief that he heard Hamilton's voice.

"You've been rather a sportsman in your time, I take it?" the playwright remarked.

His host smiled.

"I see you've noticed the cup."

Hamilton was looking about the room.

"Yes. And there's that gold shield over on the stand in the far corner. I suppose that's another prize?"

Bellamy nodded. "I received that for athletics at college," he said.

"And the silver cup?"

Hamilton's tone was that of a man deliberately making conversation to cover a waiting period. "Did you get that for athletics, too?"

There was an appreciable pause that made the queer note in Bellamy's voice even more noticeable as he replied, "No. I didn't get it for athletics. It was a prize for another kind of sport."

"Really? Do you mind If I have a look at it?"

"Not at all." The elder man rose to his feet. "I'll get it down for you."

But Hamilton already had the cup in his hands. He stood turning it over, so that the engraved surface caught the light.

"Presented to Paul Augustine Bellamy for winning highest aggregate marks in the State Revolver Shot Championship 1932."

There came a pause while he restored the cup to its position and turned to his host. That dull heaviness still lingered in his voice.

"So you were the champion revolver shot of the State two years ago, Mr. Bellamy?"

That gentleman nodded reminiscently. "Two years ago— and it seems only yesterday. How time does fly! Now, I doubt if I could hit a haystack at ten paces."

Hamilton smiled in agreement. "Yes, I suppose one does get out of practice. I suppose that's why you shut your windows every night. Although, I should imagine that even the most stout-hearted burglar would hesitate before he added that proof of your marksmanship to his swag!"

"How do you know that I close and lock my windows every night?"

The playwright shrugged his shoulders. "I saw you doing something at the window as I came running up the path to your door."

Unintentionally or otherwise, the slight pause gave significance to his next words. "I presumed you were locking it... for the same reason that every honest man locks his windows before retiring for the night."

Hamilton moved away from the fireplace and resumed his seat. When he spoke again, the heaviness had gone from his tone. It was almost careless when he remarked.

"You know, Mr. Bellamy, I can't help thinking over that dead man out there on the pavement. You say he was shot in the back. Then, if he could still speak to me, It must have occurred only a few minutes before I came along. It'd rather curious how the murderer could have got away so quickly."

"You didn't notice any conveyance in the street?"

"Nothing at all."

Bellamy's thin white fingers caressed the plush covering of his chair. "Strange," he murmured. "How could the murderer have got away?"

Hamilton sat upright, his body tense as though ready for a spring.

"Perhaps he didn't get away," he said quietly. "Perhaps he's still here— perhaps In the garden. He might even be in the house. Or in this very room!"

The Insistent buzz of the door-bell rang through the quiet house as the young man paused. Then it sounded again, urgently, authoritatively.

Bellamy, who had leapt to his feet, turned toward the door.

"That will be the police," he muttered. "Excuse me."

He returned a few moments later with a thick-set middle-aged man, who strode confidently into the room, was introduced as Sergeant Duffield, and raised his black eyebrows at the mention of Hamilton's name.

"I've heard of you," he announced. "You write those mystery stories and plays. So you found the body, eh? Can you give me a statement?"

Hamilton was smoking a second of his host's cigarettes. He nodded calmly.

"Certainly, if you likewise take a statement from Mr. Bellamy."

That gentleman eyed him in polite surprise. There was gentle reproof in his tone when he said, "My dear young man, what have I to do with this business? You burst into my house, demand the use of my telephone, accept my hospitality, and now you accuse me of knowing something about this unfortunate business!"

Hamilton faced him squarely.

"I accuse you of more than that," he said steadily. "I accuse you of being the murderer of that man out there on the pavement!"

"Here!" Sergeant Duffield's tone was sharp, "Hold on, young fellow! You can't make statements like that without proof!"

The playwright flung his cigarette into the fireplace and swung around on him.

"I'll give you proof," he said levelly. "It's been gathering before my eyes ever since I rang the doorbell tonight. I tell you that Mr. Bellamy shot that man from this window with a revolver fitted with a silencer. As I was coming up the path, he was shutting the window. When I rang the bell, I must have given him a nasty shock—he was pale and trembling when he opened the door.

"Then, when I told Bellamy that there was a dead man outside his house, he said, 'the body's just outside my gate.' I hadn't said anything about the body being near the gate. How did he know that?"

Duffield shifted impatiently.

"But this isn't proof, Mr Hamilton. You said you could give me proof!"

The young man pulled his overcoat about him.

"I can! When I stumbled over that man, he was dying. I could see his face quite plainly. He whispered what I first took to be a girl's name 'Belle Amy did this— shot me— jealousy.' Now I realised that he was trying to say Bellamy. He gave a gasp in the middle of the word that cut it in two— made it sound like a woman's name, Belle Amy."

No one spoke, and he finished quietly.

"The revolver, complete with silencer, is behind that gold shield on the table in the far corner."

Already Duffield had reached the stand, and was staring incredulously at the weapon. "Bellamy put it there after the shooting. My entrance prevented him from getting rid of it."

The clock in the room struck quarter past. Duffield, holding the revolver carefully in a handkerchief, moved back to the fireplace.

"I'm afraid you'll have to tell us all you know about this business, Mr. Bellamy."

The man addressed did not raise his eyes from the fire. Very gently he replied. "I know quite a lot about it, Sergeant. Far more than Mr. Hamilton dreams I know. For instance, I can tell you how, why, and when he shot poor John Weaver, who lies dead outside my house."

"You murdered Weaver, Mr. Hamilton, because you stole his plot and used it in your new play that is opening shortly. He threatened to expose you, and so you killed him to prevent a scandal. You see, Weaver came to me to-night with a written statement telling me how he sent you a play of his some months ago. He wanted you to read and criticise it. But you pretended it had never reached you, since that play contained a brilliant plot. You used the same plot in this new production. Weaver, reading a synopsis in the newspaper, recognised his own play and came to me to-night for advice."

The playwright had sunk into his chair. He tried to speak sneeringly, but his dry throat brought the words out as a thin whisper. "How do you know all this?"

The Reverend Bellamy raised his mild blue eyes to the young man's face. "Weaver came here to-night with a written statement of the facts— came to me for advice. I told him to go around and see you. He did so, but when he sent his card in to you and you recognised the name, you were afraid of your theft. You realised that it had been and you refused to see the man. You were in a panic, for the charge of plagiarism against a well-known playwright has serious consequences. So when Weaver left, you followed him to this lonely part of the road, and shot him in the back with, a revolver fitted with a silencer."

Duffield was staring at Bellamy in surprise. "How do you know all this?" he asked, not realising that he was echoing a question.

"By the simple solution of putting two and two together," was the reply. "I know that Hamilton did not see Weaver to-night, or he would have known something that I already knew. It was that poor John Weaver was dumb. So imagine my surprise when I recognised his body outside, since Mr. Hamilton had told me that this man, when dying, had spoken a few disjointed words."

Either Weaver had recovered his power of speech with death, or my informant was telling a deliberate lie."

Hamilton, his face paper-white, moistened his lips with his tongue.

"Why didn't I see him?" he muttered. "Why didn't I see him?"

"You were very quick-witted about that dying speech," Bellamy told him.

"At first, I believe, you were content to let it accuse an unknown person. Then, when you found the cup and discovered my name, you saw your chance to incriminate me. But in doing so, you gave yourself away in a dozen different directions.

"You said that this part of the suburb was strange to you, and yet over the telephone, you gave the police the street exactly. Then you said that you saw the dead man's face closely yet you admitted to coming out without matches. Again, it had been raining heavily. The road is tar-paved, but the path in front of my house is clay. Weaver's body lies in a mud-patch. If you had bent over the body as you described, you must have had mud on your shoes. Yet they are quite clean. All this proves one thing— that you followed Weaver and shot him from the road. He had come to town only this morning. You thought he had spoken to no one. If he were dead, you would be quite safe."

Hamilton, his face buried in his hands, did not speak as he paused.

It was Duffield who put the question. "But why give the alarm? Why didn't he slip away after the murder?"

Bellamy smiled gently. "It is publicity that makes the modern play a success. Mr. Hamilton has already shown his preference for the illustrated papers. Can't you see how every newspaper would take up the story— writer of mystery plays finds dead man and pins crime on murderer by sheer deduction? If his scheme had come off, it would have been worth hundreds of pounds in publicity. Mr. Hamilton's play would have run for months!"

The sergeant stared at the wretched playwright as though he could scarcely believe his eyes. "What about this revolver?" he asked.

"Oh that?" The elder man rose from his seat "Our young friend placed it there for you to find when I left this room to let you in. He had it in his overcoat pocket all the time. I noticed the bulge and wanted to make sure by offering to take his coat, but he was too alert for that. Better take your man along, Sergeant. I don't think he'll give much trouble."

When Sergeant Duffield returned to the sitting room, Bellamy was on his knees before the fireplace, raking out the coals. He did not glance up as the other man entered, but merely observed: "I'm afraid our playwright will get his meed of publicity, only it will be a trifle different from what he planned. But he allowed his imagination to run away with him, and that's the worst of being too clever."

Duffield crossed to the chair and stood by.

"The cleverness was on your part, Mr. Bellamy," he said. "That was a right smart piece of deduction on your part. You pieced it together. Just like one of those chaps in a detective novel." He paused and then added, "There's only one thing I can't understand. How did you know the body was outside of your gate before you'd even seen it?"

Bellamy rose to his feet. His melancholy face was lit by a smile.

"If I tell you that, Sergeant, I'm afraid I'll lose all my credit for cleverness. You see, I didn't make any of those deductions, as you call them. I was merely bluffing that man into a confession. Because— I knew that Hamilton had shot a man outside my gate even before he rang my doorbell."

Sergeant Duffield stared at him. "But how on earth—?"

"Simply because I happened to be shutting my window before going to bed when I looked out and saw Hamilton shoot Weaver down," Bellamy said quietly.

5: Pansy's Party

Miles Franklin

Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin 1879-1954

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 17 Sep 1910

Australian author who wrote as Miles Franklin and "Brent of Bin-Bin"; her first novel "My Brilliant Career", was, many years later, made into a popular TV mini-series. She wrote very few short stories. In fact, I can find only two.

THE LITTLE UP-COUNTRY TOWN of Gool-Gool was very chummy with itself. Its inhabitants were ever making merry with each other, in a variety of ways. Harvey Kelso was one of its leading men. His daughter went in style in which she was much handicapped by being the eldest of a family of boys of strong and rugged individuality, with stronger ideas of a "feller" enjoying himself without "puttin on any jam," and they adopted democratic notions of much free-and-easiness.

Musical evenings flourished in Gool-Gool. Pansy was going to give one now. She had one cousin from Sydney and another from Bathurst visiting her, and in honor of these ladies, had issued invitations on tinted notepaper bearing a flower in the corner. She invited young Howe from the bank because, for the present, he was her favorite swain, and the pleasure of the company of the three daughters of the editor of the local paper was requested, because it would not have been wise to overlook them. Young Thomson from the Lands Office was asked to come because he could sing, and Bert Caudley, the auctioneer, on account of his playing; old Burns, C.P.S., to make one more, and the two Brown girls because they had to be invited, and the two old Misses Jenkins for the same reason.

They had all accepted the invitations and great preparations were going on in the big house on the top of the hill overlooking the town. With herself and the kitchen in a tremendous muddle, Mrs Kelso had been busy all the morning, the result of which labor was to be seen in a great display of tarts, biscuits, and cakes of all fashions and complexions, which on d'oyley decorated plates, and in conjunction with a cup of tea, would be handed round in the drawing-room that evening, after the guests first began to show signs of thinking it was time to leave.

Pansy had spent all the morning in turning out the drawing-room and in effecting great decorations, of which no one, save herself, could see the use or result. Pansy was of too ambitious a nature to be cheerful and contented, and had too much intelligence to expect things to go smoothly. So, during the afternoon she afforded her cousins much amusement by her prognostications upon what might be expected to happen or not to happen.

"I suppose father will take a fit into his head to come in to-night without tidying himself. It's just about what he always does when I have a party. Mother, for goodness sake, wash the flour out of your hair. It's a wonder to me you can't cook without getting in such a mess. This young boil on the tip of my nose is something terrible. Something like that always happens me when there's anything important on. I suppose Gus and Charlie will come bundling in. I would love to have brothers with a bit of manners."

"I don't think Charlie will intrude," interposed Nellie, the Sydney cousin, "He doesn't seem to entertain a very high opinion of musical evenings or drawing-room parties."

"No," returned Pansy, "I trust him for not liking anything respectable. He'd prefer to go kicking up his heels in the gymnasium with any old Tom or Dick about the town. That would be more in his line. But, never mind; we'll, have no end of fun. I'll have a spoon with Joe Howe, and you can have young Caudley all to yourself."

In the afternoon when preparations had reached that stage when Pansy was laying her dress on the bed, and extracting the first curler from her fringe, which had been in torture since the night previous, a boy delivered a note for Miss Kelso. It proved to be from Mr Howe of the bank, begging to be excused on account of some very old friends from a distance having unexpectedly arrived.

"May Old Nick fly away with his big-toe and the toes of his friends," ejaculated Pansy "Why, couldn't they have turned up a day later? There's my whole party ruined. All the others can stay away now, for all I care. I got it up on purpose for young Howe."

"Why, Pansy, I thought you got the party up for cousin Sarah and I?" said Nellie, going off in a peal of laughter. Don't be so despondent. I'll let you have a share in Mr Caudley, or I'll give him to you altogether if you like. Come, cheer up! Here's cousin Sarah with another note for you."

It was from Bert Caudley stating that a fall from his bicycle had put his nose and eye in a sling and severely cut his knee, making it utterly impossible for him to appear in company that evening. Nellie very unsympathetically gave vent to another of her merry laughs; but Pansy's feelings were for a time beyond words.

She was collecting herself for a speech, when a third note was delivered to her. Mr Thomson begged to be excused as a piece of business, unforeseen when, he had accepted Miss Kelso's invitation, had cropped up to detain him. Cousin Sarah and, Nellie laughed consumedly.

"Look here," said Pansy, "do you think I can't see through this? They're playing a lark on me; I'll get a note from old Burns in a minute or two, saying

he's got toothache or a nail in his boot, or some such ailment, you see if I don't. They've just written these excuses for a hoax, or you and Nellie have done it, have you?" and Pansy looked suspiciously at her cousins, who assured her if it was a joke that they were not concerned in it.

Pansy had made up her mind to despatch Gus, as soon as he arrived home from work, to ascertain the true state of affairs, when that young gentleman saved her the bother by appearing on the scene and immediately opening fire.

"I say, Pans, Bert Caudley had a lucky escape."

"Escape from what?"

"Your party, of course. He nearly got killed off his bike, and he won't be able to turn, up to-night." After this remark followed particulars of the accident.

"Whatever will I do for men? It will be a 'hen convention,' " groaned Pansy. "Gus, you'll have to tidy yourself; and try and behave yourself for once."

"No jolly fear! You don't catch me at any of your old sing-songs. I'd just as soon sit with me head in a sugar-bag for a couple of hours. Joe Howe's uncle and cousin have come, and he's invited me to go shootIn' wallabies out at Bingee to-morrer, so I'm off to see if I can borrow a gun off Hinksman. I broke the trigger off mine."

"Oh, Heavens! What can I do for men?" said Pansy when Gus had departed.

"I'll try and coax Charlie to come in, and you'll have to go out and collect tramps from the highways," laughed Nellie.

"The whole thing can go smash for all I care. I'll leave my hair in pins, and eat all the cakes myself," said Pansy savagely.

The family tea came on, and during that meal they all did their best to persuade Charlie, the second brother, to. honor the shivoo with his presence. He vigorously remonstrated.

"Charlie, you must come in to-night," said Cousin Sarah.

"No fear; I ain't cut out to adorn parties," he replied.

"I don't think you adorn grammar; either," murmured Pansy under her breath.

"You must come in," said his mother.

"No fear; I don't cotton to girls at all. They're a tame lot, anyhow."

"Oh, Charlie; I'm sure you'll appear to please me," pleaded Nellie.

"Well, I might come in only that I was off to spend the night with Joe Fiddle," he replied.

"Where's Joe Fiddle?" inquired Pansy.

"He come down from Yabtree to-day with the waggon for supplies, and he's camped down agen the lagoon, in the police paddock. "

"Couldn't you persuade Joe to come up and spend the evening? He would make one more," said Mrs Kelso.

"Joe come up!" guffawed Charlie.: "Why, he ain't got anything on, but his dungarees and bluchers. I wonder how he'd shape at a party. By gum! wouldn't Pahsy screw up her nose at him. I'd just like to see him sittin' down lookin' on."

Before 9 o'clock all the ladies invited, and Mr Burns, the old bachelor, C.P.S., had put in an appearance, and having discarded their hats, were seated in the drawing room awaiting further orders. At present they were discussing the awful heat, dust and drought, scarcity of vegetables, and the alarming number of cases of typhoid fever in their midst,

Nellie had not appeared. She was still coaxing Charlie to appear. Pansy came out to see how she was progressing.

"However am I to keep things going?" she groaned for the sixtieth time. "I wish father would come home. I didn't want him at first, but how I wouldn't mind if he had on nothing but a sheet, and stood on his head by the piano"

"I'll get dressed and show up; an I guess I'll make things hum," said Charlie with sudden good-nature, "I can easy go down and see Joe to-morrer night. It'll take him all day to load. Set old Burns goin' on the war, and he'll entertain all the rest. Just btell him old Buller wasn't worth a farthing, an' watch how that information will strike him."

Charlie soon entered the drawing-room with collar very much awry and hair all on end and wet around forehead from washing his face.

"Good night Miss Jenkins, good night, Miss Brown, good night, all you girls, I can't be bothered speaking to each one separate," he said, with boyish candour.

"Hullo, Mr Burns! What about the war? Old Buller was a great big messer, wasn't he?"

"My dear boy, you make an ignorant assertion. Major-General Sir Redvers Buller was one of the most efficient officers and brave gentlemen in Her Majesty's Service. In the Transvaal you must remember—"

"He was an old duffer," interjected Cherlie, winking at Nellie, who laughed so uncontrollably that Miss Jenkins ("The Glum", as Charlie termed her) eyed her with a stony gaze and wondered what some people found to laugh at.

Old Burns rattled on:

"The impertinenee of a little State like the Transvaal daring" (here he glared fiercely round) "to attack England! If I had had my way I would have wiped out every Boer."

"Hurroo! Let's sing 'Soldiers of the Queen,' " said Charlie, winking once more. Pansy played the accompaniment of this ballad, and all the company joined lustily in the chorus.

After this item Mr Burns favored the company by reciting "The Absent-Minded Beggar", which was a great success. Next Mrs Ivelso sang "Caller Herrin' ", but it wasn't such a success, as old Burns was itching to begin on the war again.

Burns, Charlie, and the elder ladies talked war at one end of the room, while the younger ones teased each other about their sweethearts and discussed fashions at the other. Thus an hour passed. Mr Kelso came home and gave Mr Burns a fresh start about the war and threatened Charlie with expulsion if he had so much to say. At 10.30 Miss Brown rose from her seat and announced her intention of going home.

"Nonsense! It's quite early yet," said Mr and Mrs Kelso and Pansy; whereupon Miss Brown sat down again and Pansy went out and made the tea, which she brought in on one tray. Charlie following with cakes, tarts, biscuits, d'oyleys, and plates— a great array— on another.

Pansy dispensed tea and Charlie essayed to distribute the cake. In attempting to pass a plate of biscuits he caught his thumb in the netting of a d'oyley, and there was a spill. Quite unabashed, he deliberately placed the tray on the lap of Miss Jenkins, the Glum, while he collected his scattered goodies, giving a few of his views the while:

"I'm blessed if I can see the sense of these rags girls put round cakes. I suppose they think it makes 'em look pretty, but it doesn't, and they're the dooce of a nuisance. Hold on to the tray, Miss Jenkins; you can have a good feed on the sly and no one will see how much you eat. I wish I could get such a chance."

Miss Jenkins looked glum indeed, and Mr Kelso threatened Charlie with a lift under the ear for his want of manners, but with the buoyancy of sixteen, Charlie quickly recovered from the indignity of such a threat, and went on as merrily as before.

At 11.30 saw the last of the guests departed. Pansy, heaving a sigh of relief, lectured Charlie with vigor.

"Thank goodness, they're gone at last. I thought the night would never end, and it would have been such lovely fun if the others had only come."

"I don't see as there could have been any more fun," said the exasperating Charlie. "Me spillin' them cakes and the look of old Glum was the best fun. If Bert Caudley had come, he'd a played one of his stale old tunes and the others would have sung, 'I do not ask for the' hea r-rt of thy hear-r-r-t!' " And he went off, mimicking the peculiar, squeaking voice of young Hoyce with such

exactitude that Pansy went to bed in a huff, and Nellie laughed long after the candle was extinguished.

"There's never anything turns out the way I expect," said Pansy. "It'll be a long time before I get up another party."

6: The Blood-Red One
Maxwell Struthers Burt

1882-1954

Scribner's Magazine, Nov 1918

IT WAS a February evening, so it seems, about five o'clock, and old Mr. Vandusen, having left his hat and ulster in the coatroom, had retraced his steps along the entrance hall of the St. Dunstan Club to the wide doorway that led into the first-floor library. He usually sought the library at this time of day; a little group of men, all of whom he knew well, were as a rule to be found there, and they were friendly, not overly argumentative, restful. Now he paused between the heavy portières, partly drawn aside, and peered for a moment into the room. The light from the hall behind him made a pool of faint illumination at his feet, but beyond that there was only a brown darkness, scented with the smell of books in leather bindings, in which the figures of several men, sprawled out in big chairs before the window, were faintly visible. The window itself, a square of blank fog-blurred dusk, served merely to heighten the obscurity. Mr. Vandusen, a small, plump shadow in the surrounding shadows, found an unoccupied chair and sank into it silently.

"And that's just it," said Maury suddenly, and as if he was picking up the threads of a conversation dropped but a moment before; "and that's just the point"—and his usually gentle voice was heavy with a didacticism unlike itself—"that affects most deeply a man of my temperament and generation. Nemesis—fate—whatever you choose to call it. The fear that perhaps it doesn't exist at all. That there is no such thing; or worse yet, that in some strange, monstrous way man has made himself master of it—has no longer to fear it. And man isn't fit to be altogether master of anything as yet; he's still too much half devil, half ape. There's this damned choked feeling that the world's at loose ends. I don't know how to put it—as if, that is, we, with all the devilish new knowledge we've acquired within the past fifty years, the devilish new machines we've invented, have all at once become stronger than God; taken the final power out of the hands of the authority, whatever it is, toward which we used to look for a reckoning and balancing in the end, no matter what agony might lie between. Perhaps it's all right—I don't know. But it's an upsetting conclusion to ask a man of my generation offhandedly to accept. I was brought up—we all were—to believe in an ordered, if obscure, philosophical doctrine that evil inevitably finds its own punishment, and now—!"

"But—" began Tomlinson.

Maury interrupted him. "Yes, yes," he said, "I know all that; I know what you are going to say. I am perfectly aware of the fact that the ways of Nemesis

are supposed to be slow ways— exceedingly. I am aware of the fact that in the Christian doctrine the process is not usually completed until after death, but nowadays things are different. How, since all else moves so swiftly, can a just God afford any longer to be patient? Time has been obliterated in the last four years; space and centuries telescoped; the sufferings of a century compressed into a few cycles of months. No, there is something wrong, some break in the rhythm of the universe, or those grotesque ghouls who started the whole thing, those full-bodied, cold-blooded hangmen, who for forty years have been sitting back planning the future of men and women as they planned the cards of their sniggering skat games, would awake to a sun dripping blood." He paused for a moment. "And as for that psychiatric cripple, their mouthpiece," he concluded sombrely, "that maimed man who broods over battle-fields, he would find a creeping horror in his brain like death made visible."

"And you think he will not?"....

In the darkness Mr. Vandusen suddenly sat up very straight and tried to pierce with his eyes the shadows to the right of him.

Again the chair creaked.

"And you think he will not?" asked the voice again.

The words fell one by one into the silence, like stones dropped into a pool by a precise hand. As the ripples of sound they created died away in the brown dusk, the room seemed for a moment to hold a hushed expectation that made ordinary quiet a matter of movement and sound. From the drab street outside the voice of a newsboy, strident and insistent, put a further edge to the sharp minute. "N'extra!" he shouted. "N'extra! 'Nother big raid on west'n front!"

It was Torrance who asked the question. "What—" he said. "But, but— why—!" And then his wheezing inarticulateness broke like a dislocated bellows.

Mr. Vandusen, leaning forward in his chair, did not realize at the time the unreasonableness of the sharp blaze of irritation that at the interruption burned within him. It was not until much later, indeed, that he realized other odd circumstances as well: Torrance's broken amazement, for instance; the silence of Maury, and Wheeler, and, above all, of Tomlinson. At the moment he realized nothing, except an intense curiosity to hear what the man who had just sat down next to him had to say. "An extraordinary voice! Altogether extraordinary! Like a bell, that is, if a bell could by any chance give a sense of an underlying humor." And yet, even considering all this, when one is old and has heard so many voices— But here he was quite rigid in the darkness. "Do be quiet!" he whispered sharply. "Can't we be quiet!"

"Thanks!" said the voice, with its cool, assured inflections. "There is nothing so very extraordinary. Men's brains are not unlike. Merely— shall I go on?"

And before Mr. Vandusen's hurried assent could be uttered, the quiet tones assumed the accent of narration. "Good," they said. "Very well, then. But first I must ask of you a large use of your imagination. I must ask you, for instance, to imagine a scene so utterly unlike this February night that your eyes will have to close themselves entirely to the present and open only to my words. I must ask you to imagine a beech forest in early November; a beech forest dreaming beneath the still magic of warm, hazy days; days that come before the first sharp cold of winter. Will you imagine that?"

"Yes!" murmured Mr. Vandusen; and he noticed that the other men did not answer at all.

"The mild sunlight," continued the voice, "filters through the naked boughs and touches the smooth silver trunks and the moss about their feet with a misty gold as iridescent as the wings of dragonflies. And as far as you can see on every side stretch these silver boles, dusted with sunlight; in straight lines, in oblique columns, until the eye loses itself in the argent shadows of the distance.

"In the hidden open places, where the grass is still green toward its roots, wild swine come out of the woods and stare with small red eyes; but save for the crackling of the twigs beneath their feet it is very quiet. Marvellously so. Quiet with the final hush of summer. Only rarely a breeze stirs the legions of the heaped-up gray leaves, and sometimes, but rarely, one hears far off the chattering of a squirrel. So!— that is my forest.

"Through it runs like a purple ribbon a smooth, well-kept road. And it, too, adds to the impression of stillness, as the untenanted handiwork of man always does. On the rolled, damp surface are the marks of the cloven feet of the swine.

"Now there is a snapping of dead wood, a rustling of leaves, and an immense tusker— a grizzled leader of a herd— comes ponderously through the sun-dappled aisles to the edge of the road. For a moment he stands there, secure and unperturbed, and then suddenly he throws up his head, his little eyes wide and startled, and, wheeling, charges back to where his satellites are browsing. There is a breathless scurrying of huge bodies; then utter silence again, except that far away a limb cracks. But only for a moment is the road deserted. It seems as if the shadow of the great tusker was still upon it when, beyond the bend, a horn, sweet as a hunting-horn, blows once, twice, ends in a fanfare of treble notes, and a long, gray motor-car sweeps into view, cutting the sunlight and the pooled shadow with its twinkling prow. Behind it is another, and another, and another, until six in all are in sight; and as they flash past one has a glimpse, on the seats of the landaulets, of a number of men in long cloaks and helmets; big and little men; fat men and sharp-featured;

elderly men and young men, and particularly of one man, in the second car from the front, who looks straight ahead of him and is not interested in the chatter of his companions. He is a stern man, rather terrible, and his face wears a curious pallor. On the crest of a wooded slope, a quarter of a mile away, the giant boar sniffs the odor of the gasoline and delicately wrinkles his nose.

"And this," said the voice, "this convoy of motor-cars, these horns, almost as gay as the hunting-horns of former days, was, as you have guessed, The Maimed Man— as you choose to call him— come back to a hunting-lodge to rest, to slip from his shoulders for a while, if he could, the sodden cloak he had been wearing for the past three years and as many months.

"It was dark when they came to the hunting-lodge, a long, two-storied building of white plaster and timber-work above. The sun had been gone a while beyond the low hills to the west, and in the open place where the house stood only a remnant of the red dust of the sunset still floated in the pellucid air. Here the beeches gave way to solid ranks of pines and firs, and the evening sweetness of these fell upon the senses like the touch of cool water upon tired eyes. The headlights of the motor-cars cut wide arcs of blinding light in the gathering darkness. One by one the cars stopped before the entrance with throbbing engines and discharged their loads. The short flight of stairs became for a few minutes a swaying tableau of gray cloaks. There was a subdued ringing of spurs. The lamps from within the doorway touched the tips of the helmets so that they twinkled like little stars.

"The Maimed Man descended slowly and passed between his waiting suite. The scent of the pines had stirred his heart with memories. He was thinking of the last time he had been here, years before— well, not really so many years before, only four years, and yet it seemed like a recollection of his boyhood. He paused inside the threshold to remove his cloak. A hand, with a curious lack of duplication to it, stretched itself forward. The Maimed Man turned abruptly to see a servant with one arm bowing toward him. For a moment he paused, and then:

" 'You are wounded?' he asked, and, although nothing was further from his desire, his voice had in it a little rasping sound; anger it seemed, although it might very well have been fear.

"The man turned a brick-red. He had never quite been able to recover from the feeling that in some way to be crippled was a shameful thing. He had been very strong before.

" 'At Liège, your Majesty,' he murmured. 'In the first year.'

" 'Always the left arm,' said The Maimed Man. 'Always the left. It seems always so.' But now he was angry. He turned to one of his suite. 'Can I not

escape such things even here?' he asked. He went up without further words to his rooms. From his study a long door of glass opened onto a balcony. He remembered the balcony well. He opened the door and stepped out. The twilight had gone now. The night was very still and touched with a hint of crispness. Stars were beginning to show themselves. The black pines that came down to the edge of the clearing were like a great hidden army."

There was a little pause.

"And so," said the voice, "I can come now almost at once to the first of the two incidents I wish to tell you. I choose only two because there is no need of more. Two will do. And I shall call the first 'The story of the leaves that marched.'

"The warm days still held, and at the hunting-lodge there was much planning to keep things moving and every one busy and content. But secret planning, you understand. The Maimed Man is not an easy person for whom to plan unless he thinks that he has the final decision himself. There were rides and drives and picnics and, in the afternoons, usually a long walk, in which the older and stouter members of the suite either stayed at home or else followed painfully in the rear of their more active companions. The Maimed Man is a difficult person to keep up with; he walks very fast across country, swinging his stick, choosing, it would seem, the roughest ways. It is almost as if he wished to rid himself of others; and he is inordinately proud of his own activity. It was a curious sight to see his straggling attendants, spread out through the silver vistas of the beeches, like earnest trolls, all in one way or another bent upon a common end. And I suppose it was on account of this trick of The Maimed Man that one afternoon, toward dusk, he found himself almost completely alone, save for myself, who managed somehow to keep step, and a silent huntsman in gray who strode on ahead with the quiet, alert step of a wild animal.

"It was very still. There was no breeze at all. Not a sound except the sound of the dead leaves beneath our feet; and The Maimed Man was not, as was his usual wont, talking. Indeed, he seemed very preoccupied, almost morosely so. Every now and then he cut with his stick at a bush or a yellowed fern as he passed. Presently the trees opened upon a little glade swimming in sunlight. And then there was a brook to cross, and beyond that a gentle slope before the trees began again. The sunlight was pleasantly warm after the coolness of the forest, and the slope, with its soft dried grass, seemed an inviting place to rest. The Maimed Man continued until he had reached the farther belt of trees, and then he turned about and faced the sinking sun, that by now was changing itself into a nebulous radiance on the horizon. The forest stretched in gentle billows as far as the eye could see.

" 'We will stop here,' said The Maimed Man, 'until the others catch up. Lazy-bones! If they had one-half the work to do that my poorest man has to the south they would not lose their legs so readily.' Then he sat down and lit a cigarette. I sat beside him. Farther up on the slope, in the shadow of the trees, sat the huntsman. We waited. The sun burned away its quivering aura and began to sink blood-red below the hills. Long shadows fell, penetrated with the dancing flecks of twilight.

" 'Here they come!' said The Maimed Man suddenly. 'I see gray moving. There— below there, amongst the trees!' He pointed with his cane. Far back in the secret aisles of the forest across the brook there did indeed seem to be a movement. The Maimed Man half arose to his feet. 'I will shame them, the lazy-bones,' he said, and then he sat down again, with an odd, soft collapse.

"For, you see, it was very still, as I have said. Not a trace of wind. The forest seemed to be slumbering. And yet there had come out of it, and across the open place, and up the slope, so that it touched the hair and chilled the cheek, something that was not wind and yet was like it. A little clammy cat's-paw. So! And then was gone. And on its heels came the leaves. Yes, millions of them. But not blown; not hurriedly. Very hesitatingly; as if by their own volition. One might have said that they oozed with a monstrous slowness out from between the crepuscular tree-trunks and across the open space toward the brook. Gray leaves, creeping forward with a curious dogged languor. And when they came to the brook they paused on its farther edge and stopped, and the ones behind came pushing up to them. And looking down upon them, they might have been the backs of wounded men in gray, dragging themselves on their knees to water....

"I don't know how long this moment lasted— minutes perhaps; perhaps no longer than the drawing in and letting out of a breath. It was broken by the figure of a man— an upstanding man, this time— who stepped out of the forest opposite and, halting for a moment on the edge of the clearing, looked up to where The Maimed Man was sitting. Then he signalled to some one behind him, and presently one by one the figures of the belated suite appeared. They formed themselves in a little group and with some precision marched across the clearing. As they trampled upon the stricken leaves by the brookside the fixed stare in The Maimed Man's eyes faded, and he watched them with a rigid attention. Shortly they came to where he had got to his feet. A huge elderly man with a red face led them.

" 'But your Majesty,' he objected, 'it is not fitting. You should not leave us in this way. Even here, is it altogether safe?'

"The Maimed Man did not answer. Covertly and with a sly shamefacedness, unlike himself, he was trying to read the expression in the

hunter's face. But that faithful fellow's eyes were bland. There was no sign that he had seen anything out of the ordinary....

"There is no need," said the voice, "for delay. From this to the second incident I would describe to you is only a step. I shall not go into details. For these I can safely trust to your imaginations. And yet I would not, of course, have you gather that what I have just told you is without background— was out of a clear sky. Naturally, it was not; it was a cumulation, an apex. Such things do not happen altogether suddenly. There is a nibbling away at the banks, a little rivulet here and there, and then, all at once, a torrent like a hunted river under the moon. I called the first apex 'The story of the leaves that marched'; I shall call the second 'The mist that came up suddenly.'

"Two weeks had passed; quiet days, slow weeks, quiet and slow as the sunlight through the trees. The two doctors at the hunting-lodge, round, sharp-spoken men, with big, near-sighted spectacles, rubbed their hands together and nodded with certainty when they held their daily consultations. 'He is improving rapidly,' they said. 'The lines in his face are going. A little more exercise, a little more diversion— so!' They imagined crosses on their chests.

"Have you ever known mist on a moonlight night in a forest? Not a woods, not an open country with timber scattered through it, but a real forest; so limitless, so close-pressing, that one has the same sense of diminished personality and at the same time the same sense of all obstructions cleared away between oneself and the loneliness of the universe that one has at sea. As if, that is, you found yourself, a mere shadow in the darkness, kneeling close before an altar on which blazed, so that you could not altogether raise your head, the magnificence of a star. But mist in a moonlight forest is even more disembodied than mist on a moonlight sea. There are the dark masses of the trees, showing every now and then above the changing wraiths of white, and the summits of half-seen hills, to give an impression of a horizon near yet seemingly unattainable.

"They had finished supper in the great oak-ceilinged room down below, where a fire burned in the stone embrasure, and the soft lights of candles in silver candelabra made only more tenebrous the darkness overhead. The Maimed Man leaned back in his chair and peered with narrowed eyelids through the smoke of his cigar at the long table stretching away from him. For a moment he felt reassured; a hint of the old assurance that had once been one of his greatest gifts. It was partly a physical thing, stirring in his veins like the cool blood that follows the awakening from healthy sleep. The sight of all these friends of his, these followers of his, with their keen, sunburnt faces, or their wrinkled and wise ones—! Surely he occupied a position almost unassailable; almost as unassailable as that of the God of Force whose

purposes of late had at times puzzled him in a new and disturbing way— . What nonsense! He gripped power as securely as he could grip, if he wished, his sword. What strength in heaven or earth could break a man's will, provided that will had been sufficiently trained? He felt pleasantly tired from the walk of the afternoon; he thought that he would go up to his rooms for a while, perhaps write a personal letter or two, afterward come down again for a game of cards. He stood up; the long double lines of men at the table rose with him, as a unit, at attention. The Maimed Man looked at them for a prolonged second, his heart stirred with pride; then he wheeled about and departed.

"In his workroom above, two secretaries were writing at a table under the rays of a green-shaded lamp. They jumped to their feet as he entered, but he waved them aside.

" 'I shall return in a moment,' he said. 'First I wish to finish my cigar.'

"He opened the glass door onto the balcony, but, as it was cool, he stepped back and asked for his military cloak. When this was adjusted, he stepped once more into the moonlight.... And then, suddenly, there was no moonlight at all, or just the faintest glimmer of it, like light seen through milky water. Instead, he had stepped into a swirling vapor that in an instant lost him completely from the door he had just left; a maelstrom of fog, that choked him, half blinded him, twisted about him like wet, coiling ropes, and in a dreadful moment he saw that through the fog were thrust out toward him arms of a famine thinness, the extended fingers of which groped at his throat, were obliterated by the fog, groped once more with a searching intentness.

" 'God!' said The Maimed Man. 'God!'— and fought drunkenly for the wall behind him. His hands touched nothing. He did not even know in which direction the wall lay. He dreaded to move, for it seemed as if there was no longer a railing to save him from falling. There was no solidity anywhere. The world had become a thing of hideous flux, unstable as when first it was made. Gelid fingers, farther reaching than the rest, touched the back of his neck. He gave a hoarse, strangled cry and reeled forward, and fell across the balustrade that came up out of the mist to meet him. And slowly the mist retreated; down from the balcony and across the open place beneath. A narrow line of dew-brightened grass appeared and grew wider. The tops of the trees began to show. But The Maimed Man could not take his eyes off the mist, for it seemed to him that the open place was filled with the despairing arms of women and of children, and that through the shifting whiteness gleamed the whiteness of their serried faces. Behind him was the warm glow of the room, shining through the glass doors. But he did not dare go in as yet; it was necessary first to control the little flecks of foam that despite his endeavor still wet his lips. For you see," said the voice, and in the darkness its accents took on a slow,

rhythmical sombreness, like the swish of a sword in a shuttered room, "this was far worse than the leaves. For, after all, the dead are only the dead, but to the living there is no end."

At least a minute— fully a minute— must have passed, a minute in which the brown shadows of the library, held back for now this long while by the weaving magic of the voice, stepped forward once more into their places, while Mr. Vandusen waited for the voice to continue. Then the spell broke like a shattered globe, and, with a sudden realization of many things, he leaned forward and felt the chair to the right of him. There was no one there. He paused with his hand still on the leather seat. "Would you mind telling me," he asked, and he found that he was speaking with some effort and with great precision, "if any of you know the gentleman who has just left?"

"Left?" said Tomlinson sharply.

"Yes— left."

Tomlinson's voice was incredulous. "But he couldn't have," he insisted. "From where I am sitting I would have seen him as he reached the door. Although, if he really is gone, I can say, thank the Lord, that I think he's a faker."

On silent feet young Wheeler had departed for the hall. Now he returned. "It may interest you to know," he said, "that I have just interviewed the doorman and the boy who is stationed at the steps leading back, and they both say no one has come in or out in the last half-hour."

Suddenly his careful voice rose to a high note. "What the devil— !" he sputtered. He strode over to the electric switch. "For Heaven's sake, let's have some light," he said. "Why do we always insist upon sitting in this confounded darkness?"

7: The Meeker Ritual

Joseph Hergesheimer

1880-1954

The Century, Jun, Oct 1919

Joseph Hergesheimer was an American writer of the early 20th century known for his naturalistic novels of decadent life amongst the very wealthy. [Wikipedia]

THE ENTIRE PRETENSION is so ridiculous that it is difficult to credit the extent of its acceptance. I don't mean McGeorge's story, but the whole sweep of spiritism. It ought to be unnecessary to point out the puerility of the evidence—the absurd babble advanced as the speech of wise men submerged in the silent consummation of death, the penny tricks with bells and banjos, the circus-like tables and anthropomorphic Edens. Yet, so far as the phrase goes, there is something in it; but whatever that is, lies in demonstrable science, the investigations of the subconscious by Freud and Jung.

McGeorge himself, a reporter with a sufficient education in the actual, tried to repeat impartially, with the vain illusion of an open mind, what he had been told; but it was clear that his power of reasoning had been disarranged. We were sitting in the Italian restaurant near his paper to which he had conducted me, and he was inordinately troubled by flies. A small, dark man, he was never without a cigarette; he had always been nervous, but I had no memory of such uneasiness as he now exhibited.

"It's rather dreadful," he said, gazing at me for an instant, and then shifting his glance about the white plaster walls and small flock of tables, deserted at that hour. "I mean this thing of not really dying—hanging about in the wind, in space. I used to have a natural dread of death; but now I'm afraid of—of keeping on. When you think of it, a grave's quite a pleasant place. It's restful. This other—" He broke off, but not to eat.

"My editor," he began anew, apparently at a tangent, "wouldn't consider it. I was glad. I'd like to forget it, go back. There might be a story for you."

Whatever he had heard in connection with the Meeker circle, I assured him, would offer me nothing; I didn't write that sort of thing.

"You'd appreciate Lizzie Tuoey," he asserted.

McGeorge had been sent to the Meeker house to unearth what he could about the death of Mrs. Kraemer. He described vividly the location, which provided the sole interest to an end admitted normal in its main features. It was, he said, one of those vitrified wildernesses of brick that have given the city the name of a place of homes; dreadful. Amazing in extent, it was without a single feature to vary the monotony of two-storied dwellings cut into exact parallelograms by paved streets; there was a perspective of continuous

façades and unbroken tin roofs in every direction, with a grocery or drug-store and an occasional saloon at the corners, and beyond the sullen red steeple of a church.

Dusk was gathering when McGeorge reached the Meekers. It was August, and the sun had blazed throughout the day, with the parching heat; the smell of brick dust and scorched tin was hideous. His word. There was, too, a faint metallic clangor in the air. He knew that it came from the surface-cars, yet he could not rid himself of the thought of iron furnace-doors.

He had, of course, heard of the Meekers before. So had I, for that matter. A crack-brained professor had written a laborious, fantastic book about their mediumship and power of communication with the other world. They sat together as a family: the elder Meekers; the wife's sister; a boy, Albert, of fourteen; Ena, close to twenty; and Jannie, a girl seventeen years old and the medium proper. Jannie's familiar spirit was called Stepan. He had, it seemed, lived and died in the reign of Peter the Great; yet he was still actual, but unmaterialized, and extremely anxious to reassure every one through Jannie of the supernal happiness of the beyond. What messages I read, glancing over hysterical pages, gave me singularly little comfort, with the possible exception of the statement that there were cigars; good cigars Stepan, or Jannie, explained, such as on earth cost three for a quarter.

However, most of what McGeorge told me directly concerned Lizzie Tuoey. The Meekers he couldn't see at all. They remained in an undiscovered part of the house—there was a strong reek of frying onions from the kitchen—and delegated the servant as their link with the curious or respectful or impertinent world.

Lizzie admitted him to the parlor, where, she informed him, the sittings took place. There wasn't much furniture beyond a plain, heavy table, an array of stiff chairs thrust back against the walls, and on a mantel a highly painted miniature Rock of Ages, with a white-clad figure clinging to it, washed with a poisonous green wave, all inclosed in a glass bell. At the rear was a heavy curtain that, he found, covered the entrance to a smaller room.

Lizzie was a stout, cheerful person, with the ready sympathies and superstitions of the primitive mind of the south of Ireland. She was in a maze of excitement, and his difficulty was not to get her to talk, but to arrest her incoherent flood of invocations, saints' names, and credulity.

Her duties at the Meekers had been various; one of them was the playing of mechanical music in the back room at certain opportune moments. She said that Stepan particularly requested it; the low strains made it easier for him to speak to the dear folks on this side. It couldn't compare, though, Stepan had added, with the music beyond; and why should it, Lizzie had commented, and

all the blessed saints bursting their throats with tunes! She swore, however, that she had had no part in the ringing of the bells or the knocks and jumps the table took.

She had no explanation for the latter other than the conviction that the dear God had little, if any, part in it. Rather her choice of an agent inclined to the devil. Things happened, she affirmed, that tightened her head like a kettle. The cries and groaning from the parlor during a sitting would blast the soul of you. It was nothing at all for a stranger to faint away cold. The light would then be turned up, and water dashed on the unconscious face.

She insisted, McGeorge particularized, that the Meekers took no money for their sittings. At times some grateful person would press a sum on them; a woman had given two hundred and seventy dollars after a conversation with her nephew, dead, as the world called it, twelve years. All the Meekers worked but Jannie; she was spared every annoyance possible, and lay in bed till noon. At the suggestion of Stepan, she made the most unexpected demands. Stepan liked pink silk stockings. He begged her to eat a candy called Turkish paste. He recommended a "teeny" glass of Benedictine, a bottle of which was kept ready. He told her to pinch her flesh black to show—Lizzie Tuoey forgot what.

Jannie was always dragged out with a face the color of wet laundry soap. She had crying fits; at times her voice would change, and she'd speak a gibberish that Mr. Meeker declared was Russian; and after a trance she would eat for six. There was nothing about the senior Meeker Lizzie could describe, but she disliked Mrs. Meeker intensely. She made the preposterous statement that the woman could see through the blank walls of the house. Ena was pale, but pretty, despite dark smudges under her eyes; she sat up very late with boys or else sulked by herself. Albert had a big grinning head on him, and ate flies. Lizzie had often seen him at it. He spent hours against the panes of glass and outside the kitchen door.

It wasn't what you could name gay at the Meekers, and, indeed, it hadn't been necessary for the priest to insist on the girl finding another place; she had decided that independently after she had been there less than a month. Then Mrs. Kraemer had died during a sitting. She would be off, she told McGeorge, the first of the week.

The latter, whose interest at the beginning had been commendably penetrating, asked about Mrs. Meeker's sister; but he discovered nothing more than that—Lizzie Tuoey allowed for a heretic—she was religious. They were all serious about the spiritism, and believed absolutely in Jannie and Stepan, in the messages, the voices and shades that they evoked.

However, questioned directly about Mrs. Kraemer's presence at a sitting, the servant's ready flow of comment and explanation abruptly dwindled to the

meager invocation of holy names. It was evidently a business with which she wanted little dealing, even with Mrs. Kraemer safely absent, and with no suspicion of criminal irregularity.

The reporting of that occurrence gave a sufficiently clear impression of the dead woman. She was the relict of August, a naturalized American citizen born in Salzburg, and whose estate, a comfortable aggregate of more than two millions, came partly from hop-fields in his native locality. There was one child, a son past twenty, not the usual inept offspring of late-acquired wealth, but a vigorously administrative youth who spent half the year in charge of the family investment in Germany. At the beginning of the Great War the inevitable overtook the Salzburg industry; its financial resources were acquired by the Imperial Government, and young Kraemer, then abroad, was urged into the German Army.

McGeorge, with a great deal of trouble, extracted some additional angles of insight on Mrs. Kraemer from the reluctant Lizzie.

She was an impressive figure of a lady in fine lavender muslin ruffles, a small hat, blazing diamonds, and a hook in her nose, but Roman and not Jew. A bullying voice and a respectful chauffeur in a glittering car completed the picture. She had nothing favorable to say for the location of the Meeker house; indeed, she complained pretty generally, in her loud, assertive tones, about the inefficiency of city administration in America, but she held out hopes of improvement in the near future. She grew impatiently mysterious—hints were not her habit—in regard to the good shortly to enfold the entire earth. Lizzie gathered somehow that this was bound up with her son, now an officer in a smart Uhlan regiment.

A man of Mrs. Kraemer's type, and the analogy is far closer than common, would never have come to the Meekers for a message from a son warring in the north of France. It is by such lapses that women with the greatest show of logic prove the persistent domination of the earliest emotional instincts. After all, Lizzie Tuoey and Mrs. Kraemer were far more alike than any two such apparently dissimilar men.

At this point McGeorge was lost in the irrelevancy of Lizzie's mind. She made a random statement about Mrs. Meeker's sister and a neighbor, and returned to the uncertain quality of Jannie's temper and the limitations of a medium. It seemed that Jannie was unable to direct successful sittings without a day between for the recuperation of her power. It used her up something fierce. Stepan as well, too often recalled from the joys of the beyond, the cigars of the aroma of three for a quarter, grew fretful; either he refused to answer or played tricks, such as an unexpected sharp thrust in Albert's ribs, or a knocked message of satirical import, "My! wouldn't you just like to know!"

McGeorge had given up the effort to direct the conversation; rather than go away with virtually nothing gained, he decided to let the remarks take what way they would. In this he was wise, for the girl's sense of importance, her normal pressing necessity for speech, gradually submerged her fearful determination to avoid any contact with an affair so plainly smelling of brimstone. She returned to Miss Brasher, the sister, and her neighbor.

The latter was Mrs. Doothnack, and, like Mrs. Kraemer, she had a son fighting in the north of France. There, however, the obvious similitude ended; Edwin Doothnack served a machine-gun of the American Expeditionary Forces, while his mother was as poor and retiring as the other woman was dogmatic and rich. Miss Brasher brought her early in the evening to the Meekers, a little person with the blurred eyes of recent heavy crying, excessively polite to Lizzie Tueoy. Naturally, this did nothing to increase the servant's good opinion of her.

The sister soon explained the purpose of their visit: Edwin, whose regiment had occupied a sacrifice position, was missing. There his mother timidly took up the recital. The Meekers were at supper, and Lizzie, in and out of the kitchen, heard most of the developments. When the report about Edwin had arrived, Mrs. Doothnack's friends were reassuring; he would turn up again at his regiment, or else he had been taken prisoner; in which case German camps, although admittedly bad, were as safe as the trenches. She had been intensely grateful for their good will, and obediently set herself to the acceptance of their optimism, when—it was eleven nights now to the day—she had been suddenly awakened by Edwin's voice.

"O God!" Edwin had cried, thin, but distinct, in a tone of exhausted suffering—"O God!" and "Mummer!" his special term for Mrs. Doothnack. At that, she declared, with straining hands, she knew that Edwin was dead.

Miss Brasher then begged darling Jannie to summon Stepan and discover the truth at the back of Mrs. Doothnack's "message" and conviction. If, indeed, Edwin had passed over, it was their Christian duty to reassure his mother about his present happiness, and the endless future together that awaited all loved and loving ones. Jannie said positively that she wouldn't consider it. A sitting had been arranged for Mrs. Kraemer to-morrow, so that she, without other means, might get some tidings of the younger August.

Mrs. Doothnack rose at once with a murmured apology for disturbing them, but Miss Brasher was more persistent. She had the determination of her virginal fanaticism, and of course she was better acquainted with Jannie. Lizzie wasn't certain, but she thought that Miss Brasher had money, though nothing approaching Mrs. Kraemer; probably a small, safe income.

Anyhow, Jannie got into a temper, and said that they all had no love for her, nobody cared what happened so long as they had their precious

messages. Stepan would be cross, too. At this Albert hastily declared that he would be out that evening; he had been promised moving-pictures. That old Stepan would be sure to bust his bones in. Jannie then dissolved into tears, and cried that they were insulting her dear Stepan, who lived in heaven. Albert added his wails to the commotion, Mrs. Doothnack sobbed from pure nervousness and embarrassment, and only Miss Brasher remained unmoved and insistent.

The result of this disturbance was that they agreed to try a tentative sitting. Stepping out into the kitchen, Mrs. Meeker told Lizzie that she needn't bother to play the music that evening.

Here the latter, with a sudden confidence in McGeorge's charitable knowledge of life, admitted that Jannie's bottle of Benedictine was kept in a closet in the room behind the one where the sittings were held. The Meekers had disposed themselves about the table, the circle locked by their hands placed on adjoining knees, with Jannie at the head and Mrs. Doothnack beyond. The servant, in the inner room for a purpose which she had made crystal clear, could just distinguish them in a dim, red-shaded light through the opening of the curtain.

By this time familiarity with the proceeding had bred its indifference, and Lizzie lingered at the closet. The knocks that announced Stepan's presence were a long time in coming; then there came an angry banging and a choked cry from Albert. The table plainly rocked and rose from the floor, and Jannie asked in the flat voice of the tranced:

"Is Edwin there? Here's his mother wanting to speak to him."

The reply, knocked out apparently on the wood mantel, and repeated for the benefit of the visitor, said that those who had won to the higher life couldn't be treated as a mere telephone exchange. Besides which, a party was then in progress, and Stepan was keeping waiting Isabella, consort of King Ferdinand, a lady who would not be put off. This business about Edwin must keep. Miss Brasher said in a firm voice:

"His mother is much distressed and prays for him to speak."

The answer rattled off was not interpreted, but Lizzie gathered that it was extremely personal and addressed to Miss Brasher. There was a silence after that, and then the table rose to a perceptible height and crashed back to the floor. In the startling pause which followed a voice, entirely different from any that had spoken, cried clear and low:

"O God!"

This frightened Lizzie to such an extent that she fled to the familiar propriety of the kitchen; but before she was out of hearing, Mrs. Doothnack screamed, "Edwin!"

Nothing else happened. The firm Miss Brasher and her neighbor departed immediately. Jannie, however looked a wreck, and cold towels and Benedictine were liberally applied. She sobbed hysterically, and wished that she were just a plain girl without a call. Further, she declared that nothing could induce her to proceed with the sitting for Mrs. Kraemer to-morrow. Stepan, before returning to Isabella of Castile, had advised her against it. With such droves of soldiers coming over, it was more and more difficult to control individual spirits. Things in the beyond were in a frightful mess. They might see something that would scare them out of their wits.

Mrs. Meeker, with a share of her sister's aplomb, said that she guessed they could put up with a little scaring in the interest of Mrs. August Kraemer. She was sick of doing favors for people like Agnes's friend, and made it clear that she desired genteel associates both in the here and the hereafter. Jannie's face began to twitch in a manner common to it, and her eyes grew glassy. At times, Lizzie explained, she would fall right down as stiff as a board, and they would have to put her on the lounge till she recovered. Her sentimental reading of Jannie's present seizure was that she was jealous of Ferdinand's wife.

Not yet, even, McGeorge confessed, did he see any connection between the humble little Mrs. Doothnack and Mrs. Kraemer, in her fine lavender and diamonds. He continued putting the queries almost at random to Lizzie Tuoey, noting carelessly, as if they held nothing of the body of his business, her replies. While the amazing fact was that, quite aside from his subsequent credulity or any reasonable skepticism, the two presented the most complete possible unity of causation and climax. As a story, beyond which I have no interest, together they are admirable. They were enveloped, too, in the consistency of mood loosely called atmosphere; that is, all the details of their surrounding combined to color the attentive mind with morbid shadows.

It was purely on Lizzie Tuoey's evidence that McGeorge's conversion to such ridiculous claims rested. She was not capable of invention, he pointed out, and continued that no one could make up details such as that, finally, of the Rock of Ages. The irony was too biting and inevitable. Her manner alone put what she related beyond dispute.

On the contrary, I insisted, it was just such minds as Lizzie's that could credit in a flash of light—probably a calcium flare—unnatural soldiers, spooks of any kind. Her simple pictorial belief readily accepted the entire possibility of visions and wonders.

I could agree or not, he proceeded wearily; it was of small moment. The fate waited for all men. "The fate of living," he declared, "the curse of eternity. You can't stop. Eternity," he repeated, with an uncontrollable shiver.

"Stepan seemed to find compensations," I reminded him.

"If you are so damned certain about the Tuoey woman," he cried, "what have you got to say about Mrs. Kraemer's death? You can't dismiss her as a hysterical idiot. People like her don't just die."

"A blood clot." His febrile excitement had grown into anger, and I suppressed further doubts.

He lighted a cigarette. The preparations for Mrs. Kraemer's reception and the sitting, he resumed, were elaborate. Mr. Meeker lubricated the talking-machine till its disk turned without a trace of the mechanism. A new record—it had cost a dollar and a half and was by a celebrated violinist—was fixed, and a halftone semi-permanent needle selected. Lizzie was to start this after the first storm of knocking, or any preliminary jocularly of Stepan's, had subsided.

Jannie had on new pink silk stockings and white kid slippers. Her head had been marcelled special, and she was so nervous that she tore three hair-nets. At this she wept, and stamped her foot, breaking a bottle of expensive scent.

When Mrs. Kraemer's motor stopped at the door, Lizzie went forward, and Mrs. Meeker floated down the stairs.

Stopping him sharply, I demanded a repetition of the latter phrase. It was Lizzie's. McGeorge, too, had expressed surprise, and the girl repeated it. Mrs. Meeker, she declared, often "floated." One evening she had seen Mrs. Meeker leave the top story by a window and stay suspended over the bricks twenty feet below.

Mrs. Kraemer entered the small hall like a keen rush of wind; her manner was determined, an impatience half checked by interest in what might follow. She listened with a short nod to Mr. Meeker's dissertation on the necessity of concord in all the assembled wills. The spirit world must be approached reverently, with trust and thankfulness for whatever might be vouchsafed.

The light in the front room, a single gas-burner, was lowered, and covered by the inevitable red-paper hood, and the circle formed. Lizzie was washing dishes, but the kitchen door was open, so that she could hear the knocks that were the signal for the music. They were even longer coming than on the night before, and she made up her mind that Stepan had declared a holiday from the responsibilities of a control. At last there was a faint vibration, and she went cautiously into the dark space behind the circle. The curtains had always hung improperly, and she could see a dim red streak of light.

The knocks at best were not loud; several times when she was about to start the record they began again inconclusively. Stepan finally communicated that he was exhausted. Some one was being cruel to him. Could it be Jannie? There was a sobbing gasp from the latter. Mrs. Kraemer's voice was like ice-water; she wanted some word from August, her son. She followed the name

with the designation of his rank and regiment. And proud of it, too, Lizzie added; you might have taken from her manner that she was one of us. Her version of Mrs. Kraemer's description sounded as though August were an ewe-lamb. McGeorge, besotted in superstition, missed this.

Independently determining that the moment for music had come, Lizzie pressed forward the lever and carefully lowered the lid. The soft strains of the violin, heard through the drawn curtains, must have sounded illusively soothing and impressive.

"Stepan," Jannie implored, "tell August's mamma about him, so far away amid shot and shell."

"Who is my mother?" Stepan replied, with a mystical and borrowed magnificence.

"August, are you there?" Mrs. Kraemer demanded. "Can you hear me? Are you well?"

"I'm deaf from the uproar," Stepan said faintly. "Men in a green gas. He is trying to reach me; something is keeping him back."

"August's alive!" Mrs. Kraemer's exclamation was in German, but Lizzie understood that she was thanking God.

"Hundreds are passing over," Stepan continued. "I can't hear his voice, but there are medals. He's gone again in smoke. The other——" The communication halted abruptly, and in the silence which followed Lizzie stopped the talking-machine, the record at an end.

It was then that the blaze of light occurred which made her think the paper shade had caught fire and that the house would burn down. She dragged back the curtain.

McGeorge refused to meet my interrogation, but sat with his gaze fastened on his plate of unconsumed gray macaroni. After a little I asked impatiently what the girl thought she had seen.

After an inattentive silence McGeorge asked me, idiotically I thought, if I had ever noticed the game, the hares and drawn fish, sometimes frozen into a clear block of ice and used as an attraction by provision stores. I had, I admitted, although I could see no connection between that and the present inquiry.

It was, however, his description of the column of light Lizzie Tuoey saw over against the mantel, a shining white shroud through which the crudely painted Rock of Ages was visible, insulated in the glass bell. Oh, yes, there was a soldier, but in the uniform that might be seen passing the Meekers any hour of the day, and unnaturally hanging in a traditional and very highly sanctified manner. The room was filled with a coldness that made Lizzie's flesh crawl. It

was as bright as noon; the circle about the table was rigid, as if it had been frozen into immobility, while Jannie's breathing was audible and hoarse.

Mrs. Kraemer stood wrung with horror, a shaking hand sparkling with diamonds raised to her face. It was a lie, she cried in shrill, penetrating tones. August couldn't do such a thing. Kill him quickly!

The other voice was faint, McGeorge said, hardly more than a sigh; but Lizzie Tueoy had heard it before. She asserted that there was no chance for a mistake.

"O God!" it breathed. "Mummer!"

This much is indisputable, that Mrs. Kraemer died convulsively in the Meeker hall. Beyond that I am congenitally incapable of belief. I asked McGeorge directly if it was his contention that, through Stepan's blunder, the unfortunate imperialistic lady, favored with a vignette of modern organized barbarity, had seen Mrs. Doothnack's son in place of her own.

He didn't, evidently, think this worth a reply. McGeorge was again lost in his consuming dread of perpetual being.

VIRTUALLY buried in a raft of ethical tracts of the Middle Kingdom, all more or less repetitions of Lao-tsze's insistence on heaven's quiet way, I ignored the sounding of the telephone; but its continuous bur—I had had the bell removed—triumphed over my absorption, and I answered curtly. It was McGeorge. His name, in addition to the fact that it constituted an annoying interruption, recalled principally that, caught in the stagnant marsh of spiritism, he had related an absurd fabrication in connection with the Meeker circle and the death of Mrs. August Kraemer.

Our acquaintance had been long, but slight. He had never attempted to see me at my rooms, and for this reason only—that his unusual visit might have a corresponding pressing cause—I directed Miss Maynall, at the telephone exchange, to send him up. Five minutes later, however, I regretted that I had not instinctively refused to see him. It was then evident that there was no special reason for his call. It was inconceivable that any one with the least knowledge of my prejudices and opinions would attempt to be merely social, and McGeorge was not without both the rudiments of breeding and good sense.

At least such had been my impression of him in the past, before he had come in contact with the Meekers. Gazing at him, I saw that a different McGeorge was evident, different even from when I had seen him at the Italian restaurant where he had been so oppressed by the fear not of death, but of life. In the first place, he was fatter and less nervous, he was wearing one of

those unforgivable soft black ties with flowing ends, and he had changed from Virginia cigarettes to Turkish.

A silence had lengthened into embarrassment, in which I was combating a native irritability with the placid philosophical acceptance of the unstirred Tao, when he asked suddenly:

"Did you know I was married?" I admitted that this information had eluded me, when he added in the fatuous manner of such victims of a purely automatic process, "To Miss Ena Meeker that was."

I asked if he had joined the family circle in the special sense, but he said not yet; he wasn't worthy. Then I realized that there was a valid reason for his presence, but, unfortunately, it operated slowly with him; he had to have a satisfactory audience for the astounding good fortune he had managed. He wanted to talk, and McGeorge, I recalled, had been a man without intimates or family in the city. Almost uncannily, as if in answer to my thought, he proceeded:

"I'm here because you have a considerable brain and, to a certain extent, a courageous attitude. You are all that and yet you won't recognize the truth about the beyond, the precious world of spirits."

"Material."

However, I indicated in another sense that I wasn't material for any propaganda of hysterical and subnormal seances. His being grew inflated with the condescending pity of dogmatic superstition for logic.

"Many professors and men of science are with us, and I am anxious, in your own interest, for you to see the light. I've already admitted that you would be valuable. You can't accuse me of being mercenary." I couldn't. "I must tell you," he actually cried out, in sudden surrender to the tyrannical necessity of self-revelation. "My marriage to Ena was marvelous, marvelous, a true wedding of souls. Mr. Meeker," he added in a different, explanatory manner, "like all careful fathers, is not unconscious of the need, here on earth, of a portion of worldly goods. For a while, and quite naturally, he was opposed to our union.

"There was a Wallace Esselmann." A perceptible caution overtook him, but which, with a gesture, he evidently discarded. "But I ought to explain how I met the Meekers. I called." I expressed a surprise, which he solemnly misread. "It became necessary for me to tell them of my admiration and belief," he proceeded.

"I saw Mrs. Meeker and Ena in the front room where the sittings are held. Mrs. Meeker sat straight up, with her hands folded; but Ena was enchanting." He paused, lost in the visualization of the enchantment. "All sweet curves and round ankles and little feet." Then he unexpectedly made a very profound

remark: "I think pale girls are more disturbing than red cheeks. They've always been for me, anyway. Ena was the most disturbing thing in the world."

Here, where I might have been expected to lose my patience disastrously, a flicker of interest appeared in McGeorge and his connection with the Meekers. A normal, sentimental recital would, of course, be insupportable; but McGeorge, I realized, lacked the coördination of instincts and faculties which constitutes the healthy state he had called, by implication, stupid. The abnormal often permits extraordinary glimpses of the human machine, ordinarily a sealed and impenetrable mystery. Hysteria has illuminated many of the deep emotions and incentives, and McGeorge, sitting lost in a quivering inner delight, had the significant symptoms of that disturbance.

He may, I thought, exhibit some of the primitive "complex sensitiveness" of old taboos, and furnish an illustration, for a commentary on the sacred Kings, of the physical base of religious fervor.

"An ordinary prospective mother-in-law," said McGeorge, "is hard enough, but Mrs. Meeker—" He made a motion descriptive of his state of mind in the Decker parlor. "Eyes like ice," he continued; "and I could see that I hadn't knocked her over with admiration. Ena got mad soon, and made faces at her mother when she wasn't looking, just as if she were a common girl. It touched me tremendously. Then—I had looked down at the carpet for a moment—Mrs. Meeker had gone, without a sound, in a flash. It was a good eight feet to the door and around a table. Space and time are nothing to her."

Silence again enveloped him; he might have been thinking of the spiritistic triumphs of Mrs. Meeker or of Ena with her sweet curves. Whatever might be said of the latter, it was clear that she was no prude. McGeorge drew a deep breath; it was the only expression of his immediate preoccupation.

"It was quite a strain," he admitted presently. "I called as often as possible and a little oftener. The reception, except for dear Ena, was not prodigal. Once they were having a sitting, and I went back to the kitchen. Of course Lizzie Tueoy, their former servant, was no more, and they had an ashy-black African woman. Some one was sobbing in the front room—the terrible sobs of a suffocating grief. There was a voice, too, a man's, but muffled, so that I couldn't make out any words. That died away, and the thin, bright tones of a child followed; then a storm of knocking, and blowing on a tin trumpet.

"A very successful sitting. I saw Jannie directly afterward, and the heroic young medium was positively livid from exhaustion. She had a shot of Benedictine and then another, and Mr. Meeker half carried her up to bed. I stayed in the kitchen till the confusion was over, and Albert came out and was pointedly rude. If you want to know what's thought of you in a house, watch the young.

"Ena was flighty, too; it irritated her to have me close by—highly strung. She cried for no reason at all and bit her finger-nails to shreds. There was a fine platinum chain about her neck, with a diamond pendant, I had never seen before, and for a long while she wouldn't tell me where it had come from. The name, Wallace Esselmann, finally emerged from her hints and evasions. He was young and rich, he had a waxed mustache, and the favor of the Meekers generally.

"Have you ever been jealous?" McGeorge asked abruptly. Not in the degree he indicated, I replied; however, I comprehended something of its possibilities of tyrannical obsession. "It was like a shovelful of burning coals inside me," he asserted. "I was ready to kill this Esselmann or Ena and then myself. I raved like a maniac; but it evidently delighted her, for she took off the chain and relented.

"At first," McGeorge said, "if you remember, I was terrified at the thought of living forever; but I had got used to that truth, and the blessings of spiritualism dawned upon me. No one could ever separate Ena and me. The oldest India religions support that—"

"With the exception," I was obliged to put in, "that all progression is toward nothingness, suspension, endless calm."

"We have improved on that," he replied. "The joys that await us are genuine twenty-two carat—the eternal companionship of loving ones, soft music, summer—"

"Indestructible lips under a perpetual moon."

He solemnly raised a hand.

"They are all about you," he said; "they hear you; take care. What happened to me will be a warning."

"Materialize the faintest spirit," I told him, "produce the lightest knock on that Fyfe table, and I'll give you a thousand dollars for the cause." He expressed a contemptuous superiority to such bribery. "By your own account," I reminded him, "the Meekers gave this Esselmann every advantage. Why?"

McGeorge's face grew somber.

"I saw him the next time I called, a fat boy with his spiked mustache on glazed cheeks, and a pocketful of rattling gold junk, a racing car on the curb. He had had Ena out for a little spin, and they were discussing how fast they had gone. Not better than sixty-eight, he protested modestly.

"Albert hung on his every word; he was as servile to Esselmann as he was arrogant to me. He said things I had either to overlook completely or else slay him for. I tried to get his liking." McGeorge confessed to me that, remembering what the Meekers' old servant had told him about Albert's peculiar habit, he

had even thought of making him a present of a box of flies, precisely in the manner you would bring candy for a pretty girl.

"It began to look hopeless," he confessed of his passion. "Ena admitted that she liked me better than Wallace, but the family wouldn't hear of it. Once, when Mr. Meeker came to the door, he shut it in my face. The sittings kept going right along, and the manifestations were wonderful; the connection between Jannie and Stepan, her spirit control, grew closer and closer. There was a scientific investigation—some professors put Jannie on a weighing-machine during a séance and found that, in a levitation, she had an increase in weight virtually equal to the lifted table. They got phonograph records of the rapping—"

"Did you hear them?" I interrupted.

"They are still in the laboratory," he asserted defiantly, "But I have a photograph that was taken of an apparition." He fumbled in an inner pocket and produced the latter. The print was dark and obscured, but among the shadows a lighter shape was traceable: it might have been a woman in loose, white drapery, a curtain, light-struck; anything, in fact. I returned it to him impatiently.

"That," he informed me, "was a Christian martyr of ancient times."

"Burned to a cinder," I asked, "or dismembered by lions?"

"Can't you even for a minute throw off the illusion of the flesh?"

"Can you?"

He half rose in a flare of anger; for my question, in view of his admissions, had been sharply pressed.

"All love is a sanctification," McGeorge said, recovering his temper admirably. "The union of my beloved wife and me is a holy pact of spirits, transcending corruption."

"You married her against considerable opposition," I reminded him.

"I had the hell of a time," he said in the healthy manner of the former McGeorge. "Everything imaginable was done to finish me; the powers of earth and of the spirit world were set against me. For a while my human frame wasn't worth a lead nickel."

"The beyond, then, isn't entirely the abode of righteousness?"

"There are spirits of hell as well as of heaven."

"The Chinese," I told him, "call them Yin and Yang, spirits of dark and light. Will you explain—it may be useful, if things are as you say—how you fought the powers from beyond?"

"Do you remember what Lizzie Tuoey thought about Jannie and Stepan?" he asked, apparently irrelevantly. "That time Stepan had an engagement with

Isabella of Spain." I didn't. "Well, she said that Jannie was jealous of the queen."

McGeorge had, by his own account, really a dreadful time with what was no better than common or, rather, uncommon murder. Two things were evident on the plane of my own recognition—that he had succeeded in holding the illusive affections of Ena, no small accomplishment in view of her neurotic emotional instability, and that the elder Meekers had an interest in the most worldly of all commodities, not exceeded by their devotion to the immaculate dream of love beyond death.

The girl met McGeorge outside the house; he called defiantly in the face of an unrelenting, outspoken opposition. It was in the Meeker front room that he first realized his mundane existence was in danger. He could give no description of what happened beyond the fact that suddenly he was bathed in a cold, revolting air. It hung about him with the undefinable feel and smell of death. A rotten air, he described it, and could think of nothing better; remaining, he thought, for half a minute, filling him with instinctive abject terror, and then lifting.

Ena, too, was affected; she was as rigid as if she were taking part in a séance; and when she recovered, she hurried from the room. Immediately after McGeorge heard her above quarrelling with Jannie. She returned in tears, and said that they would have to give each other up. Here McGeorge damned the worlds seen and unseen, and declared that he'd never leave her. This, with his complete credulity, approached a notable courage or frenzy of desire. He had no doubt but they would kill him. Their facilities, you see, were unsurpassed.

Worse followed almost immediately. The next morning, to be accurate, McGeorge was putting an edge on his razor—he had never given up the old type—when an extraordinary seizure overtook him; the hand that held the blade stopped being a part of him. It moved entirely outside his will; indeed, when certain possibilities came into his shocked mind, it moved in opposition to his most desperate determination.

A struggle began between McGeorge in a sweating effort to open his fingers and drop the razor to the floor, and the will imposing a deep, hard gesture across his throat. He was twisted, he said, into the most grotesque positions; the hand would move up, and he would force it back perhaps an inch at a time. During this the familiar, mucid feel closed about him.

I asked how the force was applied to his arm, but he admitted that his fright was so intense that he had no clear impression of the details. McGeorge, however, did try to convince me that his wrist was darkly bruised afterward. He was, he was certain, lost, his resistance virtually at an end when, as if from

a great distance, he heard the faint ring of the steel on the bath-room linoleum.

That, he told himself, had cured him; the Meekers, and Ena in particular, could have their precious Wallace Esselmann. This happened on Friday, and Sunday evening he was back at the Meeker door. The frenzy of desire! Love is the usual, more exalted term. Perhaps. It depends on the point of view, the position adopted in the attack on the dark enigma of existence. Mine is unpresumptuous.

They were obviously surprised to see him,—or, rather, all were but Ena,—and his reception was less crabbed than usual. McGeorge, with what almost approached a flash of humor, said that it was evident they had expected him to come from the realm of spirits. In view of their professed belief in the endless time for junketing at their command, they clung with amazing energy to the importance of the present faulty scheme.

Ena was wonderfully tender, and promised to marry him whenever he had a corner ready for her. McGeorge, a reporter, lived with the utmost informality with regard to hours and rooms. He stayed that night almost as long as he wished, planning, at intervals, the future. Sometime during the evening it developed that Jannie was in disfavor; the sittings had suddenly become unsatisfactory. One the night before had been specially disastrous.

Stepan, in place of satisfying the very private curiosity of a well-known and munificent politician, had described another party that had made a wide ripple of comment and envious criticism among the shades. It had been planned by a swell of old Rome, faithful in every detail to the best traditions of orgies; and Stepan's companion, a French girl of the Maison Dorée, had opened the eyes of the historic fancy to the latent possibilities of the dance.

Jannie, at this, had spoiled everything, but mostly the temper of the munificent politician, by a piercing scream. She had gone on, Ena admitted, something terrible. When Mr. Meeker had tried to bundle her to bed, she had kicked and scratched like never before. And since then she declared that she'd never make another effort to materialize shameless spirits.

Argument, even the temporary absence of Benedictine, had been unavailing. Very well, Mrs. Meeker had told her grimly, she would have to go back to cotton stockings; and no more grilled sweetbreads for supper, either; she'd be lucky if she got scrapple. She didn't care; everything was black for her. Black it must have been, I pointed out to McGeorge; it was bad enough with worry limited to the span of one existence, but to look forward to a perpetuity of misery—

McGeorge returned the latter part of the week with the plans for their marriage, an elopement, considerably advanced; but only Jannie was at home.

She saw him listlessly in the usual formal room, where—he almost never encountered her—he sat in a slight perplexity. Jannie might be thought prettier than Ena, he acknowledged, or at least in the face. She had quantities of bright brown hair, which she affected to wear, in the manner of much younger girls, confined, with a ribbon, and flowing down her back. Her eyes, too, were brown and remarkable in that the entire iris was exposed. Her full under lip was vividly rouged, while her chin was unobtrusive.

That evening she was dressed very elaborately. The pink silk stockings and preposterous kid slippers were in evidence; her dress was black velvet, short, and cut like a sheath; and there was a profusion of lacy ruffles and bangles at her wrists. To save his soul, McGeorge couldn't think of anything appropriate to talk about. Jannie was a being apart, a precious object of special reverence. This, together with her very human pettishness, complicated the social problem. He wanted excessively to leave,—there was no chance of seeing Ena,—but neither could he think of any satisfactory avenue of immediate escape.

Jannie's hands, he noticed, were never still; her fingers were always plaiting the velvet on her knees. She would sigh gustily, bite her lips, and accomplish what in an ordinary person would be a sniffle. Then suddenly she drew nearer to McGeorge and talked in a torrent about true love. She doubted if it existed anywhere. Spirits were no more faithful than humans.

This, for McGeorge, was more difficult than the silence; all the while, he told me, his thoughts were going back to the scene in the bath-room. He had no security that it wouldn't be repeated and with a far different conclusion. He had a passing impulse to ask Jannie to call off her subliminal thugs; the phrasing is my own. There was no doubt in his disordered mind that it was she who, at the instigation of the elder Meekers, was trying to remove him in the effort to secure Wallace Esselmann.

She dissolved presently into tears, and cried that she was the most miserable girl in existence. She dropped an absurd confection of a handkerchief on the floor, and he leaned over, returning it to her. Jannie's head drooped against his shoulder, and, to keep her from sliding to the floor, he was obliged to sit beside her and support her with an arm. It had been a temporary measure, but Jannie showed no signs of shifting her weight; and, from wishing every moment for Ena's appearance, he now prayed desperately for her to stay away.

McGeorge said that he heard the girl murmur something that sounded like, "Why shouldn't I?" Her face was turned up to him in a way that had but one significance for maiden or medium. She was, he reminded me, Ena's sister,

about to become his own; there was a clinging, seductive scent about her, too, and a subtle aroma of Benedictine; and, well, he did what was expected.

However, no sooner had he kissed her than her manner grew inexplicable. She freed herself from him, and sat upright in an expectant, listening attitude. Her manner was so convincing that he straightened up and gazed about the parlor. There was absolutely no unusual sight or sound; the plain, heavy table in the center of the room was resting as solidly as if it had never playfully cavorted at the will of the spirits, the chairs were back against the walls, the miniature Rock of Ages, on the mantel, offered its testimony to faith.

One insignificant detail struck his eye—a weighty cane of Mr. Meeker's stood in an angle of the half-opened door to the hall, across the floor from where Jannie and he were sitting.

AFTER a little, with nothing apparently following, the girl's expectancy faded; her expression grew petulant once more, and she drew sharply away from McGeorge, exactly as if he had forced a kiss on her and she was insulted by the indignity. Lord! he thought, with an inward sinking, what she'll do to me now will be enough!

He rose uneasily and walked to the mantel, where he stood with his back to Jannie, looking down absently at the fringed gray asbestos of a gas hearth. An overwhelming oppression crept over him when there was a sudden cold sensation at the base of his neck, and a terrific blow fell across his shoulders.

McGeorge wheeled instinctively, with an arm up, when he was smothered in a rain of stinging, vindictive battering. The blows came from all about him, a furious attack against which he was powerless to do anything but endeavor to protect his head. No visible person, he said solemnly, was near him. Jannie was at the other side of the room.

"Did you see her clearly while this was going on?" I asked.

Oh, yes, he assured me sarcastically; he had as well glanced at his diary to make sure of the date. He then had the effrontery to inform me that he had been beaten by Mr. Meeker's cane without human agency. He had seen it whirling about him in the air. McGeorge made up his mind that the hour of his death had arrived. A fog of pain settled on him, and he gave up all effort of resistance, sinking to his knees, aware of the salt taste of blood. But just at the edge of unconsciousness the assault stopped.

After a few moments he rose giddily, with his ears humming and his ribs a solid ache. The cane lay in the middle of the room, and Jannie stood, still across the parlor, with her hands pressed to scarlet cheeks, her eyes shining, and her breast heaving in gasps.

"Why not after such a violent exercise?"

McGeorge ignored my practical comment.

"She was delighted," he said; "she ran over to me and, throwing her arms about my neck, kissed me hard. She exclaimed that I had helped Jannie when everything else had failed, and she wouldn't forget it. Then she rushed away, and I heard her falling up-stairs in her high-heeled slippers."

Naturally he had half collapsed into a chair, and fought to supply his laboring lungs with enough oxygen. It's an unpleasant experience to be thoroughly beaten with a heavy cane under any condition, and this, he was convinced, was special.

I asked if he was familiar with Havelock Ellis on hysterical impulses, and he replied impatiently that he wasn't.

"There are two explanations," I admitted impartially, "although we each think there is but one. I will agree that yours is more entertaining. Jannie was jealous again. The Roman orgies, the young person from the *grands boulevards*, were more than she could accept; and she tried, in the vocabulary lately so prevalent, a reprisal. But I must acknowledge that I am surprised at the persistent masculine flexibility of Stepan."

"It was at the next sitting," McGeorge concluded, "that Stepan announced the wedding of Ena and me. The spirits awaited it. There was a row in the Meeker circle; but he dissolved, and refused to materialize in any form until it was accomplished."

"To the music of the spheres," I added, with some attempt at ordinary decency.

8: Round Trip**Jack McLaren**

1884-1954

Truth (Sydney) 14 Jan 1945

Australian novelist and playwright, who moved to the UK in 1925. He died while holidaying in Brighton.

TO the Manager, the Police Station, Port Beach—

Dear Sir, —

My name is Pompey, and I send Ruby, my wife, with this letter to ask you send a policeman to come and take charge of a man I've got here who have done a big crime. And please, mister, if there is a reward for catching such a feller, We will be very glad, because me and Ruby are just twp very poor natives who try make a living catching kangaroos in simple bush traps and doing a bit of fishing with our two canoes. Our camp is down the coast just past the end of the swamp country. Till this morning, the only person we ever saw was a prospector named Bill Ryan, who worked a gold claim on his own a way inland from our camp, at the other side of a gap in the ranges.

WHEN Bill Ryan wanted to go to Port Beach and sell his gold and buy stores, he would come to our camp and borrow one of our canoes to take him there. Bill was a very kind man and always brought us presents. Well this morning we saw a man coming along a little narrow path between the trees and bushes that Jed to our camp— a bad-looking feller with a revolver in his belt. As he came up he said:

'I've been lost in the bush. Walking round and round till I thought I'd go mad.'

So we were kind to him, and Ruby gave him some food; and when he said he felt better I said:

'How you come to be in this part where nobody ever comes?'

He answered: 'I am a sailor and at one of the ports down the coast I went ashore to have a few drinks and I missed my ship. So I started off to walk through the bush to a port on the other side of the country where my ship is going to call and I could join her again. But I only got lost in the bush. All I can do now is to go on to Port Beach, where I might get job in some other ship.'

'But,' I said, 'you can't walk to Port Beach from here. From here the coast is all deep swamp country.'

He pointed to our canoes, which were drawn up on the sand.

'Lend me one of your canoes, then,' he said. 'I can pay you well.'

He took out some money and handed me three pounds. I said: 'All right, you can have the canoe. But you will have to wait till afternoon because the current is wrong way just now.'

Well, up till then I thought everything was all right, but soon after this Ruby went out into the bush to see if there was a kangaroo in any of the bush traps, like she always did at this time of the day; and when she came back she took me to one side and said quietly:

'I been find out something funny about that man.'

'Oh,' I said. 'What is it?'

So she told me, and I thought it very funny, too, my word! But we didn't say anything, not wanting to make him think we was suspicious or anything, because we frightened of his revolver. So we just sat there wondering what he had been up to, till at last it came afternoon and, with the current now running the right way, the man got into the canoe and started off up the coast. As soon as he was put of sight round a point of the land me and Ruby went off into the bush and followed the man's tracks where he had come to our camp through the bush, hoping to find out the reason of the funny thing Ruby had noticed. We found it all right. We came to where the man had marked the bark of a tree with a knife so he could easily find the place again. Looking round, we found where a small hole had been dug in the ground and covered over. In the hole we found a bag of gold— an old shammy leather bag, mister, that we at once saw was Bill Ryan's.

So we took the bag of gold and started back for our camp, and as we went along we saw the stranger coming through the trees away to one side. We guessed what had happened. The man was no sailor who had missed his ship, but a feller from inland who had come across poor Bill Ryan all on his own at his claim, robbed— and probably killed— him, and then made for the coast. He made up the story about being a sailor who had got lost in the bush so's to account for him being in this part of the country at all. As for the gold, he hadn't dared take it with him into our camp because we should see it and wonder where he got it. So he buried it before coming to our camp, and planned to come back for it later.

Well, he was coming back for it now. After leaving us, as soon as he was out of our sight round the point of the land, he ran the canoe ashore and came back through the bush. Me and Ruby hurried full speed for our camp. It was no use hiding in the bush. He would only track us down. But as we came to the narrow path between the trees and bushes that led to our camp Ruby got an idea. It was to fix up one of our kangaroo traps in the path, which we did by hiding a strong loop of bush cane under the dead leaves on the path and bending down a strong sapling and fastening it in a certain way. We then

fastened the end of the sapling to the loop and fixed up what we call a 'trigger' stick in the middle of the loop. It was a quick trap to make. We heard the man coming.

'You black swine, what you done with that gold?' he was shouting. The next moment he was in the narrow path. 'I'll blow the daylights out of y'!' he roared. 'I'll—'

He never got any more out. There was a swish as the sapling sprang back upright; and me and Ruby came out from behind the bushes to find him danging in the loop, kicking like a big-feller frog, and the revolver lying on the ground where he'd dropped it in his surprise.

I picked it up, and me and Ruby tied his hands nice and strong and then got him out of the loop and took him to our camp. And now I send Ruby off in our other canoe with this letter.

Yes, this feller he very nearly got away with a big crime. But he made one mistake. That was when he said he had been lost in the bush. When Ruby went out that time to look at the traps to see if there were any kangaroos in them she happened to come across the man's tracks. They were straight tracks, mister, coming in straight line from inland, from the gap in the ranges. Men lost in the bush don't make straight tracks. Their tracks show that they've been walking in curves or going round in a circle.

9: "Wish!"

Cicely Fox Smith

1882-1954

Saturday Evening Express (Launceston) 2 Nov 1935*English poet and short story writer, who also wrote three romantic novels.*

SALLY CARSTAIRS, her rather wide mouth parted in a smile of eager anticipation, held out to her neighbour the merry-thought she had just extracted from her portion of cold chicken. Snap went the slender bone, and:

"There, I've got it!" cried Sally triumphantly. "Please don't look so glum, Peter! It'll be your turn next time— and I wanted to win this time most awfully badly."

They were sitting side by side with their toes tucked under them, on a little table in the corner of the Chelsea studio, where the birthday party at which they were both guests was taking place. The studio was full, and the party was large, hence the close quarters in which Sally and Peter Wynward just now found themselves. But it suited Peter excellently and he hoped it suited Sally, too.

"I can't tell you my wish, you know," she went on, "because it spoils it if you tell. But I'm sure you'd wish it, too, if you knew. Peter, it's come. My— my chance!"

Peter would have wished a whole lot of things if he had got the right half of the merry-thought— things which he spent most of this time devoutly wishing a good part of every day, without any wish-bone to help him. He would have wished, for one thing, that he might get that job he had put in for, but wasn't in the least likely to secure, as designer to a big textile firm in the Midlands. He would have wished that he might go to Sally and say, in the cheerful, unsentimental way in which modern youth conceals its feelings:— "Look here, old thing, I've got a job. A poor thing, in a way, but mine own. Enough to marry on, so to speak. What about it?"

And that Sally might then smile that wide-mouthed smile of hers, and answer:—

"All right! Let's!"

And then that would be that.

But it wasn't that. Quite the contrary. For here was Peter— out of a job— his slender resources growing more and more slender, like a modern young woman during a diet— nothing of the kind a self-respecting young man wants to offer the girl of his choice. And here was Sally, radiant, eager, hopeful, telling him it she had got the chance which would put her even further out of his reach. A successful actress.

Peter suppressed a sigh in the birth, and responded gallantly:

"Good egg. What is it, Sally?" Sally put a significant finger to her lips.

"Not a word!" she whispered. "It's an absolutely dead secret." She breathed a name behind her hand. A name that made Peter's eyes open Wide in amazement.

"I say," he gasped, "what topping luck! But how—"

He might well gasp. For the name which Sally had whispered was that of the man who had a finger in most of the theatrical pies of the day— who could make an actress's reputation With the crook of his finger, and who was so elusive and unapproachable that an Interview with him was all but impossible to obtain only through some personal influence.

"Can't tell you," went on Sally under her breath. "I've promised. But •—I'm going— somewhere out of town— to meet him. It seems he saw me in 'Buttercups and Daisies' "— a short-lived play in which Sally had had a minor part— "and liked my style. But I hadn't to tell anybody. I oughtn't to have told you, really. Only I felt I should burst if I didn't."

And then the studio party began to sing "Auld Lang Syne," and in the hubbub which ensued Peter and Sally got swept apart. He didn't see her again till the end, and then it was only a glimpse of her laughing, excited face, with a finger to her lip, as she leaned from the window of a small two-seater into which about five people had somehow contrived to pack themselves.

Peter walked home to his rooms— they were in a very unfashionable corner of Kensington— feeling strangely troubled. Somehow he didn't like what Sally had told him. It sounded— well, hole-and-corner somehow— he Die couldn't see a big pot like Leo Grayle going in for all this mysterious tommy-rot. Suppose someone were paying a game with Sally!

Of course, it was a bit of a joke among her friends that, she meant to get an interview with Grayle.

"I'll be bound that's it," Peter told himself. "I'll just make a few enquiries on the quiet, and if—"

And by the look of quiet determination on Peter's plain but pleasant features it might be deduced that anyone who had been playing a trick on Sally was in for a bad time if his identity were discovered.

It was not long, as it happened, before his suspicions seemed to be confirmed. Over lunch the next day at the little Bohemian restaurant to which he usually resorted, Peter met his friend Aubrey Baynes, very full, as usual of his latest play. Aubrey had written at least six plays, none of which unfortunately had ever been produced. But he was still as hopeful as ever, and prattled merrily on, his words, though he knew it not, going in at one of Peter's

cars and out at the other, until a chance mention of a name brought his listener's attention sharply back

"I believe Grayle would take it like a shot," Aubrey was saying, "only the blighter isn't accessible, you know. He's cleared off to the West Indies "

"The West Indies?" exclaimed Peter. "Are you sure of that? I heard—"

"Sure?" echoed his friend. "Why, of course I'm sure. A fellow I know knows his secretary— hears from her regularly— and as I was saying, I believe if—"

The rest of the sentence was wasted on empty air, for Peter, jumping up hastily, reached for his hat and hurried out of the restaurant in such a confusion of mind that he almost forgot to pay for his frugal meal. He was feeling very unhappy about Sally. She was such a kid. And if she had a bad let-down over this business she would feel it so frightfully!

Sally shared a tiny flat with a girl who drew what Peter considered the most frightful females for drapers' catalogues. But though he disliked Pat's style of art, he liked Pat herself very much, the more so that he guessed she favoured him as a suitor for Sally; and he decided to go round to the flat and see if Pat could help him. He found Pat at home, working against time to finish a bevy of damsels in backless beach dresses for a Cruising Week Catalogue for Whiteridge's, and after briefly swearing her to secrecy he unfolded his tale.

Pat frowned, and rattled her pencil along her teeth.

"Look here, Peter," she said at last, slowly, "I don't like it. I don't like it a

"Don't like it?" echoed Peter, startled by her tone. "Why, surely, it's just a practical joke of some sort. A darned bad one, I know, but it— it— couldn't—"

He broke 'IT. unwilling to put his fears into words.

"I don't know," said Pat, "I hope it's a joke, that's all. 1 "

"Well, anyway we can put her wise to it," Peter began. But at Pat's grave look the words died on his lips.

"She's gone," said Pat briefly. "She went this morning. I don't know where and I don't know who with. She wouldn't tell me. I think it was someone she met at the Prendergasts. You know. They always have a lot of these film people and so on there. I can't even remember his name, though I've heard it. I think that's who it is. She had a telegram."

She paused. thinking furiously.

"Wait. She had a telegram. Now did she—"

She jumped up and began to rummage in the jumble of paper, cigarette stubs, and what not that lay on the unlighted fire.

"What a good job it's summer," she said, "all the same I don't believe it's here! Ah yes" —her keen eye spied a corner of pinkish-white paper half hidden by a piece of coal. "Here you are: *Littlebourne-on-Sea— Meet me outside*

Station 9.45 to-morrow.—Drane." Pat sat hack on her heels. "Drane — Littlebourne-on-Sea! Not much, help there, is there?"

"P'raps not," absented Peter. "I'm going, for all that. At least—"

He stopped, reddening to the tips of his ears.

Pat, watching his face, read his thoughts.

"Look here," she said suddenly, "Are you hard up? Let me lend you a pound or two. Because I'd go if you didn't, only I must finish these beastly women first. You can pay me back when the job materialises."

"Pat, you're a brick," said Peter. There was almost a quiver in his voice as he spoke. And if a sudden and uninvited tear fell right on to one of the most daring of the beach ensembles as Pat heard him go downstairs two at a time, why, that was no one's business but her own.

Peter had just time for the two o'clock express to Littlebourne. He hastened to his rooms, crammed some things into a suit-case, snatched up two or three letters which had come and slipped them into his pocket to read in the train, and got to Waterloo with two minutes to the good.

"Care to see the midday paper?" said a stout, horsy-looking man in the opposite corner, as the train steamed out of the station. "Solicitude looks like a good thing for the three-thirty... Funny thing about this missing girl, ain't it?"

"Missing girl!"

Could it be—but no, Sally couldn't be missing, she had only gone to Littlebourne that morning.

Peter glanced at the front page of the paper. No, the photograph wasn't a bit like Sally. But what a jolt the man's words had given him!

"I hear they think they've got a clue in Littlebourne," continued his fellow-traveller. "So a friend o' mine, super down there, was tellin' me. Porter at the station thinks he saw her comin' off the train. Saw some man meet her at the ticket-gate. Well, I hope they get the man, whoever he is. I've got daughters of my own."

Peter sat staring out of the window, the letters in his pocket forgotten and unread, while the train, so it seemed to him, crawled on towards its destination slower than ever a train crawled before. Of course, he told himself, it was the maddest nonsense to connect Sally with this vanished girl who had been traced to Littlebourne. Plenty of girls went to Littlebourne....

And so indeed it seemed. Tall girls, short girls, dark girls, fair girls, girls in shorts, girls in trousers, girls in hardly anything at all— but never that wide, laughing mouth and mop of red-brown hair Peter sought for so anxiously. A needle in a haystack was nothing, he reflected to one girl among all this mob of them!

Time after time he plodded the length of the crowded sands and at last, sick at heart, continued his walk beyond the swarming sea-front, over the deserted sand-hills that stretch away from Littlebourne to the eastward. The sun was low in the west by now, and a chill breeze had risen and was rustling the long grasses on the dunes. It was a dreary bit of the coast, this, and, cut off as one was by the lie of the shore from the crowds and bustle of the sands, the town might have been miles away. No good going any farther this way. thought Peter. He must be thinking about turning back and finding somewhere to sleep....

IT WAS only a few hours before that Sally Carstairs got out of the London train, her heart beating high with excitement, and looked round for Percy Drane, whom she expected to find waiting, for her close to the exit! At first she thought he was not there; suddenly she recognised him standing by a car on the other side of the road, his hat pulled over his eyes so that his face was hardly visible.

"Come on," he said, holding the door of the car open for her to get in. "Your train's late, Isn't it?"

He almost hustled her in, and settled himself quickly beside her at the wheel. "You've not told anybody, have you?" he asked anxiously.

"Sure? Grayle would never forgive me if I gave away his retreat."

"Not a soul," laughed Sally.

The sun shone, the sea sparkled. Everything conspired to make her feel hopeful and happy. She leaned forward, snuffing the cool fresh air, and wondering which hotel the great man was staying at. They passed the big Metropole where Sally had half hoped they would lunch, but no doubt Mr. Grayle would choose a quieter place. They passed the Seaview, the Bellavista, the Chandos. Now they were leaving the central part of the town behind, passing rows of cheaper boarding houses with bathing suits drying on their balconies and spades and buckets on the steps. Now there were scattered bungalows, with sandy enclosures, hardly to be called gardens, round them. And then even these ceased; the dunes with their blowing grasses were all there was to see. Glancing back, Sally saw that the town had suddenly dropped out of sight. For the first time, a shadow of doubt crept over her exultation.

"Why, where on earth are we going?" she asked as lightly as her dawning fear would let her.

"Going? We're there," replied Drane. As he spoke, the car turned in at an open gate, and drew up before a low white bungalow, beyond whose ragged garden the lofty dunes stretched to the sea's edge.

"Come along," he said, jumping out. "Grayle'll be along presently. In the meantime I must do my best to keep you entertained."

He gave her one of those flashing smiles which had attracted her so much in the days of their first acquaintance. He unlocked the door with a latchkey and motioned to her to go in.

It was a bright, clean, sunny little place enough, with wide windows which looked to the twinkling sea. Yet once again, in spite of the brightness of the day, an almost visible shadow seemed to fall for a moment as Sally set her foot on the threshold. A cold shiver ran through her, and she involuntarily stepped back.

"Oh, it does feel cold," she exclaimed.

"Cold?" laughed Drane. "My dear girl, it's grilling! You want your lunch, I expect. Come along in here and titivate a bit, while I see about it."

Sally went across to the dressing table, and looked in her hand-bag for a comb, for her hair had got very wild during the drive.

Bother! She had forgotten to put it in, and her suitcase had not been brought in yet from the car, and now it occurred to her for the first time that she had not seen any servants about the house. She stood quite still and listened intently. There was not a voice to be heard but the restless sighing of the wind.

"Rot!" said Sally to herself. "I'm fancying things. I wonder if there's a comb in one of the drawers."

She opened first one dressing table drawer, then another. All seemed empty. She tried the chest of drawers then, but without success; and she was just about to give up the quest in despair when her eyes fell on yet another small drawer under the looking glass. She opened it. There was nothing in it but a girl's striped beret in green and gold. A green and gold striped beret—green and gold striped beret!

Something was knocking at the gates of her memory, something which was connected with that gaudy scrap of silk and wool. A green and gold striped beret—where had she heard about such a thing, not many days ago?

Drane's voice called to her lunch was ready. She found it set out in the sunny dining-room; there was chicken in aspic, salad, cold sweets. No one waited on them. By now Sally was sure that they were alone in the house.

"A green and gold beret." The words kept saying themselves over and over in her brain, almost as if something, someone outside herself were saying them to her.

"Like some music?" said her companion. He turned to a portable wireless set in the corner, and the gay strains of a light orchestra filled the room. And

Sally remembered. She was back in the flat with Pat, listening to the wireless—hearing a man's voice saying:

"Before the news I have a police message— missing from her home since the first of the month, Isabel May Price... wearing a green jumper suit and green and gold beret."

A green and gold beret! The papers had been full of that missing girl! How had a beret just like that she had been wearing found its way U» this lonely house among the dunes? Sally realised her peril at last. How easily she had fallen into the trap!

No one knew where she had gone, any more than they had known where that other girl had gone.

"A green and gold beret... missing from her home since the first of the month."

With a desperate effort she forced her stiff lips into a smile e-some pleasantry of the man facing her. Did he suspect anything? She felt sure that her panic must show in her looks, and fancied that he cast a keen glance towards her as if he had detected it.

"Wish!" He held out the merry thought to her with his flashing, compelling glance. Sally pulled— pulled and won, and wished.

"I wish— I wish," she said to herself, "I wish Peter were here." But her heart sank within her at the thought. How should Peter know what danger she stood in— how should he know, even, where or in what company she was?

The afternoon dragged by. The sun sloped to the west. If only Drane would turn his hack for a few minutes. Sally thought, she would make a dart for freedom. But his eyes seldom left her. At last he went out of the room to see about some supper.

"Now or never," thought Sally; and as soon as she was alone she ran to the door which opened on the veranda. She shook it. It was locked! She took off her shoes and tip-toed stealthily across the hall to the bedroom. She tried the window. It opened. She heard Drane come whistling along the passage.

"A green and gold beret— missing from her home—"

She dared not wait to put on her shoes even. Jumping lightly from the sill, she alighted on her feet in the coarse grass, and set off at a stumbling run over the dunes.

There was a shout from the house behind her. Someone was running, running, running, and shouting threats as he ran. Sally's feet seemed to be made of lead. But in reality terror lent her wings.

She was free of the garden now, running, as in a nightmare, on the soft yielding sand that gave under her feet. She glanced back once, to see the man

stumble and measure his length on the ground, and the sight gave her new courage. Her breath came and went in quick gasps.

"Oh, I can't, I can't," she sobbed.

Surely those running feet were nearer now. They were in front of her, somehow coming towards her. She was done, done.

And then Peter's arms were round her, and she was clinging to him gasping out her story, while across the darkening dunes a man was running back to the house which held so guilty a secret, to start up his car and take flight before Nemesis came knocking at the door.

In the excitement of the hour Peter had clean forgotten to read those letters he had snatched up as he left his rooms. He didn't remember them until the next morning; and their having read them, especially one of them, he went straight round to see Sally.

"Sally, old thing," he said, "I've got a job. A poor thing but mine own so to speak. Enough for two and that. What about it?"

And Sally, with that rather wide-mouthed smile of hers, said; "All right! Let's!"

10: The Perfect Plan

James Hilton

Britannia and Eve, Sep 1933

Daily News (W Aust) 7 Sep 1937 (As "The Perfect Murder"— this text)

EVERY public man has his enemies, but few of these would wish to murder him. Sir George Winthrop-Dunster, chairman of the Anglo-Oceanic group of companies, was unfortunate; he had his enemies and one of them, his secretary, both wished to murder him, and did so.

It was not until a year after their first tiff that Scarsdale decided that the right moment had come. He had always been interested in science of crime, and never for an instant did he doubt his own capacity to do the job; it was merely a question of waiting till the perfect occasion offered itself.

Such an occasion seemed to be provided by the conjunction of two chance circumstances on Saturday, February 25: (1) That Sir George was to give a radio talk on 'Post-War Monetary Policy' at 8 p.m.; and (2) that immediately afterwards he intended to travel to Banbury to spend the week-end with his brother Richard.

On the morning of the 25th, Scarsdale awoke at his usual hour at Bramstock Towers, Berks. Sir George met him, according to habit, at 10 o'clock in the library: it was a fine day, and after an exchange of greetings the great financier made a very customary announcement.

'We'll take our usual turn round the woods; Scarsdale. I want to talk to you about my broadcast tonight...'

'Certainly, Sir George,' responded Scarsdale.

They put oh coats and strolled briskly across the gardens.

'You see, Scarsdale, the gold standard.... Ah, that macrocarpa seems to be doing nicely... The Federal Reserve issue...' And so on, till they were in the thickets more than half a mile from the house. 'I want your notes by 3 at the least so that I can catch the 3.50 from Lincott... Ah, just look at that— Fanning really ought to notice, these things— lazy fellow!'

But Fanning, the head gardener, was hardly to blame, for 'that' was an old tin kettle under a bush; and Scarsdale had himself placed it there late on the previous evening. Suddenly Scarsdale cried: 'Why, look there, sir— the door of the hut's open! A tramp, I suppose. Perhaps he's still inside!'

At this point Sir George began to behave precisely as Scarsdale had guessed and hoped. He left the path and strode vehemently through the undergrowth towards a small wooden structure originally intended for storing timber, but long disused.

'By Jove, Scarsdale,' he shouted, 'if I do catch the fellow, I'll teach him a lesson!'

'Yes, rather!' agreed Scarsdale, following behind. But the hut proved empty.

'He must have gone, sir,' added the young man, when they were both inside; 'Though it does look as if he's left a few relics... I say, sir, what do you make of this? Damnation, that's my last match gone. Have you a match, Sir George?'

As Sir George began to fumble in his pocket in the almost complete darkness, Scarsdale added: 'I say, sir, you've dropped something— your handkerchief, I think.'

Sir George stooped, and at the same instant Scarsdale shot him neatly through the head with a small automatic pistol which he had that same morning taken from the drawer of the Boule cabinet in Sir George's private study. Afterwards — still wearing gloves, of course — he placed the weapon by the side of the dead man, closed the door carefully from the outside, and walked away. Leaving the woods, he returned to the house by way of the garages. There he took his two-seater, drove it round to the front of the house, and had a friendly chat with the butler.

'Oh, Wilkes, would you mind bringing down Sir George's suitcase? He's decided to go right on to town immediately, so he won't be in to lunch. He's walking over to Lincott through the woods... Oh, and you might label the case for Banbury— I've got to have it sent off at the station.'

'Very good, sir.'; Lincott, which Scarsdale reached through winding lanes in ten minutes, was a middle-sized village and an important railway junction.

There were three facts about Lincott that were, from Scarsdale's point of view, fortunate— (1) Its railway station was large, frequented, and badly lit; (2) there were convenient expresses to London, as well as a late 'down' train at night; and (3) Sir George's estate offered a pleasant short-cut to the village, and one which Sir George very often took, even alone and after dark.

Scarsdale drove direct to the junction and left the suitcase for despatch to Banbury, whence it would be forwarded immediately to the house of Sir George's brother. Then he proceeded to a neighbouring garage, arranged to leave his car until called for, and asked to use the telephone. Ringing up the Towers, he had a second amiable talk with Wilkes. 'Oh, hullo, Wilkes— this is Scarsdale speaking— from Lincott. Sir George has slightly changed his plans, again— or, rather, my plans. He wants me to go along to town with him right away. Yes... yes... I'm leaving my car here.... and I've decided that, as I'm going to town, I may as well spend the week-end at my club... Back on Tuesday... yes... good-bye.'

Scarsdale then walked to the junction, booked a third-single to Paddington, and caught the 1 p.m. train. At Paddington he did several things. First he went

to the local booking-office and bought a third-single ticket to Ealing. Then he had a meal, and about 3 p.m. took a bus to the Bank, whence he walked to the Anglo-Oceanic offices in Bishopgate.

There he met several people whom he knew very well, chatted with them affably, and busied himself for some time in Sir George's private office, 'Yes, Williamson, Sir George is in town, but I don't suppose you'll see him here today. He's working up a talk for the wireless tonight— and left me the devil's own pile of letters to go through, too.'

It was quite natural therefore, that Scarsdale should still be at work in Sir George's private office when Williamson and the rest of the staff left. At six p.m., by which time the huge office-block was nearly tenantless, Scarsdale, having previously made fast the door on the inside, turned to a little job he had not cared to tackle before.

Opening the safe he carefully abstracted certain South American bearer bonds to the value of between thirty and forty thousand pounds.

Leaving the Anglo-Oceanic -offices about 6.30 p.m., he took a bus to Piccadilly and entered a cinema that was showing an unpopular film. There and then, amidst the encircling gloom of empty seats, he managed to transform himself into a fairly credible impersonation of Sir George Winthrop-Dunster. In build and dress they were fairly similar; nothing else was required but a few touches of grease-paint, a false moustache, and the adjustment of Sir George's particular type of horn-rimmed spectacles. Scarsdale left the cinema about 7.45; about 7.50 he took a taxi to Broadcasting House.

Neither he nor Sir George had ever broadcast before, and Scarsdale was quite genuinely interested in the experience. In the reception room he had a pleasant chat with one of the announcers; he found no difficulty at all in keeping up the impersonation of Sir George, even to the excellent imitation of his high-pitched voice. Punctually at eight he took his place in the thick-carpeted studio and began to read from his typed manuscript. It was a cosy and completely restful business — and such a comfort to realise that, by this simple means, he was fabricating an alibi that could be vouched for by thousands of worthy folk all over the country. Leaving the studio half an hour later, he asked the commissionaire to get him a taxi and in the man's hearing told the driver 'Paddington.'

There he began another series of operations. First he put through a trunk call to Richard Winthrop-Dunster at Banbury.

'That you, Richard?' sang out the high-pitched voice, still functioning. 'Sorry, but I'm afraid I won't be able to spend the weekend at your place after all. I've got a worrying piece of business on hand at the moment— very worrying— can't spare the time... Next week I might come, so keep my bag if

it's arrived— I told Scarsdale to send it... I'm at Paddington, just about to catch the 9.15 home— yes, I've just come from the studio — were you listening?. ... Yes, yes.... Good-bye, then...'

Then Scarsdale went to the booking office and bought a first-class single ticket to Lincott. Passing the barrier he even risked a word or two with the man who snipped his ticket, and who knew Sir George very slightly.

'Cold night, Sir George,' the man said.

Scarsdale found an empty first class compartment, and, as soon as the train moved out, opened the small nondescript attaché case which he had carried with him all day. With the help of its contents he began to make sundry changes in his personal appearance; then, taking from his pocket the single ticket to Ealing purchased earlier in the day, he cut out of it a triangular section similar to that snipped from his Lincott ticket. Finally at Ealing, a slim, clean-shaven fellow in a cloth cap might have been seen to leave the train and the station, carrying a brown paper parcel which, if examined, would have been found to contain an attaché case.

Scarsdale boarded a bus going east, and at 10 p.m., long before the train from Paddington could have reached Lincott, he was — with all disguises removed — entering a West End restaurant and exchanging a cordial 'Good evening with a head waiter who knew him. Throughout the week-end he stayed in London, visiting numerous friends; indeed, there was hardly an hour from morn to midnight which he did not spend in company. On Tuesday he returned early to the Towers, collecting his car at Lincott on the way.

'I know Sir George will expect to find me at work,' he explained to Wilkes.

But dinner-time came and Sir George made no appearance. At nine Scarsdale decided to have dinner himself without further waiting; but when ten o'clock came and it was clear that Sir George had not caught the last train from Banbury, Scarsdale agreed, with Wilkes that Richard Winthrop-Dunster had better be informed.

Five minutes later Wilkes -returned from the telephone , with a pale and troubled face.

'Mr. Richard says that Sir George never visited him at all,' he began falteringly. 'He says Sir George rang him up on Saturday night from Paddington cancelling his visit and saying he was on his way back here.'

'What an extraordinary thing!' exclaimed Scarsdale.

On the following day the police were informed and Inspector Deane of the local force, took charge of inquiries. On Thursday morning he was able to report: 'Well, Mr. Scarsdale, we've traced Sir George as far as the Lincott train on Saturday night— there's a ticket inspector at Paddington who remembers

him. We're not quite sure of him at Lincott, but no doubt he must have been seen, there, too.'

Everything, Scarsdale was glad to perceive, was still working out perfectly, according to plan. He had in mind exactly what would happen. The body would be discovered sooner or later; medical evidence would be vague after such a lapse of time, but fully consistent with Sir George's death having taken place late on Saturday night at an hour (if the matter were ever called into question) when he, Scarsdale, had several watertight alibis sixty miles away. Then would come the question: How had it happened?

At such a juncture the dead man's brother would probably recall that Sir George had confessed to being 'worried' over some business matter. Then, from the Anglo-Oceanic offices, would come the disclosure of the missing bonds. What could be simpler? Speculation, peculation, suicide— the chain was obvious.

When, on Friday morning, the police found the body of Sir George in the little hut in the woods Scarsdale might have been excused for reckoning his plan ninety-nine per cent, infallible. Unfortunately for him, the remaining one per cent, took a hand, with the rather odd result that a man named Hansell was arrested a few hours later and charged with the murder of Sir George.

Hansell was a tramp and had been arrested in a Lincott public-house after trying to pawn a watch which an alert shopman recognised as Sir George's. At first Hansell gave the usual yarn about having found the watch, but after a severe questioning at the police station, he told a much more remarkable story.

On the previous Saturday he said, he had been trespassing on the Towers estate. Finding the little hut he had pushed open the door and had there to his great alarm and astonishment, came across the dead body of a man. At first he had thought of sending for help immediately, but as he felt that his own position might be awkward, he had contented himself in the end with rifling the pockets and decamping. Yes, about eight o'clock in the evening— he was sure of that. But at eight o'clock, as the police detectives did not fail to find out, Sir George had been broadcasting a talk from London. How, then, could he have been found 60 miles away, dead, at the same hour? Obviously Hansell must be a great liar. Hansell's trial came on. He pleaded 'Not Guilty,' but his story sounded pretty thin, and no one was surprised that he was found guilty and sentenced to death. The death-penalty was afterwards commuted.

SCARSDALE, with the trial over, and everything settling down, had now only the tail end of his plan to put into cautious execution; He would wait, he

had decided, for 12 months (to avoid any semblance of flight) and would then go abroad, probably to the Argentine, taking the bonds with him.

During the year of waiting in England he lived at Kew, renting a house near the river and living on his savings while he devoted himself to writing a book on his favourite subject— criminology.

Just about a month before the year was up, a friend named Lindsey telephoned him with great cheerfulness one morning.

'Oh, hullo, Scarsdale. I'm at the B.B.C. now... how would you like to give a short talk on Crimes and Criminals? We're getting up a series here, and your name occurred to me— I knew you'd always been keen on the subject. What about June 11th at eight p.m.?'

Scarsdale had hoped to be in Buenos Aires by that date, but something urged him not to say so. Besides, he could not help being slightly thrilled at the prospect of making a whole country listen to his views on crime and criminals. He told Lindsey that the date would suit him very well.

On the evening of June 11 he did not feel at his best as he set out for Langham-place.

'This is your first experience of the microphone, Mr. Scarsdale?' asked the announcer.

Scarsdale nodded.

'Curious— I thought I recognised your face. Anyway, the chief point to remember is not to talk fast, and not to talk in a high-pitched voice. But then, you don't, do you?'

Scarsdale was a trifle pale.

'I don't think so,' he murmured.

Five minutes later he sat at the little desk before the microphone, with the green-shaded table-lamp before him. He was certainly nervous, and— beyond his nervousness —strangely apprehensive. It was all very odd.

Soon after he began his foot caught in the flex that connected the lamp with the wall plug; the lamp went out, but it did not matter; the lights in the ceiling were bright enough to read by. But all the time he was reading he was pondering subconsciously... he had been there before... the announcer had cautioned him to avoid a high-pitched voice... this was the very same studio... and the same time... Suddenly the idea burst over him in full force; this was a plant, engineered by Scotland Yard... they were testing him, by the very latest psychological methods; they had guessed the truth, and were probing subtly...it was their perfect plan seeking to undermine his...

At that moment, while Scarsdale's eyes and voice were reading automatically, the announcer stole into the studio and silently replaced the lamp-plug in the wall. The green light blazed abruptly into Scarsdale's face as

the intruder, in a whisper too soft to be audible to the microphone, murmured: 'Pulled it off, didn't you. I thought that's, what must have happened...'

Scarsdale's broadcast talk on Crimes and Criminals will never, it is safe to say, be forgotten in the annals of the radio. For about sixteen minutes past eight, the speaker's voice, vibrating with excitement, was suddenly heard to say: 'And here, if I may be permitted, I will interpose an example of what I consider to be the really perfect, undetectable crime... I myself murdered Sir George Winthrop-Dunster.'

At this point the loud-speakers in some hundreds of thousands of homes delivered themselves of a mysterious crashing sound followed by a long silence until 8.35 p.m., when a familiar Oxford accent expressed regret for the delay and announced, without further comment, a continuation of the evening's programme.

In the morning, however, the newspapers were less reticent. Scarsdale, it appeared, had made history by being the first person actually to commit suicide before the microphone. He had shot himself, and all England had heard him... .

THE INQUEST was held the following day.

'It seemed to me,' said the announcer, giving his evidence very soothingly, 'that Mr. Scarsdale was rather upset about something when he arrived at the studio. He was a few minutes early, and we chatted together. I took him to be nervous, as it was his first broadcast. About half-way through the talk I noticed that the lamp over his desk had gone out— he must have caught his foot in the flex and pulled the plug away. I went in to put it right for him, and noticed then that he wasn't looking at all well. He was very pale, and he stared at me in a rather queer way when mentioned something about the light. The next I heard was an extraordinary statement about— er— Sir George Winthrop-Dunster. Of course, I rushed to cut off the microphone immediately, but before I could do so I heard the shot...'

The verdict was 'Suicide during temporary insanity'.

Even the last of Scarsdale's plans went astray. Instead of being fearfully acknowledged the perpetrator of the world's perfect murder, he was dismissed as that familiar and rather troublesome type— the neurotic person who confesses to a crime of which he is obviously quite innocent.

'As a matter of fact,' Inspector Deane remarked, 'Scarsdale wasn't within fifty miles of Lintott during the whole of the time that the crime could possibly have been committed. We know that because, in the ordinary course of police routine, we had to check up his movements... Poor fellow, the death of his employer was too much for him— it got on his mind...'

Failure to believe Scarsdale's confession meant that Hansell failed to get his freedom. As for the bonds, Scarsdale had put them in a tin box and had buried the box three feet deep in the back garden of the house he rented at Kew, and who, pray, is ever likely to dig them up?

11: Jilted**Miles Franklin***Australasian* (Melbourne) 14 Aug 1909*The second of the only two short stories I can find by this novelist*

BOB FULLER leaned his arms on one of the stringy-bark rails, which enclosed his cow yard, and leaning his head on his arms, groaned a great grandfather of groans, very audible. Several hours earlier he had received intelligence of his "jiltment," "flat out," with no two ways about it; but not until now, on coming to milk the twenty dusty, skinny cows, which had come for their dusty, skinnier allowance of forage, did the full force of the slap in the face fortune had given come home to him.

"What's the gooder milkin' the crawlin' wretches?" he soliloquised. "What's the gooder scratchin' and delvin' an' sweatin'? What's the gooder anythink?"

Bob was sure he had been very hardly done by. Against the advice of his female relatives he had taken up a selection all for Lil. She had promised to have him. Now that she had indeed "had" him he was not satisfied. Human nature is a dissatisfied commodity.

On this selection he had erected what neighbours described as a "tidy little place", or, to describe it, a galvanised-iron, box-like, two-roomed structure, with a bark kitchen behind it, and a bark fowl-house behind that, and a hollow log dog-kennel behind that, and a cow-yard behind that.

There is no doubt Bob had been industrious, working early and late to make a home, as many other men do, and many more don't, but ought to. In the teeth of drought, pests, and his family, he undauntedly persevered and achieved his object. The cage was made, when lo! the bird flew— flew with a man who would be able to give her jewellery, and pretty silk dresses no end; so she said in her letter, which was as shallow and pretty as its penner. The parakeet preferred a keeper who could keep her plumage in parrot-like repair.

Bob felt a crushing blow. He was not more a coward than other young fellows like himself, but quailed at the thought of the "I told yers" and "What did I tell yers", he would have to encounter. Oh! The humiliation before all his little world— his little, little world, yet all the world to him.

What was the good of working any more? What is the good of continuing to make the pastry for your meat pie when the dog has run off with the meat? And too, his love, his great, beautiful, deep pure love— the like of which was never felt before, and never would be felt by him again— it was all smashed. His old beliefs were rooted up! His soul was riven asunder! Everything was gone to pot!

He pressed his head harder on his arms and groaned louder. The glaring setting sun peeped between long gum and stringy bark saplings, and tipped a leer of amusement at him. The sun knew a thing or two, and this little farce tickled him. He saw that Bob was only twenty-five, and, knowing his sex, trembled on the verge of laughter.

Bob was really hard hit for the hour, the day, mayhap for a whole week, for he was still labouring under the delusions of male youth, foremost of these being an erroneous idea that he could love. The sun could see a few years ahead, when Bob should have awakened to his sex, and would unconsciously be aware that his only power of love-emotion was passion, and, therefore, one woman was as good as another, and three better than two, according to what critics term the meretricious doctrines of some nineteenth-century doctrinists.

But now, Bob's vanity— second strongest emotion in some men— being deeply wounded. he thought his heart was broken.

Good heavens! What was he to do? He would shoot himself! He would chew up the other fellow! He would make short work of him! He would go straight off to Western Australia without taking so much as a collar with him. He would— would— would—

He would marry Bella! By George! He never thought of it before! But, by George! He would do it just for spite, and show Lil he could get a real, good, spanking wife better than she.

This last thought was an inspiration. It took him over the fence into the cow-yard, where he rushed the cows in and out of the bail like fury, surprising them, raising the dust in blinding clouds and breaking his record for fast milking.

Bella was his second best girl, but she was above Lil in social status. She could play the "peanner."

Bob put on his Sunday togs and tie, and, on many nights paid court to her, and in a few months brought her and her "peanner" to settle among the "goanners" on Stringy Bark Range.

For a time things went with a great swing. Bob gave sprees to show off Bella, and with much "frill" introduced her to all and sundry as his "missus."

When the novelty had worn off, he took no pains to withhold from her his motive for marrying.

Bella struggled bravely, as most mothers in the bush do, to rear properly and educate the children which came with unfailing regularity. It was a weary struggle, and many a time she wished Lil had not jilted Bob Fuller.

BOB drinks heavily now, so they say, and leaves to his wife the full responsibility of the heavy obligations of matrimony. When half muddled with

alcohol, with maudlin tears in his blazed eyes, to anyone who will listen he tells this tale of his life:

"My life was rooned by a woman throwing me over. Me whole soul was wrapped up wen she chucked me up for a bloke with money, and its rooned me life."

Happy Bob! Happy any man who has been chucked over by a woman, or who has married on a Friday, or who has a drunken mother, or some such peg on which to hang the blame of his inability to be a man. By the way, who or what is to blame that none of us toe the line?

12: Madge Intervenes**William McLeod Raine**

1871-1954

Ainslee's Magazine Jan 1908*Australian Women's Weekly* 16 Feb 1935

British-American author who is famed as a writer of westerns, but he also wrote in other genres, such as this early story.

"SO now you know what you are to do," concluded Miss Blackiston briskly.

"We're to sit tight and do nothing. Isn't that it?" smiled Lennox-Murray.

"That's it exactly. Yours not to reason why. Just back me, no matter what I do."

"All right. I'm game," said the Englishman.

Harville got up and put on his hat. "None for me, thank you."

Madge twisted her gay little smile at him. "Afraid, Bobbie?"

"Very much," returned Harville promptly. "I've bumped up against that engaging audacity of yours ever since I was a yard high. There are always dangerous fireworks popping where you go, Madge. I've trailed along after you into too many lickings not to know that."

"All right," said Madge, over her shoulder. "But you'll be sorry, Bobbie."

"I'll be sorrier if I go."

"Captain Lennox-Murray isn't afraid." Madge's glance at the clean-built, impassive young Englishman was warm with confidence.

"He hasn't the privilege of being your cousin. I warn you, captain, that when she's at her best she's at her worst. I know the lady's endearing little ways. There's trouble in the air for you and me."

"So you're going to see it out, Bobbie?" beamed Miss Madge. "I knew you would. You always used to sermonise for my soul's good, and then stay to see the fun."

"I stayed to keep you out of deviltry, you imp of mischief— not that I ever succeeded," he added immediately. "She had a nose for scenting trouble a mile away, captain, and her long legs ached till she had reached there and mixed us up in it. She was a pill for fair, and, what's more, she is yet."

Lennox-Murray took in, with cool appreciation, Miss Madge's faultless get-up, her piquant nose, her innocent blue eyes, the perfect complexion that had defied even Colorado suns and winds. Propriety sat so snugly about the corners of her demure mouth that it was hard to imagine her a harum-scarum tomboy with hair flying in the wind.

"The rummiest kids often turn out the best," he began. "I'm sure Miss Blackiston—"

Harville scoffed. "The little imp's planning arson at the least."

"Bobbie," murmured Miss Madge, with the prettiest touch of reproach in her voice, "what will Captain Lennox Murray think of me?"

The captain tugged at his moustache. "I'm keen to tell you. I expect to at four p.m. to-morrow afternoon on the golf links, Miss Blackiston. And if the row is to be a bonfire, let me light the match."

Madge clapped her hands. "You're what my little brother would call a dead-game sport, captain."

Lennox-Murray blushed beneath his outdoor tan. "Thank you, Miss Blackiston. I try to play the game you know."

"She's got you hypnotised, captain. It's one of her little ways," shrugged the youth who had been bitten. "Well Madge, what's the programme? Are we to loot a church or carry out a gaol-delivery?"

Miss Blackiston rose and buttoned her silk dust-coat. A little triumphant smile was dancing in her eyes. "I only want you to take a ride with me in my Climber."

"Oh, that's all. Going to smash a road-record, I suppose? You well insured, captain?" Harville stopped before a bust of Washington on his way out of the library and touched his fair, curly hair. "We who are about to die salute thee, Caesar."

Miss Blackiston is competent to write a book on "Every Woman Her Own Chauffeur." She took the lever-seat and issued orders briefly. "Remember, Bobbie, you're not to be surprised at anything I do," she concluded.

"Better tell the other victim that. I've known you fifteen years. I couldn't be," retorted Harville, taking one of the back seats.

THE Englishman, sitting beside the girl, watched admiringly her confident handling of the machine. He saw that she knew all that was worth knowing about running a Climber. She handled with the firmest of brown little hands its individual whimsies, and twisted it to her will like a professional chauffeur so as to get the best results from the least effort. The machine swept along for six blocks, turned to the left for another, right-angled down a street in the stone age, then came to an abrupt halt before a pretentious house of turrets so hideously ugly that it was a landmark.

"Run in, Bobbie, and tell Alderman Kelly that he is wanted immediately by Mr. Roberts. Say we'll take him to the Roberts' house," commanded Miss Blackiston.

Harville expostulated. "See here, Madge, what is the game? What are you up to?"

"If you ask me no questions I'll tell you no fibs," retorted that young woman oracularly.

Her cousin surrendered, and did as he was told. Mike Kelly, a fat hulk of a man with a very red face, came to the door himself in his shirt sleeves. His hard eyes went over Harville and the waiting automobile while the young man explained his errand.

"What's broke loose now?" he snapped.

"Don't know. I'm telling you what I was told to tell you."

Again Kelly's eyes took in the auto-mobile and its occupants. Big things were doing at the city hall that night. What more likely than that Roberts, of the tramway, had sent for him to consult before the board met to vote on the franchise proposition?

If he had any suspicions, the sight of a girl at the lever lulled them.

"All right. I'll be with you in a jiffy," he said, and disappeared into the house.

Presently he emerged, dragging his coat on as he came. He stepped into the back seat beside Harville. Miss Blackiston pulled a lever, and the Climber jumped forward.

Mike Kelly, boss of the city of Sheridan by right of conquest, leaned back and took stock of his well-groomed fellow travellers. He did not know any of them, but it was an easy guess that they were part of the numerous Roberts family. Two of the Roberts boys were at college, and at least one of the daughters was prominent in the younger society set. So much he knew from his wife's gossip of the society columns of the paper. They were not just the kind of people that Boss Kelly was likely to know at close range.

Now that he came to consider, he thought it strange that Roberts had not sent a servant for him. It was not like Roberts to bring his family into even the outskirts of a deal like this. For the president of the big traction company was what Kelly called "a high-flyer." He did his boodling by proxy, even though some-times, absolutely ignoring the existence of any quid pro quo, he consented to discuss generally the passage of measures in which the company was interested.

And certainly the Sheridan Traction Company had never been more vitally interested in any proposition than the one pending for settlement before the city council that evening. The company had asked for a fifty-year extension of its franchise

There had been a storm of public protest almost unprecedented in its intensity. What the company asked for was worth millions. What it proposed to give the public in exchange was a mere sop. Another corporation had

offered a sum nearly ten times as great for the privilege of a twenty-five year franchise, the city to own the lines at the expiration of that time.

But the Sheridan Traction Company had oiled the way for the passage of its ordinance in spite of the public will. The money that had been put up to obtain control of the city council totalled a sum irresistible to hungry politicians.

Mike Kelly had been in charge of the corruption fund, and he had put the money where it would do the most good. A little more than one-half of it would go down in his own pocket just as soon as the bill was passed. And that he calculated triumphantly would be in about an hour and a half. Every man that could be bought he had bought. It would be a close thing but he had a bare majority and he knew he could hold his men in line, even though some of them were weakening under the strong pressure of public opinion. To vote for the ordinance was to brand themselves as boodlers, but he guessed they could afford it under the circumstances.

To Bob Harville there came a sudden startling divination of his cousin's daring purpose. She was going to kidnap Kelly to bring about the failure of the ordinance. In connection with any other girl such an idea would have been preposterous. But he knew Mad-cap Madge better than to suppose she would stick at anything

HE saw in a flash the propelling motives of her mad ad-venture. Her mother was the president of the Sheridan Woman's Club, her father the secretary of the Good Government League. She must have dined on the Traction Company's ordinance for a month and heard it discussed morning, noon, and night.

He could imagine how her impulsive youth must have resented the patience of a community that sat down with folded hands to watch itself being robbed. He could see her blue eyes flash as she demanded: "Why don't you do something to stop it?" And he could hear her mother's calm, indulgent answer: "What is there left to do, my daughter?"

Well, Miss Madge had found some-thing to do with a vengeance. Harville watched her with an instant revival of

his admiring, boyish loyalty. She was quite cool and steady as she guided the machine over the asphalt, apparently no more disturbed than if she were out for a casual spin. Bob had helped abduct the president of the junior class at college. He concluded that he would give Madge a lift with Kelly when she needed his help. Just now she did not seem to need it.

"I say where is she heading, young man? Does Roberts live out this way?" Kelly was leaning toward Harville with a vague suspicion filtering through his brain.

"Don't know, I'm sure," returned the young man coolly.

Boss Kelly's eyes began to bulge. "What's that? Here, let me out. This don't go," he said hoarsely.

"Don't go? Well, you're the first man I ever heard say the Climber couldn't hit the road well." Harville leaned forward and spoke in his cousin's ear. "Mr. Kelly says your machine is slow. Says it doesn't go."

The girl did not blink an eye. She nodded and moved a lever gently. The Climber jumped forward like a horse under the spur.

Kelly's under jaw shot out, the same fighting jaw that had made him boss of Sheridan. "Let me out of here," he said, breathing heavily.

Harville waved his hand easily. "My dear fellow, I'm not keeping you here. If you don't care to ride you can always get out."

"Well, stop the machine."

Bob stared at him. "How can I stop it? I'm not the chauffeur?"

"Is this a hold-up?" the alderman demanded.

Harville was shocked. "We don't belong to the city council, Mr. Kelly."

The look in Kelly's eyes was venomous. His right hand slid into his hip pocket. The fingers of the big ex-Varsity guard closed on his fat wrist with a grip like a vice.

"No, you don't, my beauty. We'll cut out the fireworks. This isn't the Fourth of July," he murmured.

Kelly struggled, trying desperately to draw out his hand. But in Harville's grip he was a mere child to handle. Never an athlete in the best of days, gross living and lack of exercise had padded his bones with loose fat instead of muscle. He could only strain impotently and curse. Unexpectedly Harville let his hand jerk out, then closed on the wrist again till it was an easy matter to twist the revolver from the nerveless grip.

BOB slipped the weapon into his pocket. "It's not so likely to go off in there," he explained.

Kelly spluttered. No words could tell his rage vividly enough. "It's an abduction," he screamed.

"How did you guess it?" asked Bob with perfect good humor.

The alderman poured out a steady stream of profanity which Miss Blackiston drowned in a succession of toots from the horn. Meanwhile the auto-mobile drummed steadily along, its dragon eyes gleaming into the darkness ahead. They had passed the suburbs by this time, and houses were beginning to grow scarce. Fields rushed past in a mad scurry to the rear. The machine was flying for-ward like a racer. It whirled into the night at a mad pace that made the cool air bite.

Miss Blackiston kept her eyes glued to the road ahead. Her reddish-brown hair was flying in the wind, which had whipped a splendid color into her cheeks. Her eyes were shining with excitement, but she sat quite quiet and motionless.

"Great, isn't it?" she said to her companion, without looking at him.

"Rather," said the Englishman. He was wondering what she would say to him when he asked her to marry him. Her pluck, her wild spirits, the gay comradeship of the girl struck an answering chord in him: He, too, had felt the call of outlawry, and though he might watch her out of a wooden face, she knew his heart approved.

"I expect you think I'm a pill, as Bobbie says?" she flung out.

"If you want the truth, I'm clean bowled over, Miss Blackiston," said the Englishman, his grey eyes suggesting more than his words. "I don't know what you're up to, but I give you my word I'm in whatever it is. Always ready to give a friend a helping hand."

The comedy on the back seat had another motif. Trembling with rage, Kelly shook an impotent fist in Harville's face. "Let me out of here, damn you," he shouted wildly, "or I'll put the whole pack of you behind the bars, if there's any law left in this country."

"IT isn't your fault, Mr. Kelly, if there's any left," retorted Bob. "You remind me of a motto I once saw in the New Mexico penitentiary. Some prisoner had carved it on a piece of work that was for sale. 'Them that hollers loudest for justice ought to be mighty glad it ain't done to them.' Doesn't that about fit your case, Mr. Kelly?"

"It's an outrage!" screamed the furious city father who saw a cool one hundred thousand dollars vanishing from his clutches. "An outrage and a conspiracy!"

"Referring to the Traction Franchise steal, I suppose," returned Bob amicably. "Well, if the newspapers have it right, you ought to know. I dare say it is all you call it."

Kelly struck at Bob blindly, and suddenly found himself gasping for breath, Harville's fingers tightened round his throat till he grew black in the face.

"We'll cut that out, if you don't mind," said the big collegian.

The alderman, blind with rage, tried to fling himself from the machine. Bob jammed him back into his seat.

"Don't be a fool," he advised curtly. "You'll kill yourself."

"Let me go! Let me go! It's criminal conspiracy," screamed the boss.

Bob misunderstood him cheerfully. "That's all right, Mr. Kelly. I don't wonder you feel that way about the steal. But there's no use worrying. It isn't all velvet for the boodlers. The people may win out yet."

Kelly, choking down his rage, leaned forward and spoke into the girl's ear. "I'll give you the best automobile to be bought in the market, if you'll get me back to the city hall in forty minutes."

Madge shook her head. The alder-man turned to Harville, his voice shaking with eagerness.

"Name your own price," he begged. "I've got to be at the city hall by eight o'clock. It's absolutely necessary, man."

Harville consulted his watch. "Can't be done, Mr. Kelly. It lacks only a few minutes of eight now. 'And Sheridan twenty miles away.' I expect you'd better try to enjoy the ride."

KELLY leaned back.

His mottled face was white in patches. He saw the plan, he had builded with such care spilled like a house of cards at a girl's whim. It was all apparently so utterly aimless, but he realised bitterly the futility of fighting against it. He was trapped. The fact remained, no matter how he raged at it. While he was away the battle was being fought out in a smoky room at the city hall. He knew that his absence would be accounted a desertion, and that his followers, pressed to the wall, must be already changing front before the angry citizens gathered to witness the vote.

The automobile chugged steadily forward for another half-hour, and slowed down at a roadhouse thirty-five miles from Sheridan. The Englishman leaped out, and the machine shot forward again just as Kelly flung himself to the ground. Lennox-Murray made straight for the telephone. Madge swung the Climber round and Harville descended. He found Kelly imploring the keeper of the house to lend him a revolver.

Captain Lennox-Murray hung up the receiver and turned to Harville. His keen grey eyes had a gleam of triumph.

"It's all right. They're bowled out. Ordinance failed to pass. Corporation forces stampeded, and franchise renewal lost by vote of seventeen to seven. They are wondering what became of Kelly," he said, as they swung along to the automobile.

"All right?" asked Miss Blackiston eagerly, as they started.

"Right as a trivet," answered Lennox-Murray. "We've got them on the run. Town gone wild and making a night of it. Speeches and fireworks just ripping. I congratulate you, Miss Blackiston."

"That's a good idea, captain," assented Harville. "Here, too, Madge. Probably by to-morrow we'll be in gaol. Didn't I tell you, captain, she always started the fireworks?"

"I suppose it is rather against the law," laughed the soldier.

"Don't know, I'm sure," answered Miss Blackiston, and she looked as if she meant she did not care.

"Lord, yes! Kidnapping, they call it. From ten to twenty years in stripes. It is a hanging offence in two of our neighboring States since the Rockland kid was stolen," contributed Harville cheerfully.

"Bobbie always did pretend to be a croaker. He does not mean it, captain. He is really enjoying himself down to the ground."

"I wonder, now, if Kelly is," drolled the Englishman.

Madge sighed. "Some people are so unappreciative. You'd think he would enjoy a pleasant spin in the cool of the evening."

"I expect he couldn't afford it. By the way, Madge, I think you'd better circle round and strike Sheridan from another side. Try sou'-sou'-west."

Lennox-Murray nodded. "I dare say you're right. I fancy our friend is pretty busy with the telephone just now."

In point of fact, he was. The wires buzzed with the blasphemous tale of outrage he was shouting to the police. In an instant things grew busy at headquarters. A loaded patrol-wagon went racing wildly along the streets to intercept the returning abductors. But while it tore out toward the north the Climber ran quietly in from the south-west. Madge had done the return trip in a little over an hour, and had slipped in unnoticed.

HARVILLE took the machine to the garage while Lennox-Murray made his adieus.

"I'll see you to-morrow, then— at four," the captain said.

"Where? Here or at the gaol?" laughed the girl.

"Here. Mr. Kelly did not seem to recognise either of you. In two days we all leave for Estes Park It's a long shot that he doesn't find out who we are."

"I'm not afraid of it," said Madge.

"Are you afraid of anything?" demanded the soldier.

"Of many things. Of a mouse, of an old cat's tongue, of being bored."

"I shouldn't be afraid of being bored if I could live with Miss Blackiston as much as you do." said the captain bluntly.

"I'm not sure that is a compliment." smiled Madge.

"It isn't. It's the truth."

"There are worse things than being bored."

"And better," added the captain "She would be a liberal education in living—Miss Blackiston, I mean."

"She's a pill, captain."

"She's a sportsman from the head to the heel of her, Miss Blackiston," said the Englishman admiringly.

"Well, she's not the only one that's present," laughed the girl, with just a shade of embarrassment at the steadiness of Lennox-Murray's keen, speaking eyes. "You're no quitter yourself."

"I suppose you don't like quitters?"

"Hardly."

"I'm glad of that. You force me to play the game out no matter how much I fear the issue," replied the soldier.

"Oh! Are you playing a game?" This a little hurriedly and with a slight flush.

"A serious one— the game of hearts. Will you back me to win, Miss Blackiston?"

Madge fluttered her eyes over him for an instant. "What cards do you hold?"

He stood before her strong, dignified and unafraid, quite devoid of eloquence and the gift of expression. Though he held himself well in hand his grey eyes told a story old as Adam.

"I think you know the cards I hold. Afraid they don't make a very strong combination. Won't you show me how to play them?" he asked.

"So as to take the queen?" she laughed a trifle falsely.

He nodded, then reached out impulsively and lifted her hand to his lips.

The slam of a door came to them. Madge snatched her hand away.

"Didn't you say to-morrow at four?" she whispered as she fled.

13: The Murder of Blanche Medloe

Valentine Williams

1883-1946

In: *Mr. Treadgold Cuts In*, 1937

"Coincidence is the snag on which the most astute and ingenious deductions may be wrecked."

— *The Maxims of H.B. Treadgold*.

THE Pimlico murder, as the newspapers called it, was meat and drink to Mr. Treadgold, especially as Chief Inspector Manderton was personally in charge of the investigation. A chill of horror ran through London when, one foggy November morning, the dead body of pretty little Mrs. Medloe was found at Hardmore Mansions, a cheap and not very reputable block of furnished flats off the Vauxhall Bridge Road. About eight o'clock on the previous evening she had arrived at Hardmore Mansions in company with a well-dressed individual who signed the register "Frank Barkley." The couple were shown to a suite on the second floor.

Around noon next day a chambermaid, entering the sitting-room with her pass-key, came upon the woman, fully dressed, dead upon the couch. She had been strangled—the medical evidence showed that she had been dead for at least twelve hours. Of her companion there was no sign, but it was discovered from the night porter that, soon after midnight, the man, passing through the lobby like someone in a hurry, had gone out and not returned. The door of the suite was locked, but not bolted inside, and the key was gone—it was inferred that the man had taken it with him.

The only luggage the couple brought with them was an over-night bag and a man's dressing-case. Both remained in the suite. The bag held a man's toilet articles and a suit of pyjamas; the dressing-case a man's evening clothes. The dead woman had nothing but a handbag. The fact that it contained some four pounds in change suggested that robbery was not the motive of the crime. Nobody living in the flats had heard any disturbance in the night.

Neither dressing-case nor bag was labelled or initialled and neither the luggage nor the woman's handbag threw any light on the couple's identity. But the victim's underwear was marked "B. M." All the resources of Scotland Yard got to work and within twenty-four hours she was identified as a certain Mrs. Blanche Medloe who had a furnished bedroom at the Hypatia Bridge Club in South Kensington.

As out of the welter of newspaper statements the victim's background gradually emerged, the mystery deepened. Blanche Medloe stepped into the floodlighting of modern journalism as a pretty, rather frivolous woman in her

late thirties, of good social standing, living on a small allowance from her husband, a rubber planter in the Malay States, from whom she was divorced. She had a small circle of friends, many of them men from the East on leave, who asked nothing better than to have an amusing, nicely dressed companion to accompany them on a round of the theatres and restaurants during their furloughs.

She usually spent a month on the Riviera after Christmas, and for the rest of the year, visits to the hairdresser and cocktail parties filled her life. She was not known to be involved in any love affair and the police were able to establish that at the time the murder was committed the three or four men who had been taking her out during the London season had long since returned to their posts in the East. Neither the staff at the Hypatia nor any of her friends had ever heard her speak of the man Frank Barkley, nor could they account for her presence in the rather sordid surroundings in which she was found. "Mrs. Medloe," they said, "was always most particular about the men she went out with."

That her companion was the murderer was clearly indicated. The police had circulated his description, gleaned from the manageress at Hardmore Mansions: "About thirty. Dark, medium height, slight build. When last seen, wearing brown trilby hat, camel's hair overcoat, yellow muffler, dog-skin gloves. Speaks with educated accent." It was stated that he was unknown at the flats.

He had heard nothing from Manderton since the case broke, Mr. Treadgold told me one evening, three or four days after the discovery of the crime, as I walked back with him to his chambers from Savile Row. But when we reached Bury Street the inspector hauled his burly body out of a chair in the sitting-room. Mr. Treadgold went to the desk and glanced over his mail— he always likes Manderton to speak first— while I brought the tantalus and the cigars from the sideboard. "What do you make of this Medloe case, H.B.?" the inspector demanded through the smoke of one of Mr. Treadgold's Partagas.

My friend laughed. "Meaning you've failed to get a line on Barkley?"

"That's about the size of it."

"No finger-prints?"

"Only hers. He never took his gloves off, I guess."

"What about their traps?"

"That bag of his is old and battered— the Lord knows where and when it was bought. We're trying to trace the pyjamas, but they're a ready-made article, turned out in thousands by the manufacturers, and the prospect's pretty hopeless. As for his safety razor and toilet articles, they tell us nothing."

"And the dressing-case?"

"It's brand new, but the retailer's name has been slashed out. It's of English manufacture, however, and a luxury article— we've circulated the photographs to the trade. I brought the case along. I'd like your opinion on those dress clothes of his."

He fetched the case, solid brown crocodile hide, new and shiny, from the hall and dumped it on the desk, unsnapping the locks. Mr. Treadgold pursed his lips as a row of gold-topped bottles and containers were disclosed. "I bet this cost him a pretty penny," he murmured. Manderton's finger, indicating a clean slash just inside the rim, showed where the retailer's name had been obliterated.

A man's dinner suit— jacket, black waistcoat and trousers— were all the clothing the case contained. The inspector lifted them out and, his jeweller's glass in his eye, Mr. Treadgold inspected each garment in turn. "French," he proclaimed at length, "and made by a first-class tailor— Paris, probably. This suit stood him in at least two thousand francs."

Manderton ruffled his forehead. "You're sure of this?"

"Definitely. The French cut and stitching are characteristic. Look at the waistcoat! All that finicky braiding— it's typically French. Also, the suit's brand new— it's been worn at most half a dozen times. Maybe it's significant that the customary tab with the customer's name and date is missing— when we are asked to omit it it's generally by fellows who want to get new clothes past the Customs."

"Suggesting that this chap's on his travels?"

"From overseas, I'd submit. This new dressing-case, these new evening clothes, look to me like part of an outfit such as a man orders after long absence abroad." His glance rested tentatively on our visitor. "A lot of men from India and Malay leave the ship at Marseilles, you know, and travel to London overland through Paris. And, after all, the Continental terminus at Victoria is only round the corner from the Vauxhall Bridge Road."

The inspector frowned. "You don't suppose I didn't think of that. But if it's one of her planter friends, it'd be a new one— I've checked up on the others, and they're all back at their posts." He paused and, feeling in his waistcoat pocket, said, "There's one clue I haven't mentioned. When the woman was found she was clutching this sleeve-link in her hand."

It was a gold link with a monogram in white enamel. Mr. Treadgold perked up at the sight of it. "There was no mention of this in the Press?" he remarked reproachfully, scrutinising the link through his glass.

"For the good reason that the murderer must have overlooked it," the detective replied, "and I didn't want him to know we have it. There are three

letters there— a G, an R and an S. The trouble is, they are superimposed— you can't tell in what order to read them."

"There's no B, at any rate," commented Mr. Treadgold, handing the link back. "It suggests that Barkley's an assumed name."

He turned to the dressing-case again. A cigar case of fine plaited straw, which was lying on the bottom, proved to be empty, and he laid it aside. Some of the bottles and containers were in use, and he removed their covers at random, sniffing at their contents with an abstracted air. "What sort of place is this apartment house?" he asked Manderton suddenly.

The inspector shrugged broad shoulders. "It's not the Y.M.C.A. The police have nothing against them, but I gather they're not too particular."

"Cheap?"

"Barkley was paying three guineas a week."

"It doesn't jell," Mr. Treadgold exclaimed violently. "What was a fellow who can afford a suit-case like this doing in a dump of that description?"

The detective grinned. "You'd be surprised at the love nests some parties turn up in!"

An angry snort was his answer. His head thrust into the case, Mr. Treadgold continued his inspection. With his square-tipped practical fingers I saw him rake up some particles of dust which he shook out on the blotter on the desk. He was examining the hair-brushes— solid, ivory-backed— through his glass when the telephone rang. It was a call for Manderton. The latter, who knows his way about the apartment, spoke on the extension in the bedroom. Seeing Mr. Treadgold completely absorbed, I picked up the evening paper.

Manderton was away a good ten minutes, by which time my friend had restored the clothing to the case, and was staring moodily between the undrawn curtains at the fog-blurred lights of St. James's. Only when the detective reappeared did he stir from his lethargy. "In your place, Inspector," he observed, "I'd try to ascertain whether, by any chance, this dressing-case was bought in Paris."

"It's English made."

Mr. Treadgold looked at him fixedly. "You can buy English luggage in Paris, you know. Try and trace the clothing, too, among the leading tailors. Ask after a red-haired man about six feet in height of athletic build, who's lately come from South Africa."

This suggestion evidently did not appear as preposterous to Manderton as it did to me. "At Hardmore Mansions they described the murderer as dark and of medium height, but they may be covering someone up. People who are out to mislead always fly to opposites," he said. "Meanwhile, your tip about Paris is

a good one, and I'll follow it up. So long, H.B.— I'll keep you posted." Carrying the dressing-case, he clumped out.

I turned to Mr. Treadgold. "And where do you get the idea that the murderer's South African and red-headed?"

He sighed. "George, George, for a lawyer you have the sloppiest mind of any fellow I know. At no time have I affirmed that the murderer is a South African. My exact suggestion— for it's no more than that, at present— was that the owner of that dressing-case comes from South Africa. If I hadn't feared to test friend Manderton's patience too far, I might have added that he stoops, is probably middle-aged, and, like myself, is an inveterate pipe-smoker. Look here!"

He beckoned me to the desk. Mixed with dust some particles of pale brown tobacco lay scattered over the white blotting pad. "Boer tobacco!" he pronounced. "It had silted into the corners of the case, probably from a pouch. I found some grains in the pocket of the dinner jacket, too. As a pipe-smoker of some forty years' standing, I've made a study of pipe tobacco, and I know Boer tobacco when I see it— I've smoked it out there myself. Doesn't a fellow who carries a pouch in his evening clothes suggest an inveterate smoker? Then that cigar case of his..."

"That straw affair?"

"It's Madeira work and quite new."

"And the Cape steamers call at Madeira!"

"Exactly. Many South Africans like to get off at Gib. and travel overland to London— that would account for our man's presence in Paris. It looks to me as though he had been a long time away since the first thing he does is to get himself an outfit."

"But, H.B., the red hair, the stoop?"

"The stoop is clearly indicated by the hang of the jacket; his height and build by the measurements of his clothes. As for the red hair, well, he'd used the brushes in the dressing-case. A hair brush can be a tell-tale thing when a fellow begins to lose his hair, and that's usually when he reaches middle life." He sighed. "But the picture's out of focus, George. We can't work from motive, because there's no motive at present discoverable. What's wanted is clear thinking. It says in *Tristram Shandy*..."

"The day you fail to ram that damnable book down my throat, you get a medal!"

He chuckled. "It speaks admiringly of the disciples of Pythagoras who could get out of their body in order to think well. The best way I know of getting out of the body is to go to a movie. I think I'll go to the pictures!"

He was restless and absent-minded when I saw him next day. By evening he had had no word from Manderton, and the following morning he rang me up, asking me to meet him at Hardmore Mansions at noon. He was stalking impatiently up and down outside the rather grim, red-brick block when I arrived, and carried me straight into the office. He told Mrs. Argyle, the manageress— we knew her name from the newspapers— that we wished to see a flat for a friend arriving from abroad.

She was a determined-looking woman with a square jaw, two chins and bosom to scale, her manner such as to suggest that her opinion of the human race was based on experience with defaulting lodgers. But Mr. Treadgold believes that the way to disarm suspicion is to get people talking about themselves— cultivating the human relationships, he calls it— and by the time we reached the three-room apartment she proposed to show us on the third floor, she was chatting quite amiably about the difficulties of the servant problem.

We gravely inspected the cheerless, poky rooms with their cheap furniture and threadbare carpets, talked terms, even to the price of the breakfasts. Then Mr. Treadgold said in his most engaging tones, "I hope this isn't the flat where the poor lady was murdered."

Mrs. Argyle changed countenance. That suite, she proclaimed with trembling lips, had been sealed up by the police.

"Dear me," my friend remarked compassionately, "what a time you must have had! The police can be so ruthless when they're faced by the results of their own incompetence. They can't find Mrs. Medloe's murderer, and so they harass all kinds of innocent people. They've actually had the audacity to tackle a friend of mine, simply because he's red-haired and happened to arrive from Paris the night the woman was killed."

Mrs. Argyle snorted. "They're crazy. They were round here yesterday with this story of a red-haired man, though both Harris— that's the night porter— and I told them from the start he was dark."

"If I were the police, I believe I'd take your word for it," Mr. Treadgold put in. "You're observant, you've seen life, you're intelligent."

The manageress bristled. "I believe I can tell a gentleman when I see one. This one, Barkley, now, he didn't drop his aitches, but he wasn't out of the top drawer, to my way of thinking. Good-looking enough, I grant you, if you fancy a dark man, but nut-crackery— if you know what I mean— and a shifty eye, if ever I saw one— I wouldn't have trusted him farther than you could toss a biscuit, as the saying goes. Not that it mattered to the pore lady. She was just potty about him; couldn't hardly take her eyes off him when he was signing the

register, and he as off-hand as anything— w'y if Harris hadn't stepped forward he'd have let her lug that big pigskin bag of his to the lift."

"You mean crocodile, don't you?"

"I said 'pigskin' and I mean pigskin, and nothing the newspapers write will make me say different. If the police want to call pigskin crocodile, it's none of my business."

"But..." I was beginning, when Mr. Treadgold trod hard on my foot.

"Do you think you'd recognise this man again if you saw him?" he asked the manageress.

"Anywhere. And my sight's as good as theirs, as I told this Chief Inspector Manderton, who called yesterday. If I can't tell a dark man from a red-head, and me with three husbands in the ground, it's time I shut up shop, I told him."

We took our leave then, Mr. Treadgold promising to let Mrs. Argyle know when our mythical friend arrived. At Victoria Station he quitted me. "Just an inquiry, George," he said. "Drop in this evening for a glass of sherry."

I could see he was itching to be rid of me, so I left him there. But he put me off that evening, and it was not until the following evening that I saw him again.

He was busy with his stamp collection when I called round at Bury Street before dinner and curiously reluctant to discuss the case, although he told me that he had not heard from Manderton. As he plied his gauge and lens, however, I had the feeling that he was waiting for someone— he seemed to have his ear cocked at the door. At last the front door buzzer sounded. At the same moment the telephone on the desk rang. Would you mind, George?" he said, lifting the telephone receiver. "I'm expecting Mrs. Argyle at seven. Or it may be a man called Caro, a Frenchman— he's due in by the Paris train."

I went to the front door. It was Manderton. "H.B. in?" he barked. Mr. Treadgold's voice speaking on the telephone answered him, and I led the way into the sitting-room. Mr. Treadgold, his back to the door, was just hanging up. "That was Caro— he's on his way over from Victoria," he informed me, then turned and saw Manderton standing there, and it seemed to me that his face fell.

"Well," said the inspector, rubbing his hands briskly together, "that was an A1 hunch of yours, H.B.! We've traced the bird that bought that dressing-case and the evening suit."

Mr. Treadgold made one bound. "No! In Paris?"

"In Paris. It's a Jo'burg engineer!"

"A South African, then?"

"That's right. Name of Ralton."

In his daily business of making clothes Mr. Treadgold carries without difficulty the names of hundreds of people in his head. He has a card index mind. For the moment I had forgotten all about the sleeve link found in the dead woman's hand. But H.B. hadn't. "Ralton?" he snapped. "There was an R on that sleeve link, Inspector. An S, too, and a G."

"Right! The initials are G.S.R.— Godfrey Stamford Ralton."

"Red-haired, is he?"

"So they tell me, and a six-footer. He arrived at the Grand in Paris October 15th, and left for London by the noon train November 4th."

"The day of the murder!"

He nodded. "He's our man all right."

"And where is he now?"

"As far as we know, still in this country— he was round at his bank for his mail the afternoon after he arrived; he's a cool hand, all right. That's the last trace of him we have to date, but we'll get him, never fear."

The front door buzzer whirled. "If it's Mrs. Argyle or the man, show them into the dining-room," Mr. Treadgold whispered as I moved towards the hall.

I opened the door. A tall figure confronted me. "Monsieur Caro?" I questioned.

His reply took my breath away. "My name's Ralton," he said.

He was a big, gangling fellow who peered shortsightedly through horn-rimmed spectacles; the hair protruding from under his wide-brimmed felt was a grizzled red. "I wanted a word with Chief Inspector Manderton, who's in charge of the Medloe case," he announced shyly. "I rang up Scotland Yard and they told me, if it were urgent, I should find him here."

"Just a minute!" I bade him, and ran back to the sitting-room.

Manderton was proclaiming in a loud voice: "Murderer? Of course, he's the murderer. I don't give a damn what that old witch at the flats says—"

"It's Ralton!" I interrupted him. He stood there with his mouth open.

Treadgold said in a puzzled voice, "Here?"

I called the man in from the hall. He lumbered in, clutching his hat; his coppery hair, showing the scalp on the top, was very noticeable. He looked to be in his fifties. I indicated Manderton. "I understand you've been inquiring for me at my bank and other places?" Ralton said to him.

"That's right," the other agreed imperturbably.

"I suppose it's about that dressing-case of mine. Well, it was stolen from me, right under my nose, at Victoria Station when I landed from Paris last week." He eyed the inspector nervously through his glasses.

"Is that so?" Manderton's tone was strongly ironic. "And when did you report the loss?"

"I didn't. I had an awful crossing, and I wanted to go to bed."

"Why didn't you report it next day? It doesn't figure on the list of stolen property reported to the Metropolitan Police."

Ralton hesitated. "It was stupid of me, I guess. But next day I read of the murder in the newspapers, and recognised my dressing-case by that cigar case I bought at Madeira and— well, I just didn't want to get mixed up with it."

The inspector's laugh was short and sarcastic. "I believe you. It's my duty to warn you that I'm a police officer, and that any statement you may make—"

Ralton cut him off. "It'll have to come out, I suppose." He paused, sighed. "At one time Blanche Medloe was my wife."

Manderton's heavy eyebrows came down.

"Your wife?"

He nodded resignedly. "It's more than seventeen years since I last heard of her." He hesitated. "The point is, I kept my previous marriage secret from my present wife— you see, she has views about divorce. Blanche was only eighteen when I married her. Out West in Nevada it was, twenty years ago— I was engineer with a mining outfit, and she was travelling with a troupe of English dancers. It was a rough life, and I didn't make much money and well, one day she lit out with an actor, and I never heard another word from her until two years later. I was back on the Rand then, and she wrote me from New York, saying she'd met a man called Medloe, a rubber planter in the F.M.S.— his name came back to me when I read of her death— and could she go to Reno and divorce me? I didn't stand in her way— I was always fond of the kid, and the next thing I knew I had a Christmas card from her to say she was married and living at Kuala Lumpur. That was the last time I heard from her. I didn't see her again until the other night."

The inspector's eyes snapped into action. "You admit you saw her, then?"

"It was at Victoria Station, the evening I arrived from Paris. There was a tremendous crush, and I couldn't get a porter. I was pushing along with the crowd, lugging that dressing-case of mine, when I suddenly saw her on the other side of the gates— you know, where they take the tickets. She was staring past me into the crowd, as though she was looking for someone. I knew her at once. I was so astonished at seeing her there, I stopped dead and at the same time someone behind barged into me and knocked my glasses to the ground. I can't see a yard without my specs, so I dropped my dressing-case and made a dive into the crowd to recover them. By the time I'd rescued them Blanche had disappeared, and, what's more, my dressing-case was gone."

There was a long pause. The front door buzzer chirped. But nobody stirred. "And where were you that evening?" Manderton's strident voice broke the hush.

Ralton laughed. "In bed and asleep at my hotel. I was all in after that crossing; I almost slept the clock round."

The buzzer trilled again. "I'll go," Treadgold told me, and hastened out. When he returned he was accompanied by a large woman in black. It was Mrs. Argyle, from Hardmore Mansions. Manderton glared at her; Mr. Treadgold said, pointing at Ralton, "Is this the man who brought Mrs. Medloe to Hardmore Mansions that night?"

"Indeed, it is not," replied the lady loftily. "I've never set eyes on him before."

Once more the buzzer sounded from the hall. Mr. Treadgold, moving to answer it, stopped on the threshold. "By the way, Inspector," he remarked diffidently, "you might get this gentleman to tell us whether the dressing-case stolen from him was pigskin or crocodile."

"Why waste time?" the detective growled. "It's crocodile, as well you know."

"It's crocodile," said Ralton.

"It's pigskin," said Mrs. Argyle. "And it wasn't a dressing-case— it was a kit-bag."

"The piece he left behind was a dressing-case and of crocodile," pronounced Manderton. "It was standing in the room with the dead woman— I saw it myself. I know nothing about any pigskin kit-bag, and if there was one, I'd like to know why I didn't hear of it before." The buzzer whirled again. "Wait!" said Mr. Treadgold. "Maybe here's someone now who can clear up the mystery." He went out.

I made them all sit down; there was a strained wait during the three or four minutes he was away. He returned, ushering in a small, foreign-looking man in a raincoat, who carried a shabby attaché case. "This is Monsieur Caro, of the railway police— the plain clothes branch— at the Gare du Nord in Paris," Mr. Treadgold informed Manderton. Without speaking the newcomer opened his case and produced an album of photographs, which he laid on the desk. Mr. Treadgold signed to Mrs. Argyle. "Would you take a look at those pictures and see if you can pick out anyone resembling the man who brought Mrs. Medloe to your flats that night?" he said.

Slowly she moved to the desk and for a minute or two the rustle of turning leaves was the only sound in the room. Then she looked up, one finger planted dramatically on the open page. "That's him! I'd know him anywhere!"

We crowded round. The photograph, apparently enlarged from a snapshot taken on a racecourse, showed a nattily dressed young man with a laughing face and nose drooping to rather full lips. He held his hat in his hand and his curly, dark hair was displayed. Caro laughed softly. "It is as I thought," he said

in excellent English. "*Eh bien*, messieurs, if he is the assassin you have not far to look, for I saw the gentleman on the platform at Victoria when the Paris train came in just now. I took the liberty of asking my good *confrères* of the railway police at Victoria to keep an eye on him."

A stern eye on the speaker, Manderton snatched up the telephone. "Who is this man?" he demanded, dialling swiftly.

"The smartest luggage thief in France. We have yet to catch him in the act, but we know all about him. Some of the biggest coups are credited to him and his gang. His name is Larry Peters—'English Larry,' as they call him."

The inspector was speaking to Victoria Station. He broke off to exclaim to Caro, "English, is he?"

"That's right," the Frenchman agreed. "But he operates only on the Continent— Paris, the Côte d'Azur, Biarritz. Your international branch should know of him."

"If he attempts to leave, detain him," Manderton said into the telephone. "I'll be right along." He hung up, gazing at us sombrely. "He's drinking in the buffet on the Continental side," he announced and proceeded to dial another number.

"A luggage thief?" I exclaimed to Mr. Treadgold.

He shook his head at me. "I told you, George, that that dressing-case never fitted into the picture. But it was Mrs. Argyle here who first gave me the clue to the mystery by her positive assertion that the fellow brought with him, not the crocodile dressing-case which was found in the flat, but a pigskin bag. If this was a lie, I could discovered no reason for it. But I was already leaning towards the conclusion that the owner of the dressing-case and the murderer were two different persons, in which case it was very possible that the murderer had come by the dressing-case dishonestly. This view was strengthened by Mrs. Argyle's instinctive distrust of the man Barkley— it occurred to me that in her position she was probably an excellent judge of a crook."

Mrs. Argyle, who had approached us and was listening, sniffed. "In my job you have to be," she remarked feelingly.

"Thinking matters out," Mr. Treadgold proceeded, "I suddenly realised that the discrepancy in the matter of the dressing-case had a perfectly logical explanation in the device commonly employed by luggage thieves. This is a false bag, collapsible so that it may be concealed under the coat, with spring grapples instead of a bottom so that it may be dropped over and lift the piece of luggage it is intended to steal. The remainder was simple. There was no photograph agreeing with Mrs. Argyle's description of the murderer in the Rogues' Gallery which a friend of mine in the railway police at Victoria keeps of

the known luggage thieves working the London termini. On the chance that our man might have crossed from Paris I had a word on the Paris telephone with Caro, who has helped me out before. He said at once that the description tallied with that of this Larry Peters, who'd been missing from his usual haunts for some days."

"And how!" declared the Frenchman phlegmatically. "An unsuccessful attempt was made to snatch a jewel case at the Quai d'Orsay on November 2; one would say this old Larry felt a breath of his native air would do him good."

The inspector, who had been barking orders on the telephone to a subordinate at Scotland Yard, now sprang up and seized his hat. "I'll want you to identify this guy," he told the manageress, "you, too, Caro— I'll take you two in my car. You bring Mr. Ralton in a taxi, if you care to tag along, H.B.— he'll have to come to the Yard later to make a statement."

We left in a body. A police car swept Manderton and his companions away in the traffic while we found a cab. None of us spoke. Ralton was palpably on edge, fiddling with his glasses, while as for me, my skin was tingling with excitement. Only Mr. Treadgold remained unalterably placid, gazing out of the taxi window with those blue eyes of his which seem so innocent, yet miss so little.

There was no sign of the Manderton party when we reached Victoria. We headed for the buffet. It was the dinner hour and the place was full of smoke and clatter, with a long line of people drinking at the bar and others seated at the tables. The room was so crowded that it was a minute or two before we perceived the inspector and Mrs. Argyle taking their places at a table on the far side. There was no sign of Caro: Manderton was clearly resolved that his companion should not be influenced in her attempted identification.

There was a vacant table behind them and the three of us sat down. Mrs. Argyle had put on her pince-nez and was staring about her with a challenging air. Presently I heard her say in a low voice, "Over there on the right."

We followed the direction of her gaze. At a table near the bar a youngish man sat alone. His hat was pushed back on his head and his legs were cocked up on a chair. He was unshaven and the striped collar he wore was crumpled and soiled. He had a glass in his hand and I had the idea that he was not entirely sober. Manderton's whisper rustled in my ear. "You're sure?" he said to Mrs. Argyle. "That's the man!" she declared firmly. On that the inspector stood up and blew his nose and out of the corner of my eye I saw two individuals, who were drinking beer at the bar, detach themselves from the long line of customers and edge towards the young man's table. "Come on!" Manderton told the manageress and advanced across the room, the three of us in his wake. "I want you, Peters!" he told the young man.

The other made no move but gazed up at him stolidly. Then he caught sight of Mrs. Argyle's face of doom behind the speaker and he took his legs down. "All right," he said in a nonchalant tone. "I had it coming to me, I guess." He rose thickly. He drained the glass he still grasped and stood up, the two men from the bar, who had joined Manderton, closed in on him and the whole party filed out. It was so quickly and quietly done that the noise and the bustle went on about us undisturbed.

At the office to which they took him Caro was waiting. At the sight of him the prisoner grinned impudently. "Old home week at Victoria," he remarked *sotto voce*. Manderton administered the usual warning, but Peters disregarded it— it was obvious that he meant to talk. "I'm not sorry it's over," he said. "I was fond of the little woman and I didn't mean to kill her. But she provoked me and I lost my temper."

He spoke like a gentleman, with a pleasantly modulated voice, but a loose mouth and a certain flash air, if they did not proclaim the habitual criminal, at least explained the manageress's first reactions towards him. "I met her at Cannes last winter," he continued. "She was crazy about me, wanted me to marry her— I guess she thought I was rolling; I'd had a damned good season down south, what with one or two jobs I pulled and a spot of luck at the tables. She came out to Paris once or twice and I saw her in London a couple of times. But then things began to go wrong; the splits were right on my tail and I was flat broke. I wrote her for a loan. But she was wild to see me and only sent me the ticket to London— I was glad of it when a job I'd planned at the Quai d'Orsay went sour on me and I had to skip in a hurry."

He broke off and asked for a cigarette. The inspector borrowed one from me and the prisoner resumed: "I wrote her I'd be taking the noon train on the fourth and told her to meet me— I had to have some cash. There was no sign of her when I got off the train: there was a terrific crowd on the platform and I thought maybe I'd missed her, which was devilish awkward for me as I didn't know where she lived— she always made me write to her at her bank. Well, I was tagging along with the rest of the passengers towards the exit when I suddenly saw people stepping round a devilish good-looking dressing-case, sitting there all by itself on the platform, simply begging to be hooked. It seemed almost like an answer to prayer." He laughed. "Well, I had the old grab under my coat; it was as simple as pie."

He blew a cloud of smoke. "Blanche was at the barrier. I wasn't too pleased to see her then, for that case was hot and all I wanted was to be rid of it as quickly as possible. But I couldn't shake her. She was all for booking me a room near where she lived; as she insisted on tagging along, I had to take her with me to these flats, handy to the station, I'd heard of from a pal of mine. My plan

was to ring up a fence I knew right away, but first I had to go through the case. I sent her into the bedroom to tidy herself but she came back as I was still busy on the locks with the old skeleton keys and then the fat was in the fire."

"You mean she didn't know you were a railway dip?" Manderton suggested.

Peters shrugged his shoulders. "You know what women are. She asked no questions as long as I was flush, but directly I tried her for a touch, she got nosey. Now she came out bald-headed and accused me of having stolen the case. 'And what the hell do you think I do for a living?' I asked her. But she'd gone very serious. 'A common thief!' she said. The guy who owned this case had left some studs in one of the fittings. I had the sleeve links in my hand. Blanche snatched up one of them. 'Where did you get this case?' she screamed at me. 'Where did you get it?'"

Ralton spoke up. "She saw those links, did she?"

"You bet. She seemed to recognise them, too!"

The big man nodded. "It isn't surprising. They were her first present to me."

The thief stared. "So you're the guy that owns the case? And she knew you?" He began to laugh. "Oh, my gracious, what poisonous luck!"

"Cut out the funny business and get on with the story!" the inspector ordered roughly.

Peters shrugged his shoulders. "She said, 'It's someone who was very kind to me a long time ago. You'll have to return it, Larry.' And with that she tugged the label off the case. 'Oh, my God, it is Godfrey's!' she cried at the sight of the name. I had a bit of a tussle with her to get the label away— I shoved it in my pocket and burned it afterwards. She was like a wild woman, crying and sobbing like anything. 'You'll give him back his case, Larry!' she said. 'You'll give it back or I go to the police!' 'Like hell you will!' I told her and with that she flew at me like a tiger cat. 'Thief!' she screeched. 'Thief!' and she slapped me hard across the face. Well, then I saw red and I caught her by the throat— it was in self-defence, Inspector, for she was out to do me an injury, I swear it! I guess I squeezed too hard, for when I took my hands away she was dead. After that, I lost my head, I'm afraid— I just ran off and left her there. It was not till I was out of the house that I discovered I had only one of the sleeve links, and then I was too scared to go back. Was that how you traced me?"

Manderton's brick-red countenance flushed a darker red. "That, and some other things," he retorted loftily, avoiding Mr. Treadgold's watchful and gently amused glance. He fumbled in his pocket. Hold out your hands, Peters!" he gruffly bade the prisoner.

"AS LARRY SAID," observed Mr. Treadgold as we sat over our port at dinner that night, "it was poisonous luck— for Larry, and Manderton, too. Coincidence is the snag on which the most ingenious deductions may be wrecked. A mathematician would have to work out the chances against our young friend lifting that particular suit-case, although they are heavily discounted by the fact that Master Larry is a pro. who has doubtless stolen hundreds of pieces of luggage in his time. When coincidence takes a hand, your criminologist is all at sea for, without motive to guide him, he has to endeavour to pierce the fog with reason as his only light."

He held up his glass to the candle. "Still, though, as Tristram Shandy remarks, 'Every man will speak of the fair as his own market has gone at it,' I don't think I did too badly. It's clear thinking as does it, George, clear thinking, every time!"

14: A Frilled Lizard
William Sylvester Walker

1846-1926

The Lone Hand, 1 Feb 1913

IT was bright noon in Eastern Queensland when Ted Simpson slapped the mullock, winched up in a nail-can bucket from the Top Dog claim, down amongst the other tailings close to the standing boards. A grass-grown mound of previously disintegrated and discarded rubble lay some distance beyond. The former heap was composed of grass-grown, oval-shaped, waterworn pieces of metal which looked remarkably like iron-stone. The mine had been deserted for some time past, but now there was a fresh spirit controlling it.

The worker snatched a piece of quartz from the top of the heap his last empty bucket was responsible for, and stood still for a moment examining it attentively.

Then he threw it after a flight of parrots skimming the tree tops, over-ended his rope, picked up his bucket, and, walking back again to the windlass, took up slack, lowered the bucket again, and with a sharp cry of "Below, there!" let the windlass cylinder spin its dropping coils rapidly under his brawny hand. Whilst doing so he glanced over his shoulder to greet a mounted man who had just come up the mountain track and was now level with his back ...

"Mornin', Tarboosh," he jerked, his eyes on his work again directly.

"We've never seen a more disgusted man than Moriarty," the winch man went on in a louder voice, without turning. He's took his horse and his hook, too."

"Wouldn't buy, eh?" the horseman remarked, dismounting,

"No," Ted Simpson remorsefully affirmed. "Not him."

Then he commenced to wind up his full bucket again.

The horses saddle shook with the rattle of a vigorous steed itching for a on the grass, and James Holroyd, otherwise known as Tarboosh, replied, "That settles it, then. Say, mates we'd better sling our hooks, too, if that's his little game. Disgusted, eh? You're on the bottom, ain't you?"

"Yes," Simpson replied. On a slight vein of quartz. Leader, I expect. But there's nothing in it.

"There s more than something in it. There must be more than something in it, and there will be directly I've done with it. I haven't had my say in the matter yet, you know. That leader may go to the reef. It's got to show something. See?"

The dismounted horseman, who wore a red fez, seemed a handsome dare-devil of a man; spare, and smartly dressed. Yet traces of dissipation had so

marred his otherwise rather pleasing exterior that there was something else about him which markedly suggested unpleasantness.

"On top there," came from the depths of the shaft, as Simpson winched up the last pailful, and deposited its contents on the same heap and in the same fashion he had done before. After lowering the bucket again, he shouted to the man below to get in and look sharp about it, which, being accomplished satisfactorily, both newcomers on the upper crust of earth greeted each other in the sabre cutting tones of working Demos.

"Halloa, Dick."

"Hulloa, Tarboosh."

"What the devil is to become of us now?" asked Ted Simpson, the winchman, with a face of corrugating doubt.

"It's not to be said, Tarboosh," he continued, "that you didn't do the honorable to Dick Simpson and me, by providin' us with tucker whilst this here little game lasted; but now.... where do our shares come in?"

And Ted's look was even more lugubrious than before.

Holroyd, alias Tarboosh, hitched his horse to a tree, and the two Simpsons sat on their heels under its shady branches in the way bush Australians do, and drew figures on the ground with sticks.

"What made you take up this monkey-on-a-stick sort of claim, Tarboosh?" asked Simpson the younger.

"I used a divining rod," Tarboosh answered in a dignified manner; "so I thought I was all right. It told me of something, and as I was first settler in these parts it strikes me I'm bound to make the claim pay yet, so I've got to carry out my ideas somehow. See?"

"Look here, Boss," ventured Ted Simpson. "This claim of yours is a dead bird as far as we are concerned, so what are you going to do about it? Have you got a Jack of spades up your sleeve, or the Joker under your heel, that you're so cocksure about it?"

"Come down to Brisbane with me afterwards and find out," Tarboosh said with a grin. "I'll give you a real slap-up time there for a week. Aye, as soon as I auction this claim for a rattling good price."

"That would about suit me," asserted both Simpsons with brighter faces, and Dick put in as a clincher:

"We'd get the dividends you promised us then. See now, we'll put our duds together right away, get into town togs, and meet you at Lampson's later on for that little jaunt of yours."

"I've got some business to do below first," Tarboosh airily asserted; "just one little touch of human nature that'll keep our end up. Lower me down, chaps, will you? Now, how does that slight leader you speak of run?"

"About north and south. There's a good bit of it exposed on the bottom level," said Ted Simpson.

"Well, I won't be long," Tarboosh said, as he laid hold of the windlass rope and put one leg in the bucket. There was a grin on his face as they lowered him carefully.

Rather to their dismay, in about a minute after he was down, they heard five shots from the revolver he always carried, and presently he shouted something they did not catch.

"You ain't committed suicide, then?" bawled Dick Simpson with real concern in his tones.

"Seen a snake down there, Tarboosh?" Ted exclaimed. "There was one the other day." He was not quite over his scare yet.

"Only a good-bye salute," came the answer, nearer the shaft aperture. Holroyd made the same statement when he was hauled to the top again. "Just seeing if my barker was all right," he asserted. Then he took his departure.

They watched him until he disappeared over the brow of the hill.

"HE'S HAD US somehow, damn him," Ted Simpson muttered as his ideas quickened. "He looks too jaunty for all his bad luck, too jaunty to be real. That and this don't fit nohow." He rattled the winch handle in disdainful anger.

Then he touched his brother on the shoulder, and said in a low voice, "Do you know what he's done, Dick?"

"No, but I guess he's mean and angry enough to do anything. Tarboosh ain't the sort of man to stand loose on a trifle. He'll nail it down somehow if he only jumps on it with them boots of his, spurs and all."

"Right as rain. He's salted that leader with five revolver shots. That's just what he's done, and no back talk about it."

"You go and get your hair cut," Dick retorted. "He'd hardly do that, eh?"

"Simple as failin' off a bloomin' log," rejoined Ted, with a flourish of his hand. "See here, old man, he has five lead shells filled with gold dust. Firing 'em along a line sideways on to the leader and well into the quartz will dust it proper. The next man that takes up that claim will have to bid pretty high for the indication. See? Lead and gold together. They'll take the lead for silver like enough examining it down there. Perhaps his shells is made of silver, maybe copper. This locality runs the three metals all together sometimes. But come on and let's get going. We'll have to hump our tools down the hill till we get to our shanty. He'll be oft if we don't catch him. Say, though, look at that gohanna. Wait a bit. See me knock him off that limb. My, if he don't look as like that sneakin' Tarboosh as possible.

He grubbed out one of the rounded stones from the grass overgrown mound of the discarded heap they were now standing by, and let fly at the spectre of discord. Ted had learned how to shy a stone with the precision of a Sydney boy, though he was nearer Brisbane at that moment than he was to the former city. Hitting the raised head of the reptile on the point of its nose, it promptly fell to the ground dead. He let it lie there, and telling his brother to hurry up, they got their tools and started down the mountain track.

The scrub was pretty open where the down road was, and Ted Simpson never knew that he nearly hit two marks with that single, far-flung missile of his. A stranger was coming up as they descended, and he passed him the time of day. The newcomer seemed to be fully equipped for entomological pursuits, as shown by the fine green silk butterfly net he was carrying, with a further indication of a japanned collecting box strapped to his shoulders.

"Bug hunter," whispered Dick, derisively. "I say, give him the gohanna. He'll like it, I don't doubt."

"Have you noticed any elephant beetles up here?" the stranger asked, pulling up after returning their greeting. "They get about on the big gum trees, you know."

"I've just knocked down a good sized gohanna with a stone," Ted told him, "and if you're collecting them sort of things I'll give you that free. Bein' a Sydney boy myself, I know yer lingo. The gohanna's a-lyin' dead up there at the top of the hill alongside the track, but I can tell you that them elephant beetles don't run so far north as this, nor I ain't seen any siphon bugs either up this way."

"I am much obliged to you," the stranger said with a smile and in a pleasantly modulated voice. "Good day and good wishes, and thank you kindly for the gohanna, Mr. Brother Sydneysider."

The two Simpsons went on downwards; the newcomer climbed to the top of the track, where he found Ted's iguana, and put it in his specimen-box. He discovered it to be a fine specimen of a frilled lizard, and laughed at the generalised assumption.

"But what have we here?" he asked himself, as he took an oval stone out of his pocket, and compared it with one from the old discarded grassy heap near the claim.

"Externals," he went on, looking about him. "A claim, a windlass, a bucket, two departing miners, a ridden horse's tracks belonging to the villianous-looking man with the red fez, and a rope."

"This edition needs indexing." He lowered the bucket to the extremity of its attachment, carefully tested the rope, and went down, hand over hand. At the bottom he pressed a small electric torch he had with him, and, finally returned

to the summit of the shaft in much the same way he had gone down. It had been a long way down and a long way up, but Morgan Satterthwaite was a very practised gymnast, and had used his legs as well as his arms at times. He was a short, thick-set, determined-looking man, of about forty years of age, with beady, twinkling eyes and a stiff, bristly moustache.

"Men have been lagged for less," was his unspoken comment as he stood looking down the shaft with a heaving chest.

"They lost the whole of the water-made middle strata, didn't know what it was," he went on, critically examining the old rubbish heap. Then he followed their tracks down the mountain track, saying to himself: "It strikes me that this ignorance on their part will be a fine little dividend for Edith and myself. Fair play's a jewel, and I shall see justice done."

Near the bottom of the hill he came upon a young girl sketching, and halted.

"I am glad you have come back, father, for I was just getting a little uneasy about you," she said, preparing to collect her materials. "In my new capacity of school mistress in a mining township I want to have an object-lesson or two for my pupils on starting work to-morrow.

"And, father," she added, regretfully, "now we are so dreadfully poor, I want you to realise that I shall work hard to help you, and not to be a burden to you. We have been together so much, that this parting is the bitterest regret for myself. I do not fear for you."

"Nor need you, darling," he answered cheerfully. "But I must be off sooner than I expected after all. Knowing that you are safely placed here, I must catch the coach and train for Bundaberg and Brisbane at once, but during my work in the city, believe me I shall be thinking of my daughter up here. One word. If I should happen to come back in a strictly unofficial character at any time, don't take any notice of me until I have verified a new position. You understand?"

"Quite, daddy," she replied. "You have good news? I see it from your face. Oh, how glorious!"

And taking his arm, they left the bush track and emerged on the main road close to the township.

It was then but a primitive Eden of the goldfields, containing some 300 inhabitants, who were mostly all miners, and the school Edith Satterthwaite was now mistress of, was small. At present she lodged with a miner's family, rather well-to-do people, who had a decent wooden cottage, and the pair were to have tea there.

Two days afterwards Edith Satterthwaite got a letter from her father, telling her he had bought the Top Dog claim, with this concluding information as to his own valuation of it.

"The owner's name is James Holroyd. As I could prove that he had salted his claim from personal inspection, I forced my company upon him and got the claim for £4 10s. on the promise of secrecy. Now I'm coming up to keep you company. There's £2000 worth of gold, silver and copper in some specimens at grass on that hill I went up, in rounded stones that look like iron, and the run of that old lead must be worth thousands more. It was their frilled lizard that put me on to it."

Miss Satterthwaite laughed softly as she tore the letter up. Then, carefully watching the fragments consuming in the kitchen range, where she cooked her own meals, she clapped her hands with joy. "Daddy," she declared to herself, "is himself again. There's sure to be some fun when he takes a real hand in anything."

15: Pearls On His Mind**Jack McLaren***Daily Mirror* (Sydney) 29 Jan 1945

CONSCIENCE, they say, makes cowards of us all (commented Rygate, the pearler, as from Thursday Island's wharf we watched the 'Frisco steamer glide out of the harbor). But that packet's taking away a man I reckon conscience made a hero of.

NOT that he's much of a hero to look at. In fact, when I came across him a week ago on a remote beach in the Gulf of Carpentaria I thought he was queer in the head. All he had was a bark humpy and a log canoe, with his only visible means of support a banana and yam patch and some fish-traps made of rough sticks stuck up in the still water some way out from the shore.

"Ho, ho!" I said to myself, "Robinson Crusoe."

But when in talking with him I found out he'd taken up living there of his own free will I said to myself he was simply "nuts," and was prepared to let it go at that. Then I saw he was looking at me curious-like, and all at once he held out his hand.

"Well, I'll be hanged if it isn't Rygate!" he cried. "Now, what do you think of that? I'm Dakers. Remember me?... You've turned up just at the right time. I want you to give me a passage to Thursday Island, which is the nearest place where I can get a steamer home.

"Remember that other passage you gave me?" he asked.

I should think I did. In my pearling lugger I was passing an island about a hundred miles east of. Samarai, New Guinea, when this fellow Dakers, many years younger than he is now, came off in a canoe manned by villagers and said the natives had told him I might be making away from New Guinea, to the Solomons, say, and if so would I give him a passage.

Most of the time as we sailed along he just sat around moody and silent. The only thing he would talk about with any freedom was pearls and pearlshell. I thought I knew a lot about pearls, having been twenty-years diving for shell, but this chap could run rings around me. Not only did he talk about shapes and prices and nacre and under-lustre, but he was full of new and scientific theories about them such as I'd never heard of.

A couple of days before we reached the Solomons bad weather sent me scooting to the shelter of an islet, but in the night the gale shifted to dead off the land, and my one and only anchor-chain carried away and we started to drift out to sea, which would have been the end of the section for sure.

Something darn drastic was called for to stop the drift. So, while we were still in the shallow water, we bored holes in her bottom and let her sink. Resting on the bottom she was safe, while as for me and Dakers and the Papuan crew, we stayed up the masts, which were well up out of the water. And there, with the gale tearing at us and the sea smacking us about, we clung till daylight, when the wind went down; then in due course we raised the lugger, fixed her up and went on our way as before.

Coming through a tough spot like that together made me and Dakers close and friendly as could be, and as we sailed along he explained his remarkable knowledge of pearls by telling me he was travelling pearl-buyer for Dellamy's, the big New York gem firm. He'd been mixed up with pearls all his life and was an expert on the scientific side. He was one of Dellamy's most trusted buyers.

Or, rather, he had been till lately. At Samarai he'd fallen in with a poker-playing gang, and though he hadn't lost much he chucked it after a few nights, because it didn't look good for a buyer with a lot of pearls in his keeping to get a name for gambling. He was a very conscientious sort of bloke, you see. But, you know how it is; first you get in wrong one way, then you get in wrong in another. No sooner had he chucked the poker-playing than someone pinched his pearls.

And what pearls! There on the lugger he described them to me. There were a hundred carats of perfect "pear-shapes" he'd bought in the Ellice Group, and a dozen deep-lustre "drops" worth £100 apiece. There was a big black pearl, as full of fire as opal, that the Suva pearlers had made him pay through the nose for, but he reckoned was well worth it, because in shape, size and lustre it would exactly fit the place where one was missing from the famous Calibri necklace, and Dellamy's could charge the necklace's owner anything they liked for it.

He made a fuss, of course, but the thief who no doubt had been prompt to clear out of that part of the country, was never found. Instead, the police were sniffy with Dakers and more than hinted that perhaps he'd lost the pearls gambling and was trying to square himself with Dellamy's by making out he'd been robbed. Maybe they were only trying to cover themselves for not catching the thief; maybe they really did believe he had faked the theft. Anyway, they grew more and more sniffy, and with everyone else in the joint suspicious of him too, Dakers felt his position was becoming as bad as could be. They'd say he had betrayed his trust. He, Dakers, who was always so conscientious and trustworthy! By heck, it hurt, that!

So what did Dakers do, having thoroughly got the wind up, but run away, clear out of Samarai in the night in a native copra cutter and then make his

way from island to island by native canoe till he came to the island where I gave him a passage.

THAT was his story, and he took no notice when I told him Dellamy's, being shrewd guys, would undoubtedly have insured against their buyers getting away with the pearls. He said that didn't make any difference to the load on his conscience. He only wanted to change his name and lose himself, forgetting the world, and by the world forgot, as the saying is. So I landed him at the Solomons.

And now a week ago, after all the years, I came across him down there in a humpy on the shore of the Gulf of Carpentaria, as I've said, and I brought him along to Thursday Island as he asked. But he wasn't chewing the rag any more. It appears that after miserably wandering various parts of the South Seas for a long time an idea came to him, and he poked around till he found that quiet and distant spot where he could put it into operation without anyone to ask questions or interfere. And now he had as fine a packet of pearls as a man could wish for, including at least three that would have fitted the Calibri necklace, and any number of "pear-shapes" and "drops," to say nothing of a whole load of chicken feed.

Me, I don't reckon I would have done what he did. I'd have figured that what with Dellamy's getting the insurance money and the long time that had passed the deal was quits. But that conscience of Dakers' wouldn't let him cry quits until he'd paid Dellamy's back. It had taken him years to do it. heroic years of hard work and living on fish and bananas away there in the forgotten beyond, all on his own.

But he had done it. Yes, sir. Those sticks in the water out from his humpy weren't all fish-traps. They marked the position of carefully-tended mother-of-pearl shell beds where he'd worked out certain ideas of his own and at last produced pearls as valuable and as good as those he had lost.

16: The Hiltons' Holiday***Sarah Orne Jewett***

1849-1909

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THERE WAS a bright, full moon in the clear sky, and the sunset was still shining faintly in the west. Dark woods stood all about the old Hilton farmhouse, save down the hill, westward, where lay the shadowy fields which John Hilton, and his father before him, had cleared and tilled with much toil,— the small fields to which they had given the industry and even affection of their honest lives.

John Hilton was sitting on the doorstep of his house. As he moved his head in and out of the shadows, turning now and then to speak to his wife, who sat just within the doorway, one could see his good face, rough and somewhat unkempt, as if he were indeed a creature of the shady woods and brown earth, instead of the noisy town. It was late in the long spring evening, and he had just come from the lower field as cheerful as a boy, proud of having finished the planting of his potatoes.

"I had to do my last row mostly by feelin'," he said to his wife. "I'm proper glad I pushed through, an' went back an' ended off after supper. 'Twould have taken me a good part o' to-morrow mornin', an' broke my day."

" 'Tain't no use for ye to work yourself all to pieces, John," answered the woman quickly. "I declare it does seem harder than ever that we couldn't have kep' our boy; he'd been comin' fourteen years old this fall, most a grown man, and he'd work right 'longside of ye now the whole time."

" 'Twas hard to lose him; I do seem to miss little John," said the father sadly. "I expect there was reasons why 'twas best. I feel able an' smart to work; my father was a girt strong man, an' a monstrous worker afore me. 'Tain't that; but I was thinkin' by myself to-day what a sight o' company the boy would ha' been. You know, small 's he was, how I could trust to leave him anywheres with the team, and how he'd beseech to go with me wherever I was goin'; always right in my tracks I used to tell 'em. Poor little John, for all he was so young he had a great deal o' judgment; he'd ha' made a likely man."

The mother sighed heavily as she sat within the shadow.

"But then there's the little girls, a sight o' help an' company," urged the father eagerly, as if it were wrong to dwell upon sorrow and loss. "Katy, she's most as good as a boy, except that she ain't very rugged. She's a real little farmer, she's helped me a sight this spring; an' you've got Susan Ellen, that makes a complete little housekeeper for ye as far as she's learnt. I don't see but we're better off than most folks, each on us having a workmate."

"That's so, John," acknowledged Mrs. Hilton wistfully, beginning to rock steadily in her straight, splint-bottomed chair. It was always a good sign when she rocked.

"Where be the little girls so late?" asked their father. "'Tis gettin' long past eight o'clock. I don't know when we've all set up so late, but it's so kind o' summer-like an' pleasant. Why, where be they gone?"

"I've told ye; only over to Becker's folks," answered the mother. "I don't see myself what keeps 'em so late; they beseeched me after supper till I let 'em go. They're all in a dazzle with the new teacher; she asked 'em to come over. They say she's unusual smart with 'rethmetic, but she has a kind of a gorpen look to me. She's goin' to give Katy some pieces for her doll, but I told Katy she ought to be ashamed wantin' dolls' pieces, big as she's gettin' to be. I don't know 's she ought, though; she ain't but nine this summer."

"Let her take her comfort," said the kind-hearted man. "Them things draws her to the teacher, an' makes them acquainted. Katy's shy with new folks, more so 'n Susan Ellen, who's of the business kind. Katy's shy-feelin' and wishful."

"I don't know but she is," agreed the mother slowly. "Ain't it sing'lar how well acquainted you be with that one, an' I with Susan Ellen? 'Twas always so from the first. I'm doubtful sometimes our Katy ain't one that'll be like to get married— anyways not about here. She lives right with herself, but Susan Ellen ain't nothin' when she's alone, she's always after company; all the boys is waitin' on her a'ready. I ain't afraid but she'll take her pick when the time comes. I expect to see Susan Ellen well settled,— she feels grown up now,— but Katy don't care one mite 'bout none o' them things. She wants to be rovin' out o' doors. I do believe she'd stand an' hark to a bird the whole forenoon."

"Perhaps she'll grow up to be a teacher," suggested John Hilton. "She takes to her book more 'n the other one. I should like one on 'em to be a teacher same 's my mother was. They're good girls as anybody's got."

"So they be," said the mother, with unusual gentleness, and the creak of her rocking-chair was heard, regular as the ticking of a clock. The night breeze stirred in the great woods, and the sound of a brook that went falling down the hillside grew louder and louder. Now and then one could hear the plaintive chirp of a bird. The moon glittered with whiteness like a winter moon, and shone upon the low-roofed house until its small window-panes gleamed like silver, and one could almost see the colors of a blooming bush of lilac that grew in a sheltered angle by the kitchen door. There was an incessant sound of frogs in the lowlands.

"Be you sound asleep, John?" asked the wife presently.

"I don't know but what I was a'most," said the tired man, starting a little. "I should laugh if I was to fall sound asleep right here on the step; 'tis the bright night, I expect, makes my eyes feel heavy, an' 'tis so peaceful. I was up an' dressed a little past four an' out to work. Well, well!" and he laughed sleepily and rubbed his eyes. "Where's the little girls? I'd better step along an' meet 'em."

"I wouldn't just yet; they'll get home all right, but 'tis late for 'em certain. I don't want 'em keepin' Mis' Becker's folks up neither. There, le' 's wait a few minutes," urged Mrs. Hilton.

"I've be'n a-thinkin' all day I'd like to give the child'n some kind of a treat," said the father, wide awake now. "I hurried up my work 'cause I had it so in mind. They don't have the opportunities some do, an' I want 'em to know the world, an' not stay right here on the farm like a couple o' bushes."

"They're a sight better off not to be so full o' notions as some is," protested the mother suspiciously.

"Certain," answered the farmer; "but they're good, bright child'n, an' commencin' to take a sight o' notice. I want 'em to have all we can give 'em. I want 'em to see how other folks does things."

"Why, so do I,"— here the rocking-chair stopped ominously,— "but so long 's they're contented—"

"Contented ain't all in this world; hopper-toads may have that quality an' spend all their time a-blinkin'. I don't know 's bein' contented is all there is to look for in a child. Ambition's somethin' to me."

"Now you've got your mind on to some plot or other." (The rocking-chair began to move again.) "Why can't you talk right out?"

" 'Tain't nothin' special," answered the good man, a little ruffled; he was never prepared for his wife's mysterious powers of divination. "Well there, you do find things out the master! I only thought perhaps I'd take 'em to-morrow, an' go off somewhere if 'twas a good day. I've been promisin' for a good while I'd take 'em to Topham Corners; they've never been there since they was very small."

"I believe you want a good time yourself. You ain't never got over bein' a boy." Mrs. Hilton seemed much amused. "There, go if you want to an' take 'em; they've got their summer hats an' new dresses. I don't know o' nothin' that stands in the way. I should sense it better if there was a circus or anythin' to go to. Why don't you wait an' let the girls pick 'em some strawberries or nice ros'berries, and then they could take an' sell 'em to the stores?"

John Hilton reflected deeply. "I should like to get me some good yellow-turnip seed to plant late. I ain't more 'n satisfied with what I've been gettin' o'

late years o' Ira Speed. An' I'm goin' to provide me with a good hoe; mine 's gettin' wore out an' all shackly. I can't seem to fix it good."

"Them's excuses," observed Mrs. Hilton, with friendly tolerance. "You just cover up the hoe with somethin', if you get it— I would. Ira Speed 's so jealous he'll remember it of you this twenty year, your goin' an' buyin' a new hoe o' anybody but him."

"I've always thought 'twas a free country," said John Hilton soberly. "I don't want to vex Ira neither; he favors us all he can in trade. 'Tis difficult for him to spare a cent, but he's as honest as daylight."

At this moment there was a sudden sound of young voices, and a pair of young figures came out from the shadow of the woods into the moonlighted open space. An old cock crowed loudly from his perch in the shed, as if he were a herald of royalty. The little girls were hand in hand, and a brisk young dog capered about them as they came.

"Wa'n't it dark gittin' home through the woods this time o' night?" asked the mother hastily, and not without reproach.

"I don't love to have you gone so late; mother an' me was timid about ye, and you've kep' Mis' Becker's folks up, I expect," said their father regretfully. "I don't want to have it said that my little girls ain't got good manners."

"The teacher had a party," chirped Susan Ellen, the elder of the two children. "Goin' home from school she asked the Grover boys, an' Mary an' Sarah Speed. An' Mis' Becker was real pleasant to us: she passed round some cake, an' handed us sap sugar on one of her best plates, an' we played games an' sung some pieces too. Mis' Becker thought we did real well. I can pick out most of a tune on the cabinet organ; teacher says she'll give me lessons."

"I want to know, dear!" exclaimed John Hilton.

"Yes, an' we played Copenhagen, an' took sides spellin', an' Katy beat everybody spellin' there was there."

Katy had not spoken; she was not so strong as her sister, and while Susan Ellen stood a step or two away addressing her eager little audience, Katy had seated herself close to her father on the doorstep. He put his arm around her shoulders, and drew her close to his side, where she stayed.

"Ain't you got nothin' to tell, daughter?" he asked, looking down fondly; and Katy gave a pleased little sigh for answer.

"Tell 'em what's goin' to be the last day o' school, and about our trimmin' the schoolhouse," she said; and Susan Ellen gave the programme in most spirited fashion.

" 'Twill be a great time," said the mother, when she had finished. "I don't see why folks wants to go trapesin' off to strange places when such things is

happenin' right about 'em." But the children did not observe her mysterious air. "Come, you must step yourselves right to bed!"

They all went into the dark, warm house; the bright moon shone upon it steadily all night, and the lilac flowers were shaken by no breath of wind until the early dawn.

ii

THE HILTONS always waked early. So did their neighbors, the crows and song-sparrows and robins, the light-footed foxes and squirrels in the woods. When John Hilton waked, before five o'clock, an hour later than usual because he had sat up so late, he opened the house door and came out into the yard, crossing the short green turf hurriedly as if the day were too far spent for any loitering. The magnitude of the plan for taking a whole day of pleasure confronted him seriously, but the weather was fair, and his wife, whose disapproval could not have been set aside, had accepted and even smiled upon the great project. It was inevitable now, that he and the children should go to Topham Corners. Mrs. Hilton had the pleasure of waking them, and telling the news.

In a few minutes they came frisking out to talk over the great plans. The cattle were already fed, and their father was milking. The only sign of high festivity was the wagon pulled out into the yard, with both seats put in as if it were Sunday; but Mr. Hilton still wore his every-day clothes, and Susan Ellen suffered instantly from disappointment.

"Ain't we goin', father?" she asked complainingly; but he nodded and smiled at her, even though the cow, impatient to get to pasture, kept whisking her rough tail across his face. He held his head down and spoke cheerfully, in spite of this vexation.

"Yes, sister, we're goin' certain', an' goin' to have a great time too." Susan Ellen thought that he seemed like a boy at that delightful moment, and felt new sympathy and pleasure at once. "You go an' help mother about breakfast an' them things; we want to get off quick 's we can. You coax mother now, both on ye, an' see if she won't go with us."

"She said she wouldn't be hired to," responded Susan Ellen. "She says it's goin' to be hot, an' she's laid out to go over an' see how her aunt Tamsen Brooks is this afternoon."

The father gave a little sigh; then he took heart again. The truth was that his wife made light of the contemplated pleasure, and, much as he usually valued her companionship and approval, he was sure that they should have a better time without her. It was impossible, however, not to feel guilty of

disloyalty at the thought. Even though she might be completely unconscious of his best ideals, he only loved her and the ideals the more, and bent his energies to satisfying her indefinite expectations. His wife still kept much of that youthful beauty which Susan Ellen seemed likely to reproduce.

An hour later the best wagon was ready, and the great expedition set forth. The little dog sat apart, and barked as if it fell entirely upon him to voice the general excitement. Both seats were in the wagon, but the empty place testified to Mrs. Hilton's unyielding disposition. She had wondered why one broad seat would not do, but John Hilton meekly suggested that the wagon looked better with both. The little girls sat on the back seat dressed alike in their Sunday hats of straw with blue ribbons, and their little plaid shawls pinned neatly about their small shoulders. They wore gray thread gloves, and sat very straight. Susan Ellen was half a head the taller, but otherwise, from behind, they looked much alike. As for their father, he was in his Sunday best,— a plain black coat, and a winter hat of felt, which was heavy and rusty-looking for that warm early summer day. He had it in mind to buy a new straw hat at Topham, so that this with the turnip seed and the hoe made three important reasons for going.

"Remember an' lay off your shawls when you get there, an' carry them over your arms," said the mother, clucking like an excited hen to her chickens. "They'll do to keep the dust off your new dresses goin' an' comin'. An' when you eat your dinners don't get spots on you, an' don't point at folks as you ride by, an' stare, or they'll know you come from the country. An' John, you call into Cousin Ad'line Marlow's an' see how they all be, an' tell her I expect her over certain to stop awhile before hayin'. It always eases her phthisic to git up here on the high land, an' I've got a new notion about doin' over her best-room carpet sence I see her that'll save rippin' one breadth. An' don't come home all wore out; an', John, don't you go an' buy me no kickshaws to fetch home. I ain't a child, an' you ain't got no money to waste. I expect you'll go, like 's not, an' buy you some kind of a foolish boy's hat; do look an' see if it's reasonable good straw, an' won't splinter all off round the edge. An' you mind, John—"

"Yes, yes, hold on!" cried John impatiently; then he cast a last affectionate, reassuring look at her face, flushed with the hurry and responsibility of starting them off in proper shape. "I wish you was goin' too," he said, smiling. "I do so!" Then the old horse started, and they went out at the bars, and began the careful long descent of the hill. The young dog, tethered to the lilac-bush, was frantic with piteous appeals; the little girls piped their eager good-bys again and again, and their father turned many times to look back and wave his hand. As for their mother, she stood alone and watched them out of sight.

There was one place far out on the high-road where she could catch a last glimpse of the wagon, and she waited what seemed a very long time until it appeared and then was lost to sight again behind a low hill. "They're nothin' but a pack o' child'n together," she said aloud; and then felt lonelier than she expected. She even stooped and patted the unresigned little dog as she passed him, going into the house.

The occasion was so much more important than any one had foreseen that both the little girls were speechless. It seemed at first like going to church in new clothes, or to a funeral; they hardly knew how to behave at the beginning of a whole day of pleasure. They made grave bows at such persons of their acquaintance as happened to be straying in the road. Once or twice they stopped before a farmhouse, while their father talked an inconsiderately long time with some one about the crops and the weather, and even dwelt upon town business and the doings of the selectmen, which might be talked of at any time. The explanations that he gave of their excursion seemed quite unnecessary. It was made entirely clear that he had a little business to do at Topham Corners, and thought he had better give the little girls a ride; they had been very steady at school, and he had finished planting, and could take the day as well as not. Soon, however, they all felt as if such an excursion were an every-day affair, and Susan Ellen began to ask eager questions, while Katy silently sat apart enjoying herself as she never had done before. She liked to see the strange houses, and the children who belonged to them; it was delightful to find flowers that she knew growing all along the road, no matter how far she went from home. Each small homestead looked its best and pleasantest, and shared the exquisite beauty that early summer made,—shared the luxury of greenness and floweriness that decked the rural world. There was an early peony or a late lilac in almost every dooryard.

It was seventeen miles to Topham. After a while they seemed very far from home, having left the hills far behind, and descended to a great level country with fewer tracts of woodland, and wider fields where the crops were much more forward. The houses were all painted, and the roads were smoother and wider. It had been so pleasant driving along that Katy dreaded going into the strange town when she first caught sight of it, though Susan Ellen kept asking with bold fretfulness if they were not almost there. They counted the steeples of four churches, and their father presently showed them the Topham Academy, where their grandmother once went to school, and told them that perhaps some day they would go there too. Katy's heart gave a strange leap; it was such a tremendous thing to think of, but instantly the suggestion was transformed for her into one of the certainties of life. She looked with solemn awe at the tall belfry, and the long rows of windows in the front of the

academy, there where it stood high and white among the clustering trees. She hoped that they were going to drive by, but something forbade her taking the responsibility of saying so.

Soon the children found themselves among the crowded village houses. Their father turned to look at them with affectionate solicitude.

"Now sit up straight and appear pretty," he whispered to them. "We're among the best people now, an' I want folks to think well of you."

"I guess we're as good as they be," remarked Susan Ellen, looking at some innocent passers-by with dark suspicion, but Katy tried indeed to sit straight, and folded her hands prettily in her lap, and wished with all her heart to be pleasing for her father's sake. Just then an elderly woman saw the wagon and the sedate party it carried, and smiled so kindly that it seemed to Katy as if Topham Corners had welcomed and received them. She smiled back again as if this hospitable person were an old friend, and entirely forgot that the eyes of all Topham had been upon her.

"There, now we're coming to an elegant house that I want you to see; you'll never forget it," said John Hilton. "It's where Judge Masterson lives, the great lawyer; the handsomest house in the county, everybody says."

"Do you know him, father?" asked Susan Ellen.

"I do," answered John Hilton proudly. "Him and my mother went to school together in their young days, and were always called the two best scholars of their time. The judge called to see her once; he stopped to our house to see her when I was a boy. An' then, some years ago— you've heard me tell how I was on the jury, an' when he heard my name spoken he looked at me sharp, and asked if I wa'n't the son of Catharine Winn, an' spoke most beautiful of your grandmother, an' how well he remembered their young days together."

"I like to hear about that," said Katy.

"She had it pretty hard, I'm afraid, up on the old farm. She was keepin' school in our district when father married her— that's the main reason I backed 'em down when they wanted to tear the old schoolhouse all to pieces," confided John Hilton, turning eagerly. "They all say she lived longer up here on the hill than she could anywhere, but she never had her health. I wa'n't but a boy when she died. Father an' me lived alone afterward till the time your mother come; 'twas a good while, too; I wa'n't married so young as some. 'Twas lonesome, I tell you; father was plumb discouraged losin' of his wife, an' her long sickness an' all set him back, an' we'd work all day on the land an' never say a word. I s'pose 'tis bein' so lonesome early in life that makes me so pleased to have some nice girls growin' up round me now."

There was a tone in her father's voice that drew Katy's heart toward him with new affection. She dimly understood, but Susan Ellen was less interested.

They had often heard this story before, but to one child it was always new and to the other old. Susan Ellen was apt to think it tiresome to hear about her grandmother, who, being dead, was hardly worth talking about.

"There's Judge Masterson's place," said their father in an every-day manner, as they turned a corner, and came into full view of the beautiful old white house standing behind its green trees and terraces and lawns. The children had never imagined anything so stately and fine, and even Susan Ellen exclaimed with pleasure. At that moment they saw an old gentleman, who carried himself with great dignity, coming slowly down the wide box-bordered path toward the gate.

"There he is now, there's the judge!" whispered John Hilton excitedly, reining his horse quickly to the green roadside. "He's goin' down-town to his office; we can wait right here an' see him. I can't expect him to remember me; it's been a good many years. Now you are goin' to see the great Judge Masterson!"

There was a quiver of expectation in their hearts. The judge stopped at his gate, hesitating a moment before he lifted the latch, and glanced up the street at the country wagon with its two prim little girls on the back seat, and the eager man who drove. They seemed to be waiting for something; the old horse was nibbling at the fresh roadside grass. The judge was used to being looked at with interest, and responded now with a smile as he came out to the sidewalk, and unexpectedly turned their way. Then he suddenly lifted his hat with grave politeness, and came directly toward them.

"Good-morning, Mr. Hilton," he said. "I am very glad to see you, sir;" and Mr. Hilton, the little girls' own father, took off his hat with equal courtesy, and bent forward to shake hands.

Susan Ellen cowered and wished herself away, but little Katy sat straighter than ever, with joy in her father's pride and pleasure shining in her pale, flower-like little face.

"These are your daughters, I am sure," said the old gentleman kindly, taking Susan Ellen's limp and reluctant hand; but when he looked at Katy, his face brightened. "How she recalls your mother!" he said with great feeling. "I am glad to see this dear child. You must come to see me with your father, my dear," he added, still looking at her. "Bring both the little girls, and let them run about the old garden; the cherries are just getting ripe," said Judge Masterson hospitably. "Perhaps you will have time to stop this afternoon as you go home?"

"I should call it a great pleasure if you would come and see us again some time. You may be driving our way, sir," said John Hilton.

"Not very often in these days," answered the old judge. "I thank you for the kind invitation. I should like to see the fine view again from your hill westward. Can I serve you in any way while you are in town? Good-by, my little friends!"

Then they parted, but not before Katy, the shy Katy, whose hand the judge still held unconsciously while he spoke, had reached forward as he said good-by, and lifted her face to kiss him. She could not have told why, except that she felt drawn to something in the serious, worn face. For the first time in her life the child had felt the charm of manners; perhaps she owned a kinship between that which made him what he was, and the spark of nobleness and purity in her own simple soul. She turned again and again to look back at him as they drove away.

"Now you have seen one of the first gentlemen in the country," said their father. "It was worth comin' twice as far"— but he did not say any more, nor turn as usual to look in the children's faces.

In the chief business street of Topham a great many country wagons like the Hiltons' were fastened to the posts, and there seemed to our holiday-makers to be a great deal of noise and excitement.

"Now I've got to do my errands, and we can let the horse rest and feed," said John Hilton. "I'll slip his headstall right off, an' put on his halter. I'm goin' to buy him a real good treat o' oats. First we'll go an' buy me my straw hat; I feel as if this one looked a little past to wear in Topham. We'll buy the things we want, an' then we'll walk all along the street, so you can look in the windows an' see the han'some things, same's your mother likes to. What was it mother told you about your shawls?"

"To take 'em off an' carry 'em over our arms," piped Susan Ellen, without comment, but in the interest of alighting and finding themselves afoot upon the pavement the shawls were forgotten. The children stood at the doorway of a shop while their father went inside, and they tried to see what the Topham shapes of bonnets were like, as their mother had advised them; but everything was exciting and confusing, and they could arrive at no decision. When Mr. Hilton came out with a hat in his hand to be seen in a better light, Katy whispered that she wished he would buy a shiny one like Judge Masterson's; but her father only smiled and shook his head, and said that they were plain folks, he and Katy. There were dry-goods for sale in the same shop, and a young clerk who was measuring linen kindly pulled off some pretty labels with gilded edges and gay pictures, and gave them to the little girls, to their exceeding joy. He may have had small sisters at home, this friendly lad, for he took pains to find two pretty blue boxes besides, and was rewarded by their beaming gratitude.

It was a famous day; they even became used to seeing so many people pass. The village was full of its morning activity, and Susan Ellen gained a new respect for her father, and an increased sense of her own consequence, because even in Topham several persons knew him and called him familiarly by name. The meeting with an old man who had once been a neighbor seemed to give Mr. Hilton the greatest pleasure. The old man called to them from a house doorway as they were passing, and they all went in. The children seated themselves wearily on the wooden step, but their father shook his old friend eagerly by the hand, and declared that he was delighted to see him so well and enjoying the fine weather.

"Oh, yes," said the old man, in a feeble, quavering voice, "I'm astonishin' well for my age. I don't complain, John, I don't complain."

They talked long together of people whom they had known in the past, and Katy, being a little tired, was glad to rest, and sat still with her hands folded, looking about the front yard. There were some kinds of flowers that she never had seen before.

"This is the one that looks like my mother," her father said, and touched Katy's shoulder to remind her to stand up and let herself be seen. "Judge Masterson saw the resemblance; we met him at his gate this morning."

"Yes, she certain does look like your mother, John," said the old man, looking pleasantly at Katy, who found that she liked him better than at first. "She does, certain; the best of young folks is, they remind us of the old ones. 'Tis nateral to cling to life, folks say, but for me, I git impatient at times. Most everybody's gone now, an' I want to be goin'. 'Tis somethin' before me, an' I want to have it over with. I want to be there 'long o' the rest o' the folks. I expect to last quite a while though; I may see ye couple o' times more, John."

John Hilton responded cheerfully, and the children were urged to pick some flowers. The old man awed them with his impatience to be gone. There was such a townful of people about him, and he seemed as lonely as if he were the last survivor of a former world. Until that moment they had felt as if everything were just beginning.

"Now I want to buy somethin' pretty for your mother," said Mr. Hilton, as they went soberly away down the street, the children keeping fast hold of his hands. "By now the old horse will have eat his dinner and had a good rest, so pretty soon we can jog along home. I'm goin' to take you round by the academy, and the old North Meetinghouse where Dr. Barstow used to preach. Can't you think o' somethin' that your mother 'd want?" he asked suddenly, confronted by a man's difficulty of choice.

"She was talkin' about wantin' a new pepper-box, one day; the top o' the old one won't stay on," suggested Susan Ellen, with delightful readiness. "Can't we have some candy, father?"

"Yes, ma'am," said John Hilton, smiling and swinging her hand to and fro as they walked. "I feel as if some would be good myself. What's all this?" They were passing a photographer's doorway with its enticing array of portraits. "I do declare!" he exclaimed excitedly, "I'm goin' to have our pictures taken; 'twill please your mother more 'n a little."

This was, perhaps, the greatest triumph of the day, except the delightful meeting with the judge; they sat in a row, with the father in the middle, and there was no doubt as to the excellence of the likeness. The best hats had to be taken off because they cast a shadow, but they were not missed, as their owners had feared. Both Susan Ellen and Katy looked their brightest and best; their eager young faces would forever shine there; the joy of the holiday was mirrored in the little picture. They did not know why their father was so pleased with it; they would not know until age had dowered them with the riches of association and remembrance.

Just at nightfall the Hiltons reached home again, tired out and happy. Katy had climbed over into the front seat beside her father, because that was always her place when they went to church on Sundays. It was a cool evening, there was a fresh sea wind that brought a light mist with it, and the sky was fast growing cloudy. Somehow the children looked different; it seemed to their mother as if they had grown older and taller since they went away in the morning, and as if they belonged to the town now as much as to the country. The greatness of their day's experience had left her far behind; the day had been silent and lonely without them, and she had had their supper ready, and been watching anxiously, ever since five o'clock. As for the children themselves they had little to say at first— they had eaten their luncheon early on the way to Topham. Susan Ellen was childishly cross, but Katy was pathetic and wan. They could hardly wait to show the picture, and their mother was as much pleased as everybody had expected.

"There, what did make you wear your shawls?" she exclaimed a moment afterward, reproachfully. "You ain't been an' wore 'em all day long? I wanted folks to see how pretty your new dresses was, if I did make 'em. Well, well! I wish more 'n ever now I'd gone an' seen to ye!"

"An' here's the pepper-box!" said Katy, in a pleased, unconscious tone.

"That really is what I call beautiful," said Mrs. Hilton, after a long and doubtful look. "Our other one was only tin. I never did look so high as a chiny one with flowers, but I can get us another any time for every day. That's a

proper hat, as good as you could have got, John. Where's your new hoe?" she asked as he came toward her from the barn, smiling with satisfaction.

"I declare to Moses if I didn't forget all about it," meekly acknowledged the leader of the great excursion. "That an' my yellow turnip seed, too; they went clean out o' my head, there was so many other things to think of. But 'tain't no sort o' matter; I can get a hoe just as well to Ira Speed's."

His wife could not help laughing. "You an' the little girls have had a great time. They was full o' wonder to me about everything, and I expect they'll talk about it for a week. I guess we was right about havin' 'em see somethin' more o' the world."

"Yes," answered John Hilton, with humility, "yes, we did have a beautiful day. I didn't expect so much. They looked as nice as anybody, and appeared so modest an' pretty. The little girls will remember it perhaps by an' by. I guess they won't never forget this day they had 'long o' father."

It was evening again, the frogs were piping in the lower meadows, and in the woods, higher up the great hill, a little owl began to hoot. The sea air, salt and heavy, was blowing in over the country at the end of the hot bright day. A lamp was lighted in the house, the happy children were talking together, and supper was waiting. The father and mother lingered for a moment outside and looked down over the shadowy fields; then they went in, without speaking. The great day was over, and they shut the door.

17: The Guilty Man***Temple Bailey***

1880-1953

The Smart Set, March 1907

ALL THE CARES of a crowded week dropped from Mark Blair's shoulders as the lady of his heart came down the rose-bordered path to meet him.

"Your train was late," she said; "I have been waiting and waiting—"

He bent over her hand, but he did not kiss her, because of the man with his bag and the man with the lawn-mower, and Marion's father and mother, who were smiling at him from the doorway; but after dinner when the lawn-mower was still, and the man with the bag was unpacking Blair's things in the west room, and Marion's father and mother had gone in to escape the night air, and they were alone on the porch in the fragrant darkness, he made up for the omission of the afternoon.

"It is such a different world out here," he said, leaning back in his chair. "In town it is all bang and bustle and glare and problems, but when it gets very bad I think of the coolness and the moonlight— and you, and it rests me a lot."

She reached out her hand to him and silence fell between them. After a while Mark said: "I've had an awful week, Marion, but I'm going to get him off."

She leaned forward eagerly. "Levine?"

"Yes. They can't produce any evidence that I can't meet. It's a great case, Marion. If I win it, my reputation is established."

She smiled at him, inattentively; then looked across the sleeping garden to where the jagged line of the dark hills cut into the silver sky.

He watched her with jealous eyes.

"What are you thinking of?" he demanded. "I don't believe you care whether I win a reputation or not—"

"Oh, yes, I do." She laughed a little, and came and stood behind his chair, touching his crisp curls with her slender fingers.

Thrilled by her caress he sat very still. Even after their six months' engagement he could not accept her affection as a matter of course. There had been so many years of unloved boyhood; so many fighting years when every hand had seemed raised against him. Like most self-made men he was not humble, rating his worth by the things he had attained; but when he thought of her beauty, of her graciousness, of her infinite condescension in linking her future with his, his soul knelt at her feet.

"Oh, yes, I do," she repeated. "I do want you to be the greatest criminal lawyer of our time. But I was thinking of the man. How glad he will be!"

Blair stirred restlessly. "He's a cowardly little creature, Marion. But I'm sorry for him. I shouldn't like to see him hanged."

"Of course not. It isn't as if he were guilty."

"Guilty!" He echoed the word; then shifted his position so that he could look up into her face. "Suppose he were, Marion? You wouldn't want him to be hanged?"

"Oh, no"— she shivered a little— "oh, no. But then, you wouldn't be defending him if he were guilty, Mark."

"Why not?" sharply.

"It wouldn't be right."

"Every man has a right to get off if he can."

"Oh, but not to get off just because his lawyer is shrewd enough to hoodwink a jury and to suppress evidence. I haven't much use for that kind of lawyer, Mark."

He laughed a trifle awkwardly. "Oh, well, that is the way reputations are made nowadays. The man of ideals fails where the man of ingenuity wins."

"Oh," she said impetuously, "I don't like that view of it; I don't like to hear you say such things, Mark."

As she stood there in the moonlight with that troubled look on her face, he found himself wishing that his soul might be bared before her. It seemed to him that he would like to stand face to face with her sharpest judgment, to see himself by the light of her unsullied conscience.

He stood up, breathing quickly. "Levine is guilty," was his bald statement.

"Mark!"

"Yes."

"And you are defending him?" Her voice was very low, her hand was on her heart.

"What else could I do? He begged me to take the case, and then I got the truth out of him. There isn't a shadow of doubt in my mind about his guilt. But I am going to get him off." His tone was slightly defiant.

"And defeat the ends of justice?"

It was not pleasant to note the scorn in her voice. He took a quick step toward her, but she drew back. The action stabbed him. He had valued infinitely the few precious privileges she had granted him, and never before had he been repulsed.

Not an arm's reach apart, but divided immeasurably by his confession, they stood there in the moonlight. Blair was the first to break the heavy silence.

"I need not have told you," he said. "It is, after all, a thing that a man has no right to tell— even to his wife. But our love is the one perfect thing in my

imperfect life; Marion, between you and me there shall be no barrier of deceit. You have a right to know me as I am."

As their eyes met, deep looked into deep.

"I did not think you would compromise with conscience," she faltered, then came to him, sobbing, "Oh, Mark, Mark!"

After a while she whispered tremulously, "I'm glad you told me," but when he tried to marshal his arguments she grew very pale and held up her hand. "Don't, don't! It is all wrong somewhere," and then he knew that though he had held her by the force of his love, he had fallen from his high estate.

That night he could not sleep. He thought of his pinched childhood; of his boyish dreams of great deeds and gentle achievements; of his early entrance into the world of greed and sordidness; of the immediate revelation that money was the ruling power, and that honor in business was a thing to be relegated to a romantic past; of his gradual acceptance of selfish standards; of the burial of his ideals.

And then he had met Marion and had found her the embodiment of all that he had lost. He had loved her and had been loved in return, and it had been a new earth and a new heaven.

As the night waned he got up and dressed and went out into the garden. The east was rosy with the dawn and the air held the fragrance of the Springtime. He drew long, deep breaths. He felt within him the resurrection of the high thoughts of boyhood. Thank God, the past had belonged to him, alone. The future should be Marion's.

Later in the week, amid the dry-as-dust surroundings of his office, he had to admit that his action looked quixotic. Row after row of calf-bound books stared him in the face and challenged him to view the case in its legal aspect. He went over and stood by the window. Beyond the skyscrapers, beyond the flaring signs and grimy chimneys, he caught the flash of the shining river. Today it seemed to take on an allegorical significance. Beyond the sordidness of everyday experience there were waters wide and deep and clear on which he and Marion would sail to the land of the ideal.

Marion! He must write and tell her that he had given up the case.

And, even as he thought of her, she came. It was the first time that she had visited his office, and it seemed to fit into his mood that she should come now all in white, with a rose in her belt. He would show her the shining river and tell her.... But as she raised her veil he saw that she had been crying.

"What is it?" he asked solicitously.

She was so shaken that she could not speak at once, but after a moment she said, shuddering, "I've seen Levine's mother."

He stared at her, not comprehending.

"She came to me— she said that you were going to give up the case, that she had heard that I was going to marry you. She begged me to use my influence. She said they would hang him. She said that he was innocent— she begged me on her knees— it was awful— !"

"It is infamous to drag you into it," he said angrily.

"Oh, no!" she protested. "She is his mother, and she loves him." She reached out her hands to him. "You must save him, Mark, you must, you must—"

He took her hands and stood looking down at her. For a moment he lost the clearness of his spiritual vision.

"You said it was wrong," he began, but she stopped him, nervously.

"Oh, I know I did. I don't know now whether it is right to defend him. But I can't let him be hanged. I should see him in my dreams. I should feel like a murderer. And then, his mother! Oh, Mark!" She was sobbing uncontrollably, with her face hidden in her hands.

"Hush!" he cried, and stood looking down at her.

"Let us be reasonable," he said at last, and drew out a big leather-covered chair and put her into it.

But she would not be reasonable; there was only one course, and he must take it. She would never be happy if he did not.

After a while she reproached him. "I am asking you to do it for my sake."

"But it was a brutal murder. His wife, poor little soul, was as innocent as a baby. What right have I to defame her memory in order to get him off? Most of my cases are like a game. I must make certain moves to defeat my opponent, and when I checkmate I forget all about the moral aspect. But the other night you made me think, Marion."

She twisted her slender fingers together, nervously. "Surely he will be a better man after this— he has had such a lesson."

Blair knew that Levine would not be a better man. He would be forever a menace to society with his bestial instincts, his degenerate impulses. But Marion could not know that. She had lived her white life in a country garden among the roses!

He smiled at her the illumined smile that he seemed always to reserve for her.

"You must think me awfully inconsistent," she faltered.

"It is because your sympathy is stronger than your sense of justice. It is because you are a loving woman, Marion."

"And you will, Mark?"

"I cannot tell you yet."

That afternoon he went to see Levine. He wanted to be sure that he was making no mistake. The desperate, white-faced criminal groveled at his feet. "You've got to! You've got to get me off!" he whimpered.

Looking at him, Blair felt a little sick. That human nature should have in it so much of the beast! After all, why shouldn't Levine be killed? One killed a jackal or a hyena without compunction. Why not this thing on the floor?

"You're going back on me," Levine flung out, as he saw no sign of softening on the lawyer's face. "You've gone back on me, and I call it a dirty trick."

"Get up," Blair said shortly. Then, as the criminal got on his feet and dropped, shaking, on the bench, he had a sudden revulsion of feeling. "Poor fellow!" he said.

Levine looked up with a gleam of hope. "You're going to get me off?" he asked.

"No."

"Damn you!" the murderer said between set teeth; with his fingers kneading his knees tensely, he went on: "I won't let them hang me. I'll kill myself."

"I'm not the only lawyer in the world, Levine. Of course it will go out to the world that you have dismissed me. And someone else will help you out."

"They can't get me off, and you know it. You're the slickest one of the lot, and that's what's the matter with you. If I had a million you'd be sweating night and day to keep me from the gallows."

Out of the mouth of this mean man had come Blair's arraignment. He was "the slickest one of the lot."

That was what the world said of him. That was the pinnacle he had reached after years of climbing!

SIX MONTHS LATER Levine was condemned to be "hanged by the neck until dead." Blair, with the vision of the shivering wretch haunting him, went that evening to Marion. The wind was moaning among the dead leaves of the garden, and as he reached the porch the rain came down in a cold drizzle.

He found Levine's mother with Marion in the dim old parlor. The old woman was weeping, amid a torrent of words. "He has murdered my son," Blair heard her say. "Don't marry him, miss, don't, don't—"

"Hush!" Marion said. "He thinks he is doing what is right." But her tone wavered.

Blair stepped across the room and confronted them.

"Go home," he said to the old woman steadily, though his eyes were stormy; "go home and pray for your son."

But she cursed him with her shaking hands beating the air, until at last Marion shrank away. "Please, please," she said faintly, and this time Blair's command allowed no refusal, and the witch-like creature left them.

"Poor thing, oh, poor thing!" Marion said, and watched her from the window, as she went away in the wind and rain; but Blair flung out: "Levine would not have been where he is today if it had not been for her. All that he is she has made him. She is a bad old woman, Marion."

"But she is his mother—"

"Yes, yes," he agreed, and stood leaning against the mantel, his eyes fixed somberly on the flickering fire.

Marion sat in the shadows on the opposite side of the fireplace. The pale tints of her gown melted into the grayness of the twilight.

"You still blame me?" Blair questioned heavily.

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know. It's the awfulness of it." She reached out her hand to touch the bell. "Don't let us talk of it. We will have some tea and the lights. I can see horrors in the dark."

He interposed quickly: "I don't want lights, Marion. I want to talk to you now. To have it out."

The weariness of his voice, the despondent droop of his figure, seemed to come upon her with something of a shock.

"Mark— what is the matter?"

"Everything." He looked down at her, and his face softened. "This thing has come between us, Marion."

"Oh, no, no!" she protested.

"But I know that it has," he insisted, with a kind of quiet despair. "Since I refused to represent Levine you have shut me out of your inner life. You have tried to act the same, but you haven't felt the same. You think me hard— unfeeling, and I can't stand it any longer, Marion."

He brought the words out with a force that startled her.

"I knew if Levine were guilty you would feel that I might have saved him, and yet if I had saved him, it would have been the beginning of my eternal degradation, Marion."

"But why?"

"Because before that night, when you brought me face to face with myself, I had been unconsciously going down. I had been winning notoriety and calling it fame, and I hadn't stopped to think whether I was doing it honestly or dishonestly. But that night—"

He stopped as the memory of it surged over him.

"That night," he went on presently, with a break in his voice, "I saw myself as you wanted me to be— as I ought to be— as I might be, by the grace of God, Marion."

She sat motionless, but the laces of her gown rose and fell as her breath came quickly.

"And then you were swayed to an opposite view by your sympathy for the man, and for a time I hesitated. I don't know that I want you to understand how I fought the world before I met you— it isn't a pleasant story— but I did want you to hold out your hand to me and help me. I wanted you to lead me, and you would not."

The silence that fell between them was on her part the silence of stricken revelation.

"And so I have had to decide it alone. I have lost money, I have lost business, because it would again soil my hands. I have stood the jeers of my colleagues. I have stood your withdrawal."

Her hand went out toward him, but he continued, unheeding:

"And that is not all. I have known that I could save a man from death, and I have not done it because at last I know that there must be law in the world, and that there must be justice; that the wicked must suffer for the good of the race, and that the man who, for his own ends, defeats the ends of law and justice and order or who stands before a jury and pleads a lie is a guilty man— as guilty as the murderer who stands in the dock."

His head was up and he seemed to throw down the gauntlet to the world. Faintly it came to her that he had climbed above her and had reached the heights alone.

"That morning in the garden," he went on, more quietly, "I said that my future should be yours; afterwards, in my office, I looked out on the shining river and said it again; but now I know that what I do I must do, not because of you, but because it is right for me to do it— and if you cannot understand, why, then, why, then—"

His voice died away into silence.

Outside, the wind moaned and shrieked. The clamor seemed to intensify the stillness of the room. Blair broke it sharply.

"Well," he said, "if Levine hangs, what then?"

"Don't," she said intensely, "don't let us think of him— now."

And as she lifted her face to him, softened by a new humility, his heart leaped with the knowledge that the barrier was down, and that between them henceforth there could be no shadow of misunderstanding.

18: The Green Vase

Frank Reid

Alexander Vindex Vennard, 1884-1947

Smith's Weekly (Sydney), 3 May 1924

IT WAS a night for black magic, and the wailing monotones of the passing Kling boatmen came to Harold Carrigan like the inarticulate voices of mystery.

To the young Australian visiting Borneo for the first time, an hour spent in the shadowy Chinese kampong of Banjermassin was time put to good purpose. There were the fruit stalls, whose owners crowded their wares to the very edge of the side-walk, so that one had scarcely room to pass; and there were shops whose windows were coated with an obscuring gray film of dust, so that one had to peer closely to see the goods displayed within; gold-fish in fat-bellied bowls, long strings of ivory beads, little piles of rice cakes, and here and there a fat, good-natured idol done in brass.

Here in the shop of Oshira, where the wind-bells tinkled with every breath that swept the doorway, Carrigan found the vase. Instinctively he knew it for a treasure. It was a small thing, scarcely twelve inches high, of a dull green colour. It was cracked in several places, Carrigan saw as he rubbed away the dust that covered it.

Oshira returned the vase to its shelf, using both hands for the purpose, as though fearful lest it fall to pieces in his grasp.

"I cannot tell you how old it is," he answered Carrigan's eager questioning. "It has been in the family of Oshira many, many years, An ancestor, a pottery-maker, moulded it ages ago in Japan."

Carrigan drew out his purse.

"I will pay any reasonable amount—"

Oshira waved his hand in impatient dismissal. "Honourable Sir, I have told you before the vase is not for sale. No amount could buy it."

Carrigan slammed the tiny door of the shop behind him. He had argued fruitlessly two solid hours.

"I shall hound him until he sells it to be rid of me," he muttered doggedly, as he dodged stray carts darting here and there through the streets.

A magic odour, as of incense, that emanated from the dust filled cracks of the green vase had penetrated Carrigan's brain. He could think of nothing but the vase and its celestial odour. Days passed, and each day the Australian sought the shop of Oshira and begged for the vase. He offered goodly sums, for Carrigan was no pauper, but Oshira shook his head. Finally the Japanese, doubtless annoyed at the young man's persistent nagging, removed his treasure from its shelf in the shop; but after a month of torment on Carrigan's

part he was glad to return it, and once more the Australian was allowed to feast his gaze upon it and fill his brain with its bewitching fragrance.

One day when he hurried to the shop of Oshira the wind-bells tinkled a friendlier welcome than before, but once inside the door he paused, for Oshira was not at his usual place behind the teakwood table. At that moment a curtain at the rear of the room fluttered and a young Japanese girl stepped out.

Carrigan gasped. Oshira had mentioned his daughter several times. Could this be Haru? Oshira had not said she was beautiful— so beautiful in fact, that one could only stare rudely without a word; stare and drink in the exquisite beauty of a diminutive creature in a mauve and orange kimono who smiled with lips so small, so perfect and so red.

"My father," she explained in a voice softer than the tinkle of the wind-bells, "is sick and in bed." She raised her eyes to the shelf above her head. "And you— you are the gentleman who wishes to buy the vase?"

Carrigan nodded. Standing on a tea box, Haru reached for it, and held it tenderly in her small hands, as her father had done.

"If you will come this way, please."

Puzzled, Carrigan followed her into the rear room.

"Sir, I had been hoping you would come." She paused a moment as though choosing her next words. "If you wish, the vase is yours."

Carrigan gasped.

"You mean you'll sell it?"

Haru nodded. "You want me to explain? Sit there in the shadow, please, so no one will see us."

Carrigan drew the curtain closer.

"If my father knew he would kill me. This is my only chance to return to my lover in Japan," she explained without embarrassment. "My father hates him, and will not give me the money. Taku is poor, his business having failed, and he wants me to come. That is why I say to you, take the vase, and give me enough money for my passage. When my father returns and finds the vase gone, then I shall be gone, too."

Joyfully Carrigan crushed a roll of notes into Haru's lap.

"There, child, wrap it for me. Hurry, please!"

After she had bound it carefully in pieces of fibre matting, Carrigan bent and kissed her two small palms.

"Good-bye, little cherry-blossom lady," he said. "I'm sure I hope you have a pleasant voyage and will be as happy as I am this minute."

Haru looked up. "You will never part with the vase? You will keep it always? I could not bear—"

"Always," Carrigan promised with alacrity. "It shall stay with me always."

In a fever of ecstasy he hurried through the shadows of the Chinese kampong. This priceless thing for such a small sum— although he had given Haru twice the amount of her passage! How his friends would rave about it when he returned to Sydney. Until that time not a speck of its dust should be molested. He wanted them to see it with its mystery still about it— and that ancient odour.

Suddenly Carrigan stumbled over something in the middle of the gloomy street. When he rose and picked up the vase it was still in its wrapper of matting, and in a hundred pieces.

As soon as he reached his room he took up a glue pot. It should be a vase after all. He would piece it together. It was not such a difficult task.

He turned its base, still intact, over in his hand. For the first time he observed a small slip of paper pasted to the under side. The print was fine, and Carrigan had difficulty in deciphering the words:

MADE IN GERMANY
Guaranteed Not to Leak

Carrigan went back several times to the Chinese kampong, but Oshira's shop was always closed. The gold-fish and the ivory beads had been removed from the window. Only dust and cobwebs remained.

Whenever Carrigan is tempted to buy something very old and within reach of his purse, he takes from his hiding place the pieced together vase, sniffs a moment the now almost imperceptible odour, and curses.

What else can he do?

19: The Knock at the Door

Edward Dyson

1865-1931

The Lone Hand, 1 Dec 1910

A traditional Christmas ghost story in an un-traditional setting

THE boys sat round a small fire of twigs, their faces pale and luminous ; to right and left ran a thin string of rail fence knotted with dark clumps of furze. Between the boys and the irregular line of scattered houses that composed the township of Waddy lay a wide ironstone road, rust colored in the day, furrowed with ruts and gutters by the storm water. Beyond the township was the bush, silhouetted sharply against a prodigious yellow moon hanging desolate in the waste of grey-blue night.

The houses threw black, defined shadows towards the boys, creeping nearer and nearer, reaching long arms. The township was very still. No lights shone in its windows; no sound of revelry by night came from the Shepherds' Inn. In point of fact, the Shepherds' Inn was deserted, save for a bearded he-goat, his fat nanny and family, with a few invited friends, who slept on all-fours in the bar parlor. Quite two-thirds of the houses of the township were uninhabited and desolate; for Waddy was dying off. The families were drifting away, leaving their homes agape and wide-eyed, as if stunned by this base desertion. Those families remaining had long since crept into their beds. There was nothing to sit up for in Waddy; a-bed was not more monotonous than abroad, and in sleep the people did not feel the prevailing depression.

The boys sitting at Tommy Orphan's charmed fire were devoted members of The Circle of Seven, and had stolen from their cribs to attend a midnight meeting of the brotherhood. The Circle of Seven had strange rites and a terrible purpose. It was the aim of the Secret Seven to restore human faith in ghosts and goblins, and revive the simple trust that peopled every old road with a headless horseman, and gave every ancient house a spectre of its own.

Maybe, in forming The Circle of Seven, Tommy Orphan only sought to secure an audience for his tales of supernatural and eerie doings, in the concoction of which he developed a cunning almost diabolical. No merely human boy could hear Tommy tell the story of Bluebeard, with original variations, and fail to be thrilled from his heart's core to the extremity of every nerve in his being with delicious throes of terror, a terror dreadful but intoxicating, that brought the lads creeping together, with furtive eyes drifting towards the dark, that chilled their blood, and yet stirred some deep, abominable delight, linking their souls to myriads of the forgotten dead.

To-night the raconteur was particularly effective. Tommy was an artist.

Never could he be betrayed into telling ghostly tales by day. A ghost story cannot be effective under the sun. The moon may serve a turn, but better the pitch blackness of a starless night, with a little band drawn about a fire that solidifies the darkness behind, and sets free the fantastical wraiths of the caverns and the shadows.

True, the moon was full, but there was an abnormal quiet in the night and a new fear stirred abroad. To the ruined and broken houses left desolate, another had been added; but in this last the dead lay side by side, white on a white bed, their thin jaws held up with strips of linen, the hollows of their eyes stopped with pennies.

This morning died long William Vickers, an oldest inhabitant of Waddy. The neighbors found his wife sitting by the bedside, staring fixedly at the dead, tearless, a puzzled expression in her eyes. When spoken to the old woman swayed forward on to the bed, and slipped from there to the floor. They lifted her up; and she, too, was dead. Doctor Holman was brought from Yarraman. At odd times the doctor had attended the old people. He showed only a perfunctory interest.

"Death from natural causes," he said.

So the neighbors were left to perform what simple service the dead ask.

William they dressed in his best white shirt, and Mary in her best white linen nightgown; and now, under the white sheet they lay, white haired, all white, like a fantastic scheme in marble. After school the boys of the Circle of Seven stole in on the heels of their elders, and looked at the lifeless faces, and the rigid figures stiffly outlined under a sheet.

From that bedside the lads brought an awe that gave keener terror to Tommy Orphan's stories. They shuffled nearer and nearer, till a compact ring of humanity hemmed the fire and its feeble flames scorched their shins. Henry Betters felt cold fingers touch his spine, and dared not turn to see what eerie thing laid hands on him. Bartholomew Ryan knew there were little devils scampering in his hair.

All bent their eyes on the fire, all were pale, not even excepting Tommy, who trembled and sweated from cold pores at the horror of his own inventions. But Tommy was fearful with a difference— terror never deterred him; a desperate boldness urged him to deeds at which his superstitious flesh shuddered and jumped on his bones.

He was telling the story of The Two Tall Ghosts of Baker's Plain, the two goblins in floating draperies that shone with white fire, which hunted Bill the Herdsman from his bed, and chased him on the common night after night, driving him to the mouth of the old Norman Shaft, and, ever as they came near, whispered in his ear "Jump!"

When Tommy said "Jump!" it was a wailing cry that stopped your heart as with a blow. One night the ghosts pressed Bill the Herdsman so hard that he was forced nearer and nearer to the shaft mouth. No matter how he turned and doubled, the spectres headed him back ; and presently he hung over the deep black shaft, and the ghosts said, "Jump!" And the doomed herdsman threw his hands up and jumped. Then the ghosts sprang into the air, screaming, and shot down after him, and as they went down a great flame of blue fire belched from the shaft into the pitchy night— Here Tommy Orphan dashed a double handful of sulphur into the mystic fire of the Circle of Seven— a blue flame danced before the boys' eyes. They cried out, and cowered together, clinging to each other.

Fod Elliott's cap fell into the fire, and he did not heed it; Nigger Edson's moleskin knickers were alight, and he did not know. For fully a minute the terror held them.

"Yah-h, Nigger, yer afraid!" It was Tommy who spoke. His own teeth chattered, and his voice was scarcely raised above a whisper.

"Am I! Am I!" retorted Nigger in low, quavering tones. "Betcher I'm not; betcher pound."

"Y' are! Y' are! Anyone can see yer afraid."

"Prove it!" retorted Nigger with a better show of truculence. "Prove it; go on!"

"Well, if yeh ain't afraid, are yeh on to knock et Vickers's door?"

It was a mad proposition, a fearful idea. The boys sat and stared at Tommy Orphan, stupefied by the desperate valor and the folly that inspired the suggestion.

Long Willie Vickers and his lean, hard wife had been something of pariahs in Waddy; they were people apart, had shunned their neighbors, and lived lonely lives in their neat two-roomed skillion surrounded by a well-kept garden that was their only pride, with no company but an ancient sulphur-crested cockatoo. For years the boys of Waddy had baited Vickers and his wife. Often the members of The Circle had stolen down that garden path and knocked at Vickers's front door to enjoy being "sweated" by long William or pursued with hoarse curses by the cockatoo.

That was rational fun, but to creep through the garden now at dead of night and disturb the pale corpses with ribald knockings. Whew! it was hideous. Tommy Orphan's scalp twitched to think of it, and his teeth chattered a little as he scoffed at his mates for their cowardice- But he clung to the idea, fascinated by the awful possibility of disturbing Willie Vickers in his long sleep.

"Who's scared now?" he jeered, pointing a tremulous finger at Nigger. "Look et him shiverin'. Cowardy! Cowardy! Mummy's own!"

"I ain't! Don't care, I ain't," muttered Nigger. "Ain't scared; but— but it ain't religious t' be cheeky t' corpses. "

"Gerrou! 'Ear 'im? 'Tain't bein' cheeky. Yeh jest steal up 'n' knock et the door, tha's all."

"Scared yerself. Yes y'are— yes— yes!"

"Am I? If you'll go, I'll go."

Nigger was silenced for a moment He moved uneasily. "Don't care. I ain't frightened— much," he said.'

"Ain't yeh! Anybody can see. Scared t' death y' are. Yah, Nig's in a blue funk! He's goin' t' cry. Look et him snivellin'!"

Nigger pulled himself together. "It's a lie, see; I'll go if they'll go."

"Come on!" said Tommy Coffin in a low voice. He rose to his feet. The others clustered about him, hating the mission, but gripped by that weird allurements which the terrible has for all of us.

Tommy Coffin led the way, and the six followed him, holding to each other's clothes, walking like cats.

Tommy opened the gate. Together they crept down the garden path to the very door; quaking, they stood.

"You, Nigger," whispered Tommy— "you got ter do it."

Nigger hung back, but was urged forward by strong hands. Then, with sudden desperation, he struck twice on the panel. They fled for the gate together, but Tommy was before them. His face shone whitely in the shadow, his brow was wet, his legs shook under him. He stood at the closed gate and urged them back.

"No, no;" he said, "we orter wait. That ain't fair. Knock, 'n' then wait t' show we ain't scared. Come on; it's me t' knock this time."

They followed him back to the door, each eager to rebel, but no individual daring to run.

"Mind yer, no scootin'," said Tommy Orphan, "we stan' together."

He held Nigger with his right hand, and struck three distinct knocks. Then terror hung on their limbs like lead, and fear froze their hearts and slid ice into every vein; for the lock clicked, the door opened, and, before them, erect in the doorway, horribly distinct against the blackness of the interior, stood the dead woman in her shroud, her chalky face as visible as if lit with an inward light, the cavernous eyes glowing, the thin, rigid jaw tightly bound with a strip of linen knotted above a narrow brow, and on her shoulder perched the bedraggled cockatoo, his little beady eyes shining like points of light, his crest angrily erect.

Fod Elliott had fallen among the violets, and was squirming away on his stomach with marvellous speed, no longer sensate, scarcely human.

"Run away, you boys!" squealed the uncanny bird. "Run away, you boys!"

Tommy Orphan seemed petrified. He stood a moment, his head thrust forward, his mouth open, his hands spread, staring at the gaunt apparition of the dead woman.

Then, as if with the touch of a finger, the springs of volition worked, and he turned and fled wildly from the spot.

The boys were piled against the gate, fighting insanely. A few minutes later seven boys, possessed with terror— a terror that was almost madness— rushed into as many homes, screaming their fear.

The elders came from their beds dubiously, cautiously. They gathered at Vickers's gate. In low voices they discussed the situation. On the whole, it was thought best to send for Dr. Holman. The doctor came, angry but curious.

The bolder spirits followed him to the death bed. Mrs. Vickers lay by her husband, but the pennies that had covered the hollows of her eyes were scattered on the floor, the sheet that had been so smooth and orderly over both was under her body, and on the foot of the bed drowsed the old cockatoo.

Dr. Holman examined the woman's body, and then turned troubled eyes on the knot of shrinking people at the door.

"She is dead," he said. "She has been dead about fifteen minutes."

20: The Man Who Cheated Time

Sinclair Lewis

1885-1951

Good Housekeeping, March 1941

YOU KNOW, there are people that you love but don't like very much. You might die for them, and you might even put in a plodding lifetime of living for them; but you can't live with them.

Russell Spinrad has always been my private catastrophe. There isn't one of my patients for whom I have done more. But I wonder whether all the acts of kindness that I have jammed down his career may not have been extremely bad for him. If I hadn't thrown away at least three hundred dollars' worth of free medical advice on him every year, Russ might now, at forty-seven, be fit to associate with his young daughter, Amy. He wouldn't be so intelligent as Amy— not about anything, not about the stock market or boy friends or Prokofieff concertos, or anything else— but he might be worthy to play tennis with her.

I began my hobby of doing nice things for him in a not very nice way in Royal College, when he was a freshman and I a junior. His father and mine had been classmates at Royal before us. I spent six months getting Russ into my fraternity, and a year trying to get him out. The fraternity was too stimulating for Russ; it encouraged him to jig and holler even more than was natural. He was slim, with dark, lively eyes, and he had a large mouth, which emitted whoops surprisingly loud for such a little fellow. He could play the guitar a little, write doubtful limericks a little, dance a little, swim a little, and all this littleness he did much too largely, under encouragement of the plutocratic young gentlemen of Sigma Digamma.

They wangled for him the position of chief cheerleader, and they were always encouraging him to show off his freakish time-sense, by which, for example, after a two-hour tramp in the woods, he could tell you the time within a hundred seconds.

After college, when I was studying medicine in New York, I introduced Russ to my second cousin, May Hestrom, whom he married, after he had started law-practice in a firm in Manhattan. Probably May could never have been a model; but she was a good, practical girl. She could play the phonograph, and she could mend, and she could listen to men talking without correcting them too frequently.

Russ and she settled near me, in Tippy Manor, a Westchester suburb, and at forty-five he had become a ripened commuter, with May and Amy and Eric for family, and he owned— almost owned— a house that was a very fine miniature of Windsor Castle, built of stucco, brick, and clapboards, and

possessing a badminton court, a Japanese garden four feet square, a garage with two cars, and a library with two books, not counting the telephone and cook books. But he remained, inside him, a college cheerleader, who sang a little and practiced law a little more and drank a good deal more than that. He was a pleasant fellow, one of the best bridge players on the 5:27, and behind that, he was a dangerous gambler.

He gambled with stocks, with real-estate, with every new instrument of financial torture that proceeded from the inventive mind. Always he explained that it was to "provide for his family," and almost always he lost. The worst thing that had ever happened to him was that at twenty-three he had made a small stock-market slaughter, so that for twenty-two years he had been trying to repeat it.

That's one of the things that brings business to the family doctor.

EVERY FALL, Russ and May and my wife, Peggy, and I drove up to Massachusetts for Royal's big annual football game against Rhode Island Tech.

Personally, I thought it was a kind of nuisance. Every year you remembered fewer of the names of classmates who were annually resurrected there; every year the players got younger, and it was harder to believe that some baby-faced dinosaur was a great, famous hero and that it really mattered how many feet he galloped before the other children leaped on him and throttled him. But Russ was right back cheerleading, and my wife and May actually carried Royal banners— hideous things and very inconvenient.

This day a couple of years ago, we four, with Russ' daughter, Amy— she was sixteen then— drove up to the game together, in his sedan. Getting Russ started was like war maneuvers. In succession he forgot and went back into the house for a road map, a bag of doughnuts— sugared— the gin flask, a muffler, his dyspepsia pills, and a cowbell. All through this he kept giving the college yell, and May kept gloating, "My, isn't he a caution!" and young Amy kept looking embarrassed.

During the mob scene, a messenger boy brought a telegram for Russ. I signed for it and absently stuck it in my pocket, and for seven hours I forgot about it. Later that seemed just as well.

We were off to a good bad start. Russ was a striking object in chamois jacket, a sweater like a Swiss tablecloth, and a green hat with a feather. He drove up to and including seventy miles an hour. Every time he passed another car, which was once in thirty seconds, he snarled to me, "That so-and-so!"

He kept screaming, "Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy, are we going to lick that Tech this afternoon!" I didn't consider it anything like so certain; but I heard myself chuckling, "Are we!" And every half mile, Peggy or May would yelp from the

back seat, "We'll show up those clowns!" The general feeling was that Rhode Island Tech was not an educational institute, but a gang of scoundrels united to commit libel and barratry against the pure, high spirit of the sons of Royal, and that this afternoon we were going to smash the Tech menace forever.

We arrived in great zest at the Royal Bowl. We filed through dark passages, climbed flights of steps, came out into fall sunshine, and looked down into a canyon, in which all the people in the world were seated in rows, all waving things.

Even that sixteen-year-old cynic Amy crowed: "It's swell! The crowd's so exciting!"

We sat on those especially hard wooden planks that are laid along stadium seats because the cement alone wouldn't be hard enough, and Russ yelped and beamed and began to buy things— programs, popcorn, cigars, straw mats to sit on, and a woolen hippopotamus in the college colors.

It was a good game. Amy and I found ourselves jumping up and yelling every two minutes, and then asking everybody why we had jumped up and yelled. Russ was ecstatic, and between halves he joined the undergraduates in the snake dance.

The fall day darkened, and in the second half we settled down to a curious homey feeling— 20,000 of us cuddling together in mutual comfort against the unkind sky. Russ was quiet. He was staring at the enormous electric scoreboard.

"WHAT'S the matter?" I asked.

"Look— that clock on the scoreboard. It runs backward."

"Of course it does. It shows how many minutes there are left for play."

"And seconds! It's the seconds that get me. They go by so fast." He sounded strained. "I know what the clock's intended for, of course. But I never— I don't like it. It's as if it were saying that our whole lives are limited— the seconds are going— we better hurry— we haven't got much time left. Look at those seconds ticking off: forty-two, forty-one, forty— only forty seconds left out of this minute before it's shot. I don't like it. You will be executed in nineteen minutes from now— no, it's eighteen, now. Is there anything you would like, prisoner?"

"Oh, quit it," I said, while May fluttered, "Why, Russ, what an idea!"

He explained: "It's that exact sense of time of mine that bothers me. Let it go."

But through the rest of the game, his head kept turning toward the expiring clock— and so did mine. Seventeen seconds, sixteen seconds, only fifteen seconds for the game to go on. And the last second blinked out, and the game

was over, and Royal College was winner, 6 to 0, and Russ clogged and shouted, now that the menacing clock was still.

We drove back in the after-game traffic. I was glad when Russ grunted, "Let's stop and grab a bite and wait till the worst of this is over." He turned in at a roadside restaurant.

As I put my gloves in my overcoat pocket, I felt the telegram that I had forgotten to give to Russ. I was not comfortable. It's hard on a family doctor when he is caught in any of the crimes that he nags other people for.

"Here's a wire that came for you just as we were leaving," I said offhandedly.

He snatched at it with an anxiety unexpected in a man who received telegrams daily, and I noticed that May and Amy were looking at him with eyes watchfully blank. I thought, maybe there were terrors and subterfuges in this suburban household that even I didn't know. He read the message two or three times, folded it, laid it down, fussily squaring it with the corner of the table, then placed his knife along one side of it and his spoon along another.

"I don't think I'll eat my hamburger. Do you want it?" he said to May.

"Bad news?"

"Nothing much. Just that we're completely ruined."

"Oh, no!"

"I thought I'd have a nice surprise for you. Sure! I was in on the ground floor of an airplane-accessories company. I've put in everything I have, and quite a little I don't have. Well, the company is completely busted, that's all, and I don't know as I can cover my debts this time."

He faked a smile, while May whimpered, Amy protested, "Oh, Daddy!" and I apologized, "It was inexcusable, my forgetting to give you the wire."

"I'm glad you forgot it. I've had one good afternoon, anyway, and I guess it's the last good afternoon I'm ever going to have."

I WAS SUSPICIOUS at the sound of that. It struck me that he was hinting at suicide, and he was a type who possibly might take that cowardly kind of flight.

Ever since 1929 I had been angry at the men whom I had known in college as brave, gay youngsters with excitement about many things, about sport and music and travel and building, yet who later killed themselves when they lost their money, and so gave away the fact that they had come to live for nothing but this same money and that, in losing it, they had lost everything that was now precious to them. I thought of them and watched Russ Spinrad being showily brave. Not a bravery that was going to last, I fretted.

You can bet I drove the rest of the way, that afternoon.

At home, Russ thought he'd better lie down. It wasn't his family that had lost their stake— oh, no, just he! May insisted on sitting with him and being sorry for him. I tried to get her aside, to work out some sort of plan— I'd even have been willing to go up to Canada hunting with him— but she refused to leave him.

I had sent my wife back home, and Russ' boy, Eric, was still off at the movies. I sat downstairs with Amy.

In green sweater and skirt, with a bracelet of colored beads, she was a simple-looking young woman. At sixteen, she was as hard and transparent and honest as a sliver of clear glass. She seemed to be lounging in the big chair; but her right fingers were pressing hard on her left hand, just back of her thumb. Ordinarily, her voice was light, crisp, a bit flippant. Now it was slow and twangy, with a strain of weariness in it that I hated to hear.

"Uncle Doctor, you've got to tell me what's going on here."

She sprang up suddenly, all in one piece, like a leaping kitten, and stared out of the window. "I've got to respect my father even when I don't respect him. I've got to help save him even when he thinks it'd be so much more romantic if he didn't get saved." She turned on me. "Do you suppose girls nowadays enjoy having to be the parents of their own parents? I'd like to run in the garden, like Mother must've. I'd like to feel secure."

It was a trivially pretty suburban sitting room in which we were talking, fresh and new: a square room with light-blue walls and sunny, yellow curtains. Through tall, steel-bound windows, we looked out on a brown, serene autumn night, and the street lamp showed a sundial against a smug, clipped hedge. Young Amy herself looked as gay and contemporary as a magazine cover.

"Uncle Doctor, is he going to get some idea about doing violence to himself?"

"Possibly."

There was certainly nothing to be said at the moment, so I went home. When I got there, I observed to Peggy: "I think I'm about the only nice person that I know. Don't you?"

"No."

"Well, neither do I, but.... And have you ever heard the old saying, attributed by many to Hippocrates, 'Even a doctor has to sleep sometimes'?"

"Hippocrates was lucky. He didn't have a telephone. That's why he was celebrated and successful."

"You are a woman of great sense. And let's hope that tonight the telephone won't ring."

It did, though, about three a.m.

At night I always notice the time, on the radium-painted dial beside my bed, before I answer the telephone. If it's about three, it's often a crisis, and it was 2:45, and it was a crisis, and the crisis was May Spinrad.

"Billy, you've got to come over here, quick, and do something. Russ has a violent delusion."

I said, hang Russ and his delusion. I said, certainly not, I wouldn't come right over. I said, all right then. And scrambled into my clothes.

WHEN I REACHED the Spinrads' house less than ten minutes later, I expected to find Russ a little wild; but when May led me into the butler's pantry, Russ, wearing a black-and-gold dressing-gown, with a towel around his neck to keep his confounded throat warm, was sitting at a table and was eating strawberry jam spread on crackers.

"What have you come back here for?" he said crossly.

"A valid question, Mr. Spinrad."

"I suppose May has blabbed about my discovery. It will sound ridiculous to you; but it's pretty tremendous. It's something new in human history. You know my time-sense? Well, I've just found that I can tell to the second at what moment I'm going to die."

"Nonsense."

"I'm going to die on January thirteenth— not much more than two months from now— at eleven minutes and seven seconds past ten in the morning. Two months, eleven days, seven hours, sixteen minutes, and twelve seconds from the moment when I hold up my hand." He held it up and sighed. "I had sixty-two seconds more of lifetime left before you came in here to waste it."

There was no clock in sight. Afterward, I tried to time it by memory, including pauses, and I guess sixty-two seconds was right.

His placid frenzy seemed like the sort of psychosis that could develop into a manic state in which he might grab a butcher knife; yet he sounded as matter of fact as if he were talking about his temperature. I was scared. I was grateful that Eric and that hard young lady, Miss Amy, weren't there to be scared along with me.

I mumbled: "Well, that's an interesting idea. I'll admit there's a lot of unexplored area in our minds that I don't know anything about. But would you mind telling the family doctor just what it is you're going to die from, two months, eleven days—"

"And seven hours and fifteen minutes and twelve seconds, it is just now. A hundred and twenty-two seconds of my life you've wasted now. I have so few seconds left, and you stand there and leer! I won't put up with it! I've got to use the seconds I have left, every one of them, in being happy and useful."

MAY WAS making a tiny wifelike sound, a mouselike sound. I tried harder than ever to be sensible.

"You still haven't let me in on the secret of what you're going to die of."

"That wasn't revealed to me."

"Eh?"

"I suddenly woke up and saw an illuminated clockface in the dark, only the clock ran backward, and there were different hands for the months and weeks and days and hours and minutes and seconds— six different hands, all moving counterclockwise, all moving backward and backward, and nothing could stop them, nothing ever can, and when they all get together at a certain position that's marked on the dial with a red spot— then I'll be dead!"

"You poor, dear old chump! Why, you were dreaming— you hadn't waked up at all, and you had a dream memory of that clock on the electric scoreboard we saw at the game yesterday afternoon."

He looked sorry for me. "Don't be silly. Of course I thought about that. Seeing that clock did release my power of sight; but it merely helped me to see what was in my mind all along. You pill peddlers may know something about stomachaches; but you ought to keep your clumsy hands off a man's soul!"

I grunted. Partly I agreed!

"No, I see those clock hands right now. I see them moving toward the finish. You think I'm a little crazy, eh? Do you, May? Well, what you two think won't matter to me, two months from now— two months and eleven days and— "

"Yes, yes, yes, yes, I know!" I snapped. Even doctors are human, between three and four a.m.

He said cheerfully, "Do you want to try how accurately I see the passing of time?"

Because I couldn't think of anything sensible to do, I looked at the face of my watch while he told the seconds off. It was horrible— each second that much nearer to the end. And he was about 98 percent accurate. I'm glad he wasn't any more accurate, or he might have convinced me. I wonder what a prowler would have thought if he'd looked in at the pantry window, to see a tousled doctor, with no tie and very little medical dignity, glaring at his watch, while a woman, wearing a fluffy tan negligee, sat quietly crying, and a self-satisfied man in black and gold waved his hand like a prize-fight referee, and gloatingly called out, "For'-sev'n, for'-eight, for'-nine...."

Seconds dripping away like blood.

I tried to explain to him that all this was just a delusion, an escape, a substitution for the tedious reality of being financially broke; but he didn't

listen, May didn't listen— hang it, I didn't listen to myself. I went home, comfortably promising May to "do something about it first thing in the morning." That's the definition of morning: that portion of the day in which you're certainly "going to do something about it."

My mind didn't believe one atom of Russ' nonsense; but my emotions were just as shaky as his.

I knew that the hysterical strain might push him over into some psychosis that would cripple his mind for years. I wouldn't say that that night he was "insane." There's no definite line between normality and insanity. Every single one of us is insane about something: love or patriotism or religion or the dignity and power of our own poor selves. The "insane" are those of us who are noisy enough to get caught at it.

YOU'RE going to ask what I, a doctor, did about the case of Russell Spinrad. Well— nothing. There's nothing you can do about an unbalanced man, even a drunkard or a gambler or a believer in totalitarianism, unless his family or his neighbors complain about him. My only thought was to get him off in a sanatorium for a while.

But May said no. She wouldn't think of coaxing Russ to be shut up in a sanatorium. "The poor boy, I don't think he'd like it. And it would be useless, because I'm beginning to believe that he really does see that clock in his brain."

"What?"

"I am. And he's doomed by it."

I remembered that May had always been a pushover for fortunetelling, astrology, numerology, transmigration. And who knows? Maybe Russ did have his blasted little clock. But a doctor has to work on the hypothesis that it's specks and not spooks that his patients have been seeing.

I protested to May as pontifically as I could. "You mean to say you're going to sit here and watch him imagine himself to death?"

"Oh, I've talked that over with him, and we've both concluded that we can't prevent Fate's taking its course."

Isn't it curious that you can go on being quite fond of a person even when you know she's a good deal of a fool?

I saw only young Amy as a hope of saving Russ and his family— saving them against their will— one of the doctor's commonest jobs, and one for which he is paid only in anger and suspicion. Oh, yes, Amy was of the dreadful new generation that sages like Professor Mortimer Adler rail against: hard, realistic, doubtful of all the faiths and ideals that have sustained their forefathers, and unwilling to fight for them. But, I reflected, I could count on her being very honest.

I told her what her mother had said, and braced myself. She looked like a thin and active boy, angry on the playing field, and with a tanned hand she made a flapping gesture like that of a boy. But she began to smile, and with it she grew up instantly, she became all woman.

"Uncle Doctor, you and your whole gang are so childish. You're all sorry for yourselves, and you expect somebody to do things for you. You blame everything on that war they had way back in history, along about 1920. Postwar! But we kids don't know which war it is that we're post of. But all right. I'll make a try at taking care of Mother and Father. I'm so much older than they are. I've had to be. Talk about Father's 'time-sense' that he's so proud of— we kids have lived time fast, three years to his one. We've watched all the older folks in the world getting ready to give up; but we don't want to give up— we won't give up."

It was somehow comforting to hear her.

I HAD WEEKS of the most embarrassing plight a family physician can know: seeing that a patient needed me, but not being called in and not wanting to intrude. I dropped by at the Spinrads' often; but I kept away from the topic of medical assistance carefully— not so carefully as they did, at that. From these visits and a good deal of skilled spying by Amy, I knew what was going on.

Russ never varied as to when his end would be: on January thirteenth, eleven minutes and seven seconds after ten a.m. It's a good thing he hadn't planned it for midnight, with a stage blizzard and a few witches practically guaranteed.

After a couple of days, he made an occupation of being doomed. Hourly he spoke of the ebbing seconds. He had gone into town, to his office, and apparently his firm had been astonishingly decent. They had given him time off to "rest" and had advanced him enough money to get by on. He stayed in Tippy Maner, and for a while he chattered to everybody he met of his remarkable gift of foresight— to the neighbors, the fellows at the golf club, even to the village taxi-driver, who meets all the suburban trains.

Russ was continuously excited about his own differentness, and rather vain over it, for a few days. But he turned morose as he realized that this wasn't a new game; that in no time at all now, according to his chart, he would hear the "dark thunders of eternity." Since he had so little time, he perceived that he must not waste even one second of it. He gave methodical attention to this problem, and so became unable to use even one second of it.

He would hasten indigestibly through breakfast— he couldn't be wasting time dawdling over food. He would pick up and throw away the morning paper. What was the use of reading, even about his acquaintances, when he

would soon be out in a void, where they wouldn't be remembered? His muscles longed for golf; but he "couldn't afford the time." He would go for a walk, but come fleeing back after a block or two, and he was edgy with anybody who stopped him on the way for a good-morning. Soon he was able to do nothing at all but sit, stooped and cramped and wretched, trying to decide what was worth doing.

Once I broke my neutrality and begged him to talk with a psychiatrist or with his pastor, Mr. Horndean, a wise and solid fellow; but Russ sneered: "Those amateurs? I'm walking through dark mysteries that they never heard of, and besides, I can't take the time— I have so little to waste."

He wasn't smoking much or drinking much— in fact, he was almost too saintly and monastic for my New England taste— and out of his fog he would stare at you with infuriating forgiveness for your earthiness. I couldn't even talk with May, for daily she became more like him, daily spent more time sitting beside him, brooding on whether there was anything in the world that was really worth doing.

The eternal bank never gives you back the time that you save but don't invest.

Of course, all our friends kept saying to me, "Why don't you do something about him?" Everybody always says that to the neighborhood doctor.

You can guess what Christmas was like in the Spinrad house. I saw them once: on Christmas Eve I slipped over with a couple of packages. I had always discouraged Russ' drinking; but I thought that now a bottle of twenty-year-old liqueur Scotch would be good for him.

I tried to make myself believe that I was still good old Uncle Doctor, who was always welcome. I sneaked into their vestibule without ringing.

Amy, blank-face, was trimming the tree. May sat on the davenport. I could see she had been crying. Between them stood Russ, and in his hands was a shotgun.

I was startled. I almost jumped into the room. But here is what he was saying to Amy:

"I've been so busy getting my affairs straightened out that I haven't had any time for Christmas shopping. Do you suppose Eric would like my shotgun? I got it on St. James's Street, in London— you know, the time your mother and I went abroad. It's very light, only twenty-gauge. It's quite a sweet little gun, fine balance. And silver mounted! I always loved it. Do you think Eric would like it?"

Amy was saying, in a threadlike voice, as when you run a wet finger around the rim of a thin goblet, "Oh, yes— yes, I think he would."

THEN CHRISTMAS was gone, and New Year's; it was January, and Russ had— he thought he had— only thirteen days. Amy said she felt as though she were hanging by her fingers from the top of a cliff. And in a sort of paralysis we all came to the afternoon of January 12th.

On the afternoon of January 12th, about four, some eighteen hours before Russ was supposed to go, I stalked into their house as if I were still welcome there. I found a perfectly ridiculous— and heartbreaking— group in the dining room, about the table: Russ looking like a scared martyr, with uncut, damp hair and a dirty shirt, though he did wear his best tweed jacket; May weeping; Amy in repressed fury; and Eric alternating, I guessed, between panicky bewilderment and a desire to sneak out and go skating.

Russ yelled at me: "There's no use your coming in here! I don't need you. I know what's happening. I'm not a materialist, like you smart-aleck docs. And I don't intend to have you ridiculing me and sneering and interfering in this hour of dread."

I babbled back at him with phony cheerfulness. "No, no, Russ. I bow to the inevitable." (Yes, I crawled that far down into the pit of clichés.)

"Oh. You do?" I didn't think he looked altogether gratified.

"Certainly. And we're old friends, Russ, and I want to give you as cheerful a farewell as I can. This shall be our white night, above and beyond all earthy companionship."

May and he swallowed that. They were under such a strain that it seemed to them natural for me to be talking like a Little Theater. But Amy winked.

I looked at her rebukingly, and in a stately way I commanded her: "And you, young lady, may I trouble you to take any telephone calls that come for me and tell them I'm not to be bothered? Wait— come out here in the hall, and I'll give you a list of the calls I'm expecting."

In the vestibule, I said quickly: "Look, Amy! I've got some sleeping stuff here. I'm going to give him a dose, so he'll sleep past the time when he thinks he's due to die. Otherwise, he might will himself into dying. But I'm not on this case. Have I your permission, as a relative?"

"Okay, Uncle Doctor, shoot!"

Not the Blessed Damozel, when she leaned out from the golden bar of heaven, sounded half so musical.

WHEN we returned to the dining room, Russ held forth with noble but infuriating serenity about his control of time, about his unprecedented "secret powers," while May writhed with tender wretchedness, Amy pinched her hand, Eric looked increasingly frightened, and the maid, coming in with coffee, scuttled out in panic.

I noticed that Russ was drinking too much coffee. When he grudgingly offered me some, I had a base for attack.

"Look, old man, in an hour like this, coffee seems pretty tame. It may not seem suitable; but it's the old tradition to drink a stirrup cup with a knight who's starting off on a quest among hidden dangers. I want to have a last drink with you— a brave toast to the unknown. Have you still got some of that Scotch I brought you at Christmas?"

He nodded and looked pleased. I think he was horribly frightened and wanted an excuse for a drink.

"I'll get it," I droned.

I prepared our two drinks with care.

A few minutes later, while Russ was ambling on about his own remarkableness, he fell asleep. May was terrified. Then I turned loose on her. I told her what I had done. I told her that if she interfered, I'd have him arrested for attempted suicide.

I thought we might as well make him comfortable. We got him upstairs, put him into pajamas, and into bed. May, with some idea that he might want them when— if— he awoke, dragged up an old tabouret that Russ had had since freshman year, and on it she put his favorite pipe and the book of Wodehouse stories he had been enjoying before the game with Tech. And, more for the family's sense of duty than for Russ, for over seventeen hours we kept vigil by his bed; the family and I and Mr. Horndean, their pastor— a sensible and well-read man, an M.A. of Yale— for whom I sent, that his prayers might comfort May.

Always there were at least two of us on watch, to keep each other awake. Whenever Russ threatened to come out of his beneficent coma, I gave him a hypo, carefully measured, just enough to keep him under. Mr. Horndean agreed with me that it was a good notion to have the light on full in the bedroom.

Amy, looking very young now and little, sat on the floor, pasting stamps in her album— to keep from being unmanned, I guess. Her mother inquired whether Amy didn't think this was irreverent, and Amy said no, she didn't.

At midnight I got the idea of turning on the radio, at its most jazzy. And all night we explored a superterrestrial world of gaiety and swing music.

Yes, and all of this cheery activity was phony!

Underneath the swing bands, out in the dark beyond the electric lights, we felt horror waiting. Every minute ran desperately fast toward this man's fate; yet every sixty minutes, taken together, seemed like a thousand in the intolerable waiting.

But dawn was the prelude to a particularly clear, derisively sunny January morning. I looked out, relieved, at the snowy suburban lawns, the proud elms, and a red sled in the yard next door.

Mr. Horndean mused softly to me, "One would think that God is refusing to humor Mr. Spinrad in his desire to be theatrical."

Yes, we were cheerful till, at something after eight, when Horndean and Amy and I were downstairs, Amy had a devastating idea. "Suppose," she said, "that when Dad wakes up— if he does wake— that he thinks we've played a practical joke on him. Will it make him feel so small that he'll really go mad?"

Mr. Horndean spoke sternly. "A man who dares to emulate God in the disposal of his fate ought to feel small."

"No!" Amy protested. "I think God wants us all to be proud— He doesn't want us to feel humiliated, no matter what we've done."

How sound Amy's guess was, only I, who had known Russ as the spoiled Bright Boy in college, could know. If he believed that we were laughing at him, he might fly right off center, and I would have a certifiably insane friend on my hands and have been responsible for his final push into madness.

That fear was with me during our last hour of waiting for his predicted moment— eleven minutes and seven seconds after ten.

Not one of us dared to leave the room— May, Amy, Eric, Horndean, myself. I was at one side of his bed, trying not to look at my wrist watch, but nervously doing so every thirty seconds. May sat across, and I constantly caught her glancing from his blank face to the traveling clock on the bedside table. Horndean was reading a magazine and trying not to look at the clock— and looking at it. Amy was on the floor, at her stamp album, and once I saw her carefully paste in a stamp upside down.

Ten o'clock— and on the click of it, Russ stirred on the pillow and May cried aloud. Amy sprang up and stood by her mother, hand on her arm. Russ was quiet again, and Amy spoke with the voice of a mother— she was truly her mother's mother, just now. "It's going to be all right, you'll see."

She hesitated. I think she wanted to stay beside her mother; but she was afraid they would both break down. She sternly took herself back to her stamps for that last eleven minutes and seven seconds— no, by now not more than ten minutes and forty seconds remained, trickling fast. Ten minutes and forty seconds, ten minutes and thirty-nine seconds, ten minutes and thirty-eight seconds....

Seven minutes left to us, and Horndean rose and stood by the bed, so shaky that he could scarcely put his spectacles back into their case.

Four minutes to go, and I abruptly went for a glass of water. My mouth seemed full of ashes.

Two minutes, and May began to sob, unable to look at Russ, her head down on the bed, her hand groping for his.

Thirty seconds, and Horndean began to repeat the Seventy-Seventh Psalm.

At precisely the crisis, eleven minutes and seven seconds after ten, Russ stirred, half-rose, as though he were struggling against bonds, and collapsed again on the pillow, with stilled face, while they all cried out. I seized his wrist, felt his pulse. He was alive. He had lived on past the second of his false destiny.

Not Time or God is to be cheated; they will have their own at their own hour, and no man, no, nor any king or dictator, shall long defy them.

Russ was coming out of his anesthesia, strong and easy. It was the rest of us who suffered, and Amy who suffered most, for while Horndean and May were praying together, Amy went off and was very sick, and then came back again.

Russ was entirely conscious by a little after eleven, and, for all of Amy's fear about his being humiliated, I followed a hunch of my own and told him, straight, what a fool he had been, what a conceited and insensitive devil to his family.

He didn't listen much. He looked down at Amy, who, reduced again to domestic insignificance, was trying to study her stamps— a thin kid, not very strong, peering through a reading glass at a stamp from Costa Rica.

Russ heaved himself up under the covers, struggled out of bed, sat on the floor beside Amy, and said to her amiably: "Is that a new issue, with the airplane? I'll have to take up stamps again. You and I will go buy up a whole stamp shop, as soon as I'm flush again."

May protested: "Russ! When you've just— come back— are you going to waste your time over stamps?"

"Yes! I have time enough now for everything! For talking to people, for writing briefs, for playing golf, for reading a book! I know now that I don't know what's going to happen, or when the end will come; so I have all of eternity to do whatever I want to. I have all of eternity, every day. That's all I know— that's all I want to know."

21: The Law-Breakers

Robert Grant

1852-1940

Everybody's Magazine, June 1905

GEORGE COLFAX was in an outraged frame of mind, and properly so.

Politically speaking, George was what might be called, for lack of a better term, a passive reformer. That is, he read religiously the *New York Nation*, was totally opposed to the spoils system of party rewards, and was ostensibly as right-minded a citizen as one would expect to find in a Sabbath day's journey. He subscribed one dollar a year to the civil-service reform journal, and invariably voted on Election Day for the best men, cutting out in advance the names of the candidates favored by the Law and Order League of his native city, and carrying them to the polls in order to jog his memory. He could talk knowingly, too, by the card, of the degeneracy of the public men of the nation, and had at his finger-ends inside information as to the manner in which President This or Congressman That had sacrificed the ideals of a vigorous manhood to the brass idol known as a second term.

In fact, there was scarcely a prominent political personage in the country for whom George had a good word in every-day conversation. And when the talk was of municipal politics he shook his head with a profundity of gloom which argued an utterly hopeless condition of affairs-a sort of social bottomless pit.

And yet George was practically passive. He voted right, but, beyond his yearly contribution of one dollar, he did nothing else but cavil and deplore. He inveighed against the low standards of the masses, and went on his way sadly, making all the money he could at his private calling, and keeping his hands clean from the slime of the political slough. He was a censor and a gentleman; a well-set-up, agreeable, quick-witted fellow, whom his men companions liked, whom women termed interesting. He was apt to impress the latter as earnest and at the same time fascinating-an alluring combination to the sex which always likes a moral frame for its fancies.

It was to a woman that George was unbosoming his distress on this particular occasion, and, as has been already indicated, his indignation and disgust were entirely justified. Her name was Miss Mary Wellington, and she was the girl whom he wished with all his heart to marry. It was no hasty conclusion on his part. He knew her, as he might have said, like a book, from the first page to the last, for he had met her constantly at dances and dinners ever since she "came out" seven years before, and he was well aware that her physical charms were supplemented by a sympathetic, lively, and independent spirit. One mark of her independence-the least satisfactory to him-was that

she had refused him a week before; or, more accurately speaking, the matter had been left in this way: she had rejected him for the time being in order to think his offer over. Meanwhile he had decided to go abroad for sixty days-a shrewd device on his part to cause her to miss him-and here he was come to pay his adieus, but bubbling over at the same time with what he called the latest piece of disregard for public decency on the part of the free-born voter.

"Just think of it. The fellow impersonated one of his heelers, took the civil-service examination in the heeler's name, and got the position for him. He was spotted, tried before a jury who found him guilty, and was sentenced to six months in jail. The day he was discharged, an admiring crowd of his constituents escorted him from prison with a brass band and tendered him a banquet. Yesterday he was chosen an alderman by the ballots of the people of this city. A self-convicted falsifier and cheat! A man who snaps his fingers in the face of the laws of the country! Isn't that a commentary on the workings of universal suffrage?" This was a caustic summing up on George's part of the story he had already told Miss Wellington piecemeal, and he looked at her as much as to ask if his dejection were not amply justified.

"It's a humiliating performance certainly," she said. "I don't wonder you are exercised about it. Are there no extenuating circumstances?"

Miss Wellington appeared duly shocked; yet, being a woman of an alert and cheery disposition, she reached out instinctively for some palliative before accepting the affair in all its stark offensiveness.

"None which count-none which should weigh for a moment with any one with patriotic impulses," he answered. "The plea is that the people down there-Jim Daly's constituents-have no sympathy with the civil-service examination for public office, and so they think it was rather smart of him than otherwise to get the better of the law. In other words, that it's all right to break a law if one doesn't happen to fancy it. A nation which nurses that point of view is certain to come to grief."

Mary nodded gravely. "It's a dangerous creed-dangerous, and a little specious, too. And can nothing be done about it? About Daly, I mean?"

"No. He's an alderman-elect, and the hero of his district. A wide-awake, square-dealing young man with no vices, as I heard one of his admirers declare. By the time I return from my trip to the Mediterranean I expect they will be booming him for Congress."

Looking at the matter soberly, Mary Wellington perceived that Jim Daly's performance was a disreputable piece of business, which merited the censure of all decent citizens. Having reached this conclusion, she dismissed George Colfax on his travels with a sense of satisfaction that he viewed the affair with such abhorrence. For, much as she liked George, her hesitation to become his

wife and renounce the bachelor-girl career to which, since her last birthday-her twenty-fifth-she had felt herself committed, was a sort of indefinable suspicion as to the real integrity of his standards. He was an excellent talker, of course; his ideals of public life and private ethics, as expressed in drawing-rooms, or during pleasant dialogues when they were alone together, were exemplary. But every now and then, while he discoursed picturesquely of the evils of the age and the obligations of citizenship, it would occur to her to wonder how consistent he would be in case his principles should happen to clash with his predilections. How would he behave in a tight place? He was a fashionable young man with the tastes of his class, and she thought she had detected in him once or twice a touch of that complacent egotism which is liable to make fish of one foible and flesh of another, as the saying is, to suit convention. In short, were his moral perceptions genuinely delicate?

However, she liked him so well that she was anxious to believe her questionings groundless. Accordingly, his protestations of repugnance at Jim Daly's conduct were reassuring. For though they were merely words, his denunciation appeared heartfelt and to savor of clean and nice appreciation of the distinction between truth and falsehood.

Indeed, she was half-inclined to call him back to tell him that she had changed her mind and was ready to take him for better or for worse. But she let him go, saying to herself that she could live without him perfectly well for the next sixty days, and that the voyage would do him good. Were she to become his wife, it would be necessary to give up the Settlement work in which she had become deeply interested as the result of her activities as a bachelor-girl.

She must be certain that he was all she believed him to be before she admitted that she loved him and burned her philanthropical bridges.

Returning to her quarters in the heart of the city, Mary Wellington became so absorbed in her work of bringing cheer and relief to the ignorant and needy that she almost forgot George Colfax. Yet once in a while it would occur to her that it would be very pleasant if he should drop in for a cup of tea, and she would wonder what he was doing. Did she, perchance, at the same time exert herself with an ardor born of an acknowledged inkling that these might be the last months of her service? However that may have been, she certainly was very busy, and responded eagerly to every call upon her sympathy.

Among the cases of distress brought to her attention which interested her most was that of two children whose mother had just died. Their father was a drinking man-a reeling sot who had neglected his family for years. His wife, proud in her destitution, had worked her fingers to the bone to maintain a

tenement-roof over the heads of their two little boys and to send them neat and properly nourished to school.

This labor of love had been too much for her strength, and finally she had fallen a victim to consumption. This was shortly after her necessities had become known to the Settlement to which Mary Wellington belonged. The dying mother besought her visitor to keep watch over her boys, which Mary promised faithfully to do.

The waifs, Joe and Frank, were two bright-eyed youngsters of eleven and nine. They stood so well in their classes at school that Mary resolved that their attendance should not be interrupted during the interval while a new home was being found for them. She accompanied them to the school-house, on the morning after the funeral, in order to explain the situation to their teacher and evince her personal interest. Miss Burke was a pretty girl two or three years younger than herself. She looked capable and attractive; a little coquettish, too, for her smile was arch, and her pompadour had that fluffy fulness which girls who like to be admired nowadays are too apt to affect. She was just the sort of girl whom a man might fall desperately in love with, and it occurred to Mary, as they conversed, that it was not likely she would remain a public-school teacher long.

Miss Burke evidently knew the art of ingratiating herself with her pupils. Joe and Frank smiled bashfully, but contentedly, under her sympathetic, sunny welcome. The two young women exchanged a few words, the sequel of which was that Mary Wellington accepted the invitation to remain and observe how the youthful mind was inoculated with the rudiments of knowledge by the honeyed processes of the modern school system. While the teacher stepped to the blackboard to write some examples before the bell should ring, Joe, the elder of the two orphans, utilized the occasion to remark in a low voice intended for Mary's ear:

"She's Jim Daly's mash."

Mary, who failed on the instant to grasp the meaning of this piece of eloquent information, invited the urchin to repeat it, which he did with the sly unction of one proud of his secret. Mary laughed to herself. Some girls would have repressed the youthful gossip, but she was human. Somehow, too, the name sounded familiar.

"Who's Jim Daly, Joe?"

"He's the boss of the Ninth Ward."

"The Daly who has just been elected alderman?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Then Mary understood. "Really, Joe!" she said in the stage whisper necessary to the situation.

"Maybe she's going to be married after Easter," the guileless prattler continued, to make his confidence complete.

"Then you and Frank would lose her." This was the answer which rose to Mary's lips, partly prompted, doubtless, by her own instinctive aversion to the match.

The suggestion of another loss worked upon Joe's susceptible feelings.

Evidently he had not taken this side of the matter into consideration, and he put up one of his hands to his eyes. Fortunately the bell for the opening of the session broke in upon the conversation, and not only diverted him, but relegated the whole subject to the background for the time being.

Nevertheless, the thought of it continued in Mary's mind as she sat listening to the exercises. How could an attractive girl like this take a fancy to such a trickster? It seemed totally incompatible with the teacher's other qualities, for in her attitude toward her pupils she appeared discerning and conscientious.

When the time came to go, Mary referred to her connection with the Settlement work in the course of the few minutes' further conversation which they had together. Miss Burke expressed so lively an interest in this that it was agreed before they parted that the schoolmistress should pay Mary a visit some day later in the week, with the twofold object of taking tea with the two orphans and of being shown the workings of the establishment.

At this subsequent interview, the two young women chatted briskly in a cosy corner. Each found the other sympathetic, despite Mary's secret prejudice; and it happened presently that Miss Burke, whose countenance now and again had seemed a little pensive, as though she had something on her mind, said after a pause:

"I'd like to ask your advice about something, Miss Wellington, if you don't object."

Mary thought she knew what was coming, surprising as it was to be consulted. She smiled encouragingly.

"It's about a gentleman friend of mine," continued Miss Burke, with rising color, "who wishes me to marry him. Perhaps you have heard of him," she added with a suggestion of furtive pride. "His name is Jim Daly."

"I know all about him."

Miss Burke was evidently not prepared for such a sweeping answer. "You know what he did, then?" she asserted after a moment's hesitation.

"He pretended to be some one else, and passed a civil-service examination, wasn't it?"

"Yes. I can tell by your tone that you think it was disreputable. So do I, Miss Wellington; though some of my friends say that it was Jim's desire to help a friend which led him to do it. But he had to serve his time in jail, didn't he?"

She looked as though she were going to cry. Then she said awkwardly: "What I wished to ask was whether you would marry him if you were I."

Mary frowned. The responsibility was disconcerting. "Do you love him?" she asked plumply.

"I did love him; I suppose I do still; yes, I do." She jerked out her answers in quick succession. "But our engagement is broken."

"Because of this?"

"Because he has been in jail. None of my family has ever been in jail." Miss Burke set in place the loose hairs of her pompadour with a gesture of severe dignity as she spoke.

"And he knows, of course, that his dishonesty is the reason why you feel that you cannot trust him?" inquired Mary, who, being a logical person, regarded the last answer as not altogether categorical.

"It wasn't like stealing," said the girl, by way of resenting the phrase.

"It was dishonorable and untrue."

"The people down my way don't think much of the civil-service laws.

They call them frills, something to get round if you can. That's how they excuse him." She spoke with nervous rapidity and a little warmth.

"But they are our country's laws just the same. And a good man—a patriotic man—ought not to break them." Mary was conscious of voicing George Colfax's sentiments as well as her own. The responsibility of the burden imposed on her was trying, and she disliked her part of mentor. Nevertheless, she felt that she must not abstain from stating the vital point clearly; so she continued:

"Is not the real difficulty, my dear, that the man who could be false in one thing might be false in another when the occasion arose?"

Miss Burke flushed at the words, and suddenly covered her face with her hands.

"That's it, of course. That's what haunts me. I could forgive him the other—the having been in jail and all that; but it's the possibility that he might do something worse after we were married—when it was too late—which frightens me. 'False in one thing, false in everything,' that's what the proverb is. Do you believe that is true, Miss Wellington?"

Her unmasked conscience revealed clearly the distress caused by its own sensitiveness; but she spoke beseechingly, as though to invite comfort from her companion on the score of this adage.

"Tell me what sort of a man Mr. Daly is in other respects," said Mary.

"Oh, he's kind!" she answered with enthusiasm. "He has been a good son and brother; he is always helping people, and has more friends than any one in the district. I don't see why he cared for me," she added with seeming irrelevance.

"It's a great point in his favor that he does care for you, my dear. Is he steady at his work?"

"When he isn't too busy with politics. He says that he will give them up, if I insist; but my doing so might prevent his being chosen to Congress." There was again rueful pride in her plaint.

Mary sat silent for a moment. "He stands convicted of falsehood." She seemed to be speaking to herself.

"Yes," gasped the girl, as her mentor paused to let the fell substantive be weighed.

"That seems terrible to me. But you know him better than I do."

Miss Burke's face lighted at the qualification. Yet her quick intelligence refused to be thus cajoled. "But what would you do in my place? That's what I wish to know."

Mary winced. She perceived the proud delicacy of the challenge, and recognized that she had condescendingly shirked the real inquiry.

"It is so hard to put oneself in another's place. The excuses you have given for his conduct seem to me inadequate. That is, if a man gave those reasons to me-I believe I could never trust him again." Mary spoke with conviction, but she realized that she felt like a grandmother.

"Thank you," said Miss Burke. "That's what I wished to know." She looked at the floor for an instant. "Suppose you felt that you could trust him?"

Mary smiled and reflected. "If I loved him enough for that, I dare say I should forgive him."

"You really would?" Then Miss Burke perceived that in her elation she had failed to observe the logical inconsistency which the counsel contained. "I don't know that I understand exactly," she added.

Mary smiled again, then shook her head. "I doubt if I can make it any plainer than that. I mean that-if I were you-I should have to feel absolutely sure that I loved him; and even then-" She paused without completing the ellipsis. "As to that, dear, no one can enlighten you but yourself." "Of course," said poor Miss Burke. Yet she was already beginning to suspect that the sphinx-like utterance might contain both the kernel of eternal feminine truth and the real answer to her own doubts.

ii

SOME TWO MONTHS later the *Meteoric*, one of the fast ocean greyhounds, was approaching the port of New York. At sight of land the cabin passengers, who had been killing time resignedly in one another's society, became possessed with a rampant desire to leave the vessel as soon as possible. When

it was definitely announced that the *Meteoric* would reach her dock early enough in the afternoon to enable them to have their baggage examined and get away before dark, they gave vent to their pent-up spirits in mutual congratulations and adieus.

Among those on board thus chafing to escape from the limitations of an ocean voyage was George Colfax, whose eagerness to land was enhanced by the hope that his absence had made the heart of his lady-love fonder. His travels had been restful and stimulating; but there is nothing like one's own country, after all. So he reflected as, cigar in mouth, he perused the newspapers which the pilot had brought, and watched the coast-line gradually change to the familiar monuments of Manhattan.

Yet apparently there was a subconsciousness to his thought, for as he folded his last newspaper and stretched himself with the languor of a man no longer harried by lack of knowledge as to what has happened during the last seven days, he muttered under his breath:

"Confound the customs anyway!"

A flutter of garments and a breezy voice brought him politely to his feet.

"That's over with, thank Heaven!" The speaker was a charming woman from Boston, whose society he had found engrossing during the voyage—a woman of the polite world, voluble and well informed.

"I just signed and swore to the paper they gave me without reading it," she added, with a gay shrug of her shoulders, as though she were well content with this summary treatment of a distasteful matter.

"Have you made your declaration yet?" she asked indifferently.

"No."

"What I don't understand is why they should make you take oath to a thing and then rummage through your trunks as though they didn't believe you."

"It's an outrage—an infernal outrage," said George. "Every time the Government does it the spirit of American institutions is insulted."

"I haven't much with me this time, anyway; they can hardly expect that a person will go to Europe for six months and not bring back more than one hundred dollars' worth of things," continued Miss Golightly artlessly. "One might almost as well stay at home. It isn't as if I bought them to sell. They are my own own'ty don'ty effects, and I've no intention of paying the Government one cent on them if I can help it.

And they charge one for presents. Of course, I won't pay on presents I have bought to give other people. That would simply make them cost so much more."

"The whole thing is a wretched and humiliating farce," was George's not altogether illuminating comment on this naive revelation of the workings of

the female mind. He spoke doggedly, and then hummed the refrain of a song as though to keep up his courage.

"Well, I'll go and take my turn," he said, with the air of aristocratic urbanity which made him a favorite in social circles.

Miss Golightly detained him to add: "If you find any better method, I wish you'd let me know. It seemed the simplest way not to declare anything, and to trust to luck."

So great was the bustle and confusion that George was not conscious of the presence of his lively companion again until he heard her voice in his ear two hours later on the pier or platform where the baggage from the Meteoric was being inspected.

"Well," she said under her breath, "I'm all through. They gave me a jewel of a man. And you?"

"I've had no trouble." George spoke with nonchalance as if to imply that he had expected none. Out of the corner of his eye he was following the actions of the custom-house official allotted to him who was chalking his examined trunks with the hieroglyphics which signified that the Government had released its grip on them.

This done, George beckoned to an attendant porter, after which he turned again to Miss Golightly.

"If you'll wait a moment until I see these things of mine safely in the hands of the transfer express, I'll put you into your carriage and take a fond farewell."

"You needn't hurry," was her answer.

"My friend, Miss Pilgrim, has declared thirty-four articles, and she doesn't know in which of her eight trunks any of them are. She and the citizen in glasses meted out to her, who insists on finding every one, are now engaged in ransacking her entire wardrobe. I intend to keep at a safe distance from the scene of worry. That's what comes of being conscientious."

George and the inspector, preceded by the porter wheeling the traveller's three trunks, hat-box, and small bags, set out for the other end of the shed.

George returned ten minutes later; he stepped briskly and was beaming.

"Still waiting, I see," he said jocularly.

"And in your eyes I read the purple light of love, young man. I wish you success." Her words were the rallying outcome of confidences on shipboard after five days at sea.

George blushed, but looked pleased. "You may see her first," he said,

"for she is constantly at her cousin's, or was before she took up Settlement life."

"How much did you give him?" asked Miss Golightly.

The reversion to their previous topic was so abrupt and barefaced that the lover stared for a moment, then tried not to appear confused.

"Oh, a mere trifle!" he said with offhand dignity.

"I gave mine twenty-five dollars," she whispered. "Wasn't that enough?"

"Abundant, I should say. But I am not well posted on such matters." It was evident he wished to avoid the subject, and was also impatient to get away, for he took out his watch. "If Miss Pilgrim is really likely to be detained-" he began.

Miss Golightly rose to the occasion and dismissed him. "I understand," she exclaimed amiably. "Every minute is precious."

Nevertheless, it was not until two days later that he succeeded in finding Mary Wellington at home. He called that evening, but was told by the person in charge that she had taken a brief respite from work and would not return for another twenty-four hours. On the second occasion, as the first, he brought with him under his arm a good-sized package, neatly done up.

"I am back again," he said, and he pressed her hand with unmistakable zeal.

Her greeting was friendly; not emotional like his, or unreserved; but he flattered himself that she seemed very glad to see him. He reflected: "I don't believe that it did my cause a particle of harm to let her go without the constant visits she had grown accustomed to expect."

He said aloud: "I came across this on the other side and took the liberty of bringing it to you."

Mary undid the parcel, disclosing a beautiful bit of jade; not too costly a gift for a friend to accept, yet really a defiance of the convention which forbids marriageable maidens to receive from their male admirers presents less perishable than flowers or sweetmeats.

"It is lovely, and it was very kind of you to remember me."

"Remember you? You were in my thoughts day and night."

She smiled to dispel the tension. "I shall enjoy hearing about your travels. A friend of yours has told me something of them."

"Ah! Miss Golightly. You have seen her, then, at your cousin's? A companionable woman; and she knows her Europe. Yes, we compared notes regarding our travels."

He colored slightly, but only at the remembrance of having confided to this comparative stranger his bosom's secret under the spell of an ocean intimacy.

"You brought home other things, I dare say?" Mary asked after a pause, glancing up at him.

"Oh, yes!" The trend of the question was not clear to him, but he was impelled to add: "For one thing, I ordered clothes enough to last me three years at least. I bought gloves galore for myself and for my sister. As I belong to

the working class, and there is no knowing how soon I may be able to get away again, I laid in a stock of everything which I needed, or which took my fancy. Men's things as well as women's are so much cheaper over there if one knows where to go."

"With the duties?"

The words, gently spoken, were like a bolt from the blue. George betrayed his distaste for the inquiry only by a sudden gravity. "Yes, with the duties." He hastened to add: "But enough of myself and my travels. They were merely to pass the time." He bent forward from his chair and interrogated her meaningly with his glance.

"But I am interested in duties." He frowned at her insistence.

"Miss Golightly," continued Mary, "explained to us yesterday how she got all her things through the custom-house by giving the inspector twenty-five dollars. She gloried in it and in the fact that, though her trunks were full of new dresses, she made oath that she had nothing dutiable."

He suspected now her trend, yet he was not certain that he was included in its scope. But he felt her eyes resting on him searchingly.

"Did she?" he exclaimed, with an effort at airy lightness which seemed to afford the only hope of escape.

"How did you manage?"

"I?" He spoke after a moment's pause with the calm of one who slightly resents an invasion of his privacy.

"Did you pay the duties on your things?"

George realized now that he was face to face with a question which, as lawyers say, required that the answer should be either "yes" or "no."

Still, he made one more attempt to avert the crucial inquiry.

"Does this really interest you?"

"Immensely. My whole future may be influenced by it."

"I see." There was no room left for doubt as to her meaning. Nor did he choose to lie. "No, I paid no duties."

"I feared as much."

There was a painful silence. George rose, and walking to the mantel-piece, looked down at the hearth and tapped the ironwork with his foot. He would fain have made the best of what he ruefully recognized to be a shabby situation by treating it jocosely; but her grave, grieved demeanor forbade. Yet he ventured to remark:

"Why do you take this so seriously?"

"I expected better things of you."

He felt of his mustache and essayed extenuation. "It was-er-unworthy of me, of course; foolish-pig-headed-tricky, I suppose. I got mad."

I'd nothing to sell, and the declaration is a farce when they examine after it. So I left them to find what they chose. I'm terribly sorry, for you seem to hate it so. But it's an idiotic and impertinent law, anyway."

"In other words, you think it all right to break a law if you don't happen to fancy it."

George started visibly and colored. He recognized the aphorism as his, but for the moment did not recall the occasion of its use. He chose to evade it by an attempt at banter. "You can't make a tragedy, my dear girl, out of the failure to pay duties on a few things bought for one's personal use, and not for sale. Why, nearly every woman in the world smuggles when she gets the chance-on her clothes and finery.

You must know that. Your sex as a class doesn't regard it as disreputable in the least. At the worst, it is a peccadillo, not a crime. The law was passed to enable our native tailors to shear the well-to-do public."

Mary ignored the plausible indictment against the unscrupulousness of her sex. "Can such an argument weigh for a moment with any one with patriotic impulses?"

Again the parrot-like reminder caused him to wince, and this time he recognized the application.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, with sorry yet protesting confusion.

"It's the inconsistency," she answered without flinching, perceiving that he understood.

George flushed to the roots of his hair. "You compare me with that— er— blatherskite?" he asked, conscious as he spoke that her logic was irrefutable. Yet his self-respect cried out to try to save itself.

"Why not? The civil-service law seemed a frill to Jim Daly; the customs law an impertinence to you."

He looked down at the hearth again. There was an air of finality in her words which was disconcerting.

"I've been an ass," he ejaculated. "I'll give the things up; pay the duties; go to prison, if you like. The punishment is fine or imprisonment." He intended to be sincere in his offer of self-humiliation, though his speech savored of extravagance.

Mary shrugged her shoulders. "If you did, I dare say a bevy of society women would tender you a banquet when you were released from jail."

He bit his lip and stared at her. "You are taking this seriously with a vengeance!"

"I must."

He crossed the room and, bending beside her, sought to take her hand.

"Do you mean that but for this—? Mary, are you going to let a little thing like this separate us?"

He had captured her fingers, but they lay limp and unresponsive in his.

"It is not a little thing; from my standpoint it is everything."

"But you will give me another chance?"

"You have had your chance. That was it. I was trying to find out whether I loved you, and now I know that I do not. I could never marry a man I could not-trust."

"Trust?" I swear to you that I am worthy of trust."

She smiled sadly and drew away her hand. "Maybe. But I shall never know, you see, because I do not love you."

Her feminine inversion of logic increased his dismay. "I shall never give up," he exclaimed, rising and buttoning his coat. "When you think this over you will realize that you have exaggerated what I did."

She shook her head. His obduracy made no impression on her, for she was free from doubts.

"We will be friends, if you like; but we can never be anything closer."

An inspiration seized him. "What would the girl whom Jim Daly loves, if there is one, say? She has never given him up, I wager."

Mary blushed at his unconscious divination. "I do not know," she said.

"But you are one person, Jim Daly is another. You have had every advantage; he is a— er— blatherskite. Yet you condescend to put yourself on a par with him, and condone the offence on the ground that your little world winks at it. Remember: 'Spirits are not finely touched But to fine issues.' How shall society progress, unless my sex insists on at least that patent of nobility in the men who woo us? I am reading you a lecture, but you insisted on it."

George stood for a moment silent. "You are right, I suppose." He lifted her hand to his lips and kissed it. Then he turned and left the room.

As he passed out, Mary heard the voices of the orphans, Joe and Frank, in the entry. The former in greeting her held out a letter which had just been delivered by the postman.

"You've come back, Miss Wellington," cried the little boy rapturously.

"Yes, Joe dear."

Mechanically she opened the envelope. As she read the contents she smiled faintly and nodded her head as much as to say that the news was not unexpected.

"But *noblesse oblige*," she murmured to herself proudly, not realizing that she had spoken aloud.

"What did you say, Miss Wellington?"

Mary recalled her musing wits. "I've something interesting to tell you, boys. Miss Burke is going to be married to Jim Daly. That is bad for you, dears, but partly to make up for it, I wish to let you know that there is no danger of my leaving you any more."

22: A House of Flames

Ernest O'Ferrall

1881-1925

The Bulletin, 3 July 1913

"WHAT do you think?" cried Miss Gummer, rapturously, bursting into the dining-room where the boarders lingered over the ruins of the Saturday midday dinner. Her eyes were sparkling with the excitement of a splendid discovery—something calculated to make the senior dowager sit up and to send flappers flying.

"No! What is it?" chorused all the females present. The male boarders who had reputations for politeness removed their pipes from their lips. The Perfect Brutes—there were three of them—smoked on doggedly.

"Oh, you'd never guess!" bubbled the news-bringer. "Well, Howard Surrey-Sussex and that other lovely actor have taken the place next door for the Sydney season!"

After the first breathless shock, little shrieks of rapture came from every part of the room. The women jumped up and down on their chairs, clapped their hands, and all but embraced one another. Miss Gummer, who had not even taken off her hat or disentangled her fingers the strings of eight minute brown-paper parcels—the trophies of the eternal bargain chase—was pelted with inquiries and exclamations.

"Oh, how perfectly lovely!"

"Is it true—really?"

"Who told you?"

"Are you sure?"

She waited triumphantly until the noise had abated, then went in the knock-out. "Oh, it's quite correct. They are coming across about three o'clock in Harold Stagehaunter's new launch—so you will be able to see for yourselves!"

She made a radiantly triumphant exit, and was back again in a hatless state before order had been restored.

The women waited upon her abjectly, and begged for whatever dregs of news she had left. Such a triumph had not been witnessed within the memory of the oldest surviving boarder. The room now being like a disturbed cage of parakeets, the men for the most part sat back in their chairs, and smiled indulgently at the pretty raptures of the female section. But Mr. Bodger, who had been interrupted in a masterly exposition of the tangle over the Speakership, stroked his impressive beard and glowered at the chatterers.

Suddenly two ladies started simultaneously to talk. The dead pause and usual polite wrangle as to who should go first enabled Bodger to edge in the first discord in the happy scene.

"I can't see," he boomed. "I can't, for the life of me, see what there is in these confounded actors to make a fuss about."

The scornful remark brought forth a chorus of protest from the ladies. Miss Gummer led the shrill attack on the scoffer.

"Surely, Mr. Bodger— surely you will allow us to admire genius! Why," she continued passionately, "the *Sunday Babbler* said last week that Surrey-Sussex was one of the greatest actors Australia had ever known!"

The worshippers murmured devoutly, and stared coldly at Bodger, who grew red in the face, and retorted with considerable heat and excessive violence.

"Well, the *Babbler's* wrong as usual! I know that Sussex fellow! He isn't any good— on the stage or off of it!"

This was too much. Even the men boarders joined in the uproar, and strove to point out to the flushed and defiant Bodger that the mime with the double-barrelled name had for years been playing principal parts to adoring audiences, and was a favorite with all playgoers.

"I don't care *what* you say!" boomed the staunch unbeliever. "Nothing will convince me that he's any good!"

After this had been repeated in a wild, reason-defying below about 20 times, the admirers of genius drew off in a breathless and overheated state.

The atmosphere then gradually cleared.

Lempson, the recognised "boy" of Miss Gummer, led off for the second round. Leaning forward, he inquired in a grave and friendly manner: "What is your objection to Surrey-Sussex, Mr. Bodger? Is it his limp you object to or his lisp?"

"I object to him altogether!" was Bodger's curt and unsatisfactory reply.

Lempson was unruffled. He admitted freely that he knew old Bodger's ways, and was evident he intended to gentle his fiery subject and extract what reasons, if any, he had for his dislike of the star.

"Don't you like him in any part?" he persisted insinuatingly.

"*I've never seen him act!*" boomed Bodger. "I wouldn't go across the street to see him. He's no good!"

Some of the astounded boarders broke into scornful laughter. Others turned away in hopeless gestures and pitying smiles.

"But you can't condemn a man offhand like that," cried Lempson amid the stir.

"No, indeed!" chattered Miss Gummer and several other angry ladies.

Bodger said "Pshaw!" and carefully flicked the crumbs off his waistcoat.

"But you can't, you know," wailed Lempson, warming to his work. "As a fair-minded man, you can't say Sussex is no good when you haven't seen him act."

"Yes I can," bellowed Bodger. "I don't want to see him act. I don't need to see him. I *know* he's no good!"

Lempson lost the remnants of his hitherto carefully-kept temper.

"Oh, that's just your stupid prejudice, or spite, or something!"

"It's nothing of the kind!" roared Bodger, now thoroughly roused.

"Oh, yes, it is!" insisted the desperate young man, while the company listened apprehensively. "It's just spite— idiotic spite! How on earth can you possibly know whether an actor's good or bad"

"No actor is any good!" proclaimed Bodger stormily. "I'm a damned sight older than you are, and I know that every actor is a damned mountebank, and not fit for decent society! I tell you, it makes me sick the fuss these tuppenny-ha'penny rags like the *Babbler* make over these scoundrels—putting silly ideas in women's heads, and making them run after the painted scamps! I never knew an actor yet that wasn't a brainless blackguard! D'ye think the women would run after them if they had *brains*? Bah! Why, damme, when I first came to this country years ago, I lived in the same house with a tallow-faced scoundrel that played Hamlet—"

Someone made the discovery that a beautiful white launch was approaching the landing stage at the foot of the cliff. There was a general stampede upstairs to the balcony commanding the view of the cliff steps and the next-door garden. There they all congregated in a whispering mass, and prepared— if such a thing were possible— to stare the actors out of countenance. They were quiet enough to be able to hear Bodger fidgeting and fussing in his room close by.

As the white boat swept up to the wharf, the watchers saw, sitting in deck chairs in front of the cabin, two gracefully-posed figures in white flannels, and carefully tilted grey hats. Those hats were so exquisitely poised that they might have been placed in position by women. An ostrich feather apiece might have been added without spoiling the general effect. The two wearers were immediately identified with delighted cries, and the crowd settled down to watch the disembarkation and approach to the hired house.

It was well stage-managed. The launch swept up neatly to the wharf, and Stagehaunter's two paid hands made it fast. Then, with practised grace, the stars rose languidly from their chairs and sauntered ashore, with many graceful hand-waves and peals of insincere but beautifully modulated laughter. Some light banter in high, clear tones, as the launch, with Stagehaunter at the wheel, backed away, served to rivet the attention of the water front on them; which

much accomplished, they began the ascent of the steps. This was taken very slowly, with several halts, during which they posed like generals conferring on a height, and drew each other's attention to the view, satisfying themselves by rapid, sidelong glances that they were holding their audience. But, hungry as they were for attention, the concentrated glare of the packed and breathless balcony load seemed to almost unman— or unactor— them when, at last, they arrived at their own front gate.

Surrey-Sussex, who was the first to notice the boarders, faltered in his performance, and remarked in an irritable aside, quite audible to the onlookers: "I say! Look at all those people up theah!"

The resplendent Montmorency looked as commanded, and recoiled gracefully. "Oh, I sa-y! What a dreadful crowd!"

"Tell them they mustn't stare so!" directed his chief, pettishly.

Though the balcony fiends were only a few feet above his head. Montmorency, through force of habit, put his hand to his mouth.

"Hallo, there, you people! Don't stare so, please!"

The stupid group made no sound or move.

"Oh, tell them to go away!" cried the great but disconcerted actor. "I simply *won't* be stared out of countenance in my own garden."

"You've got to go away, please!" cried the transmitter of orders appealingly. Do go away, like dear, good people, and don't *stare* so."

After a slight pause, the abashed group or heap of the balcony stirred and started to disintegrate.

"Have you people finished looking at those damned barnstormers?" shouted Bodger from his roon.

Mrs Tribbens, who had joined the watchers on tiptoe during the actors splendid entrance, and who had not had time to have a really good stare, put her finger to her lips warningly.

"Sh-h-h! Don't speak so *loud* Mr. Bodger! They just told us not to stare so, and to go away."

"*Who* told you that, ma'am?"

"The actors did, Mr. Bodger."

Bodger blew out his cheeks and dilated his eyes. "D'ye mean to to tell me—
"

Without finishing the sentence, he strode to the rail, and, stroking his beard, stared long and contemptuously at the stars below.

"You've got to go away," cried Montmorency. "Don't stand and stare when we—"

"*What!*" shouted Bodger. "D'ye think I'm going to be ordered off my own balcony by a filthy barnstormer like *you*! Mind your own business and keep a civil tongue in your head or you'll get a flogging you won't forget."

"Come away, Montmorency," entreated the dismayed Sussex. "Come away, for Heaven's sake, and let the old ruffian discharge his Billingsgate at someone else. We shouldn't have noticed him at all."

Miss Gummer wrung her hands in front of the old landlady. "Mrs Tribbens," she gasped tragically, "You see! Mr Bodger's gone and offended those perfectly *wonderful* men, and now we'll never get to know them well enough get their names in our autograph books. It's simply dshameful the way he insulta people! I am sure they will put us down as horrid second-raters, and despise the the whole lot of us. Oh, it does make me so *angry*!"

"He is hasty," said Mrs Tribbens sorrowfully. "But what can I do, my dear? He is a gentleman, and he means well. But he's so vi'lent," she added thoughtfully, "so fearfully vi'lent and hasty!" She edged away, muttering consolation, and disappeared down the stairs.

FOR the next two weeks the actors next door were the sole topic of conversation amongst the women of the household. Their comings and goings, their elegance, their clothes, visitors and pastimes— upon these topics they breakfasted, dined, supped and afternoon- and morning tea-ed. A sudden flurry on the landing or a wild, rustling charge upstairs meant that Surrey-Sussex, beautifully dressed for the occasion, was about to push a razor-edged mower over the already close-clipped slip of lawn, or indulge in some other light outdoor amusement.

Meanwhile, Montmorency, faultlessly attired and gracefully posed on a ladder, snipped leaves and twigs off the creeper with a new pair of shears. They did not garden roughly in old clothes, or grub about usefully like ordinary humans. They simply made gardening an excuse for appearing in exquisite shirts and incomparable ties, and hats of the most expensive varieties. Everything they did was observed, faithfullv reported and excitedly discussed by the womenfolk at meal-time— also before and after. Bodger brought down numerous storms on his head by his fiercely insulting comments; but nothing could burst the theatrical boom, and the only satisfaction he got was when he stared down from his balcony until he drove the actors indoors.

Then came a cold day and colder night of drizzling rain which sent the household of Bodger early to bed, and made of the great, rambling establishment a hash-tower of darkness, long before the late boats from the city landed their little groups of shivering play-goers on the wet and windy wharf. Bodger himself was one of the first to retire; and he remarked to Mrs.

Tribbens, whom he met on the stairs on his way up, that he was glad on such a night to feel he was home, "instead of humbugging about a theatre like *some* silly women." (Miss Gummer had at the last minute decided, after changing and rechanging her mind, to brave the perils of the dark and go and witness for the ninth time "The Grand Duke's Marriage," the play in which everyone agreed the great Sussex was at his best.)

AT 11.50 poor Miss Gummer was standing at the gangway of the second-last boat, in the sacred shadow of the haughty star himself, when she happened to glance up at the shadowy house-littered hill towards which the craft was gliding. She was struck hysterical by the sight of long, red flames issuing from the top-storey window of one of the dark buildings, and licking at the roof shingles. A second terrified glance showed her that it was Mrs. Tribbens's place. Her shrill scream shocked the whole drowsy company, and made Surrey-Sussex and his lieutenant give real starts.

"What's the matter! Hyah, I say! What's the matter? Has someone fallen over the side?"

Miss Gummer extended a rigid arm, laughed mirthlessly and sobbed : "See! The house! It's on fire!"

The slowing boat at that moment grazed the pontoon, and the three— Miss Gummer, Surrey-Sussex and Montmorency— rushed tumultuously ashore and sped up the dark steps, calling like three escaped lunatics to the unconscious and invisible inmates of the tall, dead premises on the silent hillside.

"Fire!" shrieked the three. "Fire! FIRE!"

A window somewhere squealed up, and a white square of light appeared as the startled person behind it lit the gas.

"FIRE!!!"

Two more windows further away went up, and a front door opened. Someone came running.

"Where's the fire?"

"In that haouse theah!" panted Sussex importantly. He turned to the ever-ready Montmorency.

"Ring up the brigade, while I knock them up! Come on. Miss—er!"

With Miss Gummer sobbing in his tracks, he made for the front door of Mrs. Tribbens's place, and kicked and shouted: "Within there! Ho! FIAH!!!"

At last a wavering light came swiftly down the hall, chains rattled, and the door swung back revealing a man in pyjamas whose eyes were only half-open. "What's the matter?" he said. Surrey-Sussex struck an attitude and exclaimed: "The haouse! It's on *fiah*, man! Raouse everyone! FIAH!!!"

The dazed boarder opened his mouth, put down his guttering candle with a clatter, and stumbled up the hall yelling. Thin, acrid smoke swept out of the dark tunnel into the white faces of the star and Miss Gummer, and the subdued but ominous hum of wind-blown flames came to their ears. The dark house—terribly like a place of death—seemed to breathe a threat at them not to enter. It was undoubtedly the right tragic atmosphere. As the house awoke to Lempson's hysterical cries, Montmorency ran up panting.

"Got the fire brigade! They're coming now! What'll I do next?"

Surrey-Sussex flung out an arm.

"The hose! There's not a moment to be lost! Hurry, Montmorency! Remember, there are lives depending on it!"

Montmorency fled to obey, and Surrey-Sussex struck another attitude at the door, through which frenzied and unrecognisable figures were beginning to shoot, scuttle and stagger. No one having had sense enough to light the gas, the fugitives merely fled from the smoky darkness in front of the star into the darkness and confusion behind him. No one seemed to have any idea what sort of a hold the flames had on the house. Dim boarders darted here and there with extraordinary speed, begging for particulars and shouting inquiries for lost friends amongst the wavering, terrified pyjama ghosts, and the animated bundles which represented women. The frenzied hunt would not have been so hopeless if no strangers had been present. But by this time half the neighborhood had risen from its bed, and, arrayed in odds and ends of clothing, rushed down to witness the destruction. Amongst the dark, scattered crowd of expectant onlookers, half the disorganised pack of Mrs. Tribbens coursed vainly in search of the other half. The remarkable slowness of the fire in blazing up and illuminating the scene helped to keep the round game going at a high speed.

Without warning a high shriek cleft the medley of noises. "Oh! it's raining, again! We're saved! The house won't burn now! It's raining!"

It wasn't— it was only Montmorency making his futile attempt to hose from the actors' garden the second-storey window of the burning house. He had drenched half the crowd before someone discovered him and forced him to stop. He then joined his fussing superior in front of the doomed mansion, and helped him in a fine but almost unnoticed series of tableaux expressive of heroic grief and Man's utter helplessness in the face of overwhelming disaster. Unfortunately the necessary background of flaming ruins was absent; so the performance had to be given in the murky hallway. The only person who commented on it was the sharp-eyed pantryman from next door, and he merely asked— after requesting to be struck dead— "what them there blokes

thought they was doin'?" A ripple of malicious laughter ran through the crowd. At the same moment a glad shout went up, "Here's the brigade!"

Surrey-Sussex and Montmorency turned at the rumble of wheels, and saw in the distance a couple of big hose-cart lamps lurching down the rough road at the back. The fire flared up in welcome, and the crowd started to buzz uselessly in a higher key. The firemen pulled up at the back of the house. The crowd cheered and fixed its attention on the flashing helmets now busy over lengths of hose. The two actors were utterly unnoticed for several minutes. Then a female voice wailed piercingly, "Mr. Bodger! Where's Mr. *Bodger*?"

There was an instant's hush. No answer.

Voices everywhere shouted in the dark, "Bodger! Where's Bodger? Speak up, Bodger!"

Still no answer— only the horrified buzz of the frightened crowd and the fiercer roar of the flames.

The woman's voice shrieked again, "*He's in the house! It started in his room!*"

A roar went up from the crowd. All eyes turned again to the front door, where Surrey-Sussex and Montmorency were posing for their lives.

A couple of stout and indifferent firemen dragging a hose shouldered past the actors and ran fearlessly up the smoke-veiled stairs. On the first landing, a stout, pyjama'd figure stumbled past them. It was Bodger— alive and unsinged, but furious with alarm.

"Why didn't they wake me?" he bellowed as he ran. "Why didn't they wake me?"

The firemen sped upwards without answering. Bodger bounded on and came within sight of those standing before the front door.

"Bodger's coming!" was telegraphed round the crowd. Cheers were given, and everyone crowded forward to greet him.

He was only a few steps from the bottom when Surrey-Sussex dashed forward, followed by Montmorency. The breathless actors bounded up to meet him, grasped an arm apiece, and, before he knew what they were about, were half lifting and half dragging him towards the front door.

"Courage!" panted Sussex. "Courage, Father! We'll save you!"

"Bah!" howled Bodger, and made extraordinary efforts to wrench himself from their devoted grip.

"Let me go, damn you! Let me go! I'll 'Father' you!"

The three rolled and staggered drunkenly together.

"Come on! We'll save you!" gasped Sussex, shoving and dragging at the captive, who was falling over umbrella-stands and other furniture.

Bodger snorted and plunged like a draught horse, but failed to get away. "Damn you, I saved myself! Let me go!" They crashed against the wall and fought on, amid the wreckage of a bandbox, a brown paper parcel and an old coat.

The amazed crowd without cheered wildly. It seemed to refresh the actors. They dragged with renewed strength, and Sussex again gasped "Father," and urged Bodger to have courage.

Bodger howled in his beard. "You— call me 'Father' again—I'll *flog* you! *Let me go, you scoundrels! Hands off!!*" (Frightful shoving and reeling. Frantic cheers from the crowd.) "Will you let me— *bah!*"

"We'll— save— you!" sobbed Sussex grimly.

"Now, Montmorency!" Montmorency responded nobly at the right moment. They put their shoulders under Bodger's arms and rushed, him into the night amidst cheers and hysterical laughter, barking his shins against a shrub. He kicked weakly at them as they dropped him amongst the crowd.

"I'll prosecute them!" he raved. "Assault and battery— I'll prosecute them and flog them!"

Hardly anybody heard him. They were all cheering the winded and deadly-serious actors, who were some little distance off, being interviewed by the only fully-dressed man in the crowd. It turned out afterwards he was a reporter who had seen the flames from the city and hurried across in the last boat.

Before the excitement over the rescue had abated, the two firemen unexpectedly emerged with their hose. Being assailed by a number of the interested parties, they replied briefly:

"Yes, the blanky fire was out, and for Gossake get off them there 'ose— we want to take it 'ome with us."

They were allowed to depart without further hindrance.

The crowd stood about in the sudden darkness, chattering, and waiting for something more to happen, or for a band to play the first bar or two of the Anthem. Nothing more happened, and of course no band played.

The night— now morning— became colder. Rain began to fall— softly and steadily, as if commencing a steady, all-day job. The crowd reluctantly went off shivering, and the Tribbens household decided by slow stages to make the experiment of sleeping in a partially-burnt tenement. The women went in first in twos and threes. The men followed in a solid, talkative bunch, with Bodger, raving incoherently, in their midst.

NEXT morning the first Tribbensite to read the paper found that Bodger had become the best advertisement of Surrey-Sussex. The principal daily had half a column on the cable page headed "Plucky Rescue— Gallantry of Two

Well-known Actors— Old Man Snatched From the Flames." In the report, Bodger's forcible abduction from the perfectly safe hall of Tribbens, and the dragging of him through the umbrella-stand was made to appear as the heroic exploit of two dauntless super-men. It was hinted that his struggles were the result of abject fear. No one had the courage to convey the news to the victim. But the marked paper was sent up to him by Alice, the prehistoric serving-maid, just before breakfast. There was no sign for five minutes. Then an upstairs door was heard to open and slam like a 12-inch gun and a few fragments of the valuable journal fluttered down into the hall.

23: The Lost Room***Fitz-James O'Brien***

1828-1862

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IT WAS oppressively warm. The sun had long disappeared, but seemed to have left its vital spirit of heat behind it. The air rested; the leaves of the acacia-trees that shrouded my windows hung plumb-like on their delicate stalks. The smoke of my cigar scarce rose above my head, but hung about me in a pale blue cloud, which I had to dissipate with languid waves of my hand. My shirt was open at the throat, and my chest heaved laboriously in the effort to catch some breaths of fresher air. The noises of the city seemed to be wrapped in slumber, and the shrilling of the mosquitos was the only sound that broke the stillness.

As I lay with my feet elevated on the back of a chair, wrapped in that peculiar frame of mind in which thought assumes a species of lifeless motion, the strange fancy seized me of making a languid inventory of the principal articles of furniture in my room. It was a task well suited to the mood in which I found myself. Their forms were duskily defined in the dim twilight that floated shadowily through the chamber; it was no labour to note and particularize each, and from the place where I sat I could command a view of all my possessions without even turning my head.

There was, *imprimis*, that ghostly lithograph by Calame. It was a mere black spot on the white wall, but my inner vision scrutinized every detail of the picture. A wild, desolate, midnight heath, with a spectral oak-tree in the centre of the foreground. The wind blows fiercely, and the jagged branches, clothed scantily with ill-grown leaves, are swept to the left continually by its giant force.

A formless wrack of clouds streams across the awful sky, and the rain sweeps almost parallel with the horizon. Beyond, the heath stretches off into endless blackness, in the extreme of which either fancy or art has conjured up some undefinable shapes that seem riding into space. At the base of the huge oak stands a shrouded figure. His mantle is wound by the blast in tight folds around his form, and the long cock's feather in his hat is blown upright, till it seems as if it stood on end with fear. His features are not visible, for he has grasped his cloak with both hands, and drawn it from either side across his face. The picture is seemingly objectless. It tells no tale, but there is a weird power about it that haunts one, and it was for that I bought it.

Next to the picture comes the round blot that hangs below it, which I know to be a smoking-cap. It has my coat of arms embroidered on the front, and for that reason I never wear it; though, when properly arranged on my head, with

its long blue silken tassel hanging down by my cheek, I believe it becomes me well. I remember the time when it was in the course of manufacture. I remember the tiny little hands that pushed the coloured silks so nimbly through the cloth that was stretched on the embroidery-frame,— the vast trouble I was put to to get a coloured copy of my armorial bearings for the heraldic work which was to decorate the front of the band,— the pursings up of the little mouth, and the contractions of the young forehead, as their possessor plunged into a profound sea of cogitation touching the way in which the cloud should be represented from which the armed hand, that is my crest, issues,— the heavenly moment when the tiny hands placed it on my head, in a position that I could not bear for more than a few seconds, and I, kinglike, immediately assumed my royal prerogative after the coronation, and instantly levied a tax on my only subjects which was, however, not paid unwillingly. Ah! the cap is there, but the embroiderer has fled; for Atropos was severing the web of life above her head while she was weaving that silken shelter for mine!

How uncouthly the huge piano that occupies the corner at the left of the door looms out in the uncertain twilight! I neither play nor sing, yet I own a piano. It is a comfort to me to look at it, and to feel that the music is there, although I am not able to break the spell that binds it. It is pleasant to know that Bellini and Mozart, Cimarosa, Porpora, Glück and all such,— or at least their souls,— sleep in that unwieldy case. There lie embalmed, as it were, all operas, sonatas, oratorios, nocturnos, marches, songs and dances, that ever climbed into existence through the four bars that wall in melody. Once I was entirely repaid for the investment of my funds in that instrument which I never use. Blokeeta, the composer, came to see me. Of course his instincts urged him as irresistibly to my piano as if some magnetic power lay within it compelling him to approach. He tuned it, he played on it. All night long, until the gray and spectral dawn rose out of the depths of the midnight, he sat and played, and I lay smoking by the window listening. Wild, unearthly, and sometimes insufferably painful, were the improvisations of Blokeeta. The chords of the instrument seemed breaking with anguish. Lost souls shrieked in his dismal preludes; the half-heard utterances of spirits in pain, that groped at inconceivable distances from anything lovely or harmonious, seemed to rise dimly up out of the waves of sound that gathered under his hands. Melancholy human love wandered out on distant heaths, or beneath dank and gloomy cypresses, murmuring its unanswered sorrow, or hateful gnomes sported and sang in the stagnant swamps triumphing in unearthly tones over the knight whom they had lured to his death. Such was Blokeeta's night's entertainment; and when he at length closed the piano, and hurried away through the cold

morning, he left a memory about the instrument from which I could never escape.

Those snow-shoes that hang in the space between the mirror and the door recall Canadian wanderings,— a long race through the dense forests, over the frozen snow through whose brittle crust the slender hoofs of the caribou that we were pursuing sank at every step, until the poor creature despairingly turned at bay in a small juniper coppice, and we heartlessly shot him down. And I remember how Gabriel, the *habitant*, and François, the half-breed, cut his throat, and how the hot blood rushed out in a torrent over the snowy soil; and I recall the snow *cabane* that Gabriel built, where we all three slept so warmly; and the great fire that glowed at our feet, painting all kinds of demoniac shapes on the black screen of forest that lay without; and the deer-steaks that we roasted for our breakfast; and the savage drunkenness of Gabriel in the morning, he having been privately drinking out of my brandy-flask all the night long.

That long haftless dagger that dangles over the mantelpiece makes my heart swell. I found it, when a boy, in a hoary old castle in which one of my maternal ancestors once lived. That same ancestor— who, by the way, yet lives in history— was a strange old sea-king, who dwelt on the extremest point of the southwestern coast of Ireland. He owned the whole of that fertile island called Inniskeiran, which directly faces Cape Clear, where between them the Atlantic rolls furiously, forming what the fishermen of the place call "the Sound." An awful place in winter is that same Sound. On certain days no boat can live there for a moment, and Cape Clear is frequently cut off for days from any communication with the mainland.

This old sea-king— Sir Florence O'Driscoll by name— passed a stormy life. From the summit of his castle he watched the ocean, and when any richly laden vessels bound from the South to the industrious Galway merchants, hove in sight, Sir Florence hoisted the sails of his galley, and it went hard with him if he did not tow into harbor ship and crew. In this way he lived; not a very honest mode of livelihood, certainly, according to our modern ideas, but quite reconcilable with the morals of the time. As may be supposed, Sir Florence got into trouble. Complaints were laid against him at the English court by the plundered merchants, and the Irish viking set out for London, to plead his own cause before good Queen Bess, as she was called. He had one powerful recommendation: he was a marvellously handsome man. Not Celtic by descent, but half Spanish, half Danish in blood, he had the great northern stature with the regular features, flashing eyes, and dark hair of the Iberian race. This may account for the fact that his stay at the English court was much longer than was necessary, as also for the tradition, which a local historian

mentions, that the English Queen evinced a preference for the Irish chieftain, of other nature than that usually shown by monarch to subject.

Previous to his departure, Sir Florence had intrusted the care of his property to an Englishman named Hull. During the long absence of the knight, this person managed to ingratiate himself with the local authorities, and gain their favour so far that they were willing to support him in almost any scheme. After a protracted stay, Sir Florence, pardoned of all his misdeeds, returned to his home. Home no longer. Hull was in possession, and refused to yield an acre of the lands he had so nefariously acquired. It was no use appealing to the law, for its officers were in the opposite interest. It was no use appealing to the Queen, for she had another lover, and had forgotten the poor Irish knight by this time; and so the viking passed the best portion of his life in unsuccessful attempts to reclaim his vast estates, and was eventually, in his old age, obliged to content himself with his castle by the sea and the island of Inniskeiran, the only spot of which the usurper was unable to deprive him. So this old story of my kinsman's fate looms up out of the darkness that enshrouds that haftless dagger hanging on the wall.

It was somewhat after the foregoing fashion that I dreamily made the inventory of my personal property. As I turned my eyes on each object, one after the other,— or the places where they lay, for the room was now so dark that it was almost impossible to see with any distinctness,— a crowd of memories connected with each rose up before me, and, perforce, I had to indulge them. So I proceeded but slowly, and at last my cigar shortened to a hot and bitter morsel that I could barely hold between my lips, while it seemed to me that the night grew each moment more insufferably oppressive. While I was revolving some impossible means of cooling my wretched body, the cigar stump began to burn my lips. I flung it angrily through the open window, and stooped out to watch it falling. It first lighted on the leaves of the acacia, sending out a spray of red sparkles, then, rolling off, it fell plump on the dark walk in the garden, faintly illuminating for a moment the dusky trees and breathless flowers. Whether it was the contrast between the red flash of the cigar-stump and the silent darkness of the garden, or whether it was that I detected by the sudden light a faint waving of the leaves, I know not; but something suggested to me that the garden was cool. I will take a turn there, thought I, just as I am; it cannot be warmer than this room, and however still the atmosphere, there is always a feeling of liberty and spaciousness in the open air, that partially supplies one's wants. With this idea running through my head, I arose, lit another cigar, and passed out into the long, intricate corridors that led to the main staircase. As I crossed the threshold of my room, with

what a different feeling I should have passed it had I known that I was never to set foot in it again!

I lived in a very large house, in which I occupied two rooms on the second floor. The house was old-fashioned, and all the floors communicated by a huge circular staircase that wound up through the centre of the building, while at every landing long, rambling corridors stretched off into mysterious nooks and corners. This palace of mine was very high, and its resources, in the way of crannies and windings, seemed to be interminable. Nothing seemed to stop anywhere. Cul-de-sacs were unknown on the premises. The corridors and passages, like mathematical lines, seemed capable of indefinite extension, and the object of the architect must have been to erect an edifice in which people might go ahead forever. The whole place was gloomy, not so much because it was large, but because an unearthly nakedness seemed to pervade the structure. The staircases, corridors, halls, and vestibules all partook of a desert-like desolation. There was nothing on the walls to break the sombre monotony of those long vistas of shade. No carvings on the wainscoting, no moulded masks peering down from the simply severe cornices, no marble vases on the landings. There was an eminent dreariness and want of life— so rare in an American establishment— all over the abode. It was Hood's haunted house put in order and newly painted. The servants, too, were shadowy, and chary of their visits. Bells rang three times before the gloomy chambermaid could be induced to present herself; and the negro waiter, a ghoul-like looking creature from Congo, obeyed the summons only when one's patience was exhausted or one's want satisfied in some other way. When he did come, one felt sorry that he had not stayed away altogether, so sullen and savage did he appear. He moved along the echoless floors with a slow, noiseless shamle, until his dusky figure, advancing from the gloom, seemed like some reluctant afreet, compelled by the superior power of his master to disclose himself. When the doors of all the chambers were closed, and no light illuminated the long corridor save the red, unwholesome glare of a small oil lamp on a table at the end, where late lodgers lit their candles, one could not by any possibility conjure up a sadder or more desolate prospect.

Yet the house suited me. Of meditative and sedentary habits, I enjoyed the extreme quiet. There were but few lodgers, from which I infer that the landlord did not drive a very thriving trade; and these, probably oppressed by the sombre spirit of the place, were quiet and ghost-like in their movements. The proprietor I scarcely ever saw. My bills were deposited by unseen hands every month on my table, while I was out walking or riding, and my pecuniary response was intrusted to the attendant afreet. On the whole, when the bustling, wide-awake spirit of New York is taken into consideration, the

sombre, half-vivified character of the house in which I lived was an anomaly that no one appreciated better than I who lived there.

I felt my way down the wide, dark staircase in my pursuit of zephyrs. The garden, as I entered it, did feel somewhat cooler than my own room, and I puffed my cigar along the dim, cypress-shrouded walks with a sensation of comparative relief. It was very dark. The tall-growing flowers that bordered the path were so wrapped in gloom as to present the aspect of solid pyramidal masses, all the details of leaves and blossoms being buried in an embracing darkness, while the trees had lost all form, and seemed like masses of overhanging cloud. It was a place and time to excite the imagination; for in the impenetrable cavities of endless gloom there was room for the most riotous fancies to play at will. I walked and walked, and the echoes of my footsteps on the ungravelled and mossy path suggested a double feeling. I felt alone and yet in company at the same time. The solitariness of the place made itself distinct enough in the stillness, broken alone by the hollow reverberations of my step, while those very reverberations seemed to imbue me with an undefined feeling that I was not alone. I was not, therefore, much startled when I was suddenly accosted from beneath the solid darkness of an immense cypress by a voice saying, "Will you give me a light, sir?"

"Certainly," I replied, trying in vain to distinguish the speaker amidst the impenetrable dark.

Somebody advanced, and I held out my cigar. All I could gather definitively about the individual who thus accosted me was that he must have been of extremely small stature; for I, who am by no means an overgrown man, had to stoop considerably in handing him my cigar. The vigorous puff that he gave his own lighted up my Havana for a moment, and I fancied that I caught a glimpse of long, wild hair. The flash was, however, so momentary that I could not even say certainly whether this was an actual impression or the mere effort of imagination to embody that which the senses had failed to distinguish.

"Sir, you are out late," said this unknown to me, as he, with half-uttered thanks, handed me back my cigar, for which I had to grope in the gloom.

"Not later than usual," I replied, dryly.

"Hum! you are fond of late wanderings, then?"

"That is just as the fancy seizes me."

"Do you live here?"

"Yes."

"Queer house, isn't it?"

"I have only found it quiet."

"Hum! But you *will* find it queer, take my word for it." This was earnestly uttered; and I felt at the same time a bony finger laid on my arm, that cut it sharply like a blunted knife.

"I cannot take your word for any such assertion," I replied rudely, shaking off the bony finger with an irrepressible motion of disgust.

"No offence, no offence," muttered my unseen companion rapidly, in a strange, subdued voice, that would have been shrill had it been louder; "your being angry does not alter the matter. You will find it a queer house. Everybody finds it a queer house. Do you know who live there?"

"I never busy myself, sir, about other people's affairs," I answered sharply, for the individual's manner, combined with my utter uncertainty as to his appearance, oppressed me with an irksome longing to be rid of him.

"O, you don't? Well, I do. I know what they are— well, well, well!" and as he pronounced the three last words his voice rose with each, until, with the last, it reached a shrill shriek that echoed horribly among the lonely walks. "Do you know what they eat?" he continued.

"No, sir,— nor care."

"O, but you will care. You must care. You shall care. I'll tell you what they are. They are enchanters. They are ghouls. They are cannibals. Did you never remark their eyes, and how they gloated on you when you passed? Did you never remark the food that they served up at your table? Did you never in the dead of night hear muffled and unearthly footsteps gliding along the corridors, and stealthy hands turning the handle of your door? Does not some magnetic influence fold itself continually around you when they pass, and send a thrill through spirit and body, and a cold shiver that no sunshine will chase away? O, you have! You have felt all these things! I know it!"

The earnest rapidity, the subdued tones, the eagerness of accent, with which all this was uttered, impressed me most uncomfortably. It really seemed as if I could recall all those weird occurrences and influences of which he spoke; and I shuddered in spite of myself in the midst of the impenetrable darkness that surrounded me.

"Hum!" said I, assuming, without knowing it, a confidential tone, "may I ask you how you know these things?"

"How I know them? Because I am their enemy; because they tremble at my whisper; because I hang upon their track with the perseverance of a bloodhound and the stealthiness of a tiger; because— because— I was *of* them once!"

"Wretch!" I cried excitedly, for involuntarily his eager tones had wrought me up to a high pitch of spasmodic nervousness, "then you mean to say that you—"

As I uttered this word, obeying an uncontrollable impulse, I stretched forth my hand in the direction of the speaker and made a blind clutch. The tips of my fingers seemed to touch a surface as smooth as glass, that glided suddenly from under them. A sharp, angry hiss sounded through the gloom, followed by a whirring noise, as if some projectile passed rapidly by, and the next moment I felt instinctively that I was alone.

A most disagreeable feeling instantly assailed me;— a prophetic instinct that some terrible misfortune menaced me; an eager and overpowering anxiety to get back to my own room without loss of time. I turned and ran blindly along the dark cypress alley, every dusky clump of flowers that rose blackly in the borders making my heart each moment cease to beat. The echoes of my own footsteps seemed to redouble and assume the sounds of unknown pursuers following fast upon my track. The boughs of lilac-bushes and syringas, that here and there stretched partly across the walk, seemed to have been furnished suddenly with hooked hands that sought to grasp me as I flew by, and each moment I expected to behold some awful and impassable barrier fall across my track and wall me up forever.

At length I reached the wide entrance. With a single leap I sprang up the four or five steps that formed the stoop, and dashed along the hall, up the wide, echoing stairs, and again along the dim, funereal corridors until I paused, breathless and panting, at the door of my room. Once so far, I stopped for an instant and leaned heavily against one of the panels, panting lustily after my late run. I had, however, scarcely rested my whole weight against the door, when it suddenly gave way, and I staggered in head-foremost. To my utter astonishment the room I had left in profound darkness was now a blaze of light. So intense was the illumination that, for a few seconds while the pupils of my eyes were contracting under the sudden change, I saw absolutely nothing save the dazzling glare. This fact in itself, coming on me with such utter suddenness, was sufficient to prolong my confusion, and it was not until after several minutes had elapsed that I perceived the room was not only illuminated, but occupied. And such occupants! Amazement at the scene took such possession of me that I was incapable of either moving or uttering a word. All that I could do was to lean against the wall, and stare blankly at the strange picture.

It might have been a scene out of *Faublas*, or *Gramont's Memoirs*, or happened in some palace of Minister *Foucque*.

Round a large table in the centre of the room, where I had left a student-like litter of books and papers, were seated half a dozen persons. Three were men and three were women. The table was heaped with a prodigality of luxuries. Luscious eastern fruits were piled up in silver filigree vases, through

whose meshes their glowing rinds shone in the contrasts of a thousand hues. Small silver dishes that Benvenuto might have designed, filled with succulent and aromatic meats, were distributed upon a cloth of snowy damask. Bottles of every shape, slender ones from the Rhine, stout fellows from Holland, sturdy ones from Spain, and quaint basket-woven flasks from Italy, absolutely littered the board. Drinking-glasses of every size and hue filled up the interstices, and the thirsty German flagon stood side by side with the aërial bubbles of Venetian glass that rest so lightly on their threadlike stems. An odour of luxury and sensuality floated through the apartment. The lamps that burned in every direction seemed to diffuse a subtle incense on the air, and in a large vase that stood on the floor I saw a mass of magnolias, tuberoses, and jasmines grouped together, stifling each other with their honeyed and heavy fragrance.

The inhabitants of my room seemed beings well suited to so sensual an atmosphere. The women were strangely beautiful, and all were attired in dresses of the most fantastic devices and brilliant hues. Their figures were round, supple, and elastic; their eyes dark and languishing; their lips full, ripe, and of the richest bloom. The three men wore half-masks, so that all I could distinguish were heavy jaws, pointed beards, and brawny throats that rose like massive pillars out of their doublets. All six lay reclining on Roman couches about the table, drinking down the purple wines in large draughts, and tossing back their heads and laughing wildly.

I stood, I suppose, for some three minutes, with my back against the wall staring vacantly at the bacchanal vision, before any of the revellers appeared to notice my presence. At length, without any expression to indicate whether I had been observed from the beginning or not, two of the women arose from their couches, and, approaching, took each a hand and led me to the table. I obeyed their motions mechanically. I sat on a couch, between them as they indicated. I unresistingly permitted them to wind their arms about my neck.

"You must drink," said one, pouring out a large glass of red wine, "here is Clos Vougeout of a rare vintage; and here," pushing a flask of amber-hued wine before me, "is Lachryma Christi."

"You must eat," said the other, drawing the silver dishes toward her. "Here are cutlets stewed with olives, and here are slices of a *filet* stuffed with bruised sweet chestnuts"—and as she spoke, she, without waiting for a reply, proceeded to help me.

The sight of the food recalled to me the warnings I had received in the garden. This sudden effort of memory restored to me my other faculties at the same instant. I sprang to my feet, thrusting the women from me with each hand.

"Demons!" I almost shouted. "I will have none of your accursed food. I know you. You are cannibals, you are ghouls, you are enchanters. Begone, I tell you! Leave my room in peace!"

A shout of laughter from all six was the only effect that my passionate speech produced. The men rolled on their couches, and their half-masks quivered with the convulsions of their mirth. The women shrieked, and tossed the slender wine-glasses wildly aloft, and turned to me and flung themselves on my bosom fairly sobbing with laughter.

"Yes," I continued, as soon as the noisy mirth had subsided, "yes, I say, leave my room instantly! I will have none of your unnatural orgies here!"

"His room!" shrieked the woman on my right.

"His room!" echoed she on my left.

"His room! He calls it his room!" shouted the whole party, as they rolled once more into jocular convulsions.

"How know you that it is your room?" said one of the men who sat opposite to me, at length, after the laughter had once more somewhat subsided.

"How do I know?" I replied indignantly. "How do I know my own room? How could I mistake it, pray? There's my furniture— my piano—"

"He calls that a piano," shouted my neighbours, again in convulsions as I pointed to the corner where my huge piano, sacred to the memory of Blokeeta, used to stand. "O, yes! It is his room. There— there is his piano!"

The peculiar emphasis they laid on the word "piano" caused me to scrutinize the article I was indicating more thoroughly. Up to this time, though utterly amazed at the entrance of these people into my chamber, and connecting them somewhat with the wild stories I had heard in the garden, I still had a sort of indefinite idea that the whole thing was a masquerading freak got up in my absence, and that the bacchanalian orgie I was witnessing was nothing more than a portion of some elaborate hoax of which I was to be the victim. But when my eyes turned to the corner where I had left a huge and cumbrous piano, and beheld a vast and sombre organ lifting its fluted front to the very ceiling, and convinced myself, by a hurried process of memory, that it occupied the very spot in which I had left my own instrument, the little self-possession that I had left forsook me. I gazed around me bewildered.

In like manner everything was changed. In the place of that old haftless dagger, connected with so many historic associations personal to myself, I beheld a Turkish yataghan dangling by its belt of crimson silk, while the jewels in the hilt blazed as the lamplight played upon them. In the spot where hung my cherished smoking cap, memorial of a buried love, a knightly casque was suspended on the crest of which a golden dragon stood in the act of springing.

That strange lithograph of Calame was no longer a lithograph, but it seemed to me that the portion of the wall which it covered, of the exact shape and size, had been cut out, and, in place of the picture, a *real* scene on the same scale, and with real actors, was distinctly visible. The old oak was there, and the stormy sky was there; but I saw the branches of the oak sway with the tempest, and the clouds drive before the wind. The wanderer in his cloak was gone; but in his place I beheld a circle of wild figures, men and women, dancing with linked hands around the hole of the great tree, chanting some wild fragment of a song, to which the winds roared an unearthly chorus. The snow-shoes, too, on whose sinewy woof I had sped for many days amidst Canadian wastes, had vanished, and in their place lay a pair of strange up-curved Turkish slippers, that had, perhaps, been many a time shuffled off at the doors of mosques, beneath the steady blaze of an orient sun.

All was changed. Wherever my eyes turned they missed familiar objects, yet encountered strange representatives. Still, in all the substitutes there seemed to me a reminiscence of what they replaced. They seemed only for a time transmuted into other shapes, and there lingered around them the atmosphere of what they once had been. Thus I could have sworn the room to have been mine, yet there was nothing in it that I could rightly claim. Everything reminded me of some former possession that it was not. I looked for the acacia at the window, and lo! long silken palm-leaves swayed in through the open lattice; yet they had the same motion and the same air of my favourite tree, and seemed to murmur to me, "Though we seem to be palm-leaves, yet are we acacia-leaves; yea, those very ones on which you used to watch the butterflies alight and the rain patter while you smoked and dreamed!" So in all things; the room was, yet was not, mine; and a sickening consciousness of my utter inability to reconcile its identity with its appearance overwhelmed me, and choked my reason.

"Well, have you determined whether or not this is your room?" asked the girl on my left, proffering me a huge tumbler creaming over with champagne, and laughing wickedly as she spoke.

"It is mine," I answered, doggedly, striking the glass rudely with my hand, and dashing the aromatic wine over the white cloth. "I know that it is mine; and ye are jugglers and enchanters who want to drive me mad."

"Hush! hush!" she said, gently, not in the least angered by my rough treatment. "You are excited. Alf shall play something to soothe you."

At her signal, one of the men sat down at the organ. After a short, wild, spasmodic prelude, he began what seemed to me to be a symphony of recollections. Dark and sombre, and all through full of quivering and intense agony, it appeared to recall a dark and dismal night, on a cold reef, around

which an unseen but terribly audible ocean broke with eternal fury. It seemed as if a lonely pair were on the reef, one living, the other dead; one clasping his arms around the tender neck and naked bosom of the other, striving to warm her into life, when his own vitality was being each moment sucked from him by the icy breath of the storm. Here and there a terrible wailing minor key would tremble through the chords like the shriek of sea-birds, or the warning of advancing death. While the man played I could scarce restrain myself. It seemed to be Blokeeta whom I listened to, and on whom I gazed. That wondrous night of pleasure and pain that I had once passed listening to him seemed to have been taken up again at the spot where it had broken off, and the same hand was continuing it. I stared at the man called Alf. There he sat with his cloak and doublet, and long rapier and mask of black velvet. But there was something in the air of the peaked beard, a familiar mystery in the wild mass of raven hair that fell as if wind-blown over his shoulders, which riveted my memory.

"Blokeeta! Blokeeta!" I shouted, starting up furiously from the couch on which I was lying, and bursting the fair arms that were linked around my neck as if they had been hateful chains,— "Blokeeta! my friend! speak to me, I entreat you! Tell these horrid enchanters to leave me. Say that I hate them. Say that I command them to leave my room."

The man at the organ stirred not in answer to my appeal. He ceased playing, and the dying sound of the last note he had touched faded off into a melancholy moan. The other men and the women burst once more into peals of mocking laughter.

"Why will you persist in calling this your room?" said the woman next me, with a smile meant to be kind, but to me inexpressibly loathsome. "Have we not shown you by the furniture, by the general appearance of the place, that you are mistaken, and that this cannot be your apartment? Rest content, then, with us. You are welcome here, and need no longer trouble yourself about your room."

"Rest content!" I answered madly; "live with ghosts, eat of awful meats, and see awful sights! Never! never! You have cast some enchantment over the place that has disguised it; but for all that I know it to be my room. You shall leave it!"

"Softly, softly!" said another of the sirens. "Let us settle this amicably. This poor gentleman seems obstinate and inclined to make an uproar. Now we do not want an uproar. We love the night and its quiet; and there is no night that we love so well as that on which the moon is confined in clouds. Is it not so, my brothers?"

An awful and sinister smile gleamed on the countenances of her unearthly audience, and seemed to glide visibly from underneath their masks.

"Now," she continued, "I have a proposition to make. It would be ridiculous for us to surrender this room simply because this gentleman states that it is his; and yet I feel anxious to gratify, as far as may be fair, his wild assertion of ownership. A room, after all, is not much to us; we can get one easily enough, but still we should be loath to give this apartment up to so imperious a demand. We are willing, however, to *risk* its loss. That is to say," — turning to me, — "I propose that we play for the room. If you win, we will immediately surrender it to you just as it stands; if, on the contrary, you lose, you shall bind yourself to depart and never molest us again."

Agonized at the ever-darkening mysteries that seemed to thicken around me, and despairing of being able to dissipate them by the mere exercise of my own will, I caught almost gladly at the chance thus presented to me. The idea of my loss or my gain scarce entered into my calculations. All I felt was an indefinite knowledge that I might, in the way proposed, regain in an instant, that quiet chamber and that peace of mind of which I had so strangely been deprived.

"I agree!" I cried eagerly; "I agree. Anything to rid myself of such unearthly company!"

The woman touched a small golden bell that stood near her on the table, and it had scarce ceased to tinkle when a negro dwarf entered with a silver tray on which were dice-boxes and dice. A shudder passed over me as I thought in this stunted African I could trace a resemblance to the ghoulish black servant to whose attendance I had been accustomed.

"Now," said my neighbour, seizing one of the dice-boxes and giving me the other, "the highest wins. Shall I throw first?"

I nodded assent. She rattled the dice, and I felt an inexpressible load lifted from my heart as she threw fifteen.

"It is your turn," she said, with a mocking smile; "but before you throw, I repeat the offer I made you before. Live with us. Be one of us. We will initiate you into our mysteries and enjoyments, — enjoyments of which you can form no idea unless you experience them. Come; it is not too late yet to change your mind. Be with us!"

My reply was a fierce oath, as I rattled the dice with spasmodic nervousness and flung them on the board. They rolled over and over again, and during that brief instant I felt a suspense, the intensity of which I have never known before or since. At last they lay before me. A shout of the same horrible, maddening laughter rang in my ears. I peered in vain at the dice, but my sight was so confused that I could not distinguish the amount of the cast.

This lasted for a few moments. Then my sight grew clear, and I sank back almost lifeless with despair as I saw that I had thrown but *two*!

"Lost! lost!" screamed my neighbour, with a wild laugh. "Lost! lost!" shouted the deep voices of the masked men. "Leave us, coward!" they all cried; "you are not fit to be one of us. Remember your promise; leave us!"

Then it seemed as if some unseen power caught me by the shoulders and thrust me toward the door. In vain I resisted. In vain I screamed and shouted for help. In vain I implored them for pity. All the reply I had was those mocking peals of merriment, while, under the invisible influence, I staggered like a drunken man toward the door. As I reached the threshold the organ pealed out a wild triumphal strain. The power that impelled me concentrated itself into one vigorous impulse that sent me blindly staggering out into the echoing corridor, and as the door closed swiftly behind me, I caught one glimpse of the apartment I had left forever. A change passed like a shadow over it. The lamps died out, the siren women and masked men vanished, the flowers, the fruits, the bright silver and bizarre furniture faded swiftly, and I saw again, for the tenth of a second, my own old chamber restored. There was the acacia waving darkly; there was the table littered with books; there was the ghostly lithograph, the dearly beloved smoking-cap, the Canadian snow-shoes, the ancestral dagger. And there, at the piano, organ no longer, sat Blokeeta playing.

The next instant the door closed violently, and I was left standing in the corridor stunned and despairing.

As soon as I had partially recovered my comprehension I rushed madly to the door, with the dim idea of beating it in. My fingers touched a cold and solid wall. There was no door! I felt all along the corridor for many yards on both sides. There was not even a crevice to give me hope. I rushed downstairs shouting madly. No one answered. In the vestibule I met the negro; I seized him by the collar and demanded my room. The demon showed his white and awful teeth, which were filed into a saw-like shape, and extricating himself from my grasp with a sudden jerk, fled down the passage with a gibbering laugh. Nothing but echo answered to my despairing shrieks. The lonely garden resounded with my cries as I strode madly through the dark walls, and the tall funereal cypresses seemed to bury me beneath their heavy shadows. I met no one,— could find no one. I had to bear my sorrow and despair alone.

Since that awful hour I have never found my room. Everywhere I look for it, yet never see it. Shall I ever find it?

24: His Ghostly Counsellor***Edward Dyson****Sydney Mail* 30 Nov 1921

THOMAS THOMAS, otherwise 'Tom Tommy,' and Daniel Parberry, had been mates for years, always getting on at the same claim and in the same shift, on the same level, if possible. They had been in several tributes together, and when Parberry was killed in the Old Euchre Pack at Waddy, Tom Tommy was braceman, and it was into his hands the battered body of Parberry was delivered when it was brought to the surface, and upon him devolved the duty his breaking it gently to the widow, and thereafter lending his counsel and assistance in setting Mary up in business when she decided on opening a little fancy goods shop in Main-street, which thoroughfare lost nothing of the dignity of its title from the fact that it was the only street Waddy possessed.

There was a sort of misty idea floating about to the effect that Tom Tommy would carry consolation to the limit and marry Parberry's widow. The idea did not emanate from Tommy in the first place. It is hard to say whence such ideas do come in small centres like Waddy or how they spread. They seem to be an insidious moral seepage from the community. They come without volition, nevertheless involving a serious responsibility upon the subjects. Tommy had not hinted at marrying the Widow Parberry, his attentions had been only sympathetic, and friendly; but when a whole population starts thinking a certain man should marry a certain woman the banns might as well be published.

There was one man. certainly, who directly, indirectly, and deliberately, fostered the idea of Tom Tommy marrying Mrs. Parberry, a man whose motives were mercenary and selfish. The match maker was David Irons, the widow's brother-in-law, a working miner living in a weatherboard skillion at the back of the township where the thin bush still lingered hopefully.

Irons, having a wife of his own, with three children, and bright prospects of an increase, was much concerned at the possibility of some part of the burden of the widow and the orphan (there was a little Parberry falling upon his shoulders, and Tom Tommy, a sober, industrious man, with reputed savings, would make an excellent brother-in-law— one who would not only raise Nellie above the necessity of appealing to her relations, but a chap to whom an impecunious relative (a brother-in-law, for instance) might turn in an hour of need.

But Tom was slow in complying with general expectations. He drifted into the widow's shop once or twice a week, and bought more notepaper than a non-literary man like the little Welshman could have conceivable use for: but

this was more from a friendly desire to help the business than from any discoverable tenderness towards Mrs. Parberry herself.

Yet Nellie Parberry was a nice, round, neat, little widow, who filled her clothes in a manner that did not fail to give gratification to the masculine eye. She was red-cheeked and had a dark eye with a glint in it that was distinctly provocative. Tom Tommy was not foolishly insensible to these charms; he knew about her small curled ear, too, and the little clusters of reddish-brown hair, more bright than the rest, that twisted and hung around the white nape of her neck; but he was a slow kind of man, with no faith whatever in himself considered as a lady-killer; and Irons saw with great chagrin the possibility of a futile sort of philandering being maintained for years. It was manifestly his duty to Nellie, and to himself and his three children in esse not to mention the one or two in *posse*; to hasten matters.

TOMMY himself gave David the big idea. There had been a lecture on spiritualism at the Waddy schoolroom by a peripatetic theosophist, and Tommy had been heard to admit: 'Fer my part, I'm durn well sure there's more in these here spirits than most of us thinks on, look you.'

'Did you ever see one?' exclaimed Steve Carter.

'No: I never did: but it ain't to say I won't.'

'No: an' you never saw the pigs begin to fly; but it ain't to say you won't.'

'Pigs and spirits is two very different things, mark me. If we become angels when we die, who's to say a few of us don't' get sorter crowded out, an' go knoeikin' round on the loose?'

His argument provoked noisy derision, but Tommy was greatly impressed, and claimed that although his own personal acquaintance with spirits had yet to begin, he had an Aunt Sarah in the Old Country, who was once chased right, round a cemetery by the tattered spook of her lamented father, who, it appeared, was incensed against his only surviving relation because she would not bury bottles of gin in his grave.

'Flowers! Flowers!' the ghost had said. 'What-in-ell is the good of flowers to a man?'

Thereafter Tommy's Aunt Sarah had buried occasional small bottles of gin in her parent's grave, and his perturbed spirit had sunk to rest, and chased her round the cemetery no more.

It was sufficient for David Irons. He resolved that Tommy must strike up an acquaintance with the denizens of spirit land straight away, and, sitting on the hill at the back of Tom Tommy's two-roomed paling hut on the following Sunday afternoon, he studied the possibilities minutely, and gave weighty consideration to the matter of ways and means.

When something was afoot David Irons was not the man to breed frogs in his boots. He had already studied the interior of Tommy's humble home, and now his way was clear before him.

It was Sunday and Dave had conscientious objections to stealing on the Sabbath, objections that had often induced him to put off a good opportunity, of robbing the Chinaman's sluicebox till the following evening; but this was an exceptional case. Dave did not hesitate.

As soon as darkness fell he crept on to the lease of the Lone Hand Cold-mining Company and surreptitiously removed a 50ft length of one-inch garden hose from the big tank. He was borrowing, he told himself, as some salve to a chapel-going conscience: but in the absence of compulsion the hose would never be the property of the Lone Hand Company again. Dave took the hose straight to the small prospecting shaft at the back of Thomas Thomas's hut.

The tip surrounding the hole offered good cover for his purpose; in fact, by simply wedging a slab across the narrow shaft, five feet down, he could find a most suitable hiding-place in the hole itself.

First the primitive telephone must be rigged. This was a simple matter. Dave thrust one end under a loose shingle of Tommy's roof, where it would be hidden from within by the squee lining, but where it was sufficiently close to Thomas's head as he lay in his bed. Irons then clamped the hose close to the hut wall with a stone, but it was well hidden behind a clump of cape-broom growing by Tommy's window. The hose extended, from here to the little shaft in the side of the hill, and, lying behind the pipeclay lip with his mouth at this end of the hose, the operator was able to send his voice with, perfect distinctness right into Tommy's sleeping apartment. Irons had some native latent as a mimic.

We need not affect to be as surprised as Tommy was at midnight that night when, awakening from a kind of half sleep, he heard with astonishing clearness the voice of his dead mate Dan Parberry calling hiin.

'Thomas Thomas!' said the voice. 'Thomas Thomas! Thomas Thomas!'

Tommy lay perfectly still, frozen into inaction. His heart began to thump, thump, thump with heavy blows that seemed to shake the bunk under him. Had he dreamed?

'Thomas Thomas!'

Tommy jerked himself into sitting position, his scalp suffused with a creepy, crawly sensation.

'Good lor' — Dan!' whispered he.

Although Dan Parberry had never called him formally 'Thomas Thomas' in the whole course of their acquaintance, Tommy did not doubt for a moment it

was Daniel Parberry's voice he heard. Daniel Parberry's spirit was addressing him, and it was reasonable to suppose that a spirit, being a sacred and dignified thing, would not descend to frivolity or undue familiarity. It could not, for instance, bring itself to call a man 'Tom Tommy.'

'Thomas Thomas!'

'Yes, yes, yes, yes, Mr. Daniel Parberry,' faltered Tommy. 'Wh-wh-what is it, Daniel, sir?'

Parberry had been plain 'Dan' to Tom for eleven years, but you cannot call a spirit 'Dan.'

'Thomas Thomas, I cannot rest. I'm troubled about Nellie and the little girl. I want to see my Nellie settled again; I want her in safe hands. Can't you— you— ou-u--oo-oo?'

The voice trailed away and was lost.

'Yes, Daniel?' faltered Tommy. Then, after a pause, a little less weakly, 'Yes, Daniel?'

But there came no further word that night. Tommy could see the interior of his hut in the dim light, a wisp of moon provided, but he sprang from bed. going warily for fear of colliding with a spirit, and lit a candle. He peered about his bed room, he peered into the kitchen- breakfast- dining- and sitting- room, the only other apartment, he even peered out into the placid, grey night. Then he went back to bed, very tremulously, his teeth clicking as he went.

He left the candle burning, and lay with his nose above the bed clothes searching the room. He, sniffed, fancying he detected a spirituous atmosphere: but he was not disturbed again that night. Tommy, lying awake till day peeped in, thought of the amazing message he had received, not of its purport.

He thought that over all next day. He did not doubt for one moment that Dan had risen from his grave to impose a task upon him. He was to look after Mrs. Dan and little Nellie, but was it a reasonable thing for any right-thinking ghost to call upon a mortal, however much a male, to accept so grave a responsibility? Suppose all the spirits of the neighbourhood, misled by Parberry's example, were to take it into their heads to inflict him with the care and upkeep of their surviving relations!

Tommy had a bit put by, but was in no position to finance an orphan asylum in conjunction with a lone widows' home. Just imagine his position if Tom Canty, for instance, came up from the tomb to request him to take over the care of Sheilah Canty and the six little Canty brats! Sheilah used to beat Canty when he was in the flesh, and since his death had attacked and damaged two men over whom she held no legal rights in the course of disputes about their wash bills. Tom fervently prayed Canly's ghost might not walk and talk.

PLAINLY it was a matter calling for the gravest consideration— graver than the grave consideration the dead man had, no doubt, given to it. Meanwhile, not to be unfriendly, and to give the late lamented Parberry to see that he was open to reason, Thomas Thomas called to see the widow, making kindly inquiries. He was pleased to hear that she was well, but grieved to find that the business was not prospering.

'I shall have to lake in sewing,' said Mrs. Parberry, wiping a tear from the left corner of her right eye: 'I may even have to go to Tingle of Herringbone as cook. Boddycomb tells me there's an opening there at the homestead.'

She sighed deeply.

Tommy patted Nellie on her round arm, and bade her bear up.

'It'll all come out right,' said he.

'I could p'r'aps marry again in a while, Dan bein' willin',' said the widow.

Tommy understood that Boddycomb was the man she had in mind. He departed, much concerned.

How would Daniel Parberry like this? Obviously he had no such contingency in mind. Tommy uttered an ejaculation of impatience. He wished ghosts would not be so enigmatic.

Three nights passed before Tommy received an other visitation. He was then called from his sleep at about half-past midnight— the hour when Irons, who was on 4 o'clock shift, would be returning from his work. The spirit spoke deliberately and impressively, as before—

'Thomas Thomas! Thomas Thomas!'

Tommy awoke, quaking. He was not, as terrified at the idea of being haunted as he would have expected himself to be: but then the ghost was that of Dan Parberry, and he knew Dan so well. Dan wouldn't hurt a kitten. He had a creepy sensation, and a cold moisture chilled his skin, and his heart beat like a piston; but he bore up very well.

'Yes, Daniel,' he quavered.

'I had hopes of you, Thomas Thomas,' continued the voice. 'I counted on you.'

'What for, Daniel?' Tommy moistened his dry lips and tried to speak up for himself. 'I dunno what I ain't done that I ought to have done.'

But the other cut in upon his speech.

'I reckoned you was the man would love and cherish her, Thomas Thomas.'

'Meanin' Mrs. Dan?' queried Tommy.

'Beware!' said the voice, with terrible emphasis. 'Beware!'

Tommy found a threat in that 'Beware.' He covered his head with the rug in self-defence.

'I dunno as this is doin' the fair an' square thing be an old mate, Daniel,' he murmured. But silence fell. The spirit had gone.

When Tommy next called on Mrs. Dan, Boddycomb was at the shop, engaging all her attention. Tommy noted this with increasing concern, not wholly on the ghost's account, he had recounted Nell's charms again and again, with the object of keeping himself up to the mark, and they were very real to him, very significant.

'Never saw a nicer way iv smilin' in all me life,' said he, but he was thinking of how the widow had smiled on Boddycomb.

Tommy entered upon a systematic courtship of the plump widow, but Tommy was no Don Juan, no Gay Lothario; he had had small practice. Courtship with him would be a long, slow siege, no process of taking by storm— meanwhile Boddycomb was getting in his good work.

One night after calling on the widow, and being practically driven from her kitchen by Boddycomb's persistence, Tommy retired in no pleasant frame of mind. He was ready for the spirit that night.

'Ah, go on,' he retorted with some heat. 'If marriages are made in heaven you must be plumb seven miles deep in the pit not to know she's going to marry Phil Boddycomb.'

The ghost paid no heed to this, it continued to exhort him.

'Well,' retorted Tommy, 'I'll arst her; a man can't do no more than arst her.'

But Tommy didn't ask, mainly because Boddycomb, strangely enough, was always on hand when he felt he had the courage to do it.

It was perhaps four weeks after the first call of the spirit that Mrs. Parberry paid her visit to Thomas Thomas in Tommy's own hut. She was dressed in her best mourning, and looked ravishing, Tommy thought. The widow sat down on the stool near the door, took out her handkerchief, and opened proceedings with tears. Tommy hovered round, offering a pannikin of creek water, spluttering and expostulating.

'Arr, go on,' said he, 'whatjer wanter cry fer? There ain't nothin' to cry fer.' Is it Dan?

'That's it,' sobbed the widow. 'Is he happy?'

'Why, acourse he's 'appy. Why for not?'

'Well, he— he— he— he called on me last night. He said I had to get married.'

'Get married? Did he say that def'nit?' The widow nodded vigorously, her handkerchief still at her eyes.

'Quite def'nit. Angry he was with me for not thinkin' of it before.'

'Yes, Mrs. Parberry.' Tommy gulped audibly. 'Did he say who — who — who's the feller?'

'Boo— hoo! Ye— es. It's you!' With a shrill cry the widow sank her tear-stained face on the table.

Tommy was over her, he ventured to put an arm about her.

'That's all right, Mrs. Par— Nellie,' he said. 'That's quite all right. He's bin at me about it. I was goin' to ask you, on'y I thought Boddycomb was the feller.'

'Dan don't seem to care for Boddycomb,' sobbed Nellie.

'Well, then, it's settled.'

'The fifteenth of December,' said Nellie. 'I always get married on the fifteenth of December.'

SO it was arranged they were to be married on the fifteenth of December and Waddy was delighted to find that it had guessed accurately again, while Irons plumed himself mightily on his success as a match-maker. In fact, in the course of a few weeks Phil's triumph prompted him to use his stratagem still further, but more, to his personal advantage this time, with the result that, after a long rest, Tommy found himself again called up by the spirit.

'Thomas Thomas!' cried the ghost, with even more than the usual impressment.

Tommy jumped out of his sleep.

'Hello! Hello!' he said, not quite understanding.

'Thomas Thomas!'

'What, is that you again, Daniel Parb'erry?' said Tommy protestingly. 'Ain't you never satisfied, Daniel? We're marryin' in a week.'

'Buy Phil Irons' share in the Lone Hand tribute.'

'Wh—a—t?' gasped Tommy. 'Why, it don't hardly pay for tucker.'

'Buy Irons' share in the Lone Hand tribute.'

The ghost had been at Tommy several times before he began to consider seriously the idea of buying Irons out. He had argued to himself; 'Daniel Parberry is now a spirit, and spirits know a thing or two. Daniel is anxious for his widow's welfare, and that of his child. It may be that the tri'bit is going to pan out rich after all.'

He went to see Irons. Irons opened his mouth very wide.

'Fifty quid,' said Irons. 'Not a ha'penny less, not a penny more.'

'Fifty!' snorted Tommy. 'Why, she don't pay four bob a shift.'

'Fifty quid!' said Irons emphatically. 'She's lookin' more 'opeful. Might strike a rich make any day.'

Tommy got Irons' share in the tribute for £45. The transaction was completed a week before the wedding, and Tom went in to work his share, but was let off for the wedding.

The marriage took place in Waddy, and the happy couple went to Melbourne for their honeymoon. Within that week Tom Tommy realised a great happiness. He had not been exactly in love with Nell, but before the week ended he realised that he had got the best on earth, and he blessed the ghost of Dan Parberry.

'I'll bear Dan in kindest remembrance 'slong as I live. He's the bes' friend a man ever had,' said Tommy.

'It's so unlike my Dan, too,' mused the bride. 'He was that jealous. Couldn't bear a man near me, he couldn't.'

'There's nothin' mean and selfish like that about a ghost,' said Tom Tommy confidently. 'Leastwise not about Dan's ghost.'

And then, when they were on the eve of returning, came a telegram from Tarlton, Tommy's shift mate at the Lone Hand, that brought a new happiness.

Tom Tommy and Mrs. Tom Tommy returned at once. Tommy loved his wife, he loved her little girl, and things were going well with him.

That evening Phil Irons came upon Tommy digging the earth about Dan Parberry's grave in the Waddy cemetery.

'What yer.doin' that fer?' asked Phil.

'Well,' said Tommy, 'It's like this— Daniel here put me on to the best thing I've ever had— my Nellie.'

'Oh, did he?' sneered Phil.

'Yes, and he put me on to the nex' best thing, too, the Lone Hand tribit.'

'The devil he did!'

'Yes, and I think it's up to me to keep the earth nice an' loose about his grave in case he should ever want to rise up and give me a tip for the Cup.'

'Go on,' said Phil, anxiously, 'but what yer drivin' at about the Lone Hand tribit?'

'What;' replied Tommy, tantalisingly; 'd'yeh mean to say you ain't heard? Well, you'll hear from others soon enough.'

Phil Irons heard the truth within an hour, and when he did he jumped up, beat on his forehead with his hard fists, tore at his whiskers, even plucked out a fair quantity of his thinning hair, and behaved altogether like a madman, and not without reason, for the tributers at the Lone Hand mine had struck a new make of reef, four ounce stuff, it seemed, and Tom Tommy, on the strength, of the share Phil Irons had imposed upon him, was likely to make his pile.

And make his pile Tommy did.

End